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Racialized and Colonial Experiences of Graduate Teaching Assistants: Oppression, Meaning and Transformation

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Abstract
Despite significant research on racialized inequity in higher education, little research examines the experiences of TAs who are Black, Indigenous or people of colour (BIPOC) in Canada. Based on 37 semi-structured interviews with BIPOC domestic graduate student TAs, this article explores the racialized and colonial oppression of BIPOC TAs: They confront racism from students (disrespect, challenges to their authority and expertise; microaggressions and discrimination; exposure to racist and colonial discourse in students' work). They also experience challenges with TA supervisors (not being heard; discriminatory discipline; political alienation). Finally, BIPOC TAs face racism within administration ("unthinking" racism; discrimination). Yet, BIPOC TAs also experience TAing as a source of meaning (love of teaching; pride in their pedagogy; desire to help students) and transformation (fostering critical thinking; reflecting students' identities; being a role model). Although BIPOC TAs are marginalized by institutional whiteness-coloniality, they engage in resistance from the position of marginality. Given the vital role TAs play in today's universities, attention is needed to address the inequities faced by BIPOC TAs and to support their role in transforming the university.

Malgré les nombreuses recherches sur l'iniquité raciale dans l'enseignement supérieur, peu d'études examinent les expériences des assistants et des assistantes d'enseignement qui sont noirs, autochtones ou de couleur (BIPOC) au Canada. Basé sur 37 entrevues semi-structurées avec des assistants et des assistantes d'enseignement noirs, indigènes ou de couleur au Canada étudiants et étudiantes des cycles supérieurs, cet article explore l'oppression raciale et coloniale des assistants et des assistantes d'enseignement BIPOC : ils sont confrontés au racisme des étudiants et des étudiantes (manque de respect, contestation de leur autorité et de leur expertise, micro-agressions et discrimination, exposition au discours raciste et colonial dans les travaux des étudiants et des étudiantes). Ils sont également confrontés à des difficultés avec leurs superviseurs (ne sont pas entendus, discipline discriminatoire, aliénation politique). Enfin, les assistants et les assistantes d'enseignement BIPOC sont confrontés au racisme au sein de l'administration (racisme « irréfléchi », discrimination). Pourtant, les assistants et les assistantes d'enseignement BIPOC vivent aussi l'expérience d'être assistants d'enseignement comme une source de sens (amour de l'enseignement, fierté de leur pédagogie, désir d'aider les étudiants et les étudiantes) et de transformation (encourager la pensée critique, refléter les identités des étudiants et des étudiantes, être un modèle de rôle). Bien que les assistants et les assistantes d'enseignement BIPOC soient marginalisés par la blancheur et la colonialité institutionnelle, ils s'engagent dans la résistance à partir de leur position de marginalité. Étant donné le rôle vital que jouent les assistants et les assistantes d'enseignement dans les universités d'aujourd'hui, il est nécessaire de se pencher sur les inégalités auxquelles sont confrontés les assistants et les assistantes d'enseignement BIPOC et de soutenir leur rôle dans la transformation de l'université.

Keywords
teaching assistants, higher education, racialization and colonialism, resistance; assistants d'enseignement, enseignement supérieur, racialisation et colonialisme, résistance

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Graduate students who are teaching assistants (TAs) play a vital role in universities. They contribute to student development socially and support student success academically (Ankomah, 2022). TA labour enables institutions to increase undergraduate enrolment by supporting undergraduate courses, while helping faculty manage teaching workloads as research demands on faculty intensify (Ankomah, 2022; Jones et al., 2020). As class sizes increase and the student-professor ratio worsens, TAs will likely play an increasing role in university education (Lusher et al., 2018). TAs undertake a wide variety of work including running laboratories, tutorials, or discussion groups, conducting quizzes, proctoring exams, grading, and holding office hours or meeting with students (Ankomah, 2022; Lusher et al., 2018). Moreover, teaching assistantships ("TAships") are an important recruitment tool to attract students to graduate programs (Subtirelu, 2017). TAs benefit universities. At the same time, being a TA benefits graduate students. Working as a TA strengthens a variety of skills and capacities, including leadership and communication. TAships are an essential source of funding and professional development for aspiring future faculty members (Huang et al., 2023).

There is an expansive literature on international TAs (e.g., Ankomah, 2022; Kim, 2020; Ramjattan, 2020; Wakkad, 2020; Zhu & Bresnahan, 2021). However, domestic TAs are under-studied despite their ongoing importance to higher education. Although there are increasing numbers of international graduate students employed as TAs in higher education, domestic TAs still constitute 50-70% of all TAs in Canada (Korpan & Murray, 2014). This article inquires into the experiences of domestic TAs in Canada, specifically those who identify as Black, Indigenous, or people of colour (BIPOC). In Canada, "the university is a racialized institution that still excludes and marginalizes non-White people" (Henry et al., 2017, p. 3). However, the literature on racialized and colonial inequity in higher education in Canada focuses on faculty (e.g., Henry et al., 2017) and students (e.g., Bailey, 2016) while largely neglecting TAs. Similarly, literature on TAs is overwhelmingly focused on the United States and, for the most part, has not explored the Canadian context.

Before providing a brief summary of our analysis, we explain our terminological choices. The term "BIPOC" has been criticized for invisibilizing difference. In an interview, Canadian Senator Wanda Thomas Bernard argues that the term BIPOC causes us to "lose our identity… Not every racialized group has the same experience" (Policy, n.d.). In contrast, advocates of the term explain that it disaggregates experiences in recognition of differences across groups. Moreover, the term foregrounds the experiences of Black and Indigenous peoples to underscore the origins of racism in relation to colonialism and whiteness (Deo, 2023). While BIPOC is not a perfect term, we use it to acknowledge cross-cutting, shared experiences, as well as the differences among TAs who are Black, Indigenous, and people of colour. We also use the term "racialized" interchangeably with BIPOC throughout this piece to recognise that race is produced through the process of racialization (Ahmed, 2002).

Based on 37 semi-structured interviews with BIPOC domestic graduate student TAs, this article shows that being a TA ("TAing") is a complex experience, characterized by racialized and colonial oppression, yet is a source of meaning and transformation. BIPOC TAs confront racism from their students, specifically disrespect and challenges to their authority and expertise, microaggressions and discrimination, and being exposed to racist and colonial discourse in students' work. Moreover, BIPOC TAs experience challenges with TA supervisors, notably not being heard, discriminatory discipline, and feelings of political alienation. Finally, BIPOC TAs face racism within departmental administration in the forms of discrimination and "unthinking" racism, which refers to a lack of awareness, reflection, or sensitivity. To interpret experiences of

racialized and colonial oppression, we apply Sara Ahmed's (2012, p. 33) theorization of the university's "institutional whiteness" and extend Ahmed's concept to add the university's "institutional coloniality." Institutional whiteness-coloniality describes the normalization of the white, settler body in the university and the marginalization of non-white and Indigenous others as outsiders or guests in someone else's home. Despite racialized and colonial oppression, this article also explores TAing as a source of meaning and transformation. BIPOC TAs find being educators to be meaningful because of their love of teaching, pride in their pedagogical abilities, and their desire to help students. They find TAing to be a source of transformation by fostering critical thinking, reflecting their students' identities, and being a role model for marginalized students. We interpret the meaning and transformation TAs articulate as resistance to the institutional whiteness-coloniality of the university from BIPOC TAs' marginalized position. Following bell hooks (1989), we theorize marginality as a "site of radical possibility, a space of resistance" (p. 20). Drawing together Ahmed and hooks' theorizations, we find that while BIPOC TAs are marginalized as outsiders-within, their resistance is located in these marginal positions.

Literature Review

Domestic TAs have been largely neglected in the literature, with only a handful of sources examining how race and other intersecting dimensions of social positionality shape their experiences. Compared to white TAs, racialized TAs experience more isolation, marginalization, and stress in their departments, and feel more anxious and depressed, and less confident and happy (Gomez et al., 2011). Racialized TAs experience being undermined by students and having their authority challenged, including having students reject their expertise, complain about them to white TAs, or go over their heads to TA supervisors (Gomez et al., 2011). Racialized women TAs face both gendered and racialized challenges (Bartos & Ives, 2019). In their collective auto-ethnography, Santiago et al. (2017) write: "students typically cannot accept women of colour in positions of power… [A] brown woman cannot possibly be a knowledgeable and qualified educator" (p. 55). Marquis and Martino's (2021) study on intersecting social locations examines how TAs' "race, gender, and age" are "on display" in the classroom (p. 7). TAs whose embodiment most conform to the normative academic body face fewer challenges, while TAs who defy normative academic embodiment face disrespect, diminishment, and are presumed to be less competent (Marquis & Martino, 2021). This article contributes to knowledge by examining the experiences of racialized TAs as multifaceted, encompassing their experiences with students, TA supervisors (i.e., the instructor teaching the course for which a TA works) and administration (i.e., staff and faculty administrators in a department). Moreover, while most literature focuses on negative experiences, this article contributes to knowledge by juxtaposing oppression with meaning and transformation.

Theoretical Framework

In *On Being Included*, Sara Ahmed (2012) theorizes institutional whiteness, which is shaped by the presence of some bodies, and the absence of others. Whiteness is "invisible and unmarked, as the absent center against which others appear as points of deviation" (Ahmed, 2012, p. 35). White bodies are the norm within university spaces, while non-white bodies are "out of place" (Ahmed, 2012, p. 38). We "stick out" in the "sea of whiteness" (Ahmed, 2012, pp. 35, 41). While institutional whiteness is not reducible to the body, the white body as "somatic norm" is the

unspoken referent for institutional norms that include rules and ideas of suitable conduct, policed through rewards and sanctions (Ahmed, 2012, p. 38). In other words, whiteness—and to this we add coloniality—underpins the culture, customs, and expectations of the university. The inclusion of non-white and Indigenous bodies operates according to a logic of welcoming or hospitality, premised on the structural positions of host and guest: "Whiteness is produced as host, as that which is already in place or at home. To be welcomed is to be positioned as the one who is not at home" (Ahmed, 2012, p. 43). Gestures to include BIPOC people in the university signal our already-existing exclusion. Non-white and Indigenous others are inside the university, yet outside. We become outsiders by entering a space where we are thought not to belong.

bell hooks (1989), likewise, talks about being *outside but part of*. "To be in the margin," she writes, "is to be part of the whole but outside the main body" (hooks, 1989, p. 20). hooks describes a small American town where the railroad tracks divide, on one side, the white world in which Black Americans could work serving whites, but where they could not live and, on the other side, the margins. hooks explains that living on the edges affords the ability to see both the centre and the margin: "We looked both from the outside in and from the inside out" (hooks, 1989, p. 20). Moreover, hooks explains that "marginality is much more than a site of deprivation, but "the site of radical possibility, a space of resistance" (1989, p. 20). Marginality is the location for struggling against hegemony. Thus, rather than striving to move to the centre, marginality is a site one clings to in order to feed one's resistance. Marginality offers "the possibility of radical perspective from which to see and create, to imagine alternatives, new worlds" (hooks, 1989, p. 20). Despite the institutional whiteness-coloniality that positions BIPOC TAs as outsiders-within or guests in a house not built for or by them, our study finds that they engage in resistance from the margins.

Method

This study was informed by our positionality. We are racialized researchers (Augustine and Alex are East Asian Canadian, while Jasmeet is South Asian Canadian) who worked as TAs in Canadian universities in the past. This article is based on an analysis of 37 semi-structured interviews with domestic graduate student TAs. Participants were drawn from one case study institution—a comprehensive university located in a large Canadian city. There are more than 30,000 students enrolled at the study university, including over 4,500 graduate students. Almost 2,000 graduate students are employed as TAs in the study university. This analysis is part of a larger study on BIPOC graduate students exploring their experiences as learners and teachers. Recruitment involved having the administrator of each graduate program in the study institution send an email invitation over the graduate student listserv. Students contacted the principal investigator (Augustine) to express interest in participating. Interviews were carried out by all three authors. Participants included in this analysis were either working as TAs at the time of their interview or had been TAs in the past. The interview participants were master's and doctoral students from diverse disciplinary backgrounds in the humanities, social sciences and STEM fields. The interviews took place in Fall 2020, Fall 2021 and Winter 2022. All interviews took place online via Skype due to COVID-19 restrictions and were recorded using Skype's internal recording feature. The Skype recordings were immediately destroyed after secure downloading onto the interviewer's computer. NVivo Transcription was used for transcribing the recordings; however, the researchers verified the transcripts to ensure accuracy. Each participant was given a 25 CAD gift card as a token of appreciation. The study received ethics clearance from the home institution of the principal investigator.

The TA participants were comprised of the following racialized backgrounds: 11 Black, two Indigenous, one Latinx/Hispanic, five Middle Eastern or North African, 10 South Asian, five South-East Asian, and three East Asian participants. When introducing a participant for the first time in our discussion, their racial or ethnic background is parenthetically included. To protect participants' identities, all TAs in this article have been pseudonymized and their data have been de-identified.

Table 1
Participant Details

Racialized Identity	Participant Pseudonym	Degree Level	General Field	No. of courses TA'ed
Black	Martin	Masters	Engineering and related	2+
	Riley		Natural sciences; maths; computer science	2+
	Rose			2+
	Tamara			2+
	Clara			1
	Melissa		Social science	2+
	Genevieve	Doctoral	Humanities	2+
	Kathleen			2+
	Solomon		Natural sciences; maths; computer science	2+
	James		Social science	2+
	Simone			2+
Indigenous	Janna	Masters	Social science	2+
	Amy	Doctoral	Social science	2+
Middle Eastern or North African	Aniess	Masters	Humanities	2+
	Bahir		Engineering and related	2+
	Arina		Social science	2+
	Nisrine			2+
	Nasir	Doctoral	Natural sciences; maths; computer science	2+
South Asian	Advait	Masters	Engineering and related	2+
	Habiba			1+
	Prakshi		Natural sciences; maths; computer science	2+
	Sadia			1+
	Souma			2+
	Asma		Social science	2+
	Radwah			1
	Sarita			1
	Anika	Doctoral	Natural sciences; maths; computer science	2+
	Natasha		Social science	2+

Racialized Identity	Participant Pseudonym	Degree Level	General Field	No. of courses TA'ed
South-East Asian	Vanessa	Masters	Humanities	1
	Danh		Engineering and related	1+
	Janet			1
	Taylor			2+
	Alana	Doctoral	Social science	2+
East Asian	Angela	Masters	Humanities	2+
	Derrick	Doctoral	Engineering and related	2+
	Michael		Social science	2+

Note. Participants were not asked how many courses they had TA'ed but were invited to discuss their experiences TAing. We inferred the number of courses each participant TA'ed based on what they shared in their interviews.

This project included member-checking strategies. All participants were given the opportunity to review their de-identified transcript to verify or make changes. However, only four participants submitted minor changes to their transcripts. Data analysis of interview transcripts was carried out by the principal investigator (Augustine) and involved a thematic analysis, which is "the process of identifying themes in the data which capture meaning" (Willig, 2013, p. 147). According to Braun and Clarke (2006), a "theme captures something important about the data… and represents some level of patterned response or meaning" (p. 82). The thematic analysis was combined with an "empathetic interpretive" approach, which "requires the interpreter to enter the phenomenon, to get inside it and to try to understand it 'from within'" (Willig, 2013, p. 138). As an inductive approach, empathetic interpretation relies on careful engagement with the data to generate meaning. This analysis was "data-driven" so "the themes identified are strongly linked to the data" rather than imposing preconceptions or beginning with theory (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 83). Implementing a thematic analysis with empathetic interpretation required deep immersion into the transcripts through re-listening to audio-recordings and repeated re-readings of the transcripts before coding. The coding strategy involved open coding using NVivo to inductively generate wide-ranging possible themes, then focused coding by hand to refine themes (van den Hoonaard, 2015). Coded data were re-read (often multiple times), similar codes were grouped together and relationships between codes were generated. In keeping with member checking, participants were given the opportunity to provide feedback on the preliminary analysis. We received positive feedback on the analysis; no participants recommended changes.

Results

Racialized Oppression: Institutional Whiteness-Coloniality

Students

Challenges with students pervaded the experiences of many BIPOC TAs in our study, a problem which reflects the primary focus in the existing literature on race and TAs. First, students demonstrate disrespect towards BIPOC TAs and challenge their authority and expertise. Nisrine (North African) expressed that students do not respect her or her time. When she first started

TAing, she "already felt that I wouldn't be respected because I am who I am." She feels that students expect that she can be treated as an on-call "service." For instance, Nisrine recounted, students would "throw me a draft and tell me to edit it for them before they hand it in." She finds that students want her to "just do the work... I'm not here to do the work for you. I'm here to explain to you and teach you." Yet, she perceives that students regard her as at "the same academic level as them." Along similar lines, several TAs specified that students do not respect their knowledge or academic authority. Arina (Middle Eastern) narrated: "I had an instance where a student got upset with me because of a grade [on] an assignment. And they were attacking my character, saying that I wasn't smart enough to be in the program because I didn't understand their [work]." Arina explained that she was "so offended. How could a student say this to me? I'm in grad school. You're a second-year student… It was really disheartening." Likewise, Anika (South Asian) expressed that "students have gotten aggressive with me. Some students have been kind of disrespectful." Anika continued, "I have felt intimidated. I have felt uncomfortable, especially in in-person settings… My knowledge has been questioned." Habiba (South Asian) also dealt with a student who constantly "questioned if I knew what I was talking about… And I was just kind of like, 'I don't need to prove myself. I clearly have more experience than you… So, I don't know why you're, like, questioning if I know what I'm talking about in the first place.'" Riley (Black) recounted an instance when she was given the opportunity to guest lecture but, after the lecture, a student approached her and insistently disputed the content of her lecture.

Second, TAs in this study also expressed experiencing microaggressions and discrimination from students. Microaggressions are constant, everyday verbal and non-verbal exchanges that insult, invalidate and undermine the dignity of marginalized people, which are subtle and often difficult to name (Gomez et al., 2011, p. 1191). While TAing a lower-level course, Michael (East Asian) was required to circulate among students in a large lecture theatre and, whilst doing so, experienced repeated microaggressions from students that contributed to him quitting his TAship. Simone (Black) explained that students would refer to them using the diminutive "miss." While it is possible that students intended to be polite, Simone experienced it as diminishing especially in the context that students would also "whisper to their friend or, like, they giggle" in class. Simone expressed feeling a need to watch their actions and the way that they spoke in class. Bahir (Middle Eastern) described students behaving like "they don't want me to waste their time." For Bahir, this behaviour started right from the beginning of term: "they haven't covered any material. There's no assignments, and I see no reason for them to behave that way." Amy (Indigenous) explained that "there's been a lot of microaggressions," especially students approaching her with negative assumptions about Indigenous people. Specifically, students have often used a lens of poverty, substance abuse and suicide when talking to her rather than recognizing "positive, empowering things" happening in Indigenous communities. In addition to microaggressions, TAs also face discrimination, vividly illustrated by the experience of Kathleen (Black). Kathleen and a white woman were TAs for the same course. After receiving poorly written midterms from the students in their tutorials, they jointly developed a "script" of critiques to express in their respective tutorials. A student in Kathleen's tutorial complained to the course instructor resulting in Kathleen being reported to the head of the department. The white woman TA experienced no such disciplinary action despite using the same script talking to students in her tutorial.

Finally, some TAs in this study expressed challenges associated with engaging with students' work, including verbal contributions to discussion and written submissions. Engaging students' work can expose TAs to racist and colonial discourses. While TAing for an online course,

Clara (Black) found students espoused ignorant and unsettling views in the course chat. Kathleen endured having to mark sexist papers, while Angela (East Asian) lamented that "I was getting very racist papers from some of these students." As a white-presenting Indigenous person, Amy sometimes has not identified as Indigenous in her TA classes: "a lot of the times, they're talking about Indigenous issues and [colonial] comments can get made." Janna (Indigenous) received "papers [that] would talk about 'drunken Indians' or whatever… people just think that's acceptable terminology and I found it upsetting to have to correct people." While disturbed by the racist and colonial assumptions in students' work, Janna located the problem with instructors: "I guess a lot of profs don't even think to have to tell students 'Don't call Native people crackheads'… but [it happened] and then I had to read it."

TA Supervisors

Some participants reported challenges with their TA supervisor, the instructor of the course for which a TA works. First, some TAs experience not being heard by TA supervisors, which resulted in disregard for the TAs' time. Nisrine explained that especially male TA supervisors have not listened to her and have placed unrealistic demands on her time. For example, she voiced that one TA supervisor "just throws me documents and assumes I'm just going to figure it out"; moreover, he failed to inform her in a timely fashion of assignments she was responsible for marking. Despite repeated reminders, he did not respect her other time commitments, including visiting regularly with a sick family member. In her view, "because I'm a racialized woman, my time is not being taken seriously." Arina similarly found that a TA supervisor who seemed not to care about the course "definitely put everything on the TAs" to do. Taylor (South-East Asian), likewise, expressed that "when I felt the most *less* listened to, it was in my TA experiences with my profs." Taylor found TA supervisors to be inconsiderate, including not replying to his emails and expecting him to take on tasks last minute.

Second, participants in the study also reported instances of discriminatory discipline. Natasha (South Asian) recounted an incident in which her TA supervisor disciplined her in front of the students in her tutorial: "I had given [the students] an assignment and then the TA professor, he barges into the class and then he asks me 'Why is everybody quiet?! Why aren't you following my instructions?!'" Natasha continued "he could have called me outside the class. He did not need to insult me in front of the students… that kind of shook me up." Kathleen, the TA discussed earlier who shared a script on midterm performance with a white woman TA, faced discriminatory discipline for this situation by her TA supervisor who reported her to the head of the department rather than dialoguing with her: "in my opinion," Kathleen explained, "had it been someone else, the prof may have talked to them first before dragging it to the head of the department."

Finally, another source of challenges with the TA supervisor relates to feelings of political alienation. Angela expressed feeling alienated from her TA supervisor after his "tepid" response to the murder of George Floyd and the Black Lives Matter movement. Similarly, Amy voiced that TA supervisors have failed to reach out to BIPOC TAs when teaching curriculum that affects the TA. Amy pointed out that, as an Indigenous TA, curriculum on settler colonial strategies directly impact her and her family. Moreover, Amy also experienced another manifestation of political alienation with a TA supervisor. As Amy narrated

> one time, I called the government 'the settler colonial government'. I remember my supervising professor was, like, 'We don't use that terminology' and I was, like, 'Oh, okay'.

> But I was, like, to me, that's what it is because, to me, to say 'the Canadian government'… is denying the sovereignty of my own community.

Amy's TA supervisor informed her "that was not the perspective from which we were going to be leading the course." This situation extended Amy's experiences in other classes in which she had TA'ed on the Canadian government system. She explained, "I felt like I was almost going against my own identity… So, in a lot of ways, my view of the government, as an Indigenous person… I had to downplay a lot of that just because I felt like it would be bringing conflict to the classroom." This political alienation worked to deny Amy's perspective as an Indigenous person.

Administration

Participants reported experiences with racism and colonialism from departmental administration—staff and faculty administrators of a department. One form of administrative racism is "unthinking" racism characterized by a lack of awareness, reflection or sensitivity. For example, Janna, an Indigenous TA, explained that her department assigned her to be a TA for an instructor who is a former police officer—an assignment that lacked sensitivity to the power relations between TA and TA supervisor positionalities. In Canada, police have been instrumental to the settler colonial project, from the foundational role of police in "civilizing" purportedly primitive Indigenous peoples stretching forward today in the under- and over-policing of Indigenous peoples. Janna expresses frustration that her identity as an Indigenous person was not considered in her TA placement. For Janna it was "just a really problematic place to [be] put… there is such a substantial power dynamic to have an Indigenous TA working with, like, a police officer." Janna attributed the problem to a lack of thought among administrators, saying "I guess it just didn't occur to them." Further, she noted a lack of support for TAs who experience racism and colonialism. There is a lack of people who will engage in a "certain degree of frankness" by naming and calling out racism and colonialism. "I think," Janna continued, "someone just needs to be there to be, like, 'What the fuck?'" in situations like hers.

TAs may also face discrimination from faculty administration. When Kathleen was called into the department head's office for talking to students about their poor midterm performance, he told her to "smile more when delivering my criticism." The idea that Black women need to "smile more" perpetuates the stereotype of the "angry Black woman." Recall that the white co-TA in this course faced no repercussions for using the same script to talk to students in her tutorial. Discrimination also comes in the form of depriving BIPOC TAs of opportunities to which they are entitled. Cristiano (Latinx) was offered a TAship as part of his funding package at a previous institution. While he was paid, he was never given a TA job, although he wanted to gain experience as a TA. Another Latinx student in his program was in the same situation, although all their peers were given TAships. In the second year of their studies, the same situation emerged, causing them to feel that "this is racism. This is bluntly, explicit racism. They're not giving us classes because we are not white." When they approached the department head to convey their concerns, he refuted the claim of racism out of hand. Despite saying he would investigate, no action was taken. Cristiano left this program as he "couldn't bear" the racism any further.

Meaning and Transformation: Marginality as Resistance

TAing as a Source of Meaning

Despite these experiences with racialized and colonial oppression relating to students, TA supervisors and administration, participants in this study also talked about TAing as a source of meaning. TAs expressed the love of teaching as a source of meaning. When TAing for an Indigenous studies course, Amy explained:

> I felt so much more connected. I had Indigenous students and I was able to use my own community as examples in class… Being able to… TA in an Indigenous course just lets me feel like I'm being authentic to who I am and to my experiences, and that I can actually use that lived experience and that knowledge and those cultural connections to inform the way that I'm transmitting knowledge.

For Amy, the love of teaching is located in being able to TA other Indigenous students and to teach Indigenous material. Michael expressed that for most of the TA work he had done, he had been able to teach "something I love," which speaks to the love many graduate students have for research and scholarship that drew them to academia. Moreover, Michael connected the love of teaching to pride in his pedagogical abilities—another source of meaning for TAs. He explained that he has "a knack" for teaching and that he is "in my element in the classroom." Habiba articulated her pride in her pedagogy saying "I know I'm good at what I do, and I know what I'm talking about. I try to make that evident throughout my, like, various conversations with students, and kind of, guide them through [the material]." Derrick (East Asian) described how students from his lab section appreciated his teaching skills and continued to seek out teaching resources he developed even after moving to a tutorial with a different TA. James (Black) explained that students have shown gratitude for his teaching: "after one lab [a student] was like, 'Wow! Thank you very much, James. You are one of the best TAs I've ever had.'" James found that his patience and efforts with students resulted in students being "more forthcoming. They would ask questions. They trusted my authority in the lab."

The love of teaching and pride in one's abilities as a teacher are also connected to a desire to help students. Students would go to Genevieve (Black) to discuss their program choices and aspirations. Michael recounted meeting with students to explain course material for hours. In his first year TAing, Michael "literally stayed behind sometimes till midnight on campus. I taught an eight o'clock tutorial, but I stayed until midnight to tutor students who had questions. And that was very fulfilling." Anika, similarly, has offered extra review sessions to all students in her TA classes. James emphasized patience with students and the commitment "to meet every student where they are." Nisrine underscored empathy: "when I speak to [students], I understand how stressed they are." Asma (South Asian) similarly tries "to be in my students' shoes" to better understand them. She recognizes the wide variety of backgrounds of students and emphasizes "everyone learns differently." Accordingly, Asma develops many different teaching strategies in her tutorials and strives to "be the TA that I wanna see in the world."

The Transformative Potential of TAing

Participants in this study talked about TAing as a source of transformation. One major form of transformation named by participants is fostering critical thinking in students. Alana (South-East Asian) finds that students, especially white students, often come to speak with her to grapple with antiracism and anticolonialism. Kathleen recounted an incident in class when a Black male student claimed that "feminism had gone too far." While enabling students to engage in debate with one another, Kathleen took the opportunity as a "good teaching moment" to talk about historical injustice and encourage the student to draw connections between racial and gender struggles. Asma encourages students to think critically about knowledge creation. As a TA for a social science research methods course, Asma explained to the students in her class:

> it's impossible to be neutral in a world that is constantly questioning your existence and it's really hard to be neutral when you also are questioning everything. And your questions, they don't just come out of nowhere. I mean your questions as researchers, but also as people, they're rooted [in] things that you have seen, that you have heard, that you have experienced… I find that it's really important to tell students that a lot of these research questions are born out of experiences…

The transformative potential of TAing that participants in this study discussed centres on changing academia for marginalized students. Some TAs talked about the significance of having TAs who reflect the identities of undergraduate students. For these TAs, it is important for students to see TAs who "look like" them, which may lead to increased comfort in terms of learning. As Melissa (Black) noted, it is important "for people like me to be in these spaces and to set an example for people… a lot of my students that I was TAing for felt so much more comfortable coming to talk to me 'cause, like, I look like them." Sadia (South Asian), while TAing online, noticed that students tended to send her "a lot of personal messages [compared to] the other TA," who was white. Aniess (Middle Eastern) observed that racialized students "found a comradery in me" as they often approached her to talk about their families, ethnicity, and experiences. Talking about these things "was kind of an experience I could sort of have with them." Tamara (Black) explained that "racialized students identify with me a little bit more and reach out to me more than my [white] co-TAs." Tamara continued, there is "a pre-bonding that goes on with people who look like you." James noted that "most of the student who were coming to me were… racialized." These experiences echo literature that shows benefits to under-represented minority students taught by same-/similar-race TAs (Lusher et al., 2018; Oliver et al., 2021). There are many possible explanations for the positive impact same-/similar-race TAs have on undergraduates: Students may feel more comfortable with a TA of a similar race resulting in more regular attendance at discussion groups or office hours and feeling more at ease approaching a TA for help. Students may feel more able to learn from a TA of a similar race. The teaching style of racialized TAs may be better suited to similarly racialized students. Having a similar-race TA may increase a student's sense of belonging in higher education. Moreover, TAs may act as role models who inspire their students (Lusher et al., 2018; Oliver et al., 2021).

Indeed, many participants talked about the importance of being a role model for marginalized students. Being a role model takes different forms. For Clara, being a role model is about being herself and modeling rejection of racialized stigma. In an online course she TAed, Clara would "turn on my camera every class… You know that stigma about Black women having

to have their hair straightened, edges layered, like, everything? So, like, I have my full afro going on, you know, so I make sure I turn it on every time. It's little things like that." Being a role model may also involve serving as an informal mentor. Tamara took on a mentorship role in relation to students in her TA classes. Students "will ask me, 'oh, like, it's my first time having a Black TA,' for example, 'How did you get to where you are?' or questions like that." Being a role model can also involve being an example to aspire to. As Habiba articulated "students tended to look up to me." Similarly, Simone found that Black students "told me they looked up to me and things like that." For Simone, this motivated working harder as a TA: Students do not see Black people "leading classrooms and leading these discussions. So, immediately, then the responsibility is different. And to me that makes me want to work harder."

Simone and Cristiano also shared the experience of being role models to queer students. As Simone recounted, "the fact that I'm also queer, I've had a lot of students disclose or like quote/unquote 'come out' to me in papers and different things like that as well, and I think they find comfort." Cristiano, on his first day TAing any class, introduces himself as "LGP: Latino, gay and proud." He tells students in his TA classes "'if you wanna talk about it, if you have anything you want to talk, share, vent, cry, shout, celebrate, I'm here.' So, I see the faces in the non-white students, they light up, all of them." In Cristiano's observation, queer students "who are not white" do not have a "safe space." His observation was borne out in an experience with a racialized woman student who came out to him and expressed that she found his words inspiring.

Discussion

The racialized and colonial oppression that TAs in this study have experienced illustrate the institutional whiteness-coloniality of the university. Students, TA supervisors and administration act in complex and overlapping ways to reproduce and reinforce institutional whiteness-coloniality. The disrespect exhibited by students towards BIPOC TAs and the challenges to their authority and expertise suggest that students see BIPOC TAs as out of place. Institutional whiteness-coloniality positions non-white others as guests of the white-settler host. We are made outsiders by virtue of being inside a place where we are deemed not to belong. If BIPOC TAs do not belong in the university, students may reject the ideas that BIPOC TAs are knowledgeable and that they are authorized to be there, let alone to teach. Arina's experience exemplifies this as her student asserted that she was not smart enough to be in her graduate program and rejected the legitimacy of her grading. Cristiano's situation of being denied TAships to which he was entitled illustrates starkly that administration may also decide that BIPOC TAs do not belong as teachers.

Students' microaggressions and discrimination reassert racialized and colonial hierarchies and undermine the power a TA may formally hold over students. Kathleen's story of a student going over her head to complain about her illustrates how students mobilize other resources—the course instructor and the administration—to undermine the TA and put the TA "in her place." Students, thus, remind BIPOC TAs that they are guests who should not feel at home. Having to engage with some students' racist or colonial work is another challenge BIPOC TAs face that elucidates institutional whiteness-coloniality. Janna implied that course instructors have a role to play in discouraging the use of racist or colonial discourse in student submissions, but she noted that doing so seems not to have occurred to them. Janna, similarly, felt it did not occur to the departmental administration that it would be problematic to place her, an Indigenous TA, with a TA supervisor who is a former police officer. For some course instructors and administrators, not

having to think about racism or colonialism is a privilege that serves as a reminder that the university was not built with BIPOC people in mind. As Ahmed puts it, BIPOC people are guests "in someone else's house" (2012, p. 43), a house that was not made for us. Pre-empting racist and colonial content submitted to BIPOC TAs or thinking about the power dynamic between Indigenous peoples and police are considerations that are not part of the architecture of this house.

BIPOC TAs' encounter with some TA supervisors also suggests institutional whiteness-coloniality. Ahmed describes the university's hospitality as conditional: "Conditional hospitality is when you are welcomed on condition that you give something back in return" (Ahmed, 2012, p. 43). For Ahmed, non-white guests must return the hospitality by integrating with the university's organizational culture. This is exemplified by the political alienation experienced by participants in our study, especially Amy's experience of a TA supervisor clamping down on discussion of settler colonialism. However, we also observe another condition placed on BIPOC TAs as guests: abidance. BIPOC TAs are required to put up with poor treatment. The TAs in our study endure not being heard and tolerate unrealistic demands like guests putting up with an inhospitable host. Similarly, BIPOC TAs who are subjected to discriminatory discipline, as Kathleen was, are expected to endure the injustice. The condition of hospitality, thus, is abiding by mistreatment.

TAs in our study, however, are not disempowered by the racialized and colonial oppression they face. While the university as host demands that BIPOC TAs integrate with institutional whiteness-coloniality, the TAs in our study do not passively comply. They do not cooperate with institutional whiteness-coloniality but resist it and remake it from the margins. Ahmed's theorization of the guest—an outsider-within—maps onto hooks' spatial conceptualization of the edges or margin as both inside and outside, both part of and apart from the whole. For hooks, resistance does not mean abandoning the margins and joining the centre; rather, the margin is "a site of creativity and power, that inclusive space where we recover ourselves" (hooks, 1989, p. 23). Despite challenges, BIPOC TAs create meaning in their work and recover themselves through the love of teaching, pride in their pedagogy and their desire to help students. For example, while Michael experienced microaggressions from students in one class so severe that he quit this TAship, he also expressed that he loves teaching, that he is good at it, that he spent hours explaining material to students, and that doing so was personally rewarding. The experiences of BIPOC TAs, therefore, are complex—encompassing both oppression imposed on TAs and meaning that TAs create and enact. Moreover, BIPOC TAs engage in transformation. The margin is a "space of refusal, where one can say no to the colonizer, no to the downpressor" (hooks, 1989, p. 21). BIPOC TAs enact transformation through fostering critical thought among their students. The margin is also a vantage point to "see things differently" (hooks, 1989, p. 22). The TAs in this study see marginalized undergraduates and the ways in which they as TAs can transform these students' experiences. By reflecting their students' identities and by acting as role models, BIPOC TAs resist institutional whiteness-coloniality.

Conclusion

Being the guest or the outsider-within, and existing in the margin is a complex experience. hooks explains that "these margins have been both sites of repression and sites of resistance" (1989, p. 21). Indeed, the experiences of TAs in this study reflect both racialized and colonial oppression through institutional whiteness-coloniality, and meaning and transformation. This study advances scholarly knowledge of BIPOC TAs in several ways. Most of the literature on TAs and race focuses on challenges faced by international TAs in relation to students. This study

deepens our knowledge of how racism and colonialism impact domestic TAs, an under-studied population in higher education, in relation to students, TA supervisors and administration. Moreover, this study uniquely offers insight into TAs' agency in creating meaning and producing transformation. Finally, this article is one of very few that focuses on Canada in relation to the experience of TAs.

Limitations of this study point to directions for future research. For example, an intersectional lens would offer insight into the ways in which class, disability, sexuality, gender and other dimensions of identity may work with racialization to shape TA experience. In this study, only two participants made explicit reference to gender in their interviews, but their experiences suggest the need for further intersectional inquiry. Moreover, future research could compare the experience of BIPOC TAs to white and settler TAs to identify shared experiences and to underscore differences. This would differentiate experiences that are endogenous to TAing (i.e., that arise from TAs' structural position in the university) versus experiences unique to BIPOC TAs.

While this article focuses on BIPOC domestic TAs, there is an abundance of literature on racialization and international TAs (e.g., Ankomah, 2022; Kim, 2020; Ramjattan, 2020; Wakkad, 2020; Zhu & Bresnahan, 2021). A comparative study could uncover the ways in which citizenship, language and culture intersect to (differently) racialize domestic and international TAs. While one strength of this study is the inclusion of TAs who are Black, Indigenous and people of colour, future research is needed that focuses on specific groups. For example, there is no literature, to our knowledge, focused entirely on Indigenous TAs. Moreover, TAs from different racialized or ethnic groups may have differing experiences that require focused analysis. This study included students across humanities, social sciences, and STEM fields; however, a future project could examine the differences in TA experience across disciplines. Finally, as a qualitative study, this research was able to examine the nuances of experiences and perspectives; however, given the sample size, it is challenging to make more general claims about BIPOC TAs. Quantitative research exploring the themes identified in this article would give insight into the pervasiveness of different experiences.

A few of the participants offered recommendations to improve the TA experience for BIPOC graduate students. For example, TA supervisors could proactively check in with TAs to improve TA wellbeing and to show solidarity when teaching curriculum that affects BIPOC TAs or their communities. TA supervisors could act as mentors for TAs, which would also contribute to enhanced training. More regulation, or more enforcement of existing regulations, to manage to the TA supervisor-TA relationship may help TAs feel empowered to talk to the TA supervisor about issues like overwork. Finally, the university should foster a culture of recognising that TAs are teachers and merit respect. In addition to these recommendations, further research is needed on what BIPOC TAs need to flourish. Given the important roles of TAs to universities in Canada today, more research is needed on the inequities faced by BIPOC TAs and how to support them in transforming the university.

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