Children’s rights and spaces: an ethnographic look at children’s rights in Punjab, India and Ontario, Canada.

By

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A thesis submitted to the Graduate Program in Cultural Studies

in conformity with the requirements for the

Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Queen’s University

Kingston, Ontario, Canada

January, 2015

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Abstract

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) is the most widely signed and ratified human rights treaty in history. The Convention is law in the nearly two hundred countries that have ratified it including Canada and India. This project is an ethnography exploring the effectiveness of the text of the CRC in two contexts, one which is largely structured by text (Canada) and one which is not (India). To map, in depth, the top-down social relations of the CRC the author provides rich descriptions of her fieldwork in the Punjabi village of Butala and the Canadian city of Brampton. Using the new sociology of childhood as a conceptual framework, the author argues that the CRC is inherently flawed because it is in text and can therefore only create change in environments mediated by text.
Acknowledgements

First of all, I would like to thank the Divine energy that is the source of everything in this universe, Akaal Purakh. I am constantly humbled by the blessings and opportunities that are brought into my life; I have been sustained in this life with the utmost love and my existence is a constant tribute to you.

Thank you to my family, especially my parents Inderjit and Surinder. Your unwavering support in this process has meant everything to me. You have always supported me in my research, travel and crazy adventures. You have pushed me not to limit myself and still kept me safe. You are the best people I know.

To my supervisor Karen Dubinsky, thank you for taking a chance on a strange girl from Brampton who showed up in your office. You shared with me your knowledge, passion, friends, family, music and research. You went above and beyond what was required from a supervisor and I am so blessed to have had you as a mentor on this journey and in my life.

Thank you to the rest of my committee Ishita Pande, Richard Day, Roberta Hamilton and Patrizia Gentile. Thank you for your support throughout this dissertation and for the time you took out to read and better my thesis.

To my best friend Rapinder, you are everything a girl could want in a friend. You have been my confident, training partner, therapist, and advisor. You have kept me safe and sane. I will never be able to repay the countless hours you have spent listening to me but I am glad to have this moment to acknowledge you and everything you are to me.

Harsharn and Geetika, thank you for rounding out my support network of amazing women. You are the glass half full to my glass half empty. You bring out the best in me and even when your lives were full you took the time out to listen to me vent or read my thesis and ask questions.

To Harjot and Gurjit and their children (my sunshine in this life), thank you for always keeping your hearts and home open to me. Thank you for making me a Bhua and sharing your world with me whenever I needed it.

Thank you Grizzly Gym and Bram Ajarn Mike Martelle. I could not have survived life in Kingston and writing this thesis without the many training partners and instructors that kicked my butt at the gym! Having a place to go and hit bags is partly the reason I was able to get through writing this dissertation. I hold my Grizzly family very close to my heart.

Thank you to Baghael for all your help with editing this thesis. I am not the best writer and it was no doubt a challenging process. Thank you for engaging with my ideas and helping
out. Your mindful suggestions reminded me someone was reading my words and brought
dialogue to what could have been an isolating process.

Lastly, thank you to the children and resident of Butala. I hope your voices are present in
my work and I ask for your forgiveness if I have made any mistakes in bringing your stories into
these pages. You are the reason that I do this and I hope to provide an academic voice to your
struggles.
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Chapter 1: Introduction, problematc and literature review

Introduction

I often get asked as a graduate student what exactly it is that I do. Many people I come across are uncomfortable with a career description that isn’t in the box of engineer, lawyer or physician. Trying to explain a degree in Cultural Studies (which isn’t the study of culture) leads down a horrible path that ends with me having flashbacks to the first year of my degree where we tried to define Cultural Studies. So the easiest thing to say is “I look at children’s rights in Punjab and Ontario.” The usual response to this is some quip about how children don’t have rights in India and therefore I don’t have much to research.

So what is it that I do? And how do I sufficiently explain it as I invite you into the thesis that has dominated the last four years of my life? Though I love telling stories and sharing my experiences, when I sit down to write a thesis from start to finish I realise that my life is not a neat narrative with a beginning, a middle, and an end. The sporadic storytelling that will fill the pages of this thesis is subsequently my refusal to fall into linear storytelling, as life seldom does. I will start from the middle, or one of many middles, and if you stick through this with me you will start to see a picture emerge - not a perfect picture, but rather a developing one of my journey that I am choosing share.

I grew up in an environment of human rights work. I was born in Toronto in 1985, to immigrant parents from Punjab and Rajasthan, one year after the Sikh Holocaust in Punjab. My dad was an active human rights advocate and spent the first few years of my life devoting his time to fighting for Sikhs in Punjab and the diaspora. Although I couldn’t have articulated it at the time, my malleable brain was being programmed to understand that human rights are not
something that are given - they are something that need to be fought for. I learned that not everyone is treated the same in the world, and that even from my position of relative privilege I fell into categories where I was denied basic kindness and compassion as a consequence of my identity. Fast forward twenty-one years - while I was finishing my undergrad in Child Health. Eager to change the world with my new, and then seemingly useful degree, I applied for my Masters in Child and Youth Studies. Although I didn’t know what my degree would entail, I knew I wanted to do something that would help my village in Punjab. When I arrived in Butala (a small village located near Amritsar) I went to the local elementary school armed with my notepad and my arrogant notions of human rights and global development. Thinly disguising my insecurities with the righteousness that is systematically instilled in undergraduate students in Ontario, I launched into a series of questions about the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and asked to see their curriculum and policy documents around the issue. To my genuine surprise, I was not well received as a researcher and I quickly found that there were no such documents on site at the schools in Butala.

For many months I tried, and failed, to find documents that would help me map out the transmission of human rights policy from the United Nations, through multiple layers of government, and into the lives of the village children. This overly simplified understanding of how steering works in large systems was quickly overshadowed by the reality that I couldn’t use a global north lens and framework to analyse human rights documents in this global south village.

My master’s thesis, which initially set out to examine how policy from the UN affected the lives of children in Butala ended up being an exploration of what steering entails and how the text of the CRC does not apply to this context. This present work is an extension and further
exploration of this problematic. Having recovered from my initial experience of trying to do research in India, for my PhD I buckled down to explore in depth why the text of the CRC was insufficient to change the lives and spaces of children in Butala. Essential to unpacking this problematic was addressing my assumptions that text can change the material conditions of children’s lives; an assumption that was born out of my experience of living in Ontario. Thus the comparative component of my thesis was born. This thesis now looks at how two contexts, Punjab and Ontario, differently interpret the CRC and how this document does or does not work to improve the lives of children in the two places.

Problematic: the assumption of a textually-mediated society

The past century was termed the “Century of the Child” (Dekker, 2000). As established by Ellen Key (1909), this century saw a shift on the part of child caregivers towards child-oriented rights. Romantic notions of childhood and education dominated to bring children to the centre of science, consumerism and rights. Subsequently, the CRC has become the most widely signed and ratified human rights treaty in documented history (Pais and Bissell, 2006). The CRC outlines specific universal rights for all people under the age of eighteen, and provides an international legal and moral consensus for participating countries (Melton, 2005). This international convention provides guidance to form policy in a manner that addresses the lives of children at the local level. However, there is currently a disconnect between the idealised rights of children and young people and their respective lived experiences. Despite the provisions of the document, reporting cycles show that the Convention is not reaching the children for whom it was written. A primary reason for this is that it privileges text-based reality. The assumption is
that the written words of the CRC will work in a top-down fashion to penetrate international, national, and local forms of government and affect the lives of children in a uniform and substantial way. This privileging of the written-word does not account for realities that are based in traditions that operate outside a culture of writing.

Throughout this thesis I will refer to the power of text through multiple terms such as text-based society, text driven society, or text-mediated society. Text can be understood in multiple ways. Postmodernists, “use the term text in a broad sense, referring to all phenomena and all events” (Carr & Zanetti, 2001, pp 15). However, when I refer to text in this thesis, I refer specifically to the written words in the policies that mediate social interactions. I first came to understand these terms while exploring the methodology of institutional ethnography (Campbell & Gregor, 2004). This feminist methodological framework looks at how everyday life is organized in institutions, mostly health care settings, in order to understand a specific problem. The process aims to map, through mediating-texts, social relations and how they affect the group being researched. The assumption of the methodology is that text controls and mediates everyday social relations; a similar assumption is made by those who sign and ratify the CRC. The authors state that, “in a text-mediated world, people not only interact face-to-face, they also interact through text.” (Campbell & Gregor, 2004, p. 99). Within institutions texts can affect what people say and do and should not be considered transparent. The authors rely heavily on the foundational works of Dorothy Smith who also looks at how relationships are ruled through text in organizations. According to Smith social relations are not random but are intentionally organized in specific ways. She explains,

The ruling apparatuses are those institutions of administration, management, and professional authority, and of intellectual and cultural discourses, which organize,
regulate, lead and direct, contemporary capitalist societies. The power relations which come thus into view from the standpoint of an experience situated in the everyday world are abstracted from local and particular settings and relationships. These forms of communication and action are distinctively mediated by texts. The textual mediation of its forms of organization are fundamental to its characteristic abstracted, extra-local forms, and its curious capacity to reproduce its order in the same way in an indefinite variety of actual local contexts. (1990, p. 2)

Campbell and Gregor use the example of a person using a bus card in order to board a public bus. The bus card has writing on it, along with a photo of the rider. There is no communication beyond this text exchange between the rider and the driver, yet this interaction it is sufficient to get everyone on the bus and moving (2004). There is an invisible social organization behind this transfer which is taken for granted. When the intentions of those who created the bus system dictate the actions and thoughts of bus riders, ruling relations have been successfully executed. Text-mediated realities are made explicit through the methodology of institutional ethnography. Using the same ideology, the CRC assumes all reality is textually-mediated and that this will ensure the successful implementation of the Convention. The original contributors to the CRC and ratifying countries work under the pretext that the written rights of the CRC will rule the relationships between states and children and result in a unified experience of human rights for young people.

Another way to consider how text mediates life is through the work of Niklas Luhmann. In his social systems theory Luhmann suggests that there has been a historical shift in social organization. Most recently, society was conceptualized as being composed of groups of people and organized using vertical hierarchies. In contrast, systems theory is anti-humanist and holds
that society is no longer centered on minds and bodies (Moeller, 2006). Instead, it posits that there are a number of self-creating systems that are made up of sub-systems of life, communication and consciousness. This trinity of mind-body-communication creates the environment of systems. Humans are split into these three categories, but as whole beings have no place in the system; they are simply part of the environment. Individual systems, such as the government and the economy, arise randomly (that is to say that a set of circumstances allow them to arise). They are autopoietic; they sustain themselves. The downfall of vertical systems has led to systems that create and recreate themselves through language and communication which, in the case of the CRC, is expressed through text. Each system defines itself through distinguishing itself. Using a system of binary distinctions allows for language to be the medium through which systems sustain themselves. What is important to note is that no one system can actually affect another and humans cannot control any of them (Luhmann, 1997). What the organisation of society in such a way unwittingly does is connect systems across the globe; the Convention is a prime example of this. When the concept of functionally differentiated systems is brought back to the analysis of the CRC, it becomes apparent that the document relies on the old vertical systems to function the way it was intended to. In the social organization that Luhmann presents we can see that the CRC cannot set out to do what the humans involved believe it can (Moeller, 2006).

How do the theories of Smith and Luhmann apply to the use of text and communication in Canada and India? Canada, in a superficial glance, presents itself as a society highly entrenched in organization of space through text. I will examine how Canada has performed in terms of children’s rights on the international stage as a result of this organization through text. In general, the comments provided by the United Nations’ Committee on the Rights of the Child
demonstrate this effective use of text in Canada. The committee notes the implementation of the 
National Children Agenda, Canada School Net and the amending of the criminal code by 
enacting bill C-27 to name a few examples. The committee also notes the statistical data 
collected in line with the goals of the Convention (United Nations Committee on the Rights of 
the Child, 2003).

Although Canadian children are still lacking in their complete realisation of rights, an 
overview of the concluding observations demonstrates the use of text as a powerful medium. My 
own experiences being born and raised in a Canadian context and engaging with multiple social 
systems has not contradicted the reflections of the Committee on the Rights of the Child. Every 
element of my life in Canada has been dominated and mediated by text. Purchasing practices, 
attaining an education, government documents and even my work with children has been bound 
by text. For example, in between my Masters and PhD I worked in preschools where all of my 
interactions with children were dictated by written Ministry of Ontario guidelines. The staff were 
required to maintain specific caregiver-to-child ratios, spend a certain amount of time outdoors, 
and even hold children on their beds if they refused to nap because the Ministry had decided that 
there was a certain amount of time allotted to resting and sleeping within the preschool.

In my village in India on the other hand, the lack of literacy, lack of technologies that 
reproduce writing and lack of participation in text-based forms of control create an environment 
that can fall outside the parameters of text as Smith and Luhmann see it. I will later go into detail 
about life in Butala and what structures the interactions there, but the important point for now is 
that ruling relations are not mediated primarily through the use of institutional texts. For 
example, the schools don’t have curriculum documents, there are no written regulations or 
policies, and no written accountability. Parents of Butala’s students in the public school system
are for the most part illiterate, and very few students learn to successfully read while at school. Looking at the concluding observations of India’s children’s rights reports demonstrate that the rights presented in the CRC are not being lived by the children of Butala. Article 42 of the CRC clearly articulates that “state parties undertake to make the principles and provisions of the Convention widely known, by appropriate and active means to adults and children alike” (United Nations, 1989). When the Convention was being drafted, this article was added as an indicator of compliance (Mitchell, 2005). The idea behind article 42 is that a high number of children knowing about their rights will be an indicator of successful compliance with the rights presented in the convention. However, as my research and the 2004 concluding observations by the Committee have shown, this is not the case for India.

I would like to offer another example of how life in Canada is mediated by text. Early on in my research process I went to apply for my Indian visa. Brampton is a part of the Greater Toronto Area and according to the latest census the second largest ethnic group after white is South Asian; the second most spoken language after English is Punjabi (City of Brampton, 2013). Thus, the city has its own office devoted solely to Indian visa applications. My constant travelling back and forth to Punjab has meant that I have spent my fair share of time in the suffocating, small, and inadequately run visa office. This office attempts to herd and direct huge numbers of Canadians that identify with India in multiple ways. There are people applying for visas so they can attend weddings, return their fathers ashes to the land in which he was born, do research, and there is the occasional non-Indian going for a vacation or retreat. There are Canadian- born Canadian citizens, Indian-born Canadian citizens, and permanent residents who are from different countries, including India. It is the perfect example of a textually-mediated society attempting to control the bodies of many people, some of who were born in a culture that
is outside the bounds of these ruling relations. My visa application was pretty straightforward. I filled out a form online, printed it, went to Wal-Mart and got the correct photos taken, came to the visa office, took a number, turned off my cell phone and got into the appropriate waiting line. What was (for me) a simple and straightforward process, with closer introspection, was constantly mediated by text. I used my computer to do a Google search to procure the written instructions, and then typed the visa application. I knew my mother’s maiden name and I had a birth certificate. I searched out the visa office and ‘googled’ directions. I was able to read the sign to find the office, and upon entering knew to take a number and turn off my cell phone. Others who were sitting there had gone through an entirely different process to get to the same point. Some arrived empty handed to the visa office which they only knew of because someone had told them where to go. Upon arriving, the security guard (who doubled as an instructor) was telling them how to take a number and what forms to fill out by hand, while ushering people to the right line up, and reminding others to turn off their cell phones. In addition to the (seemingly obvious) written instructions on the walls, the website, and the form itself, the visa office had multiple people working live on the floor to aid people through the application process. This was one of my earliest reflections on the ability of text to mediate life. I was born into a position that allowed me to navigate through the ruling relations of text, and to get the application approved so I could have the appropriate documentation to allow my body into India via international systems of understanding and collaboration. An elderly woman, on the other hand, who was illiterate and now a Canadian citizen because her son had sponsored her to come to Canada and was applying for a visa to return to India, had a very different and difficult experience with the same process. The assumptions of the systems that control the movement of bodies through
countries could not account for those who moved outside of systems of text. It was the workers on the floor of the visa office who had to compensate for the lack of ruling relations of text.

This is just one example of my lived experience of moving between two contexts, which is something I have been doing since I was born into an immigrant family. I live as a border-dweller and I am constantly negotiating spaces between the two cultures to define and process my experiences (Anzalidua, 1987). This is a large part of what drives my research and what puts me in a unique position to critique the CRC. One of the essential distinctions I make between the two contexts I am simultaneously studying and living in, is that one is a textually-mediated society and subject to the influence of non-humanist autopoietic systems, while the other is a reality largely structured outside of this influence of text.

There are many other differences between the two spaces. They do not exist outside the influences of the global economy, their historical moment or specific social conditions. Even if children in both places had an equal experience of textually mediated relations, they would still have varying experiences of rights because of their differential access to governing institutions, their position in the global economy, and their respective national histories. However, as will be seen later in the literature review, while all of these factors have been discussed in existing research, the effects of varying levels of textual mediation have yet to be considered when critiquing the experience of rights in the CRC. I also had the option of picking two spaces in Canada, one textually mediated and one not, thus controlling for other factors. However, in keeping with a feminist ethnography, I chose to two spaces that both define me and fuel my understanding of the problematic. It was being in these two places that lead me to ask how access to text effects childhoods and I stick to that throughout this thesis. I start exploring this problematic where I left off of my Master’s thesis, from an understanding of Brampton being
mediated by text and Butala being outside of its influence. This becomes my primary criteria and the place from where I launch my ethnography.

It is not my intention to oversimplify the differences between Ontario and Punjab, nor to pit one against the other. I do not claim that Ontario represents Canada or the first world nor do I claim that Punjab represents all of India or the third world. I am looking at two contexts; one of which I am defining as textually-mediated and one which is not. This is essential to my problematic because the UNCRC assumes all societies are textually-mediated. It is a document based in text and sustained through text; it is autopoietic in the truest sense. Because of reporting procedures and documents produced by obliging state parties, the CRC continually communicates with itself. Every reporting period, new reports are submitted that re-create the ruling mechanisms of the Convention. This does not account for the many contexts and childhoods, such as those of the children of Butala who are not within the controlling elements of text.

Literature review

History of Children’s Rights

The discourses surrounding child rights have been evolving for more than a century. Swedish educator and feminist, Ellen Key, first termed this century, the “Century of the Child” (Dekker, 2000). In 1900 she published her book with the same title and proclaimed the upcoming century to be one that was committed to transforming childhood for the better. She emphasized child rights, education and the interests of the child (Dekker, 2000). In 1919, the first international body was created as a result of the Treaty of Versailles. This treaty was signed to
end World War I, and the League of Nations was created as a result. In 1924, this international body adopted the Declaration of the Rights of the Child (Marshal, 1999). The Declaration was a list of mostly protection-based rights for children written by activist Eglantyne Jebb and her colleagues (Stasiulis, 2002). In 1948, as an apparent response to human rights violations in World War II, the United Nations adopted the Universal Declaration for Human Rights (UDHR). Another international human rights treaty, this one also addressed the rights of children. No explicit mention was given to children’s rights, but their rights were assumed to be covered by the provisions in the UDHR (Stasiulis, 2002). This was the first time the UN had brought international recognition to children’s rights.

More than a decade later, in 1959, the UN modified the original Declaration of the Rights of the Child and adopted it. At this point, although children’s rights were being addressed at an international level, they were still in the form of a declaration (Stasiulis, 2002). A declaration can state an ideal form of human rights, and have countries agree in principle, but it does not legally oblige anyone to act on the rights declared. A convention on the other hand, legally obliges ratifying parties to act on the statements within it.

In 1979, also known as the United Nations Year of the Child, a forty-two member ad hoc committee began negotiating the United Nation’s Convention on the Rights of the Child. This was in large part as a response to the notable injustices confronting children including high infant mortality, health care deficiencies, lack of education, prostitution, harmful work conditions, issues of armed conflict, refugee status and other harmful circumstances. A decade later in 1989, the Convention was officially adopted by the UN General Assembly. The CRC was the first child rights document to go beyond the protection and welfare of children; it uniquely addressed participatory rights of children (Stasiulis, 2002). Since then, one hundred and ninety-three
countries have signed and ratified the convention, making it the most popular human rights treaty in history (United Nations Treaty Collection, 2013).

What is the CRC?

The Convention on the Rights of the Child is an international policy document that forms law in ratifying countries. That is to say, it is law in Canada, and it is law in India. It provides guidance to form policy in a manner that attempts to transform the lives of children at a local level. It is also a treaty that offers a common ethical framework, from a global-moral consensus, for all those who work with children and young people (Melton, 2005). Specifically, it is a document containing 54 articles that outlines the rights of children as state responsibilities (United Nations, 1989). The four main principles of the CRC are the right to life and healthy development, the right to best-interest, the right to non-discrimination and the right to participation. These four articles are integrated into the remaining provisions in the document. Other areas of rights covered include civil rights and freedoms, family environment and alternative care, basic health and welfare, education and cultural activities, and finally special protection measures.

In order to make these rights a reality, there are a number of responsibilities that states need to take on. Article 4 asks ratifying state parties to,

undertake all appropriate legislative, administrative, and other measures for the implementation of the rights recognized in the present Convention. With regard to economic, social and cultural rights, States Parties shall undertake such measures
to the maximum extent of their available resources and, where needed, within the framework of international co-operation. (United Nations, 1989)

Essentially, the Convention asks states to turn the writings of the CRC into legislation and monitor their effectiveness. Early on, countries are to change legislation and see that existing legislation is in the spirit of the Convention. Collecting information, training those who work with children, and reporting are also important elements. Whereas the first 41 articles pertain specifically to the rights of children, from article 42 onwards state responsibilities such as reporting procedures and dissemination are discussed. Article 44 requires ratifying states to report their progress to the Committee on the Rights of the Child two years after initially signing and every five years thereafter (United Nations, 1989). The committee in Geneva then submits feedback to the countries in the form of Concluding Observations. These Concluding Observations report positive and negative developments in the reporting country and also provide suggestions for improvement (Robertson, 2001). Later in this review I will look in depth at the three sets of feedback that Canada and India have received to get a better idea of the situation of children’s rights in these two countries.

Reviews and Critiques of the Convention

In the now twenty-five years since the original inception of the Convention there have been many opportunities to reflect on, and critique, the CRC. Internally, the Convention underwent an assessment eighteen years after its inception. The eighteen year landmark was celebrated with a report titled “18 Candles” (Office of the United Nations Commissioner for Human Rights, 2007). The document was co-created by both adults and children holding true to the basic principle of the convention that children have the right to participation. Experts in
children’s rights, child rights activists, NGO representatives, and chairs of multiple organizations came together to reflect on the previous eighteen years. There was an acknowledgement that the Convention had been transformational and had mobilized many people to help children realize their rights. Mainstream views of children had shifted to re-imagine children as right-holders with responsibilities, and not just the property of their parents. Awareness of problems and human rights violations that children experience had increased. As a result, two further Optional Protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child had been created. One on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, and another on the involvement of children in armed conflict. In addition, two key studies were produced, one on the involvement of children in armed conflict, and the other on violence against children. Many laws, policies and programs had been put into effect and the mandatory reporting process had provided a space for voices to be heard. On the other hand, in the same report the contributing children wrote about what the Convention means to them and, “how they have not fully enjoyed its promise.” (Office of the United Nations Commissioner for Human Rights, 2007, p. 5).

Outside of the United Nations there are many critiques of the Convention. The historically recent emergence of international human rights regimes has come in part from the transformations of individual state parties into a global civil society (Fuchs, 2007). Thus, the Convention itself is not devoid of political and cultural context; it is the result of historical actions leading to its conception. Accordingly, both the Convention on the Rights of the Child specifically, and human rights in general have been under critique for many reasons including their universal, generalising, and often westernised concepts of childhood (Burr, 2006). For example, Bentley (2005) questions whether the ideal childhood presented through the articles of the CRC can be held throughout the world when multiple contexts of childhood exist within and
amongst ratifying state parties. In addition, Bentley argues that these rights can be split into two different types; those children have as human beings and those rights that they have by virtue of their status as children (Bentley, 2005). The problem arises with the second category of rights, as most of these are defined through a Western concept of what a child is and how they function. As Bentley notes,

> These reflect Western social policies which emphasise the role of individual causations and professional interventions and de-emphasise the influence of the wider social, economic, political and cultural circumstances. (2005, p. 110)

When these individualist ideals of policy and Western concepts of childhood are presented in diverse circumstances, they are met with practical problems.

In addition to these problems, another critique arises when considering the ontological take on children’s rights (Tarulli and Skott-Myhre, 2006). One of the basic assumptions of human rights in modernity is that they are set norms and standards that are self-evident to the point of being immune to critical examination. Additionally, they occur almost exclusively at the levels of states and legal bodies, not in the everyday lives of children and youth. Tarulli and Skott-Myhre pose that actual rights are produced within everyday interactions and the lives of the multitude. They assert that modern rights, such as those found in the CRC, are produced from assumptions about children, and that these rights progress in linear and categorical ways. Rights are prescribed to children based on assumptions of ages and stages. These assumptions which are universalised become the rights found in the CRC; this in turn simultaneously reproduces the universalised child as being and as becoming. The child, in modernity, must necessarily be produced as unstable, material, and outside of the production of an adult. The authors argue, that
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in this moment, the rights of children and youth cannot be produced by legal frameworks such as the Convention, but rather must be produced in the daily lives of children in different contexts. In this sense, rights are created through the forces and bodies of children on the ground (Tarulli and Skott-Myhre, 2006).

In yet another argument against the effectiveness of the Convention, Jean Grugel discusses the relative weakness of the document when it comes to changing the material realities of children. Grugel states that “Children are winning in rights theory; but this is not yet translated into real, meaningful and sustained improvements in terms of children’s well-being and status” (Grugel, 2013, p. 19). The rights discourses in current circulation focus on the individual being violated and ignore the complex political processes that contribute to the situation. They also limit the means of addressing the violation of rights to policy. At its inception in 1989 the Convention was very well received due to shifting liberal ideologies in international politics which favoured top-down solutions to rights issues and the increased participation of NGOs and private stakeholders in policy debates and steering processes. Perception of communities, individuals and children shifted during this time and the CRC both contributed to and rode on the waves of that change. However, Grugel questions how the lived realities and circumstances of children change in accordance with these shifts, especially in a context in which policy may have changed but the practices surrounding children haven’t. For example, the trafficking of children has become a more popular topic in the public arena. In contrast to the rights of children in migration, trafficked children often become the center of debates in arenas that already have set agendas around migration. In this way, states can take what they need from the children’s rights agenda and ignore the rest. Another example are the rights of adolescents in relation to their reproductive health. Where young girls are concerned, both age and gender dynamics combine to
leave them in a sexually ambiguous stage and neglected reproductive health state. Greugel also talks about the long standing problem of child poverty that spans many states and many historical periods. Rights-based approaches to poverty reduction have been limited in effectiveness. Looking at these three issues it becomes clear that despite high level policy and theoretical shifts in children’s rights discourses, there has been little done to alter their realities (Greugel, 2013).

The critiques in this section demonstrate the Convention is a non-humanist, self-sustaining document that is used by state parties to further their own political motives. It is produced and reproduced by legal frameworks and has very little to do with the bodies of children on the ground and their lived experience. Heavily based in Western and individualist notions of childhood and child-specific rights, it is not always relevant to children in all situations. Also, the self-evident nature of human rights in modernity makes it seem immune to criticism. Despite all these issues it continues to be used as a tool by ratifying state parties, those who advocate for children and children themselves. It is constantly being reinterpreted and used by different stakeholders. The next section considers the Canadian history and interaction with the Convention.

History and Concluding Observations in Canada

In 1991 Canada signed and ratified the CRC under the Mulroney government (Robertson, 2001). In the preliminary reporting years, the committee in Geneva underestimated the demand that would be put on them by reporting countries. Because of this, the first few sets of reports took longer to get through then had been originally accounted for. Canada submitted their first
report in 1994, and received their first set of Concluding Observation in 1995 (United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, 1995). In 2000, a second report was submitted and the second concluding observations were received in 2003 (United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2003). A third report and set of concluding observations were published in 2012 (United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2012). During these years, many alternative reports were created both domestically and for international review which I will also consider in this review.

From the three sets of concluding observations submitted back to Canada, many themes have emerged. Some of the positive aspects of Canada’s progress in children’s rights were outlined in the concluding observations as follows. Following the World Summit for Children, Canada established the Children’s Bureau to ensure that the Convention was taken into account in government policies. A Family Support Enforcement Fund was established to help provincial and territorial governments in the field of promotion and protection of children’s rights. There was an increase on the part of schools and local community services in identifying children’s disabilities at an early age. Canada also made efforts to participate in international projects in cooperation with UNICEF and other governmental and non-governmental organizations. The state established a National Child Benefit to address issues of childhood poverty. A National Children’s Agenda was also created to address multicultural involvement in implementing the Convention. As a result, a Secretary of State for Children and Youth was established. A Federal-Provincial-Territorial Council of Ministers on Social Policy Renewal was assigned and previous reservations towards the Convention were removed. Canada continued to play a role, nationally and internationally, in raising awareness of sexual exploitation and respectively amended the domestic criminal code to reflect these efforts. This process included facilitating the
apprehension and prosecution of persons seeking the services of child victims of sexual exploitation and allowing for the prosecution in Canada of all acts of child sexual exploitation committed by Canadians abroad. Furthermore, when creating a national Aboriginal plan, Canada used the principles and provisions of the Convention and developed the plan to Convention standards. It was noted that the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), was playing an ever-growing role in assisting developing countries to fulfill the rights of their children, and was trying to double international aid by 2010 (United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2003). Most recently, multiple laws, policies and bills were created or amended around issues of citizenship, trafficking, and homelessness. The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities was also ratified (United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2012).

Despite these positive developments, as of the latest set of concluding observation, there were still areas of concern. When Canada ratified the convention there was a reservation on article 37 (c) around detention and punishment- this has yet to be removed. There is an absence of comprehensive legislation that covers the full scope of the Convention in domestic law. This, combined with the dualist legal system, has led to many disparities in rights fulfillment based on which province or territory you live in. Due to this, clear guidelines are needed for CRC implementation in all provinces and territories. The plan of Action for Children lacks a clear division of responsibilities, priorities, targets, timetables, resource allocation and monitoring. The concluding observations further point out that Canada has not yet adopted a national strategy for a fully comprehensive framework that includes federal, provincial and territorial levels of government. There is consequently no resource allocation or monitoring mechanism. While noting that Canada is one of the most affluent economies of the world, the reports pointed out
that a child-specific approach was not used for budget planning. Such an approach would also include monitoring and evaluating the efficacy, adequacy, and equitability of the resources shared. In the area of international cooperation, Canada needs to increase its level of funding to meet aid targets. With regards to data collection, there is limited progress in establishing a national data collection system which is essential to the implementation of the CRC. The main principles of the Convention were also being inadequately addressed. Specifically, the right to non-discrimination was being violated by Canada’s treatment of aboriginal, African, disabled and female children. Other shortcomings brought up in the reports included the lack of a federal ombudsman, lack of awareness of the Convention, lack of training for people working with children, and lack of clear guidelines for children in the work force (United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2012).

After the second set of concluding observations was received, the Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights was authorized by the Senate to examine and report upon Canada’s international obligations with regard to the rights and freedoms of children (Senate of Canada, 2007). Starting in November of 2004, the Standing Senate took on Canada’s work with children’s rights as a case study. The primary aim of this study was to assess whether the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child had been implemented, whether Canadian children were benefiting from it, and whether the Convention had been used as a tool to address key problems facing children in this country. In 2007 a report was published from the study called “Children: The Silenced Citizens”. One of the key concerns expressed by witnesses was the federal government’s unwillingness to directly incorporate international human rights treaties. Similar to the Committee on the Rights of the Child, the Standing Senate Committee also made twenty-four recommendations to better the rights of children in Canada. Most of the
recommendations were in line with the concerns of the concluding observations as well as a few addressing bullying, identity, early childhood development and sexual minority youth (Senate of Canada, 2007).

Alternative reporting has also become a strong component of reviewing the children’s rights situation in Canada. Although the government submits reports to the Committee on the Rights of the Child, the Committee also welcomes reports from other organizations and incorporates them into their review on children’s rights in Canada. An example of this is a report submitted from Shannen’s Dream Campaign in cooperation with Ontario’s Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth during the most recent reporting period (2011). This report focuses on First Nations children in Canada and their rights, lives and education. The need for the report is fueled by the massive inequalities faced by aboriginal children in an education system that provides aboriginal children $2000-$3000 less per year per student in comparison to non-aboriginal children. These children have faced harsh conditions in run down portables near diesel spills that have had heaters breakdown; the children have had to wear mittens just to hold a pencil. The report goes into detail about the fundamental violations of the rights presented in the CRC and the blatant discrepancies between aboriginal and non-aboriginal children. A large part of the report is written by children themselves. There are thirty-eight letters of concern written by these children which are not edited or mediated, in order to provide an authentic platform to express their concerns. This is followed by comments from various adults who advocate for children and a section of recommendations based on the letters written by the children. The gist of the report is that aboriginal children in Canada demand the same treatment as all other Canadian children receive. To this effect the recommendations specifically call out which parts
of the CRC require increased adherence, including those rights related to cultural sensitivity and resource distribution (Shannen’s Dream Campaign, 2011).

Yet another organization monitoring the use of the Convention in Canadian policy is the Canadian Coalition for the Rights of Children. They published a report titled “Right in principle, right in practice: implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child in Canada” (2011). This report was also submitted as a part of the latest Canadian review by the Committee on the Rights of the Child and similarly argued that Canada is lacking in many areas of children’s rights including,

- delayed health treatments for aboriginal children because of funding disputes between federal and provincial governments;
- frequent moves of children in foster care and long stays in child welfare systems;
- estimates that 25% of young children are not ready for school;
- limited access to mental health services for adolescents;
- and failure to intervene when young girls from the polygamous community of Bountiful were trafficked across the border to be child brides for religious leaders. (Canadian Coalition for the Rights of Children, 2011)

The report also demonstrates that in comparison with similar nations, children in Canada are below average or near the bottom in terms of infant mortality, health and safety, poverty, well-being, early childhood care and issues of adoption. This report contrasts with Canada’s own report which does not include the work of young people themselves or those who work with them. Contributors then go on to make general recommendations such as using a rights-based approach for proposed laws, budgets and programs, continuous reporting and monitoring, and establishing a children’s commissioner. Specific recommendations are also made such as closing
gaps in the child welfare system, educating children on their rights, providing equal access to education for all aboriginal children and changes to the youth justice system. (Canadian Coalition for the Rights of Children, 2011).

Although the number of institutions, government or otherwise, that have reviewed the Convention on the Rights of the Child in Canada are countless, I have decided to focus on a few key reports and use the information therein to provide some insight into Canada’s adaptation of the CRC in domestic processes. Canada has been obliged through the ratification process to report to the Committee on the Rights of the child two years after signing the CRC, and every five years thereafter. Alongside this, other organizations have submitted alternate reports. In light of all these the Committee has provided three sets of concluding observations as a form of feedback to Canada. As can be seen through the positive and negatives comments Canada has received, despite implementing the Convention in some laws, policies and processes, there have been, and continue to be, huge areas that need improvement. The status of aboriginal children, budgetary spending and monitoring and dissemination of the Convention are a few of the areas highlighted in the review process. In a similar sense, India has also been obliged by ratification to submit reports and receive feedback. I will now move into looking at the children’s rights situation in India.

**History and Concluding Observations in India**

The history of children’s rights in India follows a slightly different trajectory than that of Canada. When the United Nations adopted the Declaration on the Rights of the Child in the 1950’s, the Indian Government also accepted this Declaration (Rao, 2007). Following this,
various plans were launched to provide children with services in health care, nutrition and education. Compatible with these policy developments, a National Policy for Children was adopted in 1974. Amongst other things this policy addressed health care, nutrition for mothers and children, education, physical activity, exploitation, children with disabilities, and children in minority groups. To plan, review and coordinate various parts of this policy, the National Children’s Board was established in the same year. More than a decade later in 1985, the Department of Women and Child Development was set up in the Ministry of Human Resource Development. This department took on advocacy, inter-sectoral monitoring and catered to women and children as a part of its responsibilities. In 1992, a National Plan of Action for Children was formulated; this plan built on the policies before it. In the same year, the Indian Government also signed and ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The main responsibility for implementation and monitoring of the Convention fell to the Ministry of Women and Child Development. The Convention was translated into most regional languages and was also internalized by provincial governments (Rao, 2007). India received their first set of Concluding Observations in 2000, and received their second set in 2004 (United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2004).

The two sets of concluding observation in India showed similar human rights developments as Canada but in a different social context. Some of the successes in the Committee reports were as follows; there was a wide range of legislation and institutions that addressed the protection of human rights and children’s rights. Some of these included the National Human Rights Commission, the National Commission for Women, and the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Commission. In previous years the Supreme Court of India had made frequent and increasing references to human rights treaties in court settings. Similarly,
non-government organizations and other grass-roots organizations had been participating in activities that enhanced the protection of human rights. India had also been increasing their cooperation with NGOs and international bodies to address child health and labour issues. The Constitution Act had been adopted that made for free and compulsory education for all children six to fourteen years of age; simultaneously primary school access had been increased. Also, the Pre-conception and Pre-natal Diagnostic Techniques (Prohibition of Sex Selection) Act was established in 1994. This act made it illegal to selectively identify and abort female foetuses. Child telephone lines were established and a comprehensive set of data was collected and made available (United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2004).

On the other hand, the report showed many problems with CRC implementation in India. The Committee on the Rights of the Child acknowledged the unique challenge India faced due to the fact that a huge proportion of the world’s children are Indian. Similar to Canada, one of the key issues was lack of implementation of the Convention in domestic legislation. In particular, religious and personal laws which govern family matters, were not yet fully in conformity with the provisions and principles of the Convention. Divisions in the governmental system lead to a lack of proper implementation of the articles of the Convention. Coordination amongst state, federal and local governments was less than ideal; there was no permanent and adequate monitoring mechanism to ensure that the Convention was being properly implemented. The principle of non-discrimination was being hugely disregarded with respect to female, refugee, immigrant, disabled, low caste and tribal children. Since a large number of children were not registered at birth, the problem of stateless children was prominent.

An issue unique to India’s reports was torture. Within the police system, and the courts, children were being tortured and accountability was scarce. The government had also taken
limited action to prohibit violence against children in the family, school and care institutions. There were large disparities amongst children in standards of basic health, living and education. Many children were left without access to these basic requirements. Another issue unique to India’s reports was armed conflict. The government was lacking in policy and implementation of policy to protect those children who were involved. Discrepancies were also evident in administration of juvenile justice. Although girls under eighteen were protected, boys were tried as adults; the committee asked that this be amended immediately. Other problems included limited respect for the views of children, the rights of fathers, children with AIDS, traditional practices such as dowries, child labour, sexual trafficking, street children and dissemination of the CRC (United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2004).

**Return to problematic**

Because the CRC is a document that is being implemented in many countries simultaneously, the realization of article 42 (that all children and people working with children will have knowledge of the convention) should be able to serve as a measure of compliance. However, a review of the literature shows a lack of success of the entire Convention, including article 42. This provides a basis for asking why different contexts are, to varying degrees, not able to successfully implement the CRC.

Regardless of their apparent differences, India and Canada are both in agreement with the global moral consensus presented by the Convention and have decided to use it as a tool to transform the lives of children at a local level. Both nations signed the CRC in the early nineties and have since had roughly the same amount of time to disseminate the document within their
populations. The governments in both nations speak English and have parliamentary democracy as their primary form of national governance. Within these democracies there is a primarily top-down approach to policy creation and implementation (Carty, 2006; Varshney, 2007). It is also worth noting that both countries have at some point been governed by British law and that their political settings reflect this influence (Carr, 2005; Pierre, 2003). Thus, both countries have had the same amount of time to utilize the same human rights treaty in a similar top-down approach. Despite these similarities, the two countries have had very different experiences, and faced different obstacles, in implementation. The many complex reasons for this is what I set out to explore in this thesis. This exploration is not a comparison of Canada and India, the first and third world, or even the East and West. Rather, it is an examination of Brampton and Butala; two different contexts, one driven by text and one not driven by text.

The UNCRC attempts to provide a universal set of rights for an infinite number of contexts. Article 42 provides an internal checking system which shows that the CRC is not working in either Canada or India to varying degrees. This failure of compliance provides an important opportunity to ask why the CRC has been used as the primary tool for addressing the lack of children’s rights in Canada, India, and around the world. If a universal document cannot overcome contextual difficulties to affect and influence life, it is inherently flawed.

With this problematic in mind the remaining chapters will proceed as follows: the next chapter will begin by looking, in detail, at my methodology and the specific research methods I used. I will situate myself in the conceptual framework provided by the new sociology of childhood and in the larger historical framework of human rights. Chapters three and four will start with a broad explanation of the Indian context and then narrow in on the specifics of life in Butala. Rich description will be provided for multiple aspects of life in Butala such as caste,
migration, gender and the spaces of childhood. Special attention will be paid to the space of the anganwadi and how it is shaped by government protocol. Chapter five will add an element of comparison by talking about the textually-dominated context of Ontario preschools. Finally, chapter six will summarize the main findings of the thesis.
Chapter 2: methodology, conceptual framework and methods

Introduction

The power of a good story cannot be underestimated -indeed, a well told story can change the world. Stories mobilize and inspire activism, pass traditions and convey knowledge. I have learned that storytelling is the primary way that I communicate, build relationships and share parts of myself. However, like any other form of data collection and processing, narrative also requires the selective loss of knowledge. Life does not fall into neat storylines. Life happens in messy waves of sensory overload. Our brains sift through all that is marked as irrelevant by our personal biases, and churn out a few key details to draw in an audience. By clearly articulating the methodology behind my use of narrative, I hope to demonstrate its place alongside other methods of data collection that similarly proceed with a selective loss of knowledge.

Going into this project I knew that I wanted to use personal narrative and participant observation as a way of conveying knowledge. It seemed like an obvious extension of who I was, and my feminist perspective didn’t require that I separate my self from my research. As Gannon (2006) explains, all I can accurately represent is myself. Whenever I am writing, I use language as it is filtered through my understanding of the world and my personal lens. My self is produced as a result of my particular space and time and I am always writing myself. Thus, all my writing is representation, and this research is also another way of representing myself.

Ethnography then seemed to be the logical choice of methodology for what I wanted to do. My exploration of the two spaces I have chosen was also an extension of myself. As a border-dweller, I constantly walk the lines between the cultures of Punjab and Ontario. As a child of immigrant parents, certain things that others take for granted, certain assumptions about
reality, certain comforting privileges, were not afforded to me. Burr (1995), in her writing on social constructionism outlines the four basic principles of the approach. The first is a critical stance towards taken-for-granted knowledge. This questions the traditional positivistic and empirical ways of knowing the world and power relations. The second regards historical and cultural specificity. The third is the understanding that knowledge is sustained by social processes. Finally, knowledge and social action go together. Knowing, in this sense, is linked to doing; the two are not separate phenomenon.

As a border-dweller, or someone who exists between two cultures, it is the first of these four that struck me the most. I understood the world to be socially constructed even before I could articulate it as such. My brain was programmed to take a critical stance against knowledges that are otherwise taken for granted; constantly seeing the world through multiple lenses helped me to question the assumption that the world was simply the way it was. From my first breath, my parents were trying to negotiate what life would mean for me being raised in Canada. They struggled to provide me with the static sense of Indian culture that they had brought from their respective homes when they immigrated, while still trying to allow for me to be raised in Canada. My mom is from Rajasthan, my dad from Punjab, and I was born in North York, Toronto. What did this mean in my everyday life? It meant everyone at home spoke Punjabi, and so despite being born in Canada, English was not my first language. It meant that I learned to read and write Punjabi at Punjabi-school on the weekends while going to an English speaking public school during the weekdays. It meant I sang songs in English in school and in Punjabi at home. It meant I ate peanut butter and jelly in preschool and aloo paronthay at home. It meant I understood that adult/child relations were specific to the environment I was in, that similar words in either language had different meanings and elicited different emotions and that
material culture was not universal; in essence, I knew from early on, that nothing was a given. Every article of clothing that missed the mark, every meal that smelled like Punjabi spices, every mispronounced word became a platform on which I played out my (at times) contesting identities.

As I got older I realised that negotiating between the two cultures was to become less my parents’ responsibility and more mine. I learned the hard way that religious and cultural traditions were not handed down to me as concrete and unchanging, but that I was allowed to reshape them according to my own experiences. A frequent example where this manifested was around wedding traditions.

I often get asked what Punjabi weddings are like in Canada and I have a difficult time answering. For example, the Punjabi wedding traditions of forty years ago that my parents have crystalized from their idyllic memories and presented to me in stories in an attempt to teach me about Punjabi culture are but one version. Then there are the sensory overload weddings of
modern day Punjab with too much food, deafeningly loud sound systems, scantily clad stage
dancers, and army bands parading around the newlyweds. In Canada, I have seen brides wearing
every color of outfit, have flower girls, wedding receptions in banquet halls, first dances, rings
exchanged, walking around the holy scriptures, and most recently, the Gangnam style dance in
the middle of the reception. The choice to include, or exclude any one of these traditions is
informed by the way the families and couples negotiate the borders between cultures. Every
child of immigrants lands somewhere different between two cultures and I am no different.
There is no one set of traditions for having a Punjabi wedding in Canada, in the same way that
there is no one experience of being a Canadian-born child of Indian parents. Also, living this
way it became clear to me that culture was not one, unchanging thing. The culture of Punjab
changes every day as does that of Ontario. Thus, taking for granted the power of certain
knowledges was never an option for me.

This balancing act of walking between two cultures led to an obvious choice of research
topic and an obvious choice of methodology. When I started looking at children’s rights on an
international level I knew that I had access to two cultures and contexts and I wanted to share the
insights that I had via my own lived experiences. Conveying how I understood the two contexts
was as important to me as conveying the information itself. Knowing that I couldn’t separate my
conceptual lens from the “data,” I found theoretical support in the methodologies that I will now
present. This chapter is a combination of the things that define me as an academic writer: the
methodologies I choose, the conceptual frameworks that organize my understanding of the world
and the positions I take on human rights, childhood and modernity.
Methodology

History of ethnography

The methodology I used to explore children’s rights was ethnography. Born out of anthropological traditions, ethnography is a methodology whereby the researcher is simultaneously a participant and an observer in the social setting they are studying (Goldbart and Hustler, 2005). In the nineteenth century, anthropologists conducted fieldwork in what were considered to be exotic environments for the purpose of comparison among civilizations; ethnography was the speculative tool of choice (Edles, 2002). The hallmark of this approach was the (seemingly) natural aspect of it. Culture occurred, it was believed, in a complex reality. This created an opening for a nature-oriented research methodology that allowed observers greater understanding of the situations under scrutiny (Edles, 2002). Historically, ethnography also claimed that reality was tangible, empirical and objectively recordable.

In the nineteenth century there was a turn from this exoticised form of ethnography, to the use of ethnographic approaches in cultural settings that were familiar to the researcher. The emergence in North America and Britain of social ethnography focused on what was termed the “way of life” approach to culture. This marked the use of ethnography as a methodology of the oppressed (Edles, 2002, Hallett and Fine, 2000). It was at this time that the Chicago School of Ethnography was established to look at local issues and enclaves. Writing ethnography was not yet solely the intellectual preserve of the university, which meant that a non-university credited individual who had access to a certain subculture could also be considered an ethnographer. There was no concrete set of methods and rarely did researchers provide details on how they came to their qualitative data. Amongst the mixed methods were frequent diary entries, photos,
surveys and written observations (Hallett and Fine, 2000). A final and most recent shift in ethnography has resulted in a turn to the reflexive. Forsaking the idea of the researcher as the objective observer, critical ethnography now takes on self-reflexive field practices and writing techniques (Foley, 2002).

Type(s) of ethnography used in this project

The shifting face of ethnography over time has resulted in multiple types. One of the types I used to explore my environment in Butala was analytic ethnography. Based in naturalistic inquiry, this type of ethnography has many central foci (Lofland, 1995). Primarily, it looks at the organization of social life in an attempt to provide general frameworks for a problematic. There is an emphasis on an open and naturalistic form of inquiry. Central to analytic ethnography is the immersion of the researcher in the environment she is studying. The emotional, spiritual, physical and intimate familiarity with the social environment central to the research creates an understanding of the problematic that cannot be accomplished from a distance. The analytic part of analytic ethnography comes from the traditional commitment of the researcher to explore a phenomenon with a theory/goal orientation. Although the research is open and interpretive, it is driven by an attempt at theorization (Lofland, 1995).

I also employed some concepts from institutional ethnography. The basis of this methodology is the work of Dorothy Smith and her engagement, in turn, with Marxism and feminist methodologies (Holstein, 2006). This method starts with the problematic as identified in the everyday lives of people and then seeks to map it out as it falls in textually-mediated institutions. The approach,
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aims to map the translocal processes of administration and governance that shape those circumstances via the linkages of ruling relations. Recognizing that such connections are accomplished primarily through what might be called textually-mediated social organization, institutional ethnographers focus on texts-in-use in multiple settings. (Holstein, 2006, p. 293)

I use Smith’s approach partially rather than completely because it becomes ineffective at the local level for Butala’s children who are not governed by text-based institutions. The Convention on the Rights of the Child is mediated through multiple institutions but does not have a clearly mapped trajectory in Butala; therefore, part of my problematic is based in textually-oriented institutions and part of it is outside those bounds. I find Smith’s approach useful for studying the institutional aspect of the problem in question. I therefore use institutional ethnography to map the politics implicit in the CRC up until the point that they become ineffective.

Criticisms of ethnography

There have been many points of ambiguity and contention when it comes to conventional ethnography. The methodology started out as a colonial project, became repurposed as a tool for people to convey their own experiences, and is now regarded as an academic methodology and the intellectual domain of the academy. With this interesting history, post-colonial critiques of ethnography point to the power relations created by the dynamic between the researcher and the researched. Due to its roots in colonial anthropology, there remains an inherent colonization of the research subject in the use of this approach. Initially, ethnographers collected data on subjects for the benefit of those in power. The post-colonial argument is that this has not changed (Edles,
2002). There is still a dynamic between the researcher and the subject whereby indigenous information is taken and then used in the university to the benefit of the researcher or institution. The action of knowing becomes synonymous with power over the population. A researcher can take on certain characteristics of a colonizer when she enters an exotic domain with her ideas and engages with people for the purpose of attaining information (Edles, 2002).

Feminist critiques have furthered the discussion and pointed to the gendered relations in the history of ethnographic research. Most ethnographic research still happens within the androcentric institution of the university (Edles, 2002). Ethnography has been dominated by male researchers who present male-based accounts for their male-dominant institutions. These accounts, which include not only conventional ethnographies but also the more recent Chicago School ethnographies, have a tendency to show women as simply being there. The accounts given in these studies do not actually go into how women structure their social settings.

Finally, post-modern criticisms contest the apparent neutrality of the researcher. The realist nature of the methodology denies the subjective and relative states of social settings. It denies that the researcher has influence or position in the place she is studying. In post-modern and post-structuralist discourse the self is one of the only things that can be written about. As Gannon points out, knowledge, “is sourced from our particular locations in particular bodies with particular feelings, flesh, and thoughts that become possible in particular sociocultural-spatial contexts” (Gannon, 2006, p. 476). Attempts to write and describe a social other are abandoned and instead of mapping out reality, a sense of what is real is evoked through writing the self (Foley, 2002). Writing ethnographically and acknowledging the self in writing leads to the writer identifying herself in a historical, political, and personal context. The shift in postmodernity to autoethnography presents an alternative in which the researcher does not hide
behind an objective voice. Using reflexivity as the focus of writing, autoethnography moves comfortably into the space of acknowledging that a researcher can really only know herself and that is what she must therefore write about.

**Response to Criticism**

In response to these criticisms, I have decided to utilize a feminist approach to ethnography. This approach is grounded in the understanding that, individuals’ experiences are socially organized, and as such, the researcher begins by examining the individuals’ experiences but then proceeds to explore how the broader social relations have shaped them. (Perry et al., 2006, p. 177)

The feminist model also requires researchers to acknowledge their own beliefs and subjective realities thus addressing post-modern concerns with the notion of “objectivity.” Most importantly, however, feminist ethnography requires acknowledging the shifting power relations between the researcher and the researched. The realities of the changing dynamics of these relationships also address post-colonial concerns.

I also draw from what Nancy Scheper-Hughes, refers to as “good-enough ethnography” (Scheper-Hughes, 2002, p. 28). In response to the many criticisms of ethnography, Scheper-Hughes has stated that as ethnographers, accepting the necessarily flawed and biased nature of the methodology is important. Despite this we must “struggle to do the best we can with the limited resources we have at hand - our ability to listen and observe carefully, and compassionately” (Scheper-Hughes, 1992, p. 28). As another educator puts it, this type of approach “is not intended
to celebrate mediocrity, but to acknowledge imperfections that surface despite meticulous procedural implementations” (Hughes, 2008, p. 126). With this in mind, my research is carried out in a “good-enough” sense. Instead of spending time and energy deflecting critiques of subjectivity, I acknowledge the shortcomings of this methodology and during my research attempted to listen and observe with compassion.

**Methods**

With ethnography as my methodology, my research was carried out in the following way. I spent January to March and October to December of 2012 in my village, Butala, Punjab. While I was there I spent my time engaging with the *anganwadi* system; a system that could be equated with a publically funded preschool system in Ontario. I lived in my grandparents’ home in Butala and on the days that the *anganwadi* was open, I would attend classes and spend time with the workers and students. I also spent time collecting policy documents and speaking with various officials in the Indian political system. My most valuable research arose from the simple act of living in the village. The rich ethnographic experience of living in Butala is the basis from which I generated my ethnographic field notes and narratives.

The ethnographic data I present when talking about life in Ontario is not as neatly bookended by arrival and departure as my time in Punjab is. During the months between and after my visits to India, in 2012 and 2013, I mirrored the research process in Ontario. I collected policy documents, spoke with officials in various levels of government and observed life in ministry-approved preschools. Some of these preschools were either private/for-profit or non-profit and funded by a combination of provincial subsidies and fees collected from parents. All
schools however, were run by ministry guidelines as outlined in the Day Nurseries Act, therefore having a fairly controlled experience of preschool and government influence across the board (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014). Beyond this, however, when I write about life in Ontario, I inevitably draw on a lifetime of experiences. Much of the insight I have into the preschool system also comes from lived experience. I have worked with children in preschools in various contexts for the past twelve or more years. I have lived in Ontario for twenty-eight years. The observations from this time period provide valuable insight into my understanding of life in Ontario which I incorporate into my data.

*Policy Analysis*

I used institutional ethnography to consider the part of my problematic that involved texts and institutions. The aim was to map social relations through the text of institutions in an attempt to understand the problematic. For my project, I looked at the international, domestic, and local texts that documented the movement of the ideas of the CRC in a top-down approach. Some of this was accessed through the internet. For example, UN committee observations, national policies and human rights documents were widely available and easily accessed through official internet sites. The policy collection that I did on the ground in India and Canada involved more regional and domestic documentation. For this, I worked with my connections with NGO’s, teacher training institutions, and regional officers involved in the production of children’s spaces. I collected documents in both English and Punjabi that dealt directly with the dissemination and implementation of the principles and articles of the CRC in both countries.
However, the policy analysis was secondary to this project. At the forefront of this research was the rich description in the ethnography. The basis for assuming that policy differently effected reality on the ground in the two contexts came from the concluding observations of Canada and India and also from the research from my Master’s thesis. They both demonstrated the varying failure of article 42, that governments should make the convention known to children and those working with children. Preschool children and preschool teachers in Brampton had limited knowledge of the Convention and in Butala there was none at all. Knowing that article 42 was put in as an internal marker of compliance, my using it to demonstrate the failure of the policy to reach children was within the spirit of its original intention (Mitchell, 2005). Thus although I return to some policy discussion later in this thesis, I do not go into depth about the texts. I have demonstrated the failure of the Convention in both places through the analysis of the Concluding Observations and the limited policy discussion that follows in oncoming chapters simply seeks to reiterate it. The rich description, however is the part of my methodology that knits an intricate narrative and an understanding of why the lack of textual reality in Butala is not straightforward. There are many contributing factors that can only truly be understood by immersing in the culture of a non-textually mediated context. In the absence of everyone working with the Convention being able to make a trip to Butala, I seek to share with as much detail as I can to convey an understanding of all the reasons text fails in one place when it can succeed in ruling the relations of another.
Observations

Outside of the institutions that I went to in order to collect policies, I spent most of my time with children in the schools. I chose to observe these children specifically because they were part of institutions that, in theory, were governed according to government policies. As I spent time with children both inside and outside the school, I documented my observations using thick descriptions. Thick description is a significant component of ethnography that is used to richly describe the observations of the researcher (Goldbart & Hustler, 2005). As an analytic ethnographer, immersion in the social setting that I was studying was essential. My observations were done in two parts and recorded in two separate notebooks. The notebook based on observations throughout my research ventures was kept on hand at all times and contained thick descriptions of the places I went and the experiences I had. The second notebook was a journal which recorded my personal thoughts and transformations. I made note of my experiences and made reference to the issues I recorded in the first notebook. Although the feminist approach I took to ethnography did not require me to bracket my personal experience from my fieldwork, as a methodological approach, I still chose to record my observations and my reflexive journal-like entries in two different notebooks.

Interviews

In addition to the observations of daily life in the village, city and the school, I held interviews with adults involved in the lives of these children. I did not interview the children because for this problematic, I was exploring the construction of their institutional spaces and I wanted to speak with those who were on the other side of the adult/child power dynamic. In both
countries, I had the chance to talk to the workers on site with the children, the policy makers involved in creating respective guidelines and other politicians, activists and authority figures who had a role to play in shaping the spaces of children. I did not have a predetermined set of interview questions but rather had guided conversations.

*Photographs and Songs*

In order to document the social fabric of the places I lived in, I took pictures and recorded songs. Since much of the tradition in the village was not based on text, I turned to oral traditions as represented through folk music and photographs to convey a text-free form of representation. While this did not remove my position as researcher and interpreter from the methodology, it worked around the need to transcribe all research experience into the English language. In Ontario I similarly collected pictures and songs. Since the songs were already in the language that I present this thesis in, no translation was required.

*Ethnography and the Problematic*

After reviewing the details of the methodology, I now return to my problematic to understand why ethnography is my methodology of choice. The issue at hand, as mentioned in the beginning, is that children in Canada and India have unequal access to the text-structured realities that are proposed by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. In order to further explore this disconnect a holistic and qualitative approach to my findings was required. Children do not exist as objects in isolation; they are also influenced by their environments,
including the technologies that surround them. To understand a problematic involving children means understanding the many elements that contribute to their daily lives. Policies, interviews, observations and reflections were all elements that provided insight into the day to day interactions that create the material conditions of life in Canada and India. Ethnography provides the theoretical basis and support required to interpret and transcribe such interactions. Despite the infinite number of subjective realities that are present in the lives of the children with whom I worked, ethnography allowed for a critical generalization of social patterns to provide insight into why this problematic took on the form it did. Ethnography, in the sense that I engage with it, does not subscribe to an uncritical universalism. Nor does it require endless debates of cultural relativism. It is with this understanding of ethnography, that despite the potential shortcomings and criticisms of the methodology, I use it to explore my problematic.

Conceptual framework

Years as an academic have taught me the value of knowing how authors positions themselves. In the many documents I come into contact with in India and Canada, knowing who the author is provides as much information as the contents of the document. Data, although traditionally presented as an objective reality, is most often filtered and processed to the benefit of the person presenting it. Knowing the conceptual framework of a writer gives insight into why the presented data was chosen and what may have been left out. To bring transparency to my work I acknowledge that I necessarily bring my biases to the information I present in this dissertation. I share now one of the most important of these positions. After years of studying children and the multiple lenses through which childhood is constructed, I have come to position
myself as a sociologist of childhood. This section will look in depth at this lens including its history, critiques and relationship to the child rights movement in an attempt to set up a framework for my data.

*History of children in sociology*

Philippe Aries is noted for changing the way in which children were studied and bringing life back into the child studies domain. Aries’ argument, which was new when published in 1960, was that prior to the sixteenth century, children were considered to be little more than small adults. By studying their objects, portraits and spaces, Aries demonstrated that the concept of the sentimentalized and nurtured child was specific to the modern moment (Gutman & Connick-Smith, 2008). From the sixteenth to the eighteenth century there was a shift in thinking about children as being the property of parents to being equal to adults. In the nineteenth century the child came to be seen as a special class of person worthy of preservation and protection. Finally, and as previously mentioned, the nineteenth century also saw the emergence of the welfare approach, and the Century of the Child (Hart, 1991).

According to James, Jenks and Prout (1998), the study of children can be seen as either presociological or sociological. The presociological views on children are those which inform contemporary knowledge and the basis of the everyday understanding of children. As the authors state, “This spacious category contains the dustbin of history. It is the realm of common sense, classical philosophy, the highly influential discipline of developmental psychology and the equally important and pervasive field of psychoanalysis” (James, Jenks & Prout, 1998, p. 10). Childhoods, according to presociology, are assumed to be outside of social structures, i.e. that
children have a fundamental nature which is independent of the environment in which they grow up. Conceptions of the child as evil, innocent, immanent, natural and unconscious are all examples of this perspective.

In contrast, the sociological view of children acknowledges the important role that social processes play in their development. It conveys an understanding of children as objects of socialization in an attempt to comment on how society works. Instead of assuming children are outside of social influence, it acknowledges social processes and in turn uses them to comment on society. In this view, children are conceived as passive objects receiving environmentally contrived socialization as a means of conceptualising the family, school, or larger society. Traditional sociology thus largely grouped children into the study of families and did not acknowledge their agency.

Beyond this traditional view, James, Jenks and Prout offer four other sociological perspectives on childhood that are neither necessarily compatible with each other, nor do they occur in an intellectual vacuum (1998). The first is the perspective that children are socially constructed and that hermeneutic meaning can be derived by examining the context that children grow up in. The second, the tribal child, is the form the child takes on when they are researched within the island of their own world; in this approach tribes of children are studied in their own right against the backdrop of adult worlds. Thirdly, the minority-group child is studied as a minority much in the same way that women or people of color are studied as a minority-group. The fourth and final sociological perspective on childhood is in the social structural child. In this category children are universally acknowledged as being a fundamental part of every society and thus deserving of rights (James, Jenks and Prout, 1998).
Following a similar line of thought, Gillis proposes the theory of the “islanding” of children (2008). This approach understands children to be separated not only from adults but also from one another in physical and theoretical space. Children are shuttled from safe space to safe space and this contributes to the way childhood is viewed. In an unstable world, childhood is given the difficult task of representing an ideal stability. Adults created this vision of childhood which can then be retreated to during moments such as Christmas or birthdays. This mythical arena of childhood is immune to the transformations and dangers of the actual social world. This childhood does not actually exist but is an ideal to be lived by. Based on highly westernized notions of childhood, these mythical islands have their own versions of space, time and social reality (Gillis, 2008). The islanding of children, alongside the presociological and sociological views of childhood provide insight into how sociology has treated children as research subjects in the past.

*The new sociology of childhood*

In ever-shifting sociological ideas on childhood, the new sociology of childhood emerges as an alternative approach to conceptualising children (James & Prout, 1990). Self-labelled as an “emergent” paradigm, the approach tries to take some of the implicit structures of a changing sociology and make them explicit. There are six such explicit components to this paradigm that allow researchers to be reflexive about their approach to working with children. The first of these six is the understanding that childhood is a social construct. Although the biological immaturity of children is a fact, the meaning this is given is neither natural nor universal. Secondly, childhood is a variable of social analysis that can never exist outside of issues of race, class or
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gender. Thirdly, children are worthy of study in their own right, not simply as objects of socialization or as a microcosm of the adult world. Fourth, children are active participants in constructing their own lives, not passive objects of socialization. Fifth, ethnography is an ideal method of researching within this paradigm because it allows children more access to the research process and more voice. Finally, researchers within this explicit paradigm must accept the double hermeneutic of their actions; in participating in the new sociology of childhood, researchers are simultaneously reconstructing childhood (James and Prout, 1990).

Daniel Cook also expands on the recent shift towards the new sociology of childhood by providing further insight into the spirit of the framework (2002). It is important, according to this sociologist, to consider the varying constructions of children and look to the power relations present within them. If childhood is taken to be a social construction, it can subsequently be deconstructed and analysed. Cook goes further to explain the constraints of childhood as a social institution. Children are born into a pre-existing childhood and thus from birth are in constant interaction with race, class, gender, nutritional regimes, medical practices, toys etc. Childhood is thus a symbolic structure that has children self-identifying as children and also has researchers identifying certain childhoods (2002).

Scheper-Hughes (1992) is an example of an author conducting research from within this new sociology. Although she does not explicitly identify as a sociologist of childhood, in her book, Death Without Weeping, which is about child death and mother love in the shanty-towns of Brazil, she uses ethnography in a way that fulfills the criteria presented by James and Prout (1990). Throughout her research she allows the stories of the children to come through without the use of an objectifying analysis. For example, when describing the funeral of a child that she attended, she explains how the children present are playing beside the coffin and how some
consider themselves too old to be pallbearers (p. 271). She does not follow this scene with analysis or non-reflexive judgement. Instead, her extensive ethnography reads like a story in which the children are legitimate characters. In breaking down the productions of certain events like festivals and funerals, she analyses the social construction and social meanings of these events. She also provides an in-depth analysis of the Brazilian town in which her ethnography is produced, and situates it globally. While she is primarily interested in telling the stories of mothers and children, she does not avoid the intersections of race, class and gender. Above all, she has a tremendous level of critical self-reflection as a researcher. As the new sociology of childhood demands, she acknowledges her own role in the research process. Scheper-Hughes openly questions, and indeed casts doubt on, her ability to be both an activist and an anthropologist. The result is an extremely enlightening example of how children can be academically encapsulated in accord with the new sociology of childhood.

Critiques of the new sociology of childhood

Like any worthy conceptual framework, the new sociology of childhood is not without multiple shortcomings. John Morss, for example, takes a close look at the new sociology of childhood and offers a critique from the perspective of critical psychology (2002). Morss focuses specifically on the aspect of this new sociology that looks at social construction and compares it to the notion of social construction that has arisen in critical psychology. According to Morss, the term has not been clearly defined in the explanation of the new sociology by James, Jenks and Prout (1998); it is simultaneously used as a component of sociological study and as the overarching basis for it. It is also referred to in three different senses,
First there is a *general* social constructionism which is strongly endorsed and which is said to characterise the whole enterprise. Second is a *phenomenological* social constructionism which is mildly endorsed but criticised for its relativism. Third is a *discursive* social constructionism which is weakly endorsed in some respects, but also strongly criticised for its relativism. (Morss, 2002, p. 45-46)

On closer examinations of the way social construction is relayed in the new sociology of childhood, it is arguably complicated and poorly theorized. It is here that Morss insists that critical psychology has more to contribute than has previously been understood. Social construction has served as the theoretical basis for the rejection of developmental psychology by sociologists. However, issues of social production and construction, as they are framed in the rich history of critical psychological theory, are not at odds with the new sociology of childhood. Morss suggests a fifth category be added to the list of sociological childhoods outlined by James, Jenks and Prout (1998): the performative child. “It would describe the ways in which children and childhoods are produced both textually and practically, embodied just as much as adults, and with bodies that are just as much a textual-material hybrid as those of adults.” (Morss, 2002, p. 51). The theorization comes from critical psychology, but begins to address some of the shortcomings of the new sociology of childhood.

Also speaking from a psychological approach, Hart (1991) demonstrates that a validated developmental approach could be in favour of children’s capacity, agency and self-determination. The aim of the new sociology of childhood to see children as people in their own right does not have to happen in the absence of a psychological paradigm. Psychology can help construct children as beings capable of making decisions, actively engaging and being empirically validated through research as persons. Building on the argument that proven capacity
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has increased the rights of children, Hart cites cases where children have been allowed to work, have sexual relations and attain majority status (1991, p. 56). However, with an insufficient research base that demonstrates the capacity of children to make responsible decisions, the right to self-determination has been hugely undermined. Practically speaking, an empirically validated person status would help sociologists with increasing the participation of children in their research, framing children as active citizens and having children self-advocate within the field of human rights.

Critiques of the new sociology of childhood also come from the discipline of geography. The geography of childhood, a more recently emerging discipline, has much to contribute to the academic conversations around children and can address the gaps in sociology (Holt, 2011). While sociology has contributed much in the way of destabilizing the idea of childhood, “such an approach also constrains and frames conceptual and theoretical debates” (Holt, 2011, p. 2). Because the new sociology is trying to avoid framing children as subsumed members of families, there has been a denial of the social and spatial context of the family. Also the view taken on agency has been overwhelmingly based in discursive modernity that is to say the sociological child as a free agent is painted as independent and self-cohesive, thus marginalising those children who do not fit into this definition. A third problem arises in privileging the voices of children and underplaying to role of larger structures. Although there are exceptions to all three critiques, the overwhelming majority of sociological research is prey to them. The geography of childhood, while supporting the many achievements of the new sociology of childhood, offers a way of framing larger social and spatial structures to contextualise childhood (Holt, 2011).

A more intricate and theoretical critique of the new sociology of childhood stems from a Foucalutian analysis of power relationships in the lives of children (Gallagher, 2008). If adult-
Child relations are analysed through the theories of Foucault, they present a more complex
dynamic than the sociology of childhood allows. Focusing on the issue of children’s
participation, researchers have had a tendency to narrowly categorize the power between
children and adults in categories such as, “consultation, self-advocacy and representative versus
participative democracy” (Gallagher, 2008, p. 397). From Foucault we can imagine a different
form of power in which one person does not directly act over the other; instead actions act over
actions in a series of relations. Power is diverse and although the potential for power is
pervading, power only exists when it is put into action. The power that children have is different
than that which adults have. The point is that power does not lie exclusively with one or the other
or both. Instead it is everywhere in a non-hierarchal form and in the actions that happen in
networks. Foucault’s theory of governmentality helps to explain how children become complicit
self-governing bodies. Self-realisation and self-government coincide in a way that is denied, for
the most part, by those who view children’s participation as a key element of sociological work.
Thus, incorporating some of Foucault’s insights into theorisation of participation can help
debug some of the problems identified in the new sociology of childhood (Gallagher, 2008).

Finally, an important oversight of the new sociology of childhood is the language in
which it is written. In looking at the state of childhood sociology in ten different developed
countries, Buhler-Niederberger notes that the main authors who contribute to the theorization on
the sociology of childhood do so in English (2010). This in turn, “produces a global scientific
influence which initiates and shapes childhood sociological research” (Buhler-Niederberger,
2010, p. 376). Although these authors have been translated into other languages the thought
process remains in English. While some countries import scientific notions of childhood, other
export them; this produces not only global but also hegemonic notions of childhood. Although
Buhler-Niederberger does not present a plausible solution to this issue, it is a considerable shortcoming considering the new sociology of childhood positions itself to study children in diverse international settings.

The new sociology of childhood and children’s rights

The parallel growth of the sociology of childhood and the child rights movement has allowed for the sociology of childhood to become an ideal platform for discussing the rights of children (Freeman, 1998). The former movement is made up mostly of sociologists and the latter is composed by lawyers, educators and other child welfare advocates. While there is some overlap in participants and ideologies, there is also a divergence of views. The core tenants of the new sociology of childhood, as outlined above, are that childhood is a social construct, childhood cannot be seen as separate from gender, class and ethnicity, children are worthy of study in their own right, ethnography is a key methodology and most importantly that the new paradigm must engage with the process of reconstructing childhood (James and Prout, 1990). The children’s rights movement, as also previously outlined, has shifted from a welfare approach, highlighting the need to protect children, to a participation-based social justice project which incorporates age, person status, promotes autonomy, and disseminates information and advocates on behalf of children (Freeman 1998). Both have moved from a place of seeing children as passive objects or property to engaging them as individuals and autonomous subjects. Both movements understand that childhood has been constructed as a safe space without responsibility even when specific contexts show otherwise. Sociology however, actively works to deconstruct single notions of childhood into multiplicities while the Convention on the Rights of the Child necessarily creates
a universalist notion of childhood. Also, sociology considers the child a social actor and children help in the research process whereas the CRC was drawn up entirely by adults. How then, can looking at children through a sociological lens, move the child rights movement forward? The conceptualization of dependency within the child’s rights movement equates being dependent with not being able to have rights. However, through a sociological lens being dependent does not have to mean diminished capacity. Generally speaking, sociology can help explain why the wrongs in children’s lives occur in the way they do (Freeman, 1998). Another example of how sociology benefits the work of child rights is addressed by Berry Mayall. Mayall uses the women’s rights movement as an example to guide children’s rights (2000). The first step is to critique how the lives of the minority group fit into dominate accounts. The second step is to deconstruct the assumptions underlying these very accounts. The third important point is to then have a key concept, such as gender in the case of women, or generation in the case of children, to help understand relations. The fourth and final step is to then generate a standpoint from which the movement can affect human rights (Mayall, 2000). In this sense, it is imperative that the child rights movement have the support and resources of the new sociology of childhood to move in a desirable direction. Evidently, the two movements are in an optimal position to work together. Their similar aims and crossover in ideologies allow for each to gainfully contribute to the other.

Twum-Danso’s work, which discusses the concept of participation and cultural relativism in Ghana, is an example of how a child rights issue can be addressed through the lens of new sociology (2009). Arguing that families are key to the successful implementation of the United Nation’s Convention on the Rights of the Child, Twum-Danso focuses on child-parent relationships as a key to exploring why the CRC has not had optimal success. In Ghana, the
intergenerational relationships are focused around three Rs: respect, responsibility and reciprocity. In contrast to this, the CRC constructs a non-reciprocal notion of childhood with inalienable human rights. Twum-Danso spent ten months doing field work in Ghana which included focus group discussions and questionnaires with children and adults. The result is an in-depth description of the relationships between children and adults and the household interdependencies created through their everyday actions. Twum-Danso calls for more anthropological and sociological research on child rearing and how it is linked to children’s rights. Also, policy-makers need to know how to use culturally specific values to achieve children’s rights in various contexts (Twum-Danso, 2009). This is an important example of how the CRC creates a universalistic childhood that does not apply to a certain population. Twum-Danso’s work illustrates a sociological review of this issue, and the necessity of utilizing a culturally specific analysis in the application of children’s rights.

Another example is O’Neill’s use of sociology in his work on youth participation in Nepal’s people’s war (2008). The research of the author arises from the article in the Convention that outlines a child’s right to protection from conflict. The focus of this work is the war that broke out in 1996 which was a conflict about the failure of Maoist ideologies. In this war, children were recruited as illegal combatants, but more importantly, were seen as key political actors. Schools became training grounds and children voluntarily contributed to the war. Although O’Neill does not personally engage in ethnography, he cites different ethnographic contributions to research on the war that inform his position on the civil conflict. He notes that, “many ethnographic accounts of child combatants point out that children are not necessarily the passive victims of conflict, and also that they have diverse motivation in taking up arms beyond (or even despite) ideological influences.” (O’Neill, 2008, p. 31). This commitment even goes as
far as to protect children from the psychological trauma of the war. Returning to the idea that childhood is a social construct, the author questions the relevance of children’s rights based on a Western model of childhood innocence. This is another example of how the new sociology of childhood re-frames an international children’s rights issue. O’Neill takes a social constructionist approach, uses ethnography and most importantly sees children as active participants in their own lives. His dynamic view challenges the homogenous interpretation of innocence that is the basis of protection in the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Summarizing conceptual framework

After exploring the history, key points, critiques and examples of the new sociology of childhood, the link between this framework and my research on the CRC becomes clear. The goals of both the children’s rights movement and the new sociology of childhood are compatible in that they wish to advance the participation of children, demonstrate that children are active agents in their own worlds, and are constantly engaged in processes of construction and reconstruction. For the most part the two movements complement each other and where one falls short the other provides conceptual and methodological tools that support the successful advancement of children’s rights. For example, the new sociology of childhood’s use of ethnography as a methodology provides an answer to the problem of the Convention on the Rights of the Child being employed in multiple contexts. Twum-Danso (2009) and O’Neill (2008) have both shown the success of using sociology to fill in some of the vast gaps in knowledge present in the Convention.
Both movements are still emerging and have many areas that need to be explored. Despite the success of both the new sociology of childhood and the children’s rights movement, the status of children in the world has declined since the two frameworks emerged. There has been an increase in poverty and diminished citizenship in participating countries (Freeman, 2000). There has also been a strong critique from the academic community refuting the underlying assumptions of international human rights regimes (Pupavac, 2001). At present, both the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the new sociology of childhood are not perfect tools to resolve human rights violations. They are, however, useful starting points that can be used to further the discussion on childhood and children’s rights.

Human rights

There are multiple positions that academics take towards human rights. There is a wide range from those who think they are inherent and innate to those who think they are entirely socially constructed. To give transparency to how I speak about children’s rights in my work, it is essential not only to position myself amongst the many discourses that theorize childhood but also to clarify where I stand on human rights. Having examined critiques of children’s rights in chapter one, I will use this section to review the history of human rights and subsequently insert myself into the conversation. Taking into account the multiple historical narratives and multiple views on international human rights, I will use this opportunity to position myself in an attempt to set up a framework for sharing my data in the chapters that follow.
History of Human Rights

Human rights have provided a site of historical contestation in their multiple representations. Shifts in ideology, analysis and power have led to multiple human rights discourses. This section will consider the historical writing on legal, universalist and individualist notions of human rights and how they have evolved. To start I will review the traditional and seemingly uncontested narrative of the origin of human rights. Then, I will consider the idea of human rights as tools of control that legitimized the ideas of the British Empire. Finally, I will provide a historical analysis of human rights as tools of liberation.

Although the concept of rights stretches far beyond the notion of rights captured in the laws and histories of liberal democratic states, for the purpose of this thesis, when I speak of human rights I will be referring to this specific modernist notion. Rights are captured in a recent discourse that frames them as incontestable, self-evident, natural, equal and universal (Hunt, 2007). As Viljoen (2009) clarifies,

The phrase human rights may be used in an abstract and philosophical sense, whether as denoting a special category of moral claim that all humans may invoke or, more pragmatically, as the manifestation of these claims in positive law, for example, as constitutional guarantees to hold Governments accountable under national legal processes. (p. 8)

It is this second definition that I will be working with. In the case of the CRC, I will be discussing the history of human rights as they came to be encapsulated and defined in human rights laws. These rights come to include civil and political rights, socio-economic rights, and collective rights (Viljoen, 2009).
Traditional narrative

According to the dominant narrative, the American Declaration of Independence and the French Declaration of the rights of Man and Citizen are seen as two of the landmark declarations that institutionalized the notion of human rights in state practices in the late eighteenth century (Viljoen, 2009). During this time the expanded role of the state and the increasing speed of globalization lead to an international outlook and concern for human rights. International bodies, which had previously supported some of the worst human rights violations, including slavery, were now charged with protecting citizens. In 1919, the International Labour Organization set a standard in the evolution of human rights by striving to protect the rights of workers in an industrial world. Although there were successive attempts to establish an international standard of human rights after World War I, these attempts were overcast by the events of World War II. In light of these events, the United Nations was born along with an international commitment against war and in favour of the preservation of peace. Under the UN Commission for Human Rights, the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) was adopted in 1948 (Viljoen, 2009). There has since been a shift in the UN away from charters and towards treaties. There has also been a change from the general rights as presented in the UDHR to more specific groups such as women, children and indigenous peoples.

Also, since the end of World War II, other regional organizations were formed with the aim of improving the human condition. The Council of Europe was established in 1949 with the main treaty named The European Convention of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms. The Organization of American States (OAS) was formed in 1948 and adopted the American Convention on Human rights. Also, in 1963, the Organization for African Unity (OAU) was established in a similar vein, to reinforce the rule of law and prevent WWII-like events from
reoccurring. Africa, more recently, also saw an emergence of multiple sub-regional committees that contribute to regional rights (Viljoen, 2009).

By viewing human rights history through this specific lens, the United Nations and subsequently the UDHR were, and continue to be, seen as being international peace-favouring institutions that were born out of the human rights violations of World War II. The progressive conversation around human rights is seen as a natural and linear one that manifests neatly in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The idea that a single international body or Declaration can bind multiple nations and protect all humans in all contexts is reinforced. The UN and subsequent committees, such as the Council of Europe, are shown to be fundamental institutions in the history of human rights development.

As they are perceived to stand today, human rights are a transnational process of invention and reinvention that occur through consensus building. Sally Engle Merry considers this process in her book on human rights and gender violence (2006). The account of human rights by Merry shows the momentum that this social movement has since picked up and how human rights have become the lens through which many organizations now do advocacy work. In analysing the multiple sites where human rights meanings emerge, local, national and international practices have to be taken into account. The interaction of the universal ideals formed at the international level and the experiences of individuals at the local level are explored by Merry, specifically taking into account gender violence. The local context and culture are presented as a certain bound, fixed and traditional state of affairs that is at odds with globalization and idealised human rights. However, culture, at the level of international politics, is naturalised and consequently made invisible. The translation of global human rights into local spaces can be seen as an example of cultural flow that challenges these hegemonic and
demonizing representations of culture. In sharing her views on the transnational consensus building through human rights, Merry states, “While the negotiation process is often arcane and frustrating, it is amazing that national representatives who hold vastly different ideas about women’s place in society talk together at all and reach some agreement.” (Merry, 2006, p. 19).

As an anthropologist and a human rights activist, Merry sees the value and possibility of transferring human rights out of their traditional context and into local settings. She also explores in depth the process through which these rights are negotiated and the political processes that inform them. In reading this anthropological work, insight is given into a lengthy political process that connects many contexts under one ideology.

One of the main issues that arises from translating an international consensus to local settings is the role of state powers. Although human rights documents legitimize the state in one sense, they simultaneously challenge the state’s authority over their own citizens. Herein arises the issue of framing human rights as a global governance regime. James Nickel addresses the possibility of human rights-based institutions acting as global governance regime in the sense that other powerful regimes have held such status (2002). The proposed regime that Nickel discusses includes:

- the European Union (EU), the United Nations (UN) system, free trade organizations such as the World Trade Organization (WTO), the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), Mercosul, international environmental accords, and the international human rights system. (Nickel, 2002, p. 353)

The criteria of a governance regime is that it is global, it is a governance agency, it has a federal level of power, it has power over states, the power is legitimized, and the power is autonomous.
The human rights system constituted by the abovementioned institutions successfully complies with these categories. Nickel proceeds to provide a history of this human rights system that coincides with the traditional human rights history that originates from anti-war efforts and manifests in the UDHR. After considering in-depth the compliance of the institutions with the ideas of a global governance regime, the author ultimately concludes that because of a lack of powerful consequences, the human rights system does not qualify as a regime. What becomes apparent from engaging in this analysis, however, is a reaffirmation of the idea that human rights did not originate as tools of control. In following the traditional telling of the human rights story, the issue of rights as tools of global governance arises only as a current problem and not as a founding ideological principle of rights discourses.

*Human rights as oppressive*

In line with the idea that human rights can have force in the international domain is the historical approach that considers rights discourse as a framework that validated the ideas of the British Empire (Mazower, 2009). In terms of the long held view of human rights as something that arose out of sympathy and attempts to sustain peace, Mazower comments on,

the sheer implausibility of trying to trace the roots of our current humanitarian activism back to the mid-1940’s, when talking about human rights was-for the key policy makers- often a way of doing nothing and *avoiding* a serious commitment to intervene. (2009, p. 8)

If human rights are not about humane intervention, but rather about political diversion, then the original intentions and ideologies that lead up to and culminated in the UDHR are questionable.
The key proposition brought forward by this author is that British imperial thought has heavily impacted the foundations of the United Nations. By downplaying the importance of American contribution and reconsidering the influence of key colonial players, such as Jan Smuts, a different construction of human rights history is brought forth. The United Nations evolved from the failing of the League of Nations. The idea that the UN was a revolutionary body resulting from WWII events is displaced for a review of this history that shows how the UN was a more refined version of the League of Nations. The League had originally been a tool that would boost the superiority of certain global powers and use international legal discourse as a branch of British imperialism. The modeling of the UN after the League was favoured by those powers that needed to validate their ownership of colonies and was a form of international imperialism in its original conception. Although it later became an anti-imperialist body, that is not how the UN was initially conceived (Mazower, 2009).

For example, one of the key players in the initial drafting of the United Nations was Jan Smuts, a South African statesman who made a considerable contribution to the policies leading up to South African apartheid (Mazower, 2009). At first glance it may seem as if his politics would conflict with the United Nations, but a closer examination shows that the two were ideologically in sync. To Smuts, ideas of racial superiority and the international control of the United Nations were not at odds with each other. In order to keep colonies within the control of the empire, Smuts was in favour of a commonwealth or an overarching body that would legitimate these ideas of control. In this sense, the assumed power of the UN would maintain the racial distribution of world power in a way that diverted the political gaze from the obvious colonial implications of this rule. As can be seen through the example of Smuts, the anti-colonial and humanitarian sentiment that later became the hallmark of the UN was not how the
organization was initially conceived. In complete opposition to the idea that human rights were evolved from European enlightenment, empathy and a desire for peace, Smuts ideology exemplifies a political history that attempted to legitimize a colonial legacy (Mazower, 2009).

Similarly Ibhawoh considers how human rights regimes were used to legitimise colonial presence in Africa (2007). Ibhawoh contests the historical significance of the United Nations and Universal Declaration of Human Rights by addressing the influence that human rights discourse had in late colonial and early post-colonial Western Nigeria. Specifically, the colonial rule of Western Nigeria was implemented and sustained by an argument for human rights. In one sense, British justification of Nigerian rule held that they were protecting the rights of Nigerian citizens by saving them from local chiefs. The idea was that the civilising mission was to protect natives and to civilise and liberate them. Ibhawoh explains, “the primary purpose of colonial rule and the extension of English law in the colony was to ensure peace, order, social justice and good governance.” (Ibhawoh, 2002, p. 60). The history of human rights goes back far before the violations of WWII and is entrenched in racist power relations between British imperialists and their subjects. This case study of Western Nigeria not only moves away from the progressive and triumphant narrative of human rights but also looks at the nuanced ways in which power works in a pre-UN application of human rights rhetoric. Accordingly, rights discourse has been historically used not only to mark transformative processes but also to legitimize power and colonial rule (Ibhahow, 2007).

However, this same language was also used by African elites to create a third world nationalism that would directly oppose British rule. The demand for proper representation and self-rule found support in the language of rights. Rights became the ground on which clashes
amongst Africans occurred as often as clashes between Africans and colonial officials (Ibhawoh, 2002).

Through this example of Western Nigeria, rights are seen not as driven by an innate and neutral human capacity such as empathy, but rather as a convenient platform to promote political ideologies by both African elites and colonial rulers. The history of rights, similar to the history of any other tool of power, is complex and multilayered in accordance with how the powers involved see the need to use it. The idea of a progressive modernist narrative is out of the question when the contradictory and contextual specifics of Western Nigeria are considered.

Most notably, one of the primary paradoxes that arises from Ibhawoh’s examination of human rights discourse is that the language that was used to legitimise colonial rule, eventually served as its down fall. Similar to Mazower’s presentation of a revised history, Ibhawoh demonstrates that the original intention of human rights language was to maintain the hegemonic ideologies of British rule. However, these discussions on human rights were eventually reinterpreted to deconstruct the very empire they were meant to validate.

*Human rights as liberating*

Samuel Moyn also presents a history of human rights that highlights how ideas around rights became an anti-colonial platform (Moyn, 2010). He similarly contests the historical claim that human rights discourses were birthed in the aftermath of World War II. The author demonstrates that the way human rights are contemporarily conceptualised, that is to say as universal utopian ideals, does not result from the ideas presented in the American and French declarations. Those rights were presented primarily as rights of citizens and were contained
within the state they were intended for. When the UN was formed and the UDHR presented, it was an unremarkable event at the time and lacked significance. It was not the beginning of a global moral consciousness that has since steadily grown to encompass an understanding of equality amongst all peoples. The idea and language of rights stayed mostly at the international level and did not inform or inspire other movements. The idea of a power ruling above the nation-state was not prevalent until after the cold war. Thus, the actions and ideas at the level of bodies such as the UN had little more than a tokenistic presence. Human rights went largely unnoticed and remained an intrinsic part of the language of the United Nations (Moyn, 2010).

Significantly, there was a drastic and accidental rise in the notion of human rights in the 1970’s that sprang forth from a series of international events happening in that moment. During this time, the utopian ideals that had provided fuel for social movements such as socialism and third world nationalism, had failed. During the 1970’s the platform provided by the forgotten discourse of human rights presented itself as a valuable opportunity for mobilization. The idea of a rights platform based in morals and individualism was appealing in contrast to previous group-based ideas that had been traditionally structured in the political realm. There was a shift from a desire to protect the rights of the nation state to a desire to protect to rights of all individuals regardless of their state. Non-government organizations and people of the developed world began to use the language of rights to form a new sense of international citizenship. Rights were the vehicle through which individuals could be protected from their states by a higher political regime. It was at this time that organizations like Amnesty International became popular and foreign policies began to employ the ideas of rights to inform their actions.

Although Moyn does not deny that human rights were present in Greek philosophy, during the European enlightenment and within the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, his
position remains that they did not gain popular significance until they were used as a utopian platform by those looking beyond state power structures. The rights platform was constructed by anti-colonial states looking to assert freedom from the empire. This discourse went largely unnoticed until this same platform was then brought to life by groups looking to work against and beyond state powers, and towards self-determination for all humans. NGOs and people of the developed world used rights rhetoric to inform decisions that would both override state authorities and contest colonial ideologies (Moyn, 2010).

*My position*

As someone who studies human rights, it is important for me to clarify what I mean when I use this term. Throughout this thesis I am referring to a specific notion of rights grounded in modernity and encapsulated in laws of liberal democratic states. While I do believe in inherent human rights which every human being has as a virtue of their existence, the aim of this thesis is not to shed light on those. Instead I look at the institutionalised rights in the Convention on the Rights of the Child and how they do and do not have influence within the lives of children. I would argue, as Hunt does, that although human rights are inherent, they came to the forefront of conversations about humanity through an increase in empathy, reason and the changing status of the individual (2007). They were also transcribed into written laws for use by international bodies and to secure national political ideologies as well as maintain power. Subversively, they were then mobilized by human rights activists as needed. Although no one telling of human rights history accurately portrays how human rights came to be as they are today, when looking at the various stories together, a historically specific definition, and potential use of human
rights, develops. It is this type of human rights discourse that, when constructed around ideas of childhood, becomes the basis for my conversation around children’s rights. Essentially, when I talk about rights then, I am referring to the legal, universalist and individual notion of human rights that are produced and then “given” to people. This is why this project looks at the UNCRC and does not attempt to explore the problematic from the bottom up. To look at the inherent rights of children in Butala, or grassroots movements that work from the bottom up, would not only require a different methodology but also a different definition of rights. Within the scope of this project, since I look at rights as state constructed, text-based responsibilities I move into a discussion of an institutional top-down problematic.

**Conclusion**

This chapter explored my methodology and conceptual frameworks. The purpose was to set the stage for the chapters that follow and to transparently present my biases so that the narratives I present as data can be read in the same context and spirit that they are written. I established my methodology as part institutional ethnography and part analytic ethnography. I then discussed the new sociology of childhood and how it aligned, and did not align, with the children’s rights movement. Finally, I established my position on contemporary human rights discourses. By presenting in-depth, and providing critiques for, ethnography, sociology of childhood and the human rights discourse, I acknowledged the shortcomings of all three and chose to establish myself amongst them nonetheless. Although none of the three concepts are without flaw, they are far from useless. Instead of entertaining the critiques, I use the parts of these three frameworks that help to convey my research in the most useful way.
Chapter 3: Butala in Context

History, Time and Space

I now find myself faced with the overwhelming task of conveying in words the immense experience and reality of my village of Butala. It is not enough to simply say that the Convention on the Rights of the Child is not effective in Butala since text does not dominate life. I have to let you into a world that I lived in for six months for this project, and many more for other research and family visits. I have to have the courage to let you into world of the residents of Butala and hope that you, as a reader will withhold your assumptions and listen to my stories. Butala has thus far been left outside of the discourses of the academic world but by virtue of my position as an academic I write the village into these pages with the hope that it is for a greater purpose.

In the simplest reading of my ethnographic descriptions, Butala is different. It is not like Ontario, it is not like any global north city I have ever been in and it can be difficult to escape the limitations of a colonized mind to understand the complex and complicated lives of the people of Butala. As one of the few people who is connected both to Butala and the academic world, the way this small Punjabi village is perceived is at the mercy of my words and the understanding of the reader. I ask that you be gentle and kind and keep an open heart. I will guide you through my time in Butala and lead you to the conclusions that I saw and I ask that you reserve your judgements until the end.
Setting the context for Butala

One of the recent strides India made in the world of children’s rights was the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act (2009). For children between the ages of six and fourteen, education became a fundamental right as well as an obligation. The lower-caste Majbi family that took care of my dad’s house in Butala had a daughter, Kiran, who was the right age to be influenced by this act. When I first met her on one of my research trips, I quickly saw through the flaws in the act and the problems she faced in attempting to acquire an education. There were many school-related items that she did not have access to including supplies, shoes or even transportation on the days her dad could not sit her on the back of his bicycle. The education was not up to any standard and the underpaid teachers were not motivated to teach, or sometimes even show up. Eventually, my parents took responsibility for her education, enrolling her in a private school with a school bus, paying her tuition and buying her uniform.

What Kiran represented to me was the most disenfranchised child in the village context. This lower-caste, female, rural child was outside the parameters of human rights passed down by virtue of federal policies. The Free and Compulsory Education Act, although theoretically flawless, had no impact on this young girl’s education. This story, and the way in which Kiran came to live her life included the influences of everything from world politics and economics to Punjab-specific caste dynamics. Her place in the village order, the presence of my family in her life and the creation of human rights acts all contributed to her experience. In order to understand fully, every element of the failure of institutionalised human rights to impact children like Kiran, I have to go in depth and use rich and thorough descriptions of every element of life leading up to the moment in which text-based rights fail.
Rich description is a key component of ethnographic work. In order to understand the larger picture, many smaller details need to be examined. As Scheper-Hughes states, “Ethnographers, like historians, do not write on blank pages.” (1992, p. 20). In this chapter I then shed some light onto the complicated and specific context of Butala. In order to explain my problematic, I look at many defining factors of Butala including history, time and space. In using the new sociology of childhood as my conceptual framework I look at the intersections of gender, caste and age and how these affect the lives of the children I am looking at. These children do not exist in isolation; rather, they are specific products of their cultural moment. They are not blank slates, but residents of Butala, citizens of India, and subjects of a once colonised state. In order to understand childhood in Butala, the entire country, economics, social relations and village dynamics must be understood. It is in this spirit that I begin this next section by looking at the history of India and some key demographic information on Butala.

**India: history**

Known as one of the biggest democracies in the world, India is home to over one billion people. As a result, a huge portion of the world’s children are actually Indian children (Concluding Observations, 2000). Throughout India’s rich and complex history, many different groups have invaded and controlled the country, the most recent being the British. By the nineteenth century the British had control over much of India, the effects of which are still evident today. Their presence in the country changed much, including the landscape, the political system, the languages, and the military. A movement started by Indian freedom fighters from all walks of life eventually lead to the independence of India in 1947. India was split into two
countries: the predominantly Muslim nation known as Pakistan, and what is today recognized as India. The absence of the British, and the birth of a new nation left one of the world’s biggest democracies in a state of experimentation. What has followed has been economic, population and political trends that do not mirror any other nation. As McMillan puts it; “The country does not fit into mainstream theoretical and empirical explanations for democracy, constituting the everlasting exception” (2008, p. 733). Because of the many forces that have influenced the development of India, and the current trends in population, the country has become a vast mosaic of culture, unbound by the traditional definitions of democracy.

Current composition (a quantitative snapshot)

The social and political landscape of India is marked by contrasts in religion, caste and class amongst other things. The diversity of the nation presents its own unique challenge to administering government policies. Each region, province, and village has its own language, food, culture, dress, and way of life. Although it is geographically about one third the size of the United States, India is the second most populated country in the world with over 1.23 billion people, lagging only behind China (World Bank, 2012). The main religion in the country is Hinduism with 80.5% of the population classified as Hindu. 13.4% are followers of Islam, 2.3% Christians and 1.9% Sikh. Hindi is the most spoken language in the country with 41% of the population preferring to speak the language. Although English is an important tool for international affairs and communication, its role in the day to day life of much of the population is not significant. There are an additional fourteen official languages including Bengali, Telugu, Marathi, Tamil, Urdu, Gujarati, Malayalam, Kannada, Oriya, Punjabi, Assamese, Kashmiri,
Sindhi, and Sanskrit. This list is only of official languages; there are still many additional languages spoken that do not have official status. The country is split into twenty-five States and Union territories which are in turn further split into multiple districts (Government of India, 2009). Each region of India is as diverse as if it were its own country. Each group of people has their own way of life, and to provide fair insight into the context of a specific part of India, that area must be considered in its own right, not just as a part of a larger country.

**Punjab: the breadbasket of India**

The state that is home to my village of Butala, is Punjab; literally translated as the land of five rivers. With a little over twenty-four million people and the most fertile land in India, Punjab is commonly known as the bread basket of the country. Geographically, Punjab takes up less than 1.5% of the land. Despite this, it produces 22% of the wheat, 12% of the rice and 12% of the cotton found in the country (Government of India, 2009). Because of its abundance of natural resources, it is considered one of the wealthier states in India. The people of Punjab are Punjabis and the dominate language is also Punjabi. Although less than 2% of the population of India is Sikh, over 60% of the population of Punjab is Sikh (Government of India, 2001). Punjab is one of the few states in India in which the otherwise dominant Hindu population is a minority. As is the case with other states, Punjab is rich in its own traditions, food, dances, and songs.

Unfortunately, over the past forty years, the cycle of life in farming communities in Punjab has been disrupted by the Green Revolution (Katie, 2007). During the seventies, genetically modified seeds, fertilizers, and pesticides were used to create high yielding wheat crops amongst other things. Although their short term, explosive results seemed promising, in the
long run they have led to water shortages, soil erosion, reduced nutritious food for local populations, displacement of small farmers, rural impoverishment and social upheaval. Punjab, as a key producer of crops has been a target of this money making scheme that benefits that agrochemical industry, large petrochemical companies, manufacturers of agricultural machinery, dam builders and large landowners (Katie, 2007). As a result, there has been an increased phenomenon of farmer suicides related to destruction of their main source of income. This has become a prominent issue and is identified as a human rights violation by those doing human rights work in Punjab (Chakma, 2007).

Deviant Democracy

Although India carries the title of world’s largest democracy, it is not without its unique challenges and political processes. The country has come to be known by some political scholars as a deviant democracy or an experiment in democracy. Guha, for example, has argued that,

India is both an unnatural nation as well as an unlikely democracy. Never before has a territory so disparate and diverse been constructed as a single political unit. Never before has universal adult franchise been attempted—or imposed—in a poor, divided and largely illiterate society. (2009, p. 41)

Looking empirically and theoretically at India, it is not expected that this nation in particular be a democratic one (McMillan, 2008). There is usually a positive relation between economic prosperity and democracy. In the case of India, there are immense levels of poverty. It is classified as “third world” and yet it maintains democratic processes. In addition, when India gained independence from the British and started its journey as a democratic nation, there were
extremely low rates of literacy and urbanization; yet another contradiction. A third issue arises with the size and diversity of the population. It seems unlikely that such a nation could implement traditional democratic systems. Finally, there is much corruption political mayhem that denies democratic processes to the residents of India (McMillan, 2008). Even with all of these unlikely trends, the experiment of democracy in India is considered both deviant and successful. Since gaining independence in the postcolonial era, very few countries have gone on to have stable and functional political processes in place; according to McMillan, India is one of them (2008).

**The current political systems of India**

At present the legal and political framework of India is roughly based on English Common Law. The voting process is democratic and any individual over the age of eighteen, who is a citizen of the country, can legally vote. At the top of the hierarchy there is the president and the vice-president, followed the prime minister. The prime minister is selected by parliamentary members of the majority party following a legislative election. There is a cabinet who is appointed by the president on the recommendation of the Prime Minister (Government of India, 2014). Beyond that, the top-down system of governance continues throughout the states and districts right down to the local level of the village. There is as much diversity in political parties and political favourites as there are regions in India.
Childhood Studies

Understanding how quantitatively diverse and complex India is as a country, I now turn to different scholarly streams in childhood studies that qualitatively and ethnographically consider the childhoods present in the country. The previously mentioned statistics describing India can only go so far in painting a picture of Indian childhoods. What the numbers and analysis show are an incredible range of experiences that cannot be uniformly addressed by universal policies. This impossibility however, is exactly what the UNCRC attempts to make possible. The Convention, which has been called a “text without context” (Tomás, 2008, p. 5) seeks to apply universal standards across many different countries, languages and cultures. My chosen framework, the new sociology of childhood, alternatively suggests that there are multiple, layered factors which construct childhoods. Much ethnographic work has been done in India which lays the foundation for an understanding of the context(s) that the Convention can apply to.

To begin with, there is work on schooling in India. This literature is the most relevant to my ethnography as I seek to analyse those moments in which children are in textually-mediated institutions. Schools are the most obvious and prevalent of these institutions. Education in the Indian context cannot be considered without looking at the colonial past of the country. As a part of the British Empire, there was an intentional focus on bringing Western education to the Indian system. In 1934 British authorities gave instructions to provide for education in India that would focus on the arts, science, philosophy and literature of Europe and, “while this effort was being made, from the early decades of the nineteenth century, colonialism itself came to be seen as an essentially pedagogic enterprise.” (Seth, 2007, pp. 2). Every act of colonial rule became a teaching moment. From railways, to sanitation, the natives needed to be taught and the mission
of colonial rule in India took on a teaching narrative. Western knowledge, which was introduced as exotic at the time, has come to hold the highest standard of education in modern India and now reproduces itself as obvious and the only way of knowing (Seth, 2007). It is in this colonially constructed, European school system that Indian children live their lives and their social relations fall under the ruling relations of texts.

The sociological study of childhood in India takes interest in the education system in which these children are immersed. In a post-colonial India there was an ideological struggle between the modern and material West, and the reviverist nationalism of the Indians. The left over European education system kept the elite literate, the masses illiterate, and essentially reproduced caste and class based hierarchies (Sriprakash, 2001). Visions of people such as Rabindranath Tagore proposed using European traditions of modern humanistic education to restructure education around the curiosity and creativity of the child. Others, like Gandhi proposed a national program of Basic Education which would restructure school knowledge around a local craft. Eventually the 1950 Constitution of India brought to the table the notion that all children up to the age of fourteen should have access to free and compulsory education. There has since been a turn toward child-centered education embedded mostly in discourses of nationalism and religious moralism culminating in efforts like the National Curriculum Framework (2000). Global development has also played a part in the structuring of educational reform in India. Structural adjustment programs with funding from the World Bank, European Community, UNICEF, and the governments of the UK and Holland lead to the launching of the District Primary Education Program which ran from 1994-2001 (Sriprakash, 2001). Also, the signing and ratification of the UNCRC lead the country to make commitments to seeing through
the right to free and compulsory education. The reporting obligations that come with the ratification of the Convention have arguably steered policies around childhood.

A related area of consideration in the literature that looks at childhood in India is that of children and the work force. Despite India’s commitment to free and compulsory education, labour continues to be an obstacle for enrolling and keeping children in school. Labour, is not the same as work; work is related to socialization of children and is tied to the upbringing of many children in India. Labour on the other hand is tied to the modern industrial process and can create real health and safety problems for children (Manjrekar, 2012). The two are not mutually exclusive and the lines often get blurred. Children are also present in the process of entering the labour force and their agency cannot be dismissed in the name of saving them under the pretense of preserving an innocent and universal childhood. Going beyond the child labor discussion that is at the centre of global development conversations about Indian children, in a study of a primary school in the slums of Baroda, Gujrat, Manjrekar (2012) considered how interaction with the text in schools formed the world views of children. The children being studied were in grade four and mostly from migrant Scheduled Caste and Other Backward Caste communities. In analysing the children Manjrekar stated that, “The structured violence that marks them as unworthy subjects of development is mirrored in schools thought the symbolic violence exercised by the curriculum as a mechanism of social control” (pp. 160). In the study the author analysed a lesson from a language textbook which taught the range of occupations available to children when they entered the adult world. There was then a classroom discussion on the topic followed by individual interviews with the children. The textbook lesson told the story of multiple children who wanted to do work that served the country and was not driven by economic gain. The lesson preserved the idea that children should be kept separate from labour
all the while serving as a platform for the modern nation state. The curriculum reinforced gender and caste roles in labour while simultaneously alienating the children by not reflecting the labour they saw their own parents engage in. There was also a strongly gendered experience of participating in this lesson as the boys in the classroom generally had more mobility and opportunity than the girls.

On a similar note Wankhede (2012) focuses on how caste and social discrimination determine life of children in India. While many cultures experience social discrimination based on gender, ethnicity and religion, India has rigid caste based hierarchies that make for unique challenges in childhood. In looking specifically at children of Scheduled Castes or Dalits, the author notes they are more likely to experience segregation, physical attack and verbal antagonism amongst other things. Despite the strong prevalence of caste-based discrimination there has been a limited in depth analysis of the area. The obstacles towards the full realisation of civil, political, educational, and cultural rights remain intact for Dalit children. In the arena of education, Dalit children are constantly subject to unequal treatment in relation to their peers. They have less access to books, hostels, scholarships, reserved seats, and special coaching. In the long run, high caste children turn into adults who, “control public goods, get into hierarchies of power and decision making.” (Wankhede, 2012, pp.189). Thus the cycle is recreated for the next generation. The modern human rights model which is formed in countries which have many forms of social discrimination but not necessarily caste-based issues, fails to address the lives of these children.

Lastly researchers of childhood in India consider the role that law and the justice system play in their realities. Although there are national standards for juvenile justice in India, it is left up to local jurisdiction how to apply them (Kethineni and Klosky 2005). Historically, parents and
families were responsible for the supervision of children. Religious laws governed their actions and families saw to the adherence and discipline in accordance with these norms. Between 1850 and 1919, due to industrial growth and the influence of Europe, there was an increase in legislation on how to deal with new forms of childhood; neglected, delinquent, orphaned and dependent children now needed formal intervention. Penal acts had children work off their punishments for petty crimes as apprentices for business men. Children under seven could not be convicted and those over even were considered to have enough maturity to understand their actions and the resulting consequences. As of 1987 the Reformatory School Act was put into place which dealt with the treatment and rehabilitation of young offenders. Around 1920, the state of Madras became the first of its kind to venture into establishing a separate juvenile court system. Three years after independence, in 1950 both government and non-government organizations helped develop a pronounced juvenile justice system. In 1960 the Central Children’s Act was passed for the treatment and protection of young offenders and required all territories to abide by it. However, no real effort was made to apply the act. By 1986 almost all states had passed their own legislation around children and the legal system. In the same year the government passed the most comprehensive act to date, the Juvenile Justice Act (JJA). As a result Juvenile courts were created and welfare boards were established to handle neglected juveniles (Kethineni and Klosky 2005). After India ratified the Convention in 1992, the Committee on the Rights of the Child became yet another stakeholder in the treatment and care of children in the juvenile justice system. The Committee even acknowledged the positive use of the Convention in the Supreme Court of India (2004).
All of the areas of childhood studies considered in this section look ethnographically and historically at issues of labour, caste, law, and education to add complexity to the existing quantitative data. While the CRC necessarily creates a single childhood without context, the work of sociologists and ethnographers in India shows the complex nature of multiple childhoods. Adding my ethnography of Butala to this literature further complicates the text of the Convention and brings to life the struggles of implementing it on the ground.

**Butala**

Having set the complex stage of India and Punjab, I now turn to my village of Butala. This village is located in the district of Kapurthala in the state of Punjab. There is a small road that breaks off of the Grand Trunk road between Amritsar and Jalandhar. This road from Dhillwan to Nadala was paved by a king whose sister was married into the town of Nadala and needed a way to access the train station; off this road is my village. Punjab is split into districts, but also cultural regions. There are three main regions, Maja, Doaba, and Malva. The original Butala was on one side of the river Beas in the region of Maja. When the water in the river was low, the farmers would take their cattle over to the other side of the river to graze and eventually some of the Bals of Butala settled there. Thus the newer village of Butala in the region of Doaba was established. It would seem that living across the river from each other would not put people into two different regions and cultural groups. However, the nearest bridge was quite a ways away and not having transportation when the river water was high meant that the Bals of Doaba and Maja had, and still have, different songs, slight variations in words, different traditions and even some different foods. The river could act as a very powerful border. Although we all come from the same ancestors, and the two Butalas still support each other during festivals and see
each other as somewhat related, each Butala refers to the other as “parla Butala” or “the Butala on the other side”.

The Butala that I call home was the second to be established and places me in the region of Doaba, in the district of Kapurthala in the state of Punjab. One of my favorite Punjabi singers, Satinder Sartaaj writes a series of lines on what the crux of any number of situations is. He starts with comparing letters sent between lovers and states, “If you take away my love letters in the account of letters sent back and forth between the two of us, what is left?” The implication is that he was putting more into the relationship than she was so nothing is left when you take his love letters out of the equation. In writing about Punjab he says,

> Amongst those living abroad, if you take away Sartaaj’s region of Doab, what is left?

> From the map of India, if you take away the small state of Punjab, what is left?”

There is a great sense of pride associated with being from a certain region in Punjab and even in the diaspora people will be able to single you out from the way you say the word salt, or onion, and debate regularly ensues over which is the best region.

The Butala that I come from is a patriarchal village where everyone has the last name Bal. The men stay in the village and the girls are married off and move into the villages of their respective families. This overly simplified model is complicated by immigration to cities and other countries but has maintained itself for the most part. There are the rare divorced women who stay in the village to keep their kids amongst other Bals and widowed women who stay with

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1 Personal translation
their husbands’ families to live out their days. The village is made up of over four hundred families and homes.

Originally, the village was right on the banks of the river but the constant flooding would wipe out the houses of the residents and leave everyone in states of panic and crisis. In 1953, the local village panchayat (council) decided that the entire village was to be remade many kilometres away from the river bank. Over the course of the next couple of years, the residents picked up and rebuilt houses on the property of the Gurdwara, the central Sikh institution of the village. When this process was done, each farmer gave a part of their land back to the Gurdwara to restore the property balance. In 1957 there was a disastrous flood that reached the new, further set back village. All but two of the newly built houses were destroyed alongside all the crops. My grandfather’s house was one of the two that remained. My dad still remembers being a young boy and seeing people gathered around the house trying to find places to sit and stay dry; a more permanent solution was needed. In 1959, under the government of Punjab and the Chief Minister Khairon, a dhusi ban, dirt barrier, was built around 170 km of the Beas river. This barrier still exists and contains most of the yearly flood water. There is some land on the other side of the ban but it is not as valuable and is a gamble to cultivate during the flood season (summer).

Butala continues to have a complicated relationship with the river. The river is simultaneously a curse and a blessing. On the one hand it is life-sustaining and allows the farmers to boast of a good supply of water where other villages suffer from droughts. On the other hand there is the constant threat of flooding. Some of the flooding is a natural part of cycle of the river however key changes over the past few years have made a substantial difference in the levels of water. The Pong Dam was created in 1974 to divert the water of the river for
irrigation projects. It was later modified and used for electricity generation as well (Bhakara Beas Management Board, 2011). This has changed the rise and fall of water levels from a cycle dictated by nature to a controlled release of water from the dam upstream of Butala. The way that farmers in Butala today speak of flood waters is to say that water has been “released” on them. They understand that their flooded crops are intentionally destroyed by the decisions of someone even if they don’t understand the mechanisms of the dam or irrigation canals and the decision making process for opening the gates of the dam.

Another change that has come about is the building of the central institution of a group of Radhasoamis in the city of Beas which is across the river from my Butala. The Radhasoami movement is a faith-based religious tradition of the nineteenth century. They have a living spiritual guide, at present Gurinder Singh, and the main organisation is in the city of Beas on the banks of the river Beas. The dera is impressive; it has thousands of resident patrons, hundreds of thousands more that visit daily and has its own private airport complete with a private jet for the leader. Although the movement is rooted in having a saint-like mindset, the actions of those involved struggle to match the ideologies. “The Radhasoami Dera Satsang Beas”, as it is officially known is a non-profit charitable society that continues to develop the land of Beas. The constant expansion of the group and the physical institution forces many poor farmers to sell their land to the organization. Cases of farmers being unfairly thrown off their land, or manipulated until they had to concede, are not uncommon. There are also allegations that the organisation throws dirt onto the banks of their side of the river. This forces the water towards Butala leaving the wealthy organization in relative peace when flood waters arrive while increasing water levels on the Butala side. With all of these challenges, the strong farming community of the village continues to work simultaneously in humble gratitude and frustration
with the river Beas. Life ebbs and flows with the moods of the river. What can be a source of pride and life can, in a moment, turn towards destruction.

As a virtue of having been rebuilt to move away from the easily flooded river banks, Butala is one of the few villages in rural Punjab that is built with intention and some amount of planning. It is not, as many Punjabi villages are, a series of houses built in a disorganized way on narrow paths. There are five galis, or lanes, running north and south and another five running east and west. The main village is split into four patis, or subsections, each having its own ancestry linked to the original Bals. The four patis take turns nominating members to serve on different committees such as the panchayat (local government), school board and Gurdwara. One of the four patis actually functions almost as its own village within a village. Pirthipur, as it is referred to, is a part of Butala and is made up almost entirely of Bals but has its own Gurdwara, and own sense of community. Within the patis there are further, more informal, subsections by family. My grandfather is the youngest of five sons all born to Bishan Singh, who was one of five sons born to Jaimal Singh. All the descendants from Jaimal Singh’s family are knows as the Garvikay. So to clarify where that puts me, I am of the Garvikay, in my pati of daane-ke, in the second village of Butala, in the region of Doaba, in the district of Kapurthala in the state of Punjab.

Butala is a fair sized rural village, not too large and not too small. It has three Gurdwaras, a public elementary school and high school. There are three designated anganwadi centers, a hospital, doctor’s office, tailor, multiple beauty parlors and a few other small businesses. As I continue to explain throughout this chapter and the next, the children of the village interact with all of these spaces as well as the natural elements of the village including the land and river.
In the thick of this organizational system I spent my days living in my grandfather’s house in the village. My dad had recently built a newer house just outside the road leading into Butala but there were no neighbours, no *Gurdwara* nearby and no connection to the intimate bonds of village life. So, the logical decision for my research (and my sanity) was to live in my grandfather’s house in the heart of the village. I was blessed to be in the company of my *Chacha* Ji’s family who took care of me, fed me, and the grandchildren who took turns alternately showering me with affection and driving me crazy. My *Chacha Ji* is my uncle in that his grandfather and my great grandfather were brothers. His youngest of six children, Mandeep, stayed with me every night and was a confident, sister, informant, friend, spiritual companion and many other things.

*Situating Butala socio-politically*

When my grandfather was a boy, his entire world existed in the village of Butala. He can recount growing up and receiving his first bike, seeing a car, riding a train and eventually flying to Canada to live here. My father knew a different reality where leaving Butala was his only chance at making any money; his world always included the potential for life outside the village. As for me, I have never known a childhood that wasn’t defined by immigration, globalization and transnational identity. Today, childhood in Butala is being influenced by global forces in an unprecedented way; the illusion of the isolated village child is disappearing. The very fact that my dissertation can look at the CRC as an instrument of global-moral consensus alludes to the power of globalization, liberalization and privatization. In the following section I situate Butala socio-politically to explain the environment in which the CRC finds itself trying to make change.
In Butala, despite the main source of income being farming, the last twenty-five have seen an increase of flow of money into the village via remittances. Aside from the farmers, the rest of Butala was traditionally made up of some businesses, a few individuals who worked in transportation, those who held government positions and those who worked for the farmers. Jatts held a high caste-status and used to enjoy a greater lifestyle because they owned the land they worked on. For a brief historical moment, they were sovereign and rich while other occupations lacked that means of income. With the recent economic shift in Punjab, the green revolution, and the increase in immigration and remittances, the lifestyle of castes is less linked to their traditional occupations.

Over forty years ago my dad left Butala seeking opportunities abroad. At that time he was one of the handful of young men to do so. When my grandfather was young, as the youngest of five brothers, he had very little land to his name and joined the army as a means to acquire income. My grandmother worked very hard to raise her four children and take care of the household animals. My dad worked in a fruit factory, sold mangos and did any number of odd jobs before leaving Butala at the age of twenty-one to work on a ship. He eventually ended up in Canada and over time married my mom, sponsored his family and set up a life abroad. He could not have foreseen at the time that his decisions would become the most envied of those in Butala.

In all his years outside of India, he never stopped putting money back into the village in some form; such is the case with most people who have left. The mass movement of people out of India has led to large amounts of money being sent back to this country of origin. The global remittance transfer business is a multi-billion dollar industry and remittances are perceived either; “as household income, a hard-earned transnational family livelihood, a macroeconomic flow, potential dirty money, a source of development finance, or a business opportunity.”
The domestic remittance market in India alone was estimated to be ten billion dollars in 2007-2008, eighty percent of which was directed towards rural households (Tumbe, 2011). Nearly ten percent of rural Indian households were considered a remittance-receiving household and thirty percent of their expenditures were financed by these remittances. Researchers suggested that this led to regional inequalities. Kerala, Punjab and Goa accounted for over forty percent of the international remittance flows and were considered the top remittance-dependent economies of the world (Tumbe, 2011). Barrier and Dusenbery even suggest that remittances help explain why Punjab was the wealthiest state in India (1989).

Punjab has also been the centre of many conversations surrounding the state of the current economy. Despite being rich in natural resources it is not overly industrially developed. After severe and chronic food shortages in the 1960s, in the 1970s Punjab found itself in the midst of the green revolution. Chemical fertilisers, high yielding crops and farming equipment bought with loaned money increased the amount of grain and capital in the region. Not too soon after however, there was stagnation in crops, soil depletion, low water levels and a drastic decrease in profits. As the food shortages of the 1960s turned into surpluses in the 1990s Punjab’s predominately agrarian economy became non-sustainable and a national liability (Sidhu, 2002). It was during this time that neoliberal economic policies and trade liberalisation were put into effect (Patnaik, 2007). The combination of these events uniquely made Punjab, “a case of material prosperity in the midst of structural poverty” (Singh, 2008, p. 5). Despite being the bread basket of India and having a rich agricultural capacity, Punjab was and continues to be industrially underdeveloped. Singh (2008) points out that the British, during colonial rule, were invested in keeping the economy agrarian to provide raw materials for British industry and the current federal government has similar policies that hold back industrial growth in Punjab. In
both cases there was and is a conscious exploitation of Punjab through either colonialism or federalism, leaving Punjab rich but not developed (Singh, 2008).

So what does this mean in Butala? How do neo-liberal economics manifest in the environment of the village? How does globalization play out in the lives of children? The answers to these questions are constantly shifting and every time I go back to the village there is a new phenomenon to be considered. Neoliberalism in India has meant that money spending on a macroeconomic level has shifted. To restructure economics in the nineties the government put in place deflationary policies which took away money from agriculture, rural development, irrigation and flood control, special areas programmes and village and small scale industry (Paitak, 2007). As a result, rural productivity and employment plummeted while the nation’s GDP increased.

The decline in farming has had many subtle and not so subtle consequences. Eleven years ago, during my first trip to Butala, on the day we arrived to the village, my cousin and his wife arrived the latest of all our relatives to receive us. They were late because their buffalo had given birth. As an extremely Canadian seventeen-year-old, it was outside of my understanding how someone would have to plan their day around buffalo pregnancies but such was the life of someone in Butala at that time. Most families had their own milk-producing animals because it was cost effective and there were enough hands on board to make it possible. As of my last trip, only one of the families in my immediate circle of relatives still produced their own milk. It was now either bought from another family, or from a dairy.
In their study on the changing economy’s impact on livestock in Punjab, Sidhu and Bhullar (2004) note that the traditional household in Punjab used to have livestock that produced just enough milk for the house and selling it was considered a sin. They attribute the shift of milk production to large scale dairy farms to, “the requirements of the people, agricultural technology, market forces and availability of scare land and water resources.” (p. 578) As a result, the deep relationship that villagers used to have with animals, has changed. Buffalo, which used to share the open courtyard of the house, were now sectioned off into dairy farms and are for the most part out of sight.

Another reason for the change away from traditional agrarian households was the lack of healthy young men in Butala to carry out farm work. Changing economics meant that farming could not keep up with the demands of life and most young men looked at going abroad as the only viable option. As one of my aunts explained to me, there were only two ways for boys to look at education anymore. One was to forsake it all together because they would most likely end
up working a labor job in another country, or to go at it full force so they could go to another county on a study visa. In either case, the process required the help of an agent who could negotiate the paper work and knew all the short cuts to immigration. Because institutions and paper work and immigration laws were not accessible to the everyday man in Butala, these agents made a lot of money off of the farmers. Most farmers ended up selling huge parts of their land to pay agent fees and could only afford to send the best of their kids abroad. This has resulted in what could be termed a brain drain but is far more complicated. Immigration which is formally based on points or school grades, or more informally based on a villager deciding which of his children to send abroad, has systemically removed all of the smart, strong and healthy young men from Butala. Nowhere is this more obvious than when the village gathers for a celebration or decision-making processes and there are diverse sizes, shapes and ages of women and children but only old or unfit men. In a patriarchal village, to systemically remove all these men has resulted in sad, uninformed decision making practices and a general sense of loss.

(3. Older village men gathered to collect compensation for flooded fields.)

The culture of the boys that are left in the village then becomes negative and dangerous. There is an internalised sense of failure among the boys that get left behind; either those who
could not afford to pay an agent, or those who were not smart enough to make it out on a study-based visa. There is, in this moment in Punjab, an exploding drug culture that is a welcome economic opportunity for these boys. As India is situated amongst many drug producing hubs it is a natural transit zone for drug dealing. Domestically, Punjab is the third highest drug using state in India (Gupta, Kaur, Singh, Kaur & Sidhu, 2003). With a value placed on being abroad, there is a stigma around farming and very little pride left in staying in the village and working the land. A lifestyle of leisure and excess is seen as attractive. Thus, even those who don’t have excessive time and money, perform as if they do. Such are the origin stories of young boys, and even some girls, who have gotten caught up in the drug trade either as vendors or consumers or both.

Technology

Modern technologies are another way in which village life has been redefined. The technologies that have been accepted and those that have been repurposed are a testament to the intelligence of the villagers and their unique ability to adapt and survive. The stories I have are limited to my own experiences and the living memories of my family members but are qualitative pieces of a larger picture. For example, when my mom first left India, communication, even sending a letter was expensive and slow. Mom recalls that she would cram sentences on top of sentences to make the most of the paper she had. Mail was unreliable and a gamble. To make a long distance phone call to her family back home, a family member in India would have to drive into the closest city and sit by the only phone that would receive long distance phone calls. An entire day would be set aside for this excursion and after many failed
attempts, one very expensive, very short phone conversation would be had. My grandmother did not even know my sister had been born until months later when she received a letter bearing the news.

Butala was in a similar situation. Twelve years ago, my grandfather had a landline installed in his village house; he was one of the few people to do so. The house subsequently become a hub of incoming phone calls; a child would be dispatched to the house for whom the phone call was intended so they could come and receive it. I remember my, then seventy-nine year old, grandfather explaining to his older brother that you put the part connected to the curly wire towards your mouth and the other end to your ear; this explanation was necessary because in 2002 my grandfather’s older brother had yet to be in regular contact with a phone. At this point Butala also had not one but two subscriber trunk dialing booths (STDs). They were phone booths where you could make outgoing phone calls; the land line could only receive. They were expensive but having them in the village meant you no longer had to travel into the city to make a phone call. Butala was progressing.

The recent global explosion of cell phones has changed the way the entire village communicates and interacts with their relatives abroad. The new, albeit slow, internet has been unleashed, long distance rates have plummeted and without the expense of having to install landlines everyone has access to a phone. Whereas my grandmother didn’t know my sister had been born for months, my cousin, who was in Italy when his daughter was born in Butala, received Facebook pictures within the week. This year my nephew in Butala had a birthday and I received pictures within seconds.
The presence and quantity of cars has also increased. My dad can recount the first radio in Butala and the first television, the first motorcycle and the first car. Now, young boys use motorcycles to go over a *gali* or two to visit a relative. Cars are used to go down the road to pick up milk or vegetables. In the same moment that some people are still using ox-driven carts, others are using cars.

Every home also now has a TV. Where cable connections were once necessary, satellite dishes mean that every home can now have access to television programs and all the mainstream media consumption they entail. The programming that follows is now a mind-boggling mix of everything from “traditional” values (such as commercials advocating the value of fair skin through skin bleaching creams) to channels that broadcast the Oscars.

One of the strangest moments I had witnessed was not in Butala but in the city of Jalandhar. I mention it here because it clearly demonstrates the confusing ways in which narratives of modernity do not play out in a historically or socially uniform way. At the time, I was at my cousin’s house in the city. She was born and raised in Butala and had married a man with a great job in the city. She moved to Jalandhar and very quickly adopted the city life. She cut her hair, learned to drive a scooter and started wearing jeans. This particular day one of the neighbourhood children was having a birthday party and as she had two young kids of her own she was invited. I got dressed in a modest Punjabi suit and tagged along. What I witnessed was strange and I struggled to make sense of it. The easiest way I can explain it was that I saw a group of women and children performing what they thought a birthday party should be. Of course the whole concept of a birthday party was ideologically imported. In Butala, from my grandparents’ generation, and even my dad’s, no one actually knew when their real birthday was. They were all made up during the process of getting passports. Birth certificates were not usually
issued at the time of birth. The exact origin of the “birthday party” remains unclear but the cultural hegemony of the global north in this situation was obvious. While there were some traditions that have been appropriated by Punjabis that seem genuine, this was not one of them. The parents of the children presented gifts, a cake was cut, songs were sung and everyone sat in uncomfortable silence on folding chair lining the perimeter of the room. The little girls were wearing revealing western outfits and the boys were wearing brand name knock offs. There was the occasional harsh reminder of where we were such as the lower-caste nanny/caretaker of the birthday girl who was mistreated in front of all the guests. Another clue was the brother of the birthday girl who (to me) clearly had an undiagnosed cognitive impairment but was treated as an embarrassment to be covered up by the family. My cousin, who speaks Punjabi at home with her children, suddenly only spoke to them in Hindi in front of the other city women as Hindi is deeply entrenched as a superior language to Punjabi in the Hindu-dominant country. When the party was finally over, I was happy to return to my cousin’s house down the street.

Conceptions of space

Culturally, the shift from farming to remittances as a main form of income resulted in an inside versus outside culture; a sort of global south generated us and them complex. For the people in Butala, there were only two worlds: that which they knew, and that which was outside, or baar. Taylor and Singh (2013), in a study of the Doaba region of Punjab state that conservative estimates put at least two million Doabans in the diaspora making them at least 10% of the Indian population settled abroad. The word baar (outside) has long since passed its literal meaning. An outside country is anywhere that someone can go to make money and has some element of mystery to it. North America, Europe, the Middle East and Australia are amongst the most popular in the discourse of baar. There is a hierarchy amongst these countries
that translates into very real expenses when you paying an agent to get your child settled abroad. Gianno Auntie for example, who used to rent rooms in my grandfather’s house, was a mother to three boys. The youngest of her three sons, who up until recently was not working and hovering on the margins of illegality, was nowhere to be seen on my last trip to the village. Gianno Auntie’s family was poor and so it was outside their means to send their boys abroad. She very proudly told me that the youngest was now *baar*. Of course she added that he was not in a big country, rather, he was somewhere in Africa. Despite this, he was no longer doing drugs and he was sending money home. There were obvious markers that made some countries more valuable than others: how the currency translated into rupees, the presence of white people and the quality of living. Canada was ranked amongst the highest alongside the US, England, Australia and New Zealand. Countries like Italy, Dubai and Qatar were a good and admirable second. African countries came in last.

Every element of life in Butala was now somehow in conversation with the discourse of *baar*. There was an unclear yet somehow homogenized understanding of what the outside world entailed. People born in outside countries were all put into one category, even if they were from different places. I was told that I was much nicer and spoke better Punjabi than a certain Aunt’s son who was born in Holland. What I might have in common with a boy from Holland was questionable, but my cousin who made the comparison could not see that. If it wasn’t familiar to those in Butala, it must be part of the outside world. The outside world was see as one of law and order, of riches and plenty, and of freedom. I happily fielded ridiculous questions from my cousins in return for them answering my ridiculous questions about village life. What are white people like? Are they good or bad? What is it like to sit in a plane? How do you drive a car? What does a grocery store look like? How do ovens work? How much do you pay the women
who work for you during weddings? Where does your water come from? Who sews your clothes?

What happened to money remitted to Butala was remarkable and obvious. For the most part it was sent informally and used for personal consumption, the most obvious display of this was housing (Taylor & Singh, 2013). Houses changed in their basic structure. My grandfather’s house used to be one of the highest standing houses. This can be attested to by all those who took shelter there during the last huge flood. Now it was one of the lowest and most humble residences in Butala. The basic set-up of a *gali* used to be a number of houses, each with a few roofed off rooms set further back and an open courtyard up front. As can be imagined, this meant that everyone walking by could see into everyone else’s house. You could hear your neighbours fighting and laughing, see laundry drying, and shout across to each other. Eleven years ago when I went to Butala, this was still the common housing structure. Walking down the *gali* you could see everyone. On a hot day, when the electricity was turned off because of systemic roaming blackouts, the women would pull their *manjas* out into the *gali* and sit and talk until the electricity came back on and provided some relief with a fan. However, more remittance money now meant more construction and a change in the way houses were built. During my last trip, two story houses, with a wall out front and a gate that opened allowing a car or motorcycle to drive into the courtyard, were common practice.
On my last trip, walking down the *gali*, all I could see were closed doors; only the poor still had exposed homes. When the electricity turned off people had generators or invertors that switched to a reserve of battery powered fans. There were televisions for entertainment and, essentially, a huge social element of Butala life had shifted. Whereas before we would walk into each other’s homes unannounced to sit and talk for a while, doors were now locked and walls created a real sense of going into someone’s personal space.

![The front of my Grandfather’s house and our gali on my last research trip](image)

Interestingly, these new and larger houses often had owners who left to go live permanently in the countries in which they worked. The only way to keep the houses clean and free of the insect and vermin that would otherwise take up residence was to have people live in them and take care of them. As the higher castes could afford to leave Butala, the residents of these giant houses were often lower-caste individuals. This played an interesting role in the way traditional caste dynamics worked. The high-caste villagers migrated to other countries to work
as manual laborers, while the lower-caste families lived for free in the fancy houses that were built back in Butala.

Virtual and physical space

One of the fundamental assumptions of this thesis is that the spaces of Butala are outside the confines of text. They cannot be mapped and controlled through the technologies that do so in other places. As someone who lives most of my days in Canada, I am used to the internet and the readiness with which I can access a virtual reality. Now, as someone who is not well versed in how technology works, I have no idea where the internet actually is. The way I feel sometimes is that the internet is floating around the air and my varied devices tap into it in a moment’s notice. I can check the weather on my phone faster than I can look outside the window. I can map directions, follow friends’ life events, and communicate using the vast beast that is the internet. Every element of my reality in Canada is mirrored on the internet which is accessible in seconds. There are virtual avatars of most of my acquaintances, policy documents available to the public, maps with street views, online clothing stores, I can even order pizza online.

In Butala and for a lot of Punjab this was not the case. One of my earliest encounters with this realisation came during my first research trip in 2012. As someone who only eats fair trade chocolate I usually travel with my own private stash. During this particular trip however, I ran out. I was rationing chocolate and looking at having to spend another month in India without it. I did what any internet-dependent Canadian girl seeking chocolate would do. I googled “fair trade chocolate Punjab” on my ridiculously slow internet connection. This was my first head on collision with what it meant to face a reality without the internet to map it. There were no yellow
pages, no reviews of stores, no businesses plotted on maps of nearby cities, no websites from which I could order and have chocolate delivered. This understanding continued to be apparent every time my first world reflex to google something would kick in. Because of a lack of technology, the physical space of Butala only existed in the material world; it did not exist in the virtual realm.

Conceptions of time

One of the most difficult things I came up against was my own perception of time and the product of the Fordist system that I was. Literally a product of the factory system, I started working in factories when I was thirteen. I learned to punch a card and be somewhere on time. I came from an environment where work and leisure activities were separate; classes and exams started on the exact time they said they would, and meetings had to be attended on time. To this day if I am more than five minutes late for any event, even if it is dinner with friends, I will apologise; I hold others to the same standards.

This was not the case in Butala!

One of my nieces, Upinderjit attended school in the nearby town of Dhilwan and insisted one day that I come see her dance in one of her school’s productions. I got ready and went to school with her I the morning. Her school bus, and I use the term loosely, was a karuka, a crudely fashioned vehicle made out of an engine from a tractor, a steering wheel and some wood thrown together to create a trolley-like holding container for the kids. It was by far cheaper than paying the private school for the busses they provided and it did the job adequately. The driver,
after dropping the kids off at school would then use his karuka for odd jobs including transporting furniture and selling onions.

When I arrived, in one piece, to the school at 9 a.m. with the rest of the kids, the teacher told me the program was not starting until 12 noon. I went back home and then went to the school with Upinderjit’s parents, sitting side-saddle in between two people in the back of a motorcycle. The teacher then told us to come back at 1:30. I spent some time in Dhilwan and came back at the given time at which point I was told the program would be held on Saturday. When I arrived at the school again on Saturday, I was told the program had been held earlier and was now in fact over. It was a frustrating waste of a few days but not an uncommon way in which scheduling worked.

I had to readjust my sense of time every time I re-entered the village but factory time was like a muscle that I had gotten used to using. It was hard to unlearn. My grandfather would tell me about the first watch he bought, even my dad can recall buying his first watch; these were big moments in their lives. The obvious thought that comes to my mind is “how did life work before
you had a watch?” People in the village talked about getting up at 3 am to start praying or visiting the buffalo or going to the Gurdwara. I once asked an older man in the village how he would know it was time to get up and start working if there were no clocks. He told me he would sleep under the stars and know by the position of the stars according to where they were in the year what time it was. I asked how he could see the stars when he was sleeping and he laughed and said “There was so much work to do; we never actually closed our eyes.” I realised it’s hard to be late for work when your work never stops. When life and work are not distinguished from each other you don’t have the same sense of time.

This was why the life in Butala was too slow for me. I was conditioned to believe that work should be finished as soon as possible so I could later relax and enjoy leisure time. The women of Butala worked and lived at an entirely different pace. They reserved their energy and spent it equally throughout the day, not in bursts and then resting. The walk to go milk the buffalo was a slow gait, the carrots were peeled slowly while gossiping about the day, getting ready to go to an event was never rushed as the event was not going to start on time anyway. I had to learn to slow down everything I did as well.

Sikhs in Punjab have a Nanakshai calendar which is still printed today and taught in schools. The months are different, the New Year is around mid-March and the year works around the farming schedule as well as Sikh tradition. Before the “development industry’s” ideas of progress started to penetrate the Butala mindset, life was cyclical and not linear. This does not mean it was overly simple; there was a lot of nuance but it was built around major harvesting times. For example my Taya Ji, in trying to remember when his tenant’s yearly rent was due, instead of stating the month, said “he last paid rent when the jamuns were ripe, it has not yet been a year”. Festivals and celebrations were held accordingly. The influence of this calendar is
still a huge factor in Butala life. Mid-April in the Gregorian calendar marks the beginning of Vaisakh on the Nanakshai calendar. This is when one of the biggest responsibilities of farming families, the harvesting of wheat, is over. Festivals erupt and during the down time before the next crop of rice is planted, time is taken for friends and family and religious ceremonies. There is a common saying:

Muk gayee kanka(n) di rakhi, Jatta aye Vaisakhi!
The care of the wheat harvest is over. Oh farmer, the festival of Vaisakhi has arrived!²

Similarly, during the summer in the month of Saun, when there is a lull in work after rice has been planted, before it is harvested, the festival of Dheeyan occurs. During this time women return back to their village of birth to sing, dance, hang swings off trees and play games. Certain foods are associated with certain festivals. I was able to get gajarayla, a carrot based sweet, during Duserah, but not a month earlier because food is, for the most part, local and seasonal.

Every time a new month starts, on sangrandh, there is a reading from the scriptures that explains how this month relates to the spiritual journey of the human soul. Baramah is a Sikh composition that goes through the 12 Nanakshai months and explains their significance. For example in the month of Poh, the following is read

```plaintext
pokh thukhaar n viaapee ka(n)t(h) miliaa har naahu ||
In the month of Poh, the cold does not touch those, whom the Husband Lord hugs close in His Embrace.

man baedhhiaa charanaarabi(n)dh dharasan lagarraa saahu ||
Their minds are transfixed by His Lotus Feet. They are attached to the Blessed Vision of the Lord's Darshan.

outt govi(n)dh gopaal raae saevaa suamee laahu ||
Seek the Protection of the Lord of the Universe; His service is truly profitable.
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² Personal translation
Life, and time, are simultaneously connected to the season and the journey of the soul. Thus the Bhai that works at the Gurdwara is the first to utter the auspicious name of the new month. If you ask someone a few days before the start of a new month what month is arriving, they will not tell you; the understanding is that the first time the name of the month is heard it should be through the teachings of the Gurus. During this reading of the month, everyone brings their monthly donation of a bowl of sugar or wheat or money to the Gurdwara. It is also during this time that the financial account of the Gurdwara is read out over the loudspeakers.

The moon cycle also played a huge role in life in Butala. Before electricity came to the village, the moonlight was essential for getting work done at night. With a lack of light pollution and smog, the stars and moon provided enough light to see pretty clearly at night. There is poormanmashi, when the moon is full, and also chaudai which is the eve of the night where there is no moon. During these times people made a point of going on pilgrimages, often on foot, which could be started early in the morning by the light of the moon.
Alongside the moon cycle, the cycle of the day also dictated how life and especially the school days worked. Unlike the school day in Canada which always started and stopped at the same time, in Butala the timing depended on the season. In the absence of guaranteed electricity, changing the school time was helpful. In the winter, when the sun rose later in the day, the school day started later and allowed for the children to soak in the warmth of the sun as opposed to sitting in their cold classrooms. In the summer where the days got very hot very quick, it was dangerous to keep children in hot classrooms without a fan. Hence classes started earlier while the sun was less threatening.

(6. Kids warming up using the embers of the cooking fire before they start their school day)

**Lying**

Lying was also a huge part of the social fabric of life in the village. There is a saying in Punjabi that an elephant has two sets of teeth, one which they show the world and one with which they eat. Basically, there is an acknowledgement that people have one face they show the
world and another truth which is their internal functioning. Lying was a normalized tool of negotiating life in Butala, so much so that I decided I needed to devote a section of my rich description to it.

Even the most revered and sacred function of village life, the reading of the divine Sikh scriptures, was not safe from the dishonesty of the Bhai who ran the Gurdwara. When a woman in our village died, the forty-eight hour non-stop tradition of reading of Siri Guru Granth Sahib Ji (divine Sikh scripture) was performed. People would come in shifts to read while the family listened and everyone was invited for food. Traditionally, the only text that would have been available would have been the scriptures themselves and the listeners would hear the spoken words of the Bhai doing the reading. I had my iPod with me which had an app on which the entire scriptures were uploaded so I began to read along. To my horror, the Bhai was skipping lines. He would read a few lines, skip ahead and read a few more. At first I thought he was mistaken but when I saw the pattern emerge I realised he was cutting out lines so he wouldn’t have to put in as much work. Heart sinking in panic, and knowing I could not interrupt his reading, I scrambled to find someone to replace him. At a loss, I eventually re-entered the room and started reading out loud. Every time he would skip ahead, I would go back and read the appropriate line. He eventually caught on there was some sort of magic in the piece of metal I was holding and he couldn’t get away with what he was doing. He started reading all the lines until someone came to relieve him of his duties.

Truths were also frequently distorted when it came to matters of immigration. Because of the high value of a visa to a country abroad and the history of stolen passports in Butala, travel plans were kept extremely secretive. One family from our gali, on receiving their visas to go live in Greece, held a religious ceremony in humble gratitude for this life changing opportunity. They
invited the village and fed everyone but never actually explained that the ceremony was in thanks for their visas. Everyone assumed it was a normally scheduled prayer to ask for peace and health in the family. A few days later the whole family was gone and the house was locked up. Now and again when word would get out that someone was leaving Butala, flight information would be lied about. Since not a lot of people in Butala understood how plane scheduling worked, it was easy to convince people that there was no way to confirm travel plans until minutes before hand. Thus people would pick up and leave, often times without saying goodbye.

Once a family member was abroad, the lying about how much money they made would continue. To avoid the evil and jealous gaze of people who had less money and opportunity, long tales would be spun about how the son who had gone to Italy was now sitting there without work. No one bothered to keep their stories straight and every family member had a different answer for questions regarding money and travel.

In a similar vein, wedding dates would never be set in stone. Knowing how much gold, food and money could be stored in a wedding house, it was of little use to divulge exact details of a wedding until it was absolutely necessary. A family member would often have to sleep in the banquet hall the night before a wedding so as to prevent the cooks from stealing the food stored there and selling it. When a young man, Lali, from Butala got married, there were so many dates and details given that the official words on the wedding card were useless. A second, verbal invitation was issued alongside the formal written one. Secret undertones would give instruction such as “nenda” meant you were being invited to eat a meal at the wedding house and “chulay nenda” meant the entire family was invited to eat. Immediate families were always invited in full whereas distant friends and family would mean too many mouths to feed so one representative would go alongside the family. Lali came to my house and sat down to invite me
to his wedding. While there his phone rang and he answered it saying that he was at Goga’s house and would be home in a bit. Whenever Lali was at my house he would lie about where he was because, despite the fact that we were related, he understood his presence in a room alone with me would spread like wildfire gossip if he was honest.

Immigration weddings were another opportunity to deceive the people in the village. There were many ways to go abroad and one the most readily available ones was through marriage. Since the rise of fake weddings for the purpose of immigration, the burden to prove that a marriage was real had increased. Now wedding albums, in depth interviews and the testimony of others in the village were all requirements for successfully leaving the country with a spouse. Since the ceremonies were always broadcast over the Gurdwara speakers it was obvious when someone was getting married. One particular occasion that stands out is when I heard three of the four rounds of the marriage ceremony being recited and then silence over the speakers. It turns out the whole wedding was staged for immigration purposes but not wanting the couple to actually end up married, they stopped just shy of the fourth round of the ceremony. The layers of deception could go as deep as the bride not knowing her wedding was fake until after she got married. The more convincing the wedding, the better the chances of getting through immigration without problems.

The women in the village had their own motivations for lying to each other. Girls would lie about what they were going to wear to a certain party or get together. Initially I was surprised when I saw these interactions. For example, a cousin of mine has come back to Butala for a festival and had a new salwar kameez sewn for the occasion. When her friend Harmeet came over to ask what she was going to wear, my cousin replied that she had nothing new to wear and would wear whatever old clothes she had bought. I found out that this was so each girl could
upstage the other at the festival. If she had been honest about what she was going to wear, Harmeet would have gone home and adjusted her wardrobe to one-up my cousin.

Lying permeated life on a very personal level as well as on a larger institutional scale. A family friend had a mother who was diagnosed with a terminal illness. The doctor refused to tell the dying woman that her illness was terminal so that she could continue being charged for treatment. The family was given vague descriptions and it wasn’t until a second opinion was sought from a doctor in Canada that this became clear. In many cases of people experiencing illness in Butala, it was common for the doctor to mistreat patients to make more money for themselves. Pregnant women and mothers in Butala constantly described how, when their children were born, the doctor gave them a needle which started immense pain (induced labor). If by the end of the day they hadn’t produced a baby, there was a caesarian section. I was alarmed at the number of women who had C-sections in Butala. The privately run hospitals for women nearby wanted a fast turn around and were inducing labour and performing unnecessary surgeries to reduce the time women spent in their clinics. For the uninformed women in the village, however, this was the new discourse on childbirth following the arrival of Western medicine. They did not share this information with me with any note of concern, rather with the tone of explaining the process of giving birth.

In yet another institutional setting, a family friend had a daughter in college where she was accused of bullying another student. The recent phenomenon of “ragging” had made this a very important issue to be dealt with in a harsh way and Leena was thus threatened with expulsion. Our family and her grandfather piled into a car and made the three hour drive to her college to use one of my dad’s connections to deal with the situation. My dad’s friend, a former military man and now professor, met us in advance for lunch and we discussed how to save the
girl from expulsion. We went to meet the principal and after she apologised it was agreed that no action would be taken. The next day in the newspaper I was surprised to see a story printed, complete with the girl’s name, about how she had in fact been expelled for bullying another student. I immediately asked my dad for clarification, who called his friend who told us that to appease the girl who had been bullied and to cement the reputation of the college as one who did not tolerate bullying, the official word would be that the girls involved had been expelled. The layers of deception that surrounded this story were beyond my ability to negotiate. In Ontario although newspapers have biases and agendas, I would have taken that there was some truth to the facts in the reports. In Punjab, however, the newspaper could be bought by the highest bidder.

There was a similar case with a girl in our village who went into the city for college and became heavily involved in a drug circle. She started not only taking, but also selling, cocaine. This was not an uncommon occurrence in her demographic. When she was arrested and returned to the village, her petrified family went to the main newspaper in the area and paid them not to publish the story. The newspaper agreed and took their money but before the paper could be published another (unknown) person came in and paid even more to have the story published. Word spread like wildfire from literate and illiterate alike. In the circles of young Butala men living abroad with a substantially different relationship to the internet, her story was well known. They saw videos of her on YouTube and pictures on Facebook, but in the immediate world of Butala, she had been exposed by the newspaper. To save face and remedy the situation, a marriage was quickly arranged to a man from another village. It wouldn’t be until after they were married that he would come to learn his teenaged wife was a former drug dealer.
When I would ask bewildered questions about why everyone was lying to each other, my cousins would laugh at my naiveté. They would find it amusing and at times a bit tiring how honest I was about everything. I never understood when to answer a question with a lie to protect myself from some sort of harm. I would openly declare when my flights were, how much things cost, what I was going to wear and many other details. I never learned how to function with a lack of transparency. Instead, the functioning of reality in this way created a deep-seated mistrust that formed the environment in which all social interaction occurred. While I found this traumatizing from a Canadian perspective, for the people of Butala it was a normal part of village life. I retreated further and further into myself to avoid feeling mistrusted and could not being myself to practice the culture of lying.

**Conclusion**

Staying true to the methodology of ethnography, this chapter presented some of the rich descriptions of my time in Butala. I started off with looking at the history and demographics of India, Punjab and then Butala. I then explained many important aspects of Butala life including caste dynamics, technology, and concepts of space and time. In order to understand my problematic of why the UNCRC does not work in the context of village life, it is necessary to look in detail at the global politics, institutions, relationship dynamics that create Butala. This chapter set the stage for delving into the world of children and the moments of failure on the part of the Convention. The next chapter will continue this journey.
Chapter 4: Childhood and Social Relations in Butala

Spaces of children: the anganwadi

Having established the context of Butala, I know turn specifically to the spaces I was most interested in looking at: the spaces of children. The children of Butala, as anywhere else, do not live in a vacuum. They are a part of the fabric of Butala, subject to the same concepts of space, caste, history and politics. The spaces in which the lives of the children take place are the same as those in which other aspects of village life occur. What I wanted to look at in Butala was how children interact with government institutions as a way of gauging how effectively state policy works at changing the material conditions of their lives. The obvious choice of institution for this was the *anganwadi*.

In 1975, the Government of India, in pursuance of the National Policy for Children launched the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) scheme (Kapil, 2002). It is considered one of the largest programs in the world that promotes maternal and child health. Although it involves multiple sectors of the government, the primary responsibility lies with the Department of Women & Child Development. The scheme targets children under the age of six and pregnant and lactating women between the ages of fifteen and forty-four (Kapil, 2002). The *anganwadi* centers found all over India are a product of this scheme; the main objectives of the ICDS are carried out through them. *Anganwadi* workers and their helpers are responsible for supplementary nutrition, immunization, health check-up, referral services, pre-school non-formal education and nutrition health education (Government of India, 1975).

In Butala there were three *anganwadi* units in accordance with the population and needs of the children. Two of these were consolidated and located in the public primary school of
Butala. The other one was located in the main *Gurdwara*. Since I had done my masters’ research with the elementary school in Butala I decided to start there. I sat down with two of my cousins and explained start to finish what I was researching and what I wanted to do. I was not going to make the same mistake I had made during my MA in which I began with assumptions about how the research process worked in India, and soon fell flat on my face. With my cousins help I went to the primary school. Although the *anganwadi* worker was not there and had not been there for a few days, the main elementary school teacher immediately recognized me and my cousin and invited us to sit in the January sun with her and eat peanuts. The kids basically kept themselves entertained for the next hour or so with the occasional reprimand from their teacher. Although there were two rooms for the primary school kids to hold classes in, it was too cold to sit indoors. Taking advantage of the sunlight we sat outside and discussed the school’s progress. The morning also brought it with it the sounds of artillery fired on the military grounds that bordered Butala. Although these sounds were a regular part of my mornings, at the poorly built school they shook the weak walls.

The overwhelming majority of children in the publically funded school were lower-caste Majbi children. Anyone who had money would send their kids to a private school. The money that was supposed to pay for a free mid-day meal for the kids hadn’t arrived for a while so the school was in debt, but the people from whom they bought basic grains and fuel were still letting them have supplies. The teacher asked me about my research, asked my cousin Kindi about her family and in turn told us about her life, recent miscarriage, and problems working in the school. When one of the kids had an outburst she sent him over to the other group of kids to borrow the switch with which she was about to hit him. She turned to me and said “see, times are so bad, we only have one stick with which to hit the kids.” I knew that hitting children in schools was
technically not allowed and she knew that I was there as an observer yet somehow this didn’t stop her from hitting the kids in front of me. She did tell me, however, that when people came by to inspect the schools they would hide the stick. I had to wonder why she didn’t feel the need to perform as a teacher in front of me. Why was she cracking peanuts with me in the mid-morning sun while the children amused themselves? Where was the obtrusive and often internalized gaze of policy that forced teachers in Ontario to always perform in the right way?

My purpose in going to the school that morning had been to meet with the *anganwadi* worker who set up her centre on the school grounds. I eventually realised that she was not going to come in to work that day. As a result, the children in her care weren’t present either. I left thinking this absence was somewhat unusual but I would return to find her again in a few days; I was in no way prepared for the barrage of excuses I would hear from *anganwadi* workers in the future. In the week that followed the elementary school teacher told me the *anganwadi* worker for this location, Rani Madam, wouldn’t be in for a few days. I then got a hold of Rani Madam who told me that she had a relative who was sick and was visiting them in the hospital, the next day she was off collecting survey data on why girls who had dropped out of school didn’t return, this was followed by the weekend and a death in the family. It was almost a week later when I finally got a chance to sit down with her at the primary school.

Of the many services that were funded for the *anganwadi*, a physical building was not one of them. Each centre had to negotiate with the village *panchayat* about where to set up. Those that were lucky would find a funder, usually someone from the village now living in another country, to help build a simple classroom. In Butala, two of the centres were run under Rani Madam and set up shop in the primary school while the third was run under Devinder Madam in a room out of a room in the *Gurdwara*. 
A few more days passed before I was able to see Rani Madam again, she had a wedding to attend amongst other things and we finally picked up again where we had left off. On that day, her assistant Shallo was sick. As Shallo was in charge of the daily meal, this meant that the two children that had showed up were not getting food. Rani Madam filled her register with names of multiple children she knew to be under her jurisdiction in Butala. She explained to me that she got funding and rations based on attendance so she had to continue to fill in fake attendance records to keep the centre running. The sparse, hand written records at the anganwadis in Butala always showed perfect attendance, resource distribution, and census data. The discrepancies between the written records and actual reality were huge but not uncommon.

I quickly learned that Rani Madam’s job was so much more than that of a preschool teacher. The official description of an anganwadi worker under the ICDS described her as “a community based frontline honorary worker of the ICDS Programme. She [was] also an agent of social change, mobilizing community support for better care of young children, girls and women” (Government of India, 1975). That morning, Rani let me shadow her as she put on her community worker hat. We quickly left the two children who had showed up at the anganwadi with the primary school teachers and walked into the part of Butala that very few interactions in my normal life allowed for: the kotli, or vera. This was the part of the village that was physically and ideologically separated based on caste. It was mostly Majbis and had its own organizational system, Gurdwara and social network. The kids that Rani Madam was responsible for came from this area.

Unlike the main part of Butala which had been structured neatly in the post-flood village, the kotli was a poorly organized mess of house-on-house and unsanitary lanes haphazardly running into each other. It was midday and most of the women were sitting about in the sun.
Rani Madam went around and asked the mothers of the children who should have been at the anganwadi why they were absent. They provided multiple reasons for their children’s absences: their school bags were locked up, the mother was sick and needed the aid of her three-year-old, or the children simply refused to go. Rani Madam openly critiqued the mothers telling them that they were in charge; the children did not get to decide if they wanted to go to school or not. She also declared it was not the job of a three-year-old to care for their mother. Rani Madam asked at every house if children were eating dirt as a means of assessing if the children had anemia. After meandering through the Kotli for most of the morning we returned to the school where, once again turning their backs to the school children, the teachers engaged me in a conversation about how the lower castes don’t value education.

I started to understand the anganwadi system was operating with little commitment to the way it was conceived as a federal initiative. The Government of India stated that, “The Non-formal Pre-school Education (PSE) component of the ICDS may well be considered the backbone of the ICDS programme, since all its services essentially converge at the anganwadi” (Government of India, 1975). Also, the centre was envisioned as a, “natural, joyful and stimulating environment, with emphasis on necessary inputs for optimal growth and development.” (Government of India, 1975) This was not what I was seeing in the Butala anganwadi. I suspect that even the walk-through of the kotli had been put on as a performance for my benefit. I therefore wasn’t surprised that, as the days wore on and children continued to be absent, Rani Madam made up more excuses as to why the centre was not open for my visits. In the meantime, Shallo’s illness kept her at home. The attendance register, however, continued to show high numbers of participation. After all, wasn’t this what I knew to be happening in Butala to some point? The government had set up an institution like the anganwadi in order to
enact certain policies, resource distribution and data collection. In the written world, right down to the attendance and food distribution records, everything was happening perfectly. In the lived, material world, nothing worked this way.

This was not only happening in Butala but in centers around the country. In the early 80’s a study of 96 *anganwadi* workers in Delhi, Kant, Gupta and Mehta found the following results:

The number of children under 2 they would expect in an *anganwadi* was known to only one (1.04%) and the number of pregnant and lactating mother to only 3.12 percent. Majority 92.71 percent could not tell full form of ICDS. Most of them (90.62%) could not enumerate all the services being provided and none could list out their job responsibilities. (1984, p. 401)

Another, more recent study, reported the following observations from centres in West Begal, “In one *anganwadi* supplementary nutrition could not be prepared as the helper was absent. In 13 other *anganwadis* raw food materials were out of stock. In 80% *anganwadis* pond water was used to clean utensils.” (Chattopadhay, 2004, p. 9) With a tendency towards similar behavior, Rani Madam ran out of things to perform for me. We were headed down a dangerous path, as she realized that her various and questionable practices might become obvious to me. During the second month of a planned six months of participant observation, she told me she thought my work with her was done. She redirected me to the second *anganwadi* centre under Devinder Madam in the *Gurdwara*.

It was here that I found myself a frequent visitor. Devinder Madam, a police officer’s widow with two children of her own in high school, was a sharp, stern and resourceful woman. She was more open about the failures of the *anganwadi* system and let me into her world. This is
not to say that her centre wasn’t under-attended or closed down for most of the week. Rather, she was never so embarrassed by this situation that she pushed me away. My mom knew her as well and with that personal connection in place, I started regularly dropping in and observing. I became a sounding board for Devinder Madam’s rants and in turn she informed me about the things that others would often leave out of a discussion.

The *anganwadi* centre at the *Gurdwara* location was a humble room that doubled as a storage room and a sleeping area for out of town *Gurdwara* musicians. There was a *dhari*, a rough blanket, on the ground, a greatly treasured poster/blackboard, a few broken toys and blocks and outside the room there was access to the *Gurdwara’s* kitchen, where the children’s meals were prepared. There was also one desk and a chair that the *Gurdwara* treasurer would take every time he needed it for official *Gurdwara* business. This location was resource rich compared to the centre at the primary school which didn’t even have a room, just a blanket on the ground.
This centre, like the other one in Butala, also had many discrepancies between the written and lived reality. Of course there was no official way of accounting for this. In all the paper work, the numbers added up. Officially, the children and mothers were all accounted for, the food was brought in and dispersed in accordance with the formulas of how much each developing child and nursing mother should have, the workers were all paid on time. Anything that could be incriminating was never put down in writing. If I had studied the anganwadi system strictly through reports it would have seemed flawless.

This centre also had equally frustrating moments for me as a researcher. First off there were the frequent occasions where it would simply not be running. As I go through my notes and my calendar from the days I was in the village my pages are filled with days when the anganwadi was not open. There were major holidays, minor holidays, days when no kids would show up, days when Devinder Madam was off on training or running errands, and of course since the center was run out of the Gurdwara, every time there was a wedding or religious occasion, the room would be needed and the center would be shut down. My notes from the week of March 22nd read as follows,

Two days ago the anganwadi was locked. Yesterday Devinder’s kids were getting their school results so she didn’t come and Pammi was going to Kapurthala on the 11am bus. Today I went to visit them. Tomorrow is Shaheed Bhagat Singh’s birthday. Saturday the anganwadi should be open. Sunday it is closed. Monday is Baba Bhala’s Mela and it is closed again.

Realistically, the center was only running two-thirds of the time it should have been; it was meant to operate three hours a day, six days a week (Government of India, 1975). The official
records showed that the center was always open and there were plenty of children in attendance. Between Devinder Madam and her assistant Pammi there was always some situation happening that strayed from the official discourse.

On one occasion there were no adults in the small room, only children. When I asked where the teachers/women were, one of the kids told me that he was Pammi’s son. She had gotten work cleaning RoopRani’s house that morning and so she had given him the key to go open the centre and play there with his cousins. The kids were essentially watching themselves. Even when the adults were present we would often talk amongst ourselves while the kids ran outside, out of site, and out of earshot. Devinder Madam was often so swamped with paper work that she would have her back to the children only occasionally turning to stop them from physically attacking each other. There was no programming or direct engagement with them.

There were obvious limitations to what Devinder Madam could do. She shared with me the struggles of the women who worked in the centres. The rule was that the center was to be run by a daughter or daughter-in-law of the village who had at least a high school education and the assistant was to be from the lower-castes of the village with no specific requirements around education. The worker would be provided with training and was accountable to the block in which she worked. There was a strictly organized hierarchy of who was accountable to whom. What ended up happening was that there were too many responsibilities placed on the underpaid and often unpaid women running these centers. They were responsible for various things including but not limited to attending meetings, transporting food, recruiting children for the centre, checking in on expectant mothers, providing nutrition for expectant and nursing mothers, collecting census information, filling out forms for pensions and helping with voting during election times. It was not actually possible for one or two women to do all this.
She also found that she could not separate her work life from her private life. She was known as an *anganwadi* worker and people would therefore come to her house seeking her services. She found she could not deny them entry into her home or services because she knew them personally. This was neither the kind of job nor the type of clients you could walk away from at the end of the day. Her assistant Pammi also lacked clear boundaries in her job. When she was needed to clean an elderly woman’s house one day, I found the woman sitting and watching the anganwadi kids in exchange for Pammi cleaning her house. What counted as work and what counted as social life was often blurred.

There were delays in pay and many times the women would stop working all together to protest their working conditions. Devinder Madam still had not been paid for the census information that she had last collected during the hot summer days, walking door to door. She told me this as she filled in false information for this year’s census from the comfort of her desk in shaded the *anganwadi* room. Without hiding the reality of what she was doing from me, she loudly proclaimed that she would not march around the village in the debilitating heat again to do a job that she was not going to be paid for. She was often not given money for transportation to pick up food or go to meetings or mandatory trainings. When I came back to visit her in October during my second fieldwork trip, she had not been paid for three months. The clerk that was supposed to pay her had been pocketing the money himself. This was not uncommon as the women who ran these centers were known to be overworked and underpaid (Amalappa & Kawale, 2013).

Ideally there was a certain amount of food that was to be given to every pregnant and breast feeding woman and every child up to the age of six. For example, for children between the ages of three and six the ICDS scheme clearly states,
State/ UTs have been requested to make arrangements to serve Hot Cooked Meal in AWCs and mini-AWCs under the ICDS Scheme. Since the child of this age group is not capable of consuming a meal of 500 calories in one sitting, the States/ UTs are advised to consider serving more than one meal to the children who come to AWCs. Since the process of cooking and serving hot cooked meal takes time, and in most of the cases, the food is served around noon, States/ UTs may provide 500 calories over more than one meal. States/ UTs may arrange to provide a morning snack in the form of milk/ banana/ egg/ seasonal fruits/ micronutrient fortified food etc. (Government of India, 1975)

These instructions were repeated in the scheme for children between zero and six months and six months to three years. There were formulas and nutritional expectations that determined how much every person that the *anganwadi* was responsible for. Again, in accordance with the calculations and paper work everyone was being fed what they should have been. In reality the money that was allocated for purchasing food was pocketed by corrupt officials at multiple levels of the system. With what money was left, sub-par rations were bought and the workers brought them into their respective villages. Although Devinder Madam herself did not keep the food, she knew some workers would use the sugar, grain and rice meant for the children to run their own households.

Because children were not coming into the centres, Devinder Madam and Pammi would often walk around to houses and hand out the food which, they told me, ended up being eaten by the parents and still didn’t make it to the children. Devinder Madam also never refused women who came the centre asking for extra sugar. Even with this in place, there were still excessive sacks of food lying in the *anganwadi* room. There were no children to feed and meals were not
made every day; I can only recall a handful of days during the six months I was there when they actually cooked food onsite. Although in the official reports the cooking happened every day, in reality there would be a ladle missing or a part of the stove needing repair or not enough kids present to make it worth firing up an entire meal. The conundrum was that Devinder Madam had to keep submitting paperwork for how many children she had to feed in order to keep her job and her center running. Her supervisor regularly asked her to report that she was out of food so they could keep getting more. The food kept piling up and the children continued to be absent.

What these situations brought to light was that even if the mediating text stopped having the intended influence at the level of the village, its presence was still felt in varying ways. The original goals of governing bodies, included having census information, having children fed in calculated ways and having the bodies of children accounted for at the centres. Although these ruling relations were failing, during the moments in which anganwadi workers were filling in false data, protesting, or showing resistance, they were still interacting with the force of the governing body. Thus, even in the absence of influence of the text, there was still a force to be negotiated.

Returning to the problem at hand, why then, were children not coming to the anganwadi? Everyone had their own theory. The influx of private schools in Punjab, alongside the deterioration of the public school system had allowed for many privately run preschools to open and operate successfully. With the green revolution and more recent influx of remittances in Punjab, many farmers had been able to afford to send their kids to private schools. This alongside structural adjustment programs which required cutbacks on essential public services meant a huge and rapid inflation of a two-tiered school system. As Johnson and Bowles (2010) point out, in this context of underfunding, neo-liberal reform, and deregulation of public schools,
the validity and use of private schools increased. The authors found in their study of private education in Northern India that enrolment in private schools was skewed towards higher caste and male children. Such was the case in Butala; any number of the higher caste children that should have been under the supervision of Devinder Madam, were actually getting an education in a private setting. As for the lower-caste children in Butala, despite their poverty, they still had better food at home than the sub-par rations provided by the *anganwadi*, thus decreasing their motivation to attend.

Then there were the theories of the workers who criticized the lower-castes for their laziness. The *anganwadi* workers shared the belief that mothers were lazy, did not value education, and kept their children at home instead of sending them to school. Whatever kept the children away from the centre, one thing was obvious; on the days they did attend, they were bored. With no programming offered to them, they would come and sit for hours and play with the same four toys by themselves, greatly differing from the ICDS vision of a “joyful play-way daily activity.” (Government of India, 1975)

I had a few opportunities to talk to senior administrators of the *anganwadi* system. One of these people was Sukhjeet Multani. She held the position of Child Development Program Officer. I secured the meeting through a connection of my dad. I went to her office in Jalandhar with my mom and dad and driver, a research practice that would have seemed bizarre in Ontario. We entered her office and the immediate commotion of people yelling orders back and forth filled the air. She was initially hostile as I told her about my research and kept referring me to the man sitting next to her. She told me that he would give me all the information I needed alongside a random sampling of the area under her jurisdiction. I started to experience the familiar feelings of self-doubt that occasionally beset a “misplaced” researcher. I could feel the valuable
opportunity that this meeting was slipping from me, because we had not achieved a mutual understanding of my research questions. My dad jumped in and started asking her about her family. We established that somehow we knew her and she immediately relaxed.

Eventually my meeting with her ended and the man she had been gesturing at took me into his office to get me all the documentation I had asked for. He, of course, had not been paying attention during the meeting and then looked at me blankly, not understanding why I was there and what I could possible want. He photocopied one policy document for me and then handed me off to a subordinate woman; I never saw him again. This woman had even less of an idea why I was sitting in her office. I had nothing to offer in terms of an explanation at this point so I asked if I could shadow her for the day and hopefully ask some questions along the way. As someone who worked in the office and not in the village directly with the children, she gave me the “official” story. I asked her why things I had seen on the ground were happening with so much discrepancy from the written policy. She denied that any such informal practices were happening. According to her, there was no false attendance in the registers, no misdistribution of food or resources, and no corruption in the system. She then sat me down on the back of her scooter and we spent the rest of her workday at a nearby Gurdwara that was having a festival (essentially reproducing the informal variations from technical job descriptions that she denied existed in the anganwadi system). When we got back to her office where my driver picked me up, he told me that the first woman I had interviewed, Mrs. Multani, had started as an anganwadi worker herself and used to sell the sugar that was allocated to the children.

Another person I had the privilege of interviewing was Mr. Sangral. He was the equivalent of a parliamentary secretary in the Punjab secretariat. I was very fortunate to get to talk to him. One of my dad’s political connections set up the interview for me. I was told that if I
didn’t have this networking connection it would have taken me over six months just to get a chance to talk to him. He was entrenched in the remnants of a British system of government that had been taken over by Indian elites but was essentially designed to physically and ideologically keep the common Indian person at bay. My dad and driver went with me on the four hour drive to Chandigarh. When we finally found his office we had to go through multiple levels of security, submit identification, and have our pictures taken before we could enter the building. He was running late and we were offered coffee. I rarely drink coffee but my dad ordered two cups, explaining that in this environment, accepting a drink from an official would establish a level of trust and settle us in for a longer conversation.

We talked for a while and he was surprisingly honest in sharing his views about the flaws of the anganwadi system with me. Whether it was his privilege or security in his position that allowed him to speak so frankly, he filled me in on the basic set up of the anganwadi system, the multiple areas that needed improvement and the gains that had been made. He was aware of all the dishonesty and multiple challenges faced by the women who ran these centres. When positively describing one of the centres he has recently visited, he even amended his story with an understanding that the centre has most likely been set up in its best form for his viewing benefit that day. Unlike the subordinate CDPO, he did not overcompensate for the inadequacies of the system and try to mislead me. He also took this opportunity to question me in turn about children’s rights in Canada. There was a level of mutual interest in the meeting and he even asked me to email him my MA thesis. He had travelled to Canada on occasion and was particularly interested in aboriginal children.
Other spaces for children

Aside from the *anganwadi* the children spent their unstructured time in multiple spaces. For the older kids there were sports fields (or open spaces that doubled as sports fields). For the younger kids there was first and foremost the home. As everyone in the village was related, it was safe for most kids to be at each other’s houses unless of course there was a deeply rooted feud between the families. Aside from that the *gali* (lanes) were ruled by children, which is why anyone who drove their motorcycle too fast in the village would be reprimanded for putting the children in danger. For the most part, outside of school, children’s bodies and time were unaccounted for. There were those children who had scheduled tutors to visit, and there was homework to be done every day, but other than that children got to choose how they spent their time. It was not uncommon for no one to know where a child was after school hours and before night fall. In much of urban Ontario, this would have resulted in a police issued amber alert.

There was also the *Gurdwara*. The simplest way to describe the *Gurdwara* would be to say it was a place of worship, but that would not do it justice. It was a central institution in Butala. Literally situated in the middle of the village it was where the *anganwadi* ran, where village meetings were held, where festivals were held, where people borrowed dishes and where children went to play. All village announcements happened over the village speaker and the day started and ended with prayers played over those same speakers. At the *Gurdwara* I had seen people sell lentils, refill propane cylinders, a circus performance, weddings, funerals, and election announcements.

The children were just as much a part of this space as anyone else. As you had to take your shoes off to enter the *Gurdwara*, children were continuously reprimanded for playing with
the shoes of others. The very frustrated Bhai who ran the Gurdwara even had to make a formal announcement on the loud-speakers asking women to control their children, as their playing with the shoes of village devotees had become a real problem. On Sunday nights the kids and I would get to sing after the evening service was over and most of the village had gone home. Although the kids were at the periphery of the Gurdwara life, the space was still theirs to use.

Thus for the children of Butala, there was no space designated particularly for them. They were integrated into the spaces in the village where life occurred. The anganwadis were crammed into previously existing village structures and play happened in houses, galis, and fields. What is important is that all of these spaces, even those linked to government institutions, were free of the deeply intrusive gaze of text-based supervision. There were limited protocols, and barely any system of monitoring or checking. Spaces were used because they were available; they were not specially structured for children. In the same sense, children were not excluded from many aspects of life. As the next section will show, the relationships of children with adults and village life were integrated. Like everything else, childhood in Butala had not yet become a separate area of life. It was not worthy of expertise. In Ontario, children had child-sized bikes; in Butala they simply rode large, adult bicycles and found a way to make them work. It was a pre-industrial childhood unlike that of Ontario which I explain in the next chapter.

**Childhood in Butala**

This pre-industrial childhood was a salient element of life in Butala. As Shrestha (2002) wrote so eloquently when talking about his village in Nepal, development and progress was imported into his space. First he witnessed a plane fly into the village, followed by a jeep,
bicycles and eventually an ox-driven cart. The author states, “This was quite symptomatic to the whole process of development, everything backwards.” (p. 108) Butala had many parallels. Development had not happened in a progressive and linear fashion, but had been imported. That which was useful had stuck, that which was not deemed necessary, had been rejected. This is why everyone had cell phones but didn’t progress to cell phones from landlines.

No culture is ever pure and untouched. Everything that is considered traditional Punjabi culture is still understandably molded by conquest, war, development, inter-marriages etc. Similarly, there were elements of child-adult relationships that were derived from many different places. There was no one discourse of childhood in Butala. Some aspects were from traditional Punjabi life, some were colonial-inheritance, some were imported from the hegemonic discourses of childhood from the global north and, of course, some were derived from the dominant ideas of the India elite. All of these put children in different relationships with institutions and thus varied the influence these institutions could have on their realities. Some of the next few stories unpack these ideas and show the varieties of childhood in Butala.

The younger girls were not held to all the same gendered standards that they would be when they were older. They were free to run around, play games with the boys, flash their underwear while twirling in circles and run around naked when it rained. Although the specific ages at which girls started being admonished for these activities varied, somewhere between five and eight, the understanding was that play should now be gender specific. There were a group of boys that used to play with my nieces, and as the girls got older, the women of my house started sending the boys back home. They questioned the judgement of the boys’ mothers. Didn’t they know that the boys shouldn’t be coming over to play with the girls anymore? Of course there
was little monitoring of the play of boys so their mothers probably had no idea where they were going.

The transition out of childhood was also more defined for girls than for boys as it was marked by an increase in household responsibilities. The role that men played in the village household was in a moment of transition. Machines and migrant worker had taken over farm labour and schools were holding tanks for boys until they could be sent abroad to send home remittances. For women, however, the work at home, although having shifted somewhat qualitatively, had not changed in its intensity. Women were still cooking, cleaning, running errands, raising children and they did not have many technologies that had reduced the time it took for their work to be done. Most of the women in Butala washed their clothes by hand and walked everywhere, still not having access to the transportation that men did. Thus, young girls were brought gradually into these responsibilities while boys continued to have free time.

Gurleen’s mom, once remarked, now that Gurleen was no longer a child, things were easier for her. Gurleen would now wake up, bathe herself, comb her hair and her sisters, help the other two...
kids with homework, do dishes and help clean the house. Similarly, Upinderjit, now fifteen, was cooking the evening meals so her mom had more time to go milk the buffalo. There was a “natural” transition out of unstructured and unmonitored play time into the gendered household responsibilities.

Younger girls could also wear clothes that were not traditionally Punjabi. Although in the cities it was common practice for women of all ages to wear pants, t-shirts, dresses and tights, in the village, it was only the younger girls who dressed this way. As they got older the expectation was they would wear a Punjabi salwar kameez and cover their heads.

Young boys, on the other hand, were often written off in a “boys will be boys” attitude. As girls were phased out of being children, boys continued to fly kites, explode fire crackers, cruise motorcycles and play sports. Many mothers would complain about their sons citing that boys were not as good at studying as girls were and they were constantly in physical altercations.

The abrupt and obvious transition out of childhood usually happened after college or whenever the boys were sent abroad for work. In 2010 a song by Sherry Mann exploded called yaar anmulle. Roughly translated, he sang:

I frequently recall my priceless friends
they were like passing gusts of wind
we would have fun, in college
that age, that life, that world was unique
we fought, and never studied
never stayed home, never feared of anything.
Life was like a bed of roses at that time
I frequently recall my priceless friends
they were like passing gusts of wind.

We never went to class
we would sit in the canteen
and drink tea with excessive amounts of sugar
and talk about the future
what to do and how.
We loved styling our hair
putting gel in it
we stood in front of the mirror styling our hair
Wearing Tommy shirts and Armani sunglasses
I frequently recall my priceless friends
they were like passing gusts of wind.

There was a girls' college
we'd go there at noon, we would keep our car's window open
we'd play music on full and let the beautiful girls on the way stare at us.
Samri was a hunky playboy
he tried and trapped many girls
he would go to Chandigarh and lay on riversides with girls
I frequently recall my priceless friends
they were like passing gusts of wind.

My bullet motorcycle was very dear to me
we may not have bathed ourselves but we washed it everyday
we drove it in circles every day
girls went crazy over it.
The room that Gill used to rent
his landlord Aunty would constantly complain
There was always a party
the boys would always gather, with bottles of alcohol
I frequently recall my priceless friends
they were like passing gusts of wind.

Then there was Deep with his open-roof Jeep
wearing his Ray Bans, and wearing kurtas, with a beautiful girlfriend
when we returned to the village, our brother Cheema met us, a part of our hearts
we would gather and still by the tubewell, drinking homemade wine with its incomparable taste
I frequently recall my priceless friends
they were like passing gusts of wind.

This song became very popular in Punjab and was highly relatable for young college boys and
nostalgic older men. There was a not so subtle undertone of extended adolescents. In contrast,
Satinder Sartaaj released a heartfelt song about the young men who leave India.

Putt Saadey (our sons)

They traveled far from home,
they came into a new world,
their earnings were difficult to come by.
In good and bad states, when your parents sent you off, 
tell me did you achieve those dreams you were sent off with? 
You father was asking me, 
have my sons stood on their own feet? 
Your father was asking me.

They traveled far from home, 
they came into a new world, 
their earnings were difficult to come by.

You used to pull them off and throw them to your sisters, 
have you ever washed your own clothes here? 
A rakhri (bracelets sisters tie on their brothers wrist) came in a letter, 
did it make you happy to tie it on your own wrist? 
A rakhri came in a letter.

Oh my brothers and heirs to my soil (land/dirt), 
may the water from the well of hope never dry out, 
may the vine of hopes be ever-green. 
Watch that it does not dry out endlessly waiting for you, 
may the vine of hope be ever green.

They traveled far from home, 
they came into a new world, 
their earnings were difficult to come by.

Be wise and be good rane (endearing term used for boys, meaning little kings), 
hurry up and finish your studies abroad, 
then we have to get you married off. 
Save all your earnings penny by penny, 
then we have to get you married off. 

Scrapped together, 1500 rupees, 
when you were leaving, your mother put it in your pocket, 
away from the eyes of everyone else. 
The dust from the car embraced her as you drove away, 
she put it in your pocket.

Your poor mother worries only about one thing, 
Have my sweet sons slept well, 
There is only one thing Sartaaj asks you, 
have you ever cried in remembrance. 
There is only one thing Sartaaj asks you.

They traveled far from home,
they came into a new world, their earnings were difficult to come by.3

The first of these two songs evoked a sense of extended adolescence that was only made available to young men. This extended adolescence was not offered to girls in the same age group. In Butala, during their college years, young women were objectified and to be protected and preserved. In the closest college to Butala, where a lot of the village girls went to school, they were not allowed to wear anything but Punjabi clothes. They could not wear make-up and jewellery, they were kept enclosed indoors, they were told women should not ride motorcycles, and they learned to walk with their gaze lowered. Even in the colleges in bigger cities, girls were kept in security guarded, locked hostels between school days with strict curfews and limited days off.

These varied discourses around gender and childhood meant that young boys and girls, the target populations of the Convention, had very different experiences with institutions. Young girls, especially lower-caste girls, were more likely to be removed from school and turn to housework thus removing them from the influence of text-based institutions (Johnson & Bowles, 2010). The education and deployment of young men into institutions or first world countries that were text-mediated meant that they were far more likely to come into contact with treaties like the CRC. The CRC not only uniformly applied its non-reflexive assumptions about reality being textually-mediated, but also assumed that textually-mediated realities were equally accessible by different genders.

3 Personal translation
Caste and class relations

In Butala caste manifested itself in many ways and influenced not only relationship dynamics on a daily basis but also fundamentally defined identity, lifestyle and resource distribution. In an increasingly privatised education system, the majority of children who participated in government funded (and thus government controlled) public schools and preschools were lower caste children. It was these lower caste children who were most in contact with public institutions and should have theoretically been more influenced by government policies. Lower caste was often associated with lower class, increased poverty and decreased social status (Jodhka, 2002). These children needed treaties like the CRC the most, and yet were the least likely to have their lives affected by them. It is for this reason that it is important to understand caste dynamics as they shaped life in Butala.

Although there is no religious based caste system in the dominantly Sikh community of Punjab, there is a caste system that is rooted in occupation and deeply entrenched in Punjabi culture. The agrarian society of Punjab has made the caste system essential to maintaining social order. The caste system has been studied mostly in Western and Southern India and then uniformly applied to the rest of the country. However, Jodhka (2002) points out in a study of caste in rural Punjab that; “The specific historical trajectory, the patterns of politico-economic changes experienced during the post-independence period and the composition of different ethnic communities determine the actual working of caste relations in a given region.” (p. 1813) Punjab is the exception to caste patterns of other Indian states. Of all India states, Punjab has the highest percentage of what are referred to as scheduled castes; in rural Punjab the percentages are even higher reaching an estimated 50%. However, Punjab simultaneously has a history of being more influenced by Islam and Sikhism, thus the traditional Hindu caste system has less
influence on social relationships. The ideological rejection of caste by Sikhism, although not practiced in its entirety, still has influence in Sikh governing bodies and formally denounces caste in many Sikh and Punjabi institutions (Jodkha, 2002).

Butala is made up of Jatts for the most part with a large Majbi community coming in second. There was the odd Hindu family who is there by virtue of their business oriented ancestors who set up shop in the village alongside the haircutting Nais, woodworking Misteries, domestic Cheeris, and Sansis who carry out odd jobs. The strength of the caste system made it a fundamental part of village life. Relationships, resources and lifestyles were determined by caste. The lower-castes of Butala lived both literally and figuratively on the outside. The Majbi community has a separate entrance to their side of the village, their own panchayat, and even their own Gurdwara. Their houses were separated from the Jatts by a road and multiple fields. There was a great power divide amongst the land-owning Jatts and the Majbis that work labour jobs for them.

During my research time in Butala, the pervasive and deeply entrenched understanding of the caste system led to moments in which it was painfully obvious how caste shaped the realities of Butala residents. I once saw a young Jatt boy, who was ten years old at the time, come home after having beaten up a kid from a Sansi family. The main Sansi family in Butala, did everything from transmitting messages, to cleaning houses and brewing alcohol. His grandmother had to sit him down and explain that even though the little boy was a Sansi, he should not have hit him; he was just like them. The Jatt boy had to be explicitly taught that little boys of different castes were human too and should not be hit, implying that amongst his peer group, the understanding was that the young Sansi boy was fundamentally different.
There were many practices that maintained the power imbalance amongst castes. The yearly marriage ceremony the richer families put on for the poorer families is one such example. Every year, the residents of Butala arranged to pay for the marriages of lower-caste daughters.

I had the privilege of witnessing a massive ceremony where over twenty couples got married.

The grooms all received watches and the brides received the equivalent of full dowries to distribute to their new in-laws. There were beds, sewing machines, clothes, jewellery and mattresses. Everything from the food to the ceremony costs were paid for by the higher caste residents of Butala. People opened up their homes to allow the brides to get dressed up in, and everyone stood on their rooftops to watch the processions. The Jatts in Butala got together every year to put on these weddings and impoverished couples signed up eagerly; not just those from Butala but also from surrounding villages. As most of the marriages were arranged each bride was given a number that matched her groom so the right woman ended up married to the right
man. Acknowledging the generosity of the higher castes was essential to this whole performance of charity.

There were also many intimate and personal relationships that were built into my immediate family that played with the boundaries of caste. My father’s house, just outside the village, never had a quiet moment. From 5 or 6 in the morning until 8pm there was a constant stream of visitors. There was always hot tea and fresh food. With a household as busy as this, my mother and I were never able to keep up with the demands of household work. Every time we went to Punjab we hired someone to help with the kitchen and some of the cleaning. During one of our trips back to Butala, my parents went ahead of me and I arrived a month later to meet Bholi, the Majbi woman who was helping mom in the kitchen. Bholi had a kind heart and a quiet personality. She was mother to five children and despite her troubling relationship with her mother-in-law, she ran her house with pride and a certain fierceness. Upon my arrival I walked straight into an established dynamic that was troubling. For one, my grandfather refused to eat the food that she had cooked. He was okay with her doing other work in the house but if her hands had touched the food he would not eat it. Also, to my horror, Bholi did not eat at the kitchen table with my family. Much like my mother had been made to do when she first married into our family, Bholi would eat on the floor in the kitchen. My mom and I had to persuade her to start eating at the table with us and after a while she did, although she was clearly never comfortable doing so.
Mom made a point to have Bholi eat everything the family did and one day, while we all ate bananas, mom saw Bholi put her share of the bananas into her bag to take home. When asked why, Bholi explained that she was taking the two bananas home for her five kids. Mom, surprised, forced Bholi to eat the bananas and gave her another five to take home. Bholi worked, slowly but tirelessly throughout the day and she eventually built a relationship with my mom that led to my mom purchasing a propane stove and an electricity connection for Bholi’s house. We were all women who worked side by side in that kitchen and to make that household run. We all ate last and what was left; we were the same in some sense, but Bholi still had to rely on the generosity of my mother.
One of most intimate multi-caste dynamics in my father’s house was that between my Tayi Ji (aunt) and our gardener Surjit. When you entered my dad’s house just outside the village there was a large garden with vegetables on one side and flowers on the other. Trees of various fruits and those that provide shade lined the path around the garden and every possible surface had potted flowers from various areas across Punjab. Needless to say, to maintain this house a full time employee was needed. Surjit was so much more than a gardener; although that was his official position, he lived in the house year round with his family. He was our watchman, gatekeeper, handyman, garbage man, milkman, and general informant. He did not drink, could write his own name and count to one hundred. He was insubordinate, yet had an absolute understanding of boundaries. If I was ever in a room alone he would stand outside and hand me things instead of entering. He knew when he could disagree and refuse to do work and when he was not to push back.

On the other hand there was my Tayi Ji. My dad’s lifelong Hindu friend from Dhilwan had brother status and his wife was therefore my aunt or Tayi. We all called her Chaee, meaning mother and she truly had the unique quality of being a mother to everyone she met. Well into her sixties, Chaee would come to my dad’s house every day to supervise Surjit in our absence, and when we were there she would come every day to help with feeding the large number of friends and family always present. Despite a limp in one leg and a recently broken arm, she would match the pace of all the other women working in the house and keep an eye on Surjit. Surjit also called her Chaee and thus cementing a strange mother-son bond between a lower caste Majbi and an upper caste Hindu Brahman woman. The two of them were remarkable to watch. They were friends, mother and son, and both under the rule of my Taya Ji, her husband. They would both work all day in my dad’s house and were both more relaxed when Taya Ji wasn’t around.
Although their respective castes put them in different places, there were other forces at work that made their situations remarkably similar. I was witness to many quiet moments in that house where away from the gaze of those who would have them perform their caste-specific roles, Chaee and Surjit would tend to the garden together, chop vegetables together or simply sit and talk. There were these unique moments that occurred in both my mom’s relationships with Bholi and between Chaee and Surjit that were somehow outside the bounds of the traditional understanding of worth related to caste.

The caste system was also reproduced in the public sphere though the policies of Punjab and the central government. In the constitution there is a schedule that classifies all people who are disadvantaged and entitled to special privileges. Despite their economic, social and cultural differences they are all classified in the constitution as Scheduled Castes. Scheduled Tribes also appear in the constitution as specific indigenous communities (Singer, 2012). The discrepancies between these groups are reproduced by the government in an attempt to remedy them through the practice of reservation. To create a platform for equal opportunity there are a reserved number of government positions for the lower castes. The argument was made in Indian parliament in 1949 that members of the lowest castes and indigenous communities in India should have a percentage of legislative seats assigned to them. These Scheduled Castes and Scheduled tribes were then given specific representation in government in accordance with article 294 of the constitution. The constitution also set the stage for reservation in areas of employment, education, and eventually local levels of government. Women and Other Backwards Castes were also added to those groups who would have reserved positions in local government (Singer, 2012). Since their inception, these reservations have been contested by those in higher castes and my experience of hearing about them reflected this.
One day, during the late afternoon, my dad invited over for tea the principal of a private school in Nadala and her husband who was a professor. They had both helped me with my MA research and over my multiple trips to Punjab I had come to value their perspective and all the help they had provided me. As we sat in the garden with another one of my dad’s friends the men started on a rant about the system of having reservations for those of lower castes. What was essentially happening, in the time they had witnessed, was that lower caste children could not afford private education and were suffering at the hands of the corrupt and poorly funded public school system. Although all the men there, including my father, were a product of public schools in India, they all attested to the fact that through the increase of privately run schools and corruption, the quality of public school had greatly diminished. These children were now failing to learn basic skills but since the reserved seats had to be given to them, there was a system of picking the best amongst the failures to take on reserved positions in the public sector. The result was the creation of an illiterate elite that was not well equipped or trained to hold the positions they assumed. The men told me that these lower-caste, illiterate-elites were now in powerful positions from which they perpetuated their dislike for higher castes in a systemic way. Thus, the ruling relations of text were administered by people who were systemically less inclined to be comfortable with writing due to their lack of literacy skills.

Yet another, historically recent class divide had been created by an economic shift bringing workers from Bihar to Punjab in great numbers. The plentiful and giving land of Punjab needed many hands to work it, even with advances in technology. Economically conscribed workers from Bihar came to Punjab to earn money and then send the money back to their families. Workers migrating into Punjab from other states usually fell into the ages of fifteen to twenty-five at the time of migration and could be away from home for anywhere from one month
to thirty-five years. The first form of employment for all these workers was usually in the agricultural sector (Chahal and Kataria, 2009).

Each family running a farm in Punjab had a different role and repertoire with the workers from Bihar. Some hired young women to work as domestics. Like domestics everywhere, their working life completely depended on the families for whom they worked; some of them were treated with abuse and some were regarded as confidants and valued family members. Others families hired men from Bihaar to work the fields and the men could live with one family year round or move from place to place as they searched for work. In the rice planting season, or when harvesting wheat, Jatts could commonly be heard talking about not being able to find enough men; here they were referring to the workers from out of state who did the hard manual labour. The male workers were referred to as Bhaiya and the women as Bhairani. The unkind prejudice and stigma that accompanied the lives of these men and women was akin to racism. Punjabi families rarely took the names of the workers when they spoke of them but will simply say “our Bhaiya ate this” or “her Bhairani, showed up late”. There was an implicit sense of ownership of one human being over another. A rich Jatt could boast that he had three or four Bhaiyay.

During my Taya Ji’s son’s wedding in Dhilwan, a local woman was hired to help with the increased household work. Chaee insisted I come over every day during the festivities, thus inviting me into the private sphere of their household. I refused to adhere to the norms of this strict Hindu household and so I helped the worker-Auntie with housework and spent many hours with her during the wedding. The morning of the wedding arrived and she was driven to the ceremony with the rest of us to perform odd duties at the banquet hall. As we rode in the back of the van together, she began to unload on me the story of her daughter who had ran away and
eloped with a *Bhaiya* who was working for a restaurant in Dhilwan. She was near tears as she explained to me how all the money and fine things she had collected over the lifetime of her daughter, by working as a domestic in high caste houses, were now left untouched in her house. She would often bump into her daughter as they both still lived in the same town but she would ignore her, saying her daughter was as good as dead to her. For this lower caste woman, there could be no bigger betrayal than her daughter marrying a man from Bihaar.

Childhood for the children of Bihaar in relation to Punjab was problematic at best. A lot of the children were invisible. Many of the workers who came to Punjab to work had children in Bihaar who were left in the care of extended family and money was sent back to them. Then there were those workers in Punjab who were children themselves. Most shops had young boys who acted as runners, delivered material, brought cups of tea or cleaned up workshops. Walking along the streets of small towns and big cities alike, almost every shop keeper could be seen with a skinny, dark boy lurking in the shadows. The boys could often not speak Punjabi and if they had to handle customers, transactions could get complicated; the boys would have to fearfully call their employer to deal with the situation. In the cities, domestic workers were often young girls. In all cases, the children were obviously underfed, underpaid and not in school. They were not able to read or write at high levels and were definitely outside of the ruling relations of text as their lives did not occur in the institutions that put forward text-relations (schools, *anganwadis*, social services etc.).

The idea of childhood was further complicated when it came to these children who, in many cases, pushed the socially constructed boundaries of adulthood. Although the CRC defined every person under the age of eighteen as a child and thus had jurisdiction over their rights, the transition through childhood was not as simple. A lot of the teenaged girls were married, the
boys were responsible for sending money back to their entire family and all were engaged in physical labour that left little time for CRC deemed appropriate activities like the right to play (United Nations, 1989).

I found it challenging to grapple with the complex realities of living in a world where caste and class were so deeply a part of the material reality. In Canada, most Punjabis had continued to place value on the caste system but not in an overt way. There was an understanding that the religion had technically abolished the caste system and especially that as an immigrant community, we now all shared the same socio-economic-status. Yet some people held their children to a belief in this system of established castes. In other words, we understood we should know better but we still thought it was important. In Butala, and when I was travelling about Punjab, people would openly ask what caste I was. It was asked with the same tone that someone might ask how old I was. The topic was not taboo; it was almost like a biological fact that someone could use to understand and categorize another human being. My personal politics of “not believing” in the caste system were no match for force of an idea, no less powerful due to its social construction. The wide range of realities produced by the castes and classes shocked my system because in Canada such differences were less vast, or in the cases of extreme poverty, they were out of sight and easy to avoid in places such as ghettos or reserves. In Butala I would, in the same day, go from eating while sitting cross legged on a homemade woven bed in a dirt courtyard, to dining in a five star restaurant with an army officer and his family. This movement between spaces and classes was normal during my days in Punjab. I could be at a place where there was no toilet, or a small room with no roof that served as a toilet to being at a shopping mall with air conditioned bathrooms. Rural village life, and “hi-fi” city life, constantly intersected. There wasn’t enough time to take in the vast differences, reflect, and adjust
accordingly. To be genuine and honest with myself amongst these was always a challenge. One night at my Chacha Ji’s house, there were no chairs to sit on so I sat on a stack of dry grass that was to later be used to fuel the fire. My Chacha felt bad, remarking that I came from a heaven where everyone had chairs and now I was being made to sit on dried grass. While I was not uncomfortable with the seating arrangement, I was made uncomfortable my Chacha Ji’s embarrassment over his own poverty.

One day, my Chacha Ji’s granddaughter, my niece, asked me if it was true that I had my own room in Canada; she had heard such a rumour. I looked around at the three room house, where at the end of the night my Chacha Ji’s family of seven brought down hand-woven beds and slept in one room, and I realised I could not tell this little girl about my reality. I could not tell her that in Butala I had my grandfather’s house more or less to myself. I had my dad’s extravagant house just outside the village, I had my own room in my parents’ house in Brampton and I had my own apartment in Kingston. I had four bedrooms to myself and she shared a bed with two other people in a room with four others. It is one thing to understand how resource distribution favors the global north, but an entirely different feeling to come up against it when talking to a child and not being able to justify it.
Historically recent shifts in migration patterns have also not changed the caste system in a way that is positive. There are suggestions that immigration has fortified caste and class distinctions. Taylor states,

Far from disappearing under the forces of globalization and neoliberalization which have been transforming India since the 1980s, Indian and Punjabi caste distinctions, and their direct relationship to the most extreme forms of exploitation, humiliation and inequality, have intensified in recent years. (2014, p. 279)

In their 2013 study, Talyor and Singh also suggest that, “Doaban caste inequalities are not only shifting, but widening and deepening because of overseas migration.” (p. 54)

Amongst these intense and fortified caste relations I struggled to make sense, almost every day, of how to be genuine in a setting where my privilege consistently reared its head. The
multiple classes and castes co-existing in the space of Butala or even amongst Butala and other parts of Punjab presented many opportunities to reflect on my own understandings of income disparity. Be it in the form of caste or state of origin, Punjab in general, and Butala specifically was deeply entrenched in identities based on class and caste. As integral members of village life, children were subject to the same interactions based on caste that I was. In Butala, not having as many specialized child-specific places and roles meant that children were integrated into the village world in the same way that I was. They saw that food was rationed out based on caste, prices of grain and lentils were adjusted according to caste, and state positions were reserved based on caste. The othering of lower-caste individuals was only deepened by the very real resource distributions related to caste. The caste system of Punjab was reflected in government policy and imprinted on the minds of everyone in the village including children. As was the case with everyone else in Punjab, caste, like gender or religion, formed a part of the basic network of life for children.

(II)literacy

All the rich description of Butala comes down to understanding the moment in which the children interact with text. There were multiple unique moments in which text interacted with life. The text-based systems of governance in Butala worked in two ways. One was from the top down and the other was the text that the villagers resubmitted to the system. For example, in the second of my two research trips, a huge and grossly misunderstood issue arose around the change in policy surrounding the gas cylinders that were used for cooking. As most good things are in Punjab, the propane cylinders were rationed. Every family had a ration card on the basis of
which provisions were allocated. Anything above and beyond that had to be bought. When I was in Butala in October, the village was in disarray over the new policy that limited each family to six cylinders.

As one of my cousins was busy with the farm work, the job of sorting out the cylinder problem was left to his wife. I tagged along as we went to the nearby town of Nadala to fill out the new documents that would help her get the cylinders she needed to cook for her family. When we arrived there was a mob of people shouting at a clerk sitting behind a glass window. There were no clear instructions, written or otherwise, about how to proceed with the paper work. As we asked around we were directed by someone from the mob to a nearby shop that looked like it sold cell phones. The resourceful woman working inside had taken advantage of her location so close to the clerk, the lack of literacy, and the lack of clear instructions. For a small amount of money she was offering to fill out the forms and provide instructions on how to go about the task. This was apparently not uncommon. Wherever there was a situation where official documentation had to be filled out, someone would set up shop and start charging people to fill out their paperwork. To further complicate matters, the forms were being filled out on behalf of my cousin’s mother who was illiterate to the point of not being able to sign her own name; she would stamp her thumb. Since she was too old to travel to Nadala and it would have been too much trouble to take the forms home, get her to stamp them, and then bring them back, the daughter in law stamped her own thumb. No one was actually going to check the thumbprints to see if they matched up.

The following Sunday as I was sitting at Bira Chacha Ji’s house, his son-in-law came in from the city. I started sharing with them the experience of filling out forms for the new cylinder policy. Chacha Ji told me that the government was only allowing six cylinders per family and
that anything above and beyond that would have to be bought “black” for triple the price. His son-in-law, who was an educated city man, explained to me that the provisions on the ration card were subsidized by the government. Although the alternative would be to buy the cylinders at a regular price, the high demand had created a black market which ran the prices very high. This difference in their two perceptions was very important. The educated young man who understood how subsidies work saw the price differences between cylinders in a certain light; to his uneducated father in law there was a different understanding of the changes in cylinder policy that was informed by village conversations. The lack of literacy and education left Chacha Ji in a place where he could not understand the systems of governance and politics which led to this change in policy and was reliant on the knowledge provided to him by others. In Butala, there were often as many explanations for a phenomenon as there were people experiencing it. Everyone had their own framework for organizing information that was not rooted in text.

In another instance, I had gone with my cousin to fill out application forms to enrol her in her second semester of a Masters in Computers. Nothing in this process was similar to the official paper work that I was used to. As I would normally do admissions online, the act of getting dressed and taking two busses through villages and towns and then walking ten minutes on a road with no shade was unfamiliar. We arrived at 10 am and my cousin was excited to show me around her school. The clerk did not arrive until 11:30 although we were repeatedly assured she was around the corner. My cousin was registering late and there was some policy about paying late fees but no one could figure out what it was. There was a lot of confusion over whether or not she was going to pay these fees but there was no written document to consult that could clarify the situation. A professor came in to help fill out the paperwork and continually referred to my cousin as bachay, meaning child. As the minimum qualification to work as a
professor was having a Masters’ degree, the prof was only a few years and some courses more qualified than Mandeep, but the power in the relationship was clear. When the right paper was found and filled out, the professor did all the paper work, even choosing the electives for Mandeep. A pen had to be borrowed from a student. The office had no pen, paper, staplers, or courtesy.

One of the moments I got to witness people interacting with governance was as Devinder Madam filled out pension and voter forms. People would come in and she would ask them questions about when they were born or their mother’s name. The, often illiterate, villagers would have no knowledge of these otherwise useless things. Devinder Madame would fill out the forms with enough information that would get the people what they needed. Thus the written word from the top down didn’t work but also the lived experience from the grassroots was similarly not accurately transcribed into the writing that was sent back up to the top.

The official, written version of reality never accurately mirrored Butala. How then was information processed? That varied amongst genders, castes and abilities. Juli’s wife for example, who was illiterate but in charge of handing out wedding cards, would deliver a card to a house and have a literate person in that house find the next card in the pile of cards she had. She would then proceed to the next house where the process would be repeated. Bholi, who used to work in my mom’s kitchen, had a phone but could not count. She would hand her phone off to someone else to enter new phone numbers and she then learned to use autodial. Any number of kids in Butala would have different legal names and home names; they did not have nicknames at home, but entirely different names that were not reflected in their legal paperwork. Marriages, births, and names would be retroactively registered when the paperwork was needed for purposes like school enrolment or immigration.
For women, gossip was an invaluable means of communication and reality-building. As work and leisure were not separated, sitting around for hours cooking, sewing, or mending would lead to conversations around different things. I had to be careful in these moments, not to jump in with the “right” answers. I would listen while they talked about their experiences about politics, farming and the hot topics of Butala life. The woman who had the freshest gossip was the most valuable and would use it as leverage to elevate her social standing. Some of the most valuable stories would start with, “Now, you know it’s not like me to gossip, but…”

For men, it was often the same. There was a tree in our village under which the men would sit, play cards, and talk. I am told there is one such tree in every village. The tree became such an official landmark that the area under the tree was elevated and cemented so this thara (or satth) became the go-to place for the men of Butala to exchange information. Those who could read, would transmit information from compromised news sources, others would cite their television broadcast. Every man brought knowledge from his area of expertise and together they created a narrative that each man would take home and share with the family. It was a flawed system. Once a man was declared dead, and it was announced at the thara that he had died the night before. When my uncle went to this man’s house to pay his respects, he saw him walking about! The misinformation of the knowledge production system of Butala was a given, but with no way of accessing reality beyond that which they constructed amongst themselves, there was nothing else to rely on.

In another circumstance, when my Chacha Ji had immense pain in his leg and needed to see a doctor, he was told by a young physiotherapy student from our gali that in a nearby town there were doctors holding a free medical camp, so he went to get treatment. Another person in the village had sought relief from a nearby city from a healer who gave oil and a toe-ring, and so
Chacha Ji went there for help. His daughter told him of yet another doctor nearby who specialised in leg pain and so he went in that direction. Without the tools to assess, compare and validate information on his own, he was reliant on the advice of others.

I came from a place where wanting to know and knowing went hand in hand. In recent years, as soon as the desire to understand something came to mind I could access the internet via laptop or even phone and look things up. For more detailed analysis I could look into opposing sides of an argument, access academic writing on a topic, and look up the biases of a certain publication. The gap between curiosity and knowledge was easy to bridge. For the people of Butala it was never quite that simple. Every day was a struggle to negotiate and make sense of reality. Even the most educated and resourceful were limited by slow technology and a system of lies built on a foundation of corruption.

All of these situations show that writing essentially neither accurately reflected nor informed reality. For the most part, the people of Butala were given only that information which immediately concerned them. They never had access to the larger structures and policies that influenced their existence. Without being able to read, write, access the internet, seek out government officials, or discern the truth from lies, reality was left to be constructed via non-written communication and rich social networks. Personal connections, gender, age, class, caste, and education all contributed to the way in which reality was accessed. The flawed system of knowledge production in Butala disadvantaged many already disenfranchised people. In this context, the children of Butala, by virtue of being situated outside both text and non-text based forms of knowledge production were left uninfluenced by the CRC.
Access to Information

The complicated relationship that Butala had with text and knowing led to a very challenging experience as a researcher. In Canada, I was trained as an academic and researcher. I knew how to ask questions, use resources and discern the important information from the less important. Although I was trained to critically question my sources, there was still a sense of trust in the information I was attaining. I never came face to face with such a high level of deceit and corruption that I had to question my entire epistemological framework.

In Punjab there was a dual process to acquiring knowledge. On the surface there was the gathering of information, taking pictures, asking questions etc. Then, as I learned over time, there was the process of validating that same knowledge. In the absence of an easily accessible higher truth to compare my knowledge to I had to resort to other forms of checking. For example, if I went to a preschool in Ontario and saw a certain policy in place, I could go home and look up the policy online. If the need was urgent I could look up the policy on my phone. Chances were that the preschool would have a copy on hand and it was more than likely that I would never even doubt the existence of a policy that was being implemented in a school. In Butala, I would see something happen in the anganwadi and then make a point of mentioning the action to everyone I could. For example, when I saw that the children at school were being hit as a normal part of the school practice I made a point to bring it up with friends, family, various community members and even our driver. Every person had a different perspective on the situation. There was no one official discourse in writing, on the internet, or in easily accessible policy about the practice of hitting kids at the school. Thus, to find some way of understanding the phenomenon, I had to weave together what I learned from various people to form some sort of understanding. It was like piecing together a fuzzy puzzle that was only valuable if you knew
the right people. Valid knowledge was at the mercy of those who understood the system and were kind enough to dispense it.

Hiding the truth was, at its core, an act of self-preservation. There was no way of understanding why I had showed up in the village and insisted on knowing things. The few people that had experience with higher education in Butala had fully admitted that their degrees were purchased or they had acted like indentured servants to their thesis advisors until the thesis was more or less written for them. My intrusive and independent project of asking questions and seeking truths was alien. The fact that the institution I came from and the weight it carried was invisible when I was doing my groundwork made my presence questionable. There were times when I was assumed to be a spy from the Canadian or Indian government who was there to monitor and report back about the abuses the children were facing. At other times it was thought I was there as a rich Canadian who could purchase buildings for the school or anganwadi. It took a long time before there was some understanding of what I was doing in Butala during my research trips. So long as I was perceived as a threat, no valuable exchange of information occurred. It was over time that I built relationships that allowed me to see the world through the eyes of the villagers.

Learning about these relationships was an interesting moment as an ethnographer. When I was younger and visiting Butala in vacation mode, I would show up, have tea with relatives, go shopping and site seeing. This left no space for being a part of the fabric of the village and sharing stories and listening. The value of staying in Butala for an extended amount of time evaded me for a while until I started to understand how people would tell stories to someone who was in their constant mix as opposed to just visiting. In the winter the days were short and there was nothing to do after the sun went down. After 6 pm life was about sitting with family, eating
dinner and talking until it was time to sleep. In the cold winter days I would be the first to sit by the cooking fire to gain some warmth. As the lines of work and leisure were blurred for the women of the village, the cooking fire was always a good time to share stories and talk. It was during these moments, in the dark, surrounded by the temporary warmth of the fire, that I could shoot off naïve questions without fear of judgement and that the women would answer with a frightening level of honesty. It was as if the deception of the day faded with the light and all that was left in the dark were the harsh realities of life in Butala. The dark was safe, there was less eye contact, no judgement and an anonymity that the days never afforded.

A similar thing would happen as my cousin and I would lie in the same bed every night. She would come stay the night so I wouldn’t be alone in my grandparents’ home. As we both lay there staring at the ceiling we would deconstruct the entire day in our heads. We were only a few years apart in age and we shared our fears, questions, hopes and, at times, pointless stories. It was in this time that she would let me into the gossip of Butala. I would find out who was dating who, whose daughter had ran off, who was doing drugs, who had cheated on their wife. The rules of the night were different from that of the day; we both understood that.

**Conclusion**

After establishing the village context in the previous chapter, this chapter continued the rich description of Butala. The multiple spaces and roles that children occupy were deconstructed including gender, caste, and age. The relationship of villagers with systems of communication were considered as well. Essentially, there is a world of written documents that can either shape reality or not shape reality. Feeding into this world of text is the information inputted in moments
of census data collection or policy writing for example. Life in Butala fails to be molded by these documents and in turns misinforms them as can be seen when *anganwadi* workers fabricate information or knowingly reproduce an official discourse that matches the written word. Amongst all these complicated moments of interaction with textually mediated reality, the UNCRC can have no significant influence. The next chapter will provide insight into an alternative reality where text does work to provide contrast to the childhood of Butala.
Chapter 5: Adding Ontario to the Conversation: A comparison of two contexts

Four years ago, when I started this dissertation, I moved to Kingston, Ontario. Every day of my experience since has been unsettling to some degree. Although the city and the lifestyle have grown on me over time, I can never quite just exist without having to reflect on where I stand. I was born in Toronto and raised in Brampton from the age of five onwards. Being in Brampton for me is just “being”. It is my effortless default state, my normal, the unacknowledged supposedly neutral background against which I compare all other cities and ways of being. I imagine most people have a place in the world where they feel the same comforting sense of normalcy. Most days in Brampton are lived on autopilot, not questioning all the social, historical, and economic forces that collide to create each moment. There is no meta-analysis, no need to constantly deconstruct, analyse, and figure out where I stand and how I got there. There is no breaking down of taken for granted knowledges and looking under the surface. Being in Kingston however requires both existing and simultaneously analysing that existence; there are constantly two levels of my brain at work. The same can be said for anytime I leave Brampton, be it Kingston or Punjab.

This thesis, however, has uniquely demanded that I start to peel back the layers of my own default setting. This has been no easy task. There is no start and end to my ethnographic field work in Brampton. There is no neat collection of field notes or stories that capture a historical moment but rather a lifetime of experiences that require sorting. This is part of the reason that I insisted on doing a comparative study. If I hadn’t made my comparisons explicit, they would have been present in the way I spoke of my village but hiding behind my words and assumptions. Using Brampton as my mark of normal and natural without pointing it out as so would have led to many hidden assumptions about reality in the writing on Punjab. Thus, my
now speaking of childhood in Ontario serves two purposes. The first is to highlight and deconstruct the very realities I take for granted and shed light on why I wrote about Punjab in the way that I did. The second, and equally as important, is to look at another context for childhood under the UNCRC, one heavily controlled by text.

**Canada: overview and context**

In order to understand Canada’s position with respect to India, I now explain the historical and political place it holds. Canada is the second largest country in the world and is ranked eleventh on the Human Development Index (HDI) (United Nations Development Programme, 2013). It has multiple natural resources and complicated trade networks which comprise its wealthy economy. Statistically it is a stark contrast to India, ranked number one hundred and thirty-six on the HDI, providing for an interesting second context of childhood. Again, I am not pitting the two countries against each other to compare the first and third world. I emphasize here, that India and Canada, and hence the respective experiences of childhood within them, are two very different contexts that the CRC tries to address.

Canadian nationality is interesting when trying to understand the landscape of Canada and the space that children occupy. Pluralism in the country takes many forms including negotiating aboriginal relations, unresolved dualism between the French and English and immigrant diversity (Frost, 2011). There have been multiple waves of immigration into Canada starting with the French and the English in the fifteenth century. This was followed by other immigrant groups who have since come to be known as visible minorities. At present, Canada has one of the highest per capita immigration rates in the world (Dolin and Young, 2004).
Canada also resettles one out of every ten refugees enrolled in international processes (Government of Canada, 2014). The intricacies of social interaction in a pluralist country like Canada mean that there are as many different childhoods as there are diverse groups. There is no one Canadian identity, no one experience of childhood, and this leads to variation in the experiences of rights alongside the constant reimagining of Canadian culture. For example, the Committee on the Rights of the Child, the UN body which provides feedback to states on their implementation of the CRC, writes:

The Committee is concerned that vulnerable children, including Aboriginal and African Canadian children, who are greatly over-represented in the child welfare system often lose their connections to their families, community, and culture due to lack of education on their culture and heritage. (2012)

The committee was also concerned with, “The serious and widespread discrimination in terms of access to basic services faced by children in vulnerable situations, including minority children, immigrants, and children with disabilities.” (2012). The pluralism that forms the social fabric of Canada presents multiple and unique challenges as children interact with systems of government.

The political system in Canada is a democratic constitutional monarchy with a Sovereign as the head of state, and an elected Prime Minister. Under them is a federal system of parliament which divides state responsibilities amongst the federal, provincial and territorial governments. The Concluding Observations from the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child have pointed out, multiple times, that the lack of coherence amongst levels of government in Canada poses a real problem for the realisation of children’s rights (United Nations’ Committee on the Rights of
the Child, 1995, 2003, 2012). There is a lack of coordination amongst levels of government which means that children in similar situations are treated quite differently across provinces and territories.

*Children’s Rights in Canada and Aboriginal children.*

When setting the context for children’s rights in Canada, the violence, genocide and discrimination experienced by the aboriginal population cannot be understated. Aboriginal children in Canada carry with them the legacy of multiple generations that were hugely mistreated by the European colonial project. Being born into this disadvantage is only the start of a journey in which they receive fewer services at every turn.

Since first coming into contact with Europeans five hundred years ago aboriginal people have been segregated into reserves, their children have been taken away from them and entire sections of the population have been annihilated (Bennet, Blackstock and De La Ronde, 2005). The Canadian government targeted aboriginal children as site of destruction for the community. Through the missionary process of residential schools in the mid-nineteenth century, children were taken away from their families and put in schools where they were stripped of their languages and heritage, and abused. When these schools failed to assimilate children, the child welfare system stepped in and started removing children from their families under the guise of protecting them. Despite being 4% of the population, across provinces the prevalence of aboriginal children in care was anywhere from 50-70% (Bennet, Blackstock and De La Ronde, 2005).
In contemporary Canada, aboriginal children are still systemically at a disadvantage. For many, their native language is not recognised as valid in public schools and they are still forced to learn English and then French as a second language. They are more likely to come into contact with the criminal justice system and still more likely to end up in the child welfare system. Aboriginal families, both on and off reserves are more likely to be living in poor economic conditions and the children have less access to education, and health care. Youth are more likely to commit suicide for reasons linked to mental health, family instability and alcohol use. Also, high rates of alcohol use means there are a higher number of children exposed to fetal alcohol syndrome than in the Canadian population as a whole (Bennet, Blackstock and De La Ronde, 2005).

Canada and India are extremely different countries, of course. However, at times, Canadian Aboriginal children are in the same conditions as the disenfranchised children in Butala. If the aboriginal population in Canada alone was ranked on the Human Development Index they would come in at number eighty as opposed to Canada as a whole ranking eleventh (Bennet, Blackstock and De La Ronde, 2005). These children are for the most part outside of the textual reach of the CRC as they live deeply entrenched in the complicated web of Canadian settler and aboriginal relations. While I continue to differentiate between the children of Brampton and Butala it is crucial to acknowledge the complicated relationship between aboriginal children and the Canadian state.
Brampton and the diaspora

As can be seen by the concluding observation reports and the history of aboriginal children in Canada, the country has a great many human rights violations. For children on reserves, in ghettos, or living in refugee families, life can be outside the influence of the text of the CRC. Having acknowledged this, I choose to focus on the middle class children of Brampton for a couple reasons. For one, in this feminist ethnography, I explore the communities I am already linked to and use my experience as a border-dweller to discuss the spaces that define me. It was my experiences of seeing childhoods in Brampton and Butala that made me start questioning the effectiveness of the Convention as a written document and thus these are the spaces I explore. Secondly, my choice to focus on Brampton as opposed to other places in Canada was to highlight a context highly entrenched in text-based reality. In order to fully explain how the CRC could work in one context and not in another, a contrast was needed that was provided by considering Brampton against Butala. This does not reduce Canadian reality to an ideal and uniform human rights experience. Canada is complicated with many different childhoods and injustices, but Brampton, being the context that I grew up in and serving as my “normal” became the place that, as a feminist researcher, I was compelled to talk about when describing a text-based reality.

Having narrowed my second context to Brampton, it is still far too large to experience in its entirety. The way in which I can recount the experience of community in Butala cannot be done in Brampton. My observations about Butala can hold somewhat true for the village of five hundred families. This is in no way possible when conceptualising a city with over five hundred and twenty thousand people. There are many sub cultures, classes, ethnicities and clusters of immigrant populations. Since my family moved to Brampton twenty-three years ago there has
been a non-stop growth of real estate. Every week new houses, businesses and schools are constructed. New distributions for political ridings are negotiated and undocumented people further confuse the accuracy of census information.

Amidst all this it is very difficult to paint childhood in Brampton in one brushstroke. Also, the residents of Brampton are not united by a form of sustenance as villagers are to the land in Butala. Being a farming community in Punjab means that everyone lives by the same growing cycle, harvests and festivals. There is common conversation and purpose across ages, gender and even caste. Overwhelmingly, there are common threads of conversation based on the land-related issues of the moment; lack of rain, compensation for flooding, migrant workers needed to plant seeds etc. Everyone is on the same internal rhythm dictated by the land. Relationships amongst villagers and across class and caste boundaries are maintained through grain and seed.

In Brampton, in the absence of this, there is a wide array of job descriptions and subsequent variations in experience. Residents work for hourly wages, for salaries, as business owners, factory workers, shift workers or homemakers. Enclosed houses and varying schedules and goals make for a sense of isolation that I never felt in Butala. Not much in Brampton is walking distance from anything else, and although it is densely populated it can take up to a thirty minute drive to meet someone on the other end of the city. Homes are entirely closed off so being at home always means being indoors and choosing who you allow into your space. Doors are designed to be closed and the perceived distinction between public and private is strong.
Brampton has an overwhelming South Asian population. According to the 2011 census 38% of the residents of Brampton are South Asian followed by 33% white and then 13% black (City of Brampton, 2013). Brampton is an interesting city to compare to Butala for many reasons including that it is one of the main cities in Canada where the Punjabi diaspora resides. In Brampton you can speak Punjabi at the bank, doctor’s office and with the bus driver. The local Wal-Mart sells Indian clothes and the mainstream grocery stores stock Indian groceries. The local hospital’s emergency room is named after the founder of the Sikh faith, Guru Nanak Dev Ji, and you never have to drive more than ten minutes to find a Sikh place of worship. In all this diversity the average preschool and elementary school classroom that I have been in has had more children of color than white children.

Alongside these obvious markers of the South Asian community in Brampton, there are more subtle connections to India. As previously mentioned, the domestic remittance market in India alone was estimated to be ten billion dollars in 2007-2008, eighty percent of which was directed towards rural households (Tumbe, 2011). Therefore, one of the realities of life in the immigrant community in Brampton is that a significant percentage of income is not kept in the home; most immigrant families in Brampton are sectioning off a portion of their income to send to someone back home. Between 2010 and 2011 the estimate flow of money from Canada to India in the form of remittances was three billion dollars (Bhushan, 2014).

The illusion of secular society

Another aspect of life that differentiates Butala from Brampton is that the life cycle is not centered on religion. There are many scarcely visible hegemonic Christian ideologies that
permeate the life and thus the spaces of children in Brampton, but they do not carry the same weight and uniting force that Sikhism does in Butala. As Dalton (2013) explains, “Religion in the global south is a complexity of religio-cultural relationships that are different from those of the north, even among peoples who have been colonised by the north” (p. 160). What she means by this is that indigenous forms of religion challenge Enlightenment notions of religiosity, whereas Christianity in the global north sides itself with those that “emphasise separation of church and state, individualism, a conservative personal and family morality and noncritical acceptance of neoliberal economics” (p. 160). Indigenous religions have an “entire way of life” approach to them, which make them indistinguishable from culture. However in secular societies like Canada, religion posits itself separate from the state. The European Enlightenment helped to create such separations; religion became optional and therefore a part of the private sphere. Public space was for neutral and objective thought.

Nowhere is this contrast more visible than Butala and Brampton. As I have previously explained, the Gurdwara in Butala is a central institution. It is not only a place of worship but a meeting ground, a hub of cultural festivities, a wedding hall, and it houses one of the three *anganwadi* centres in the village. For the most part, there is no talk of whether or not you believe in God or choose to go to the Gurdwara. You cannot separate the fact that village announcements are made over Gurdwara speakers and when you have wedding guests over you run to the Gurdwara to borrow dishes. The religion is not separate from the everyday culture of the village. There is no such equivalent in Brampton.

In Brampton there are hidden ideological links and practices that reveal Canada’s Christian religious traditions. Although Canada is a pluralistic and secular society there is no constitutional separation between church and state; this allows for unmonitored influence of one
on the other (Stahl, 2007). Growing up in the public school system in Brampton I sang Christmas songs in the choir, had days off around Easter, and carried crosses on Remembrance Day. All this while being in a classroom where the white children were a minority. However, the official word was, and still is, that Canada is a secular society and that institutions reflect this. As Dalton so eloquently states, “secularism is religion (in fact Christianity) stripped of God” (2013, p. 161).

For the children in Brampton this has interesting consequences. It means that the taken for granted knowledge and realities they experience are rooted in Christian ideologies veiled as secularism. For children in Butala, when they are dismissed early to go get sweet parshad to eat as a blessing from the Gurdwara because it is the first day of a Nanakshai month there is an open acknowledgment of religious and cultural tradition. When preschool children in Brampton gather for a Christmas assembly the explicitly religious foundations of this practice are not acknowledged the same way.

**Preschools in Brampton**

This complex cultural tapestry of Brampton is where I set the stage for most of my preschool observations. I have been working with, volunteering with, and teaching young children for more than a decade. Throughout high school I volunteered in classrooms and afterschool programs and almost every summer during my university years I worked as a tutor or care-provider. During my undergrad I did my first internship in an actual preschool. Preschools in Ontario are either private/for profit or non-profit and funded by a combination of provincial subsidies and fees collected from parents (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014). This first centre was in a government-funded housing project for young families transitioning out of the justice system and trying to get back into society. The building in which all the families lived had, on
the main floor, a free preschool where the children could get care while the parents had life skills workshops and job interviews. The families and often single-mothers whom I came across during my time here were mostly of low-income. During my Masters I worked with preschoolers who had special needs in multiple licensed Ontario preschools. These centers in Mississauga were ones where the parents all paid fees. Like all Ontario parents, these parents were eligible for Ontario Child Care Subsidies, The Ontario Child Care Benefit, The Universal Child Care Benefit, the Ontario Child Care Supplement for Working Families, and the Canada Child Tax Benefit (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014). Some of these were made available to only low-income families, and some, like the Universal Child Care Benefit, were made available to anyone with a child under the age of six. Once the families received money from these subsidies, they would pay the centres. The services I was providing for these children with disabilities were paid for by Community Living funding, at no cost to the parents. Thus the socioeconomic status of the children I worked with during this time varied from those from low-income families with subsidized fees to middle and high income families who paid entirely out of pocket.

For my graduate research I observed various preschools as well. These schools, in Brampton and some in Mississauga, also fell into the same range of economic backgrounds with some children having subsidized care and others having their costs paid for by their parents. They were a combination of profit and non-profit centers.

The important thing in how Ontario childcare was subsidized was that the money went to the parents and they could then pick the centre that they wanted. Thus, once in the classroom, every child had a uniform environment. Children from different classes and economic backgrounds received the same care. The only exception was the centre where I did my initial internship in the housing project for former convicts; every child in that centre came from a low
income family. Throughout these different experiences I have seen the inner working of every type of preschool in Ontario. I have witnessed different teaching styles, classroom set-ups, pedagogies, funding packages, building structures and management practices.

Despite the variations in individual practices around how preschools were managed, they were remarkably similar because of the Day Nurseries Act. All licensed childcare centres in Ontario are subject to the Day Nurseries Act as of 1990. In order to provide care for more than five children under the age of ten at home or in a centre, a license is needed. Under the Ontario, Ministry of Education, the Day Nurseries Act is an extensive series of regulations that every licenced program must adhere to at all times. Every year there is an inspection of every licenced centre conducted by the Ministry. If the centre is found to be in violation of any part of the act, the licence can be revoked. Unannounced visits are a regular practice and can also be brought on by a complaint submitted by anyone concerned with the welfare of the children in the centre (Ministry of Education, 2013).

It was this remarkable adherence to the Day Nurseries Act that led me to understand how much power text could have in mediating the spaces of children. Any one of the centres I was in as an intern, volunteer, employee or researcher presented as more or less uniform. Since, the Act dictated teacher to student ratios, structuring of space, meal requirements and play activity, there were few variables left that could be different across preschools. Every centre I was in had different rooms for different age groups, had indoor and outdoor play areas, adhered strictly to ratios and spent the same amount of time on naps, outdoor play and mealtime.

Often, when I was working, when an additional, unaccounted for child showed up, the acceptable ratio of adults to children as dictated by the Act, would be thrown off. This was one of the most stressful times for any given director of a center. Teachers would be juggled and
students moved from one room to another until everyone was in the right numbers. This had very little to do with a predetermined objective understanding of how to keep children safe, and more to do with the fear of losing the centres license if an inspector chose that moment to come into the centre. This word “ratio”, which had could have any number of meaning in another context, in the preschool world came to be understood as a delicate tipping point that could result in the centre shutting down. A teacher on break once rushed passed a room and joked “Don’t look at me, I’m not in ratio!”

Also, in accordance with the act, “each child over eighteen months of age up to and including five years of age that is in attendance for six hours or more in a day had a rest period not exceeding two hours in length following the mid-day meal.” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013). Children were required to be on their beds for an hour of this time and then could engage in a quiet activity if they did not sleep. This, for me, was one of the most troubling times when I was working with preschoolers who had special needs. A lot of the children I worked with were non-verbal and often did not understand routines. Their uniqueness as individuals had no way of being accommodated by the blanket policy provided by the government and so I was often charged with taking them to their beds and holding them there for an hour so that the Day Nurseries Act was upheld and the centre did not risk losing their license. With one particular child, the only way to keep him physically on his bed was for me to repeatedly sing the following Halloween nursery rhyme.

Five little pumpkins sitting on a gate.

The first one said, "oh my it's getting late."

The second one said, "there are witches in the air."

The third one said, "but we don't care!"
The fourth one said, "let's run and run and run."

The fifth one said, "I'm ready for some fun!"

OOOhh OOOhh went the wind

And out went the lights

And the five little pumpkins rolled out of sight

Every day that I worked with this child, I had to sing this specific song for an hour. I would watch the clock to see when he could be permitted off his bed and do another activity. Every day for an hour, while repeating the song in different voices, at different paces and different volumes I would have an hour to ponder what I was doing sitting on the floor of a preschool trying to keep an otherwise panic stricken child glued to a bed.

Text in Brampton and Butala

It was experiences like these that framed my understanding of childcare in Ontario. When I was in Butala, they would provide sharp contrasts to the lack of adherence to policy in the anganwadi. When looking at the two contexts together for this thesis, I had to start to deconstruct the reasons behind the varying adherence to the written word.

In the introduction to this dissertation I cited Campbell and Gregor’s example of taking a bus to reveal the importance of text in the Global North. (2004). In the Canadian context, when someone got on the bus with a bus card, there was a nonverbal exchange between the rider and the driver. There was writing on a bus card which had everything from the name of the rider to a date of expiry. Both parties operating in a world of textually-mediated relations and had some understanding of the non-verbal exchange. Thus so the rider could get onto the bus, flash the card and be granted access. In contrast, taking a bus in rural Punjab was a very different process.
When I first started using the bus I had to continually ask my cousins travelling with me how they possibly knew what to do. First of all, there were no signs at the bus stops. There were two areas in my village, one by the elementary school and one by Nadala road where everyone in the village knew the bus stopped. Then, there were no identifying numbers or destinations on the bus, regular commuters recognized which bus was going to which destination. Once you got onto the bus you would pay a man (who was not in any uniform) who walked up and down the aisle selling bus tickets and he would tear you off a piece of paper. There were no written or set fares and all interactions had to be done through words. The bus system had to work for the large part of the population that was illiterate and so writing wasn’t too important.

Another example is that of building houses. Over the past few years I have seen buildings being constructed and renovated in both Brampton and Butala which provided for an interesting point of comparison. In Brampton building anything, from extending your driveway to starting a project from the ground up, required multiple layers of text-based interactions. Zoning permits, floor plans, contracts, receipts, tax papers, even instruction booklets for Ikea furniture are a few examples of texts that mediated the process. In Butala there were many examples of building things that had little or no text involved. When the lanes between houses needed to be repaved, there were no municipal by-laws measuring the dimensions of the new lanes. People who were hired did the work that they had learned informally, no receipts were issued or contracts signed; there were no plans written down and no measurements in place. The way things all over the village were hammered, painted, built and shaped was a product of necessity, inherited knowledge and informal interactions.

Text, however, was not only crucial to all aspects of Brampton life but also Brampton preschools. Every element of preschool life in Brampton could be traced back to writing. There
were studies that inform parents and policy makers about the importance of preschooling for children. There were policies that provided for the social structure and funding of early childhood care. The actual preschool buildings were subject to strict codes and inspections. The children were registered through paperwork and the actions of early childhood educators were entirely dictated by curriculum and policy documents. The halls of preschools were lined with diplomas, and certifications for the school. The educators wrote out everything from meal plans to extracurricular activities for the week. How many children were allowed in each room and the ratio of adult to students was decided by policies and writing. The ways in which the children’s bodies were moved, fed, rested and organized were all linked back to writing.

**Text in the preschool**

As previously mentioned the Day Nurseries Act for childcare supervisors of Ontario is an extensive document that outlines and dictates the parameters for every room and action in a preschool in Ontario (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013). This is the most important text that controls the bodies, space and time of children to a very specific degree. The table of contents provides insight into the complicated and controlling nature of the document.
In the body of the document there are instructions on everything from the specific quantities of food that children should consume to how many adults should be in the room and how much rest the children should get. The following are some excerpts.
Children’s rights and spaces

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Column 1</th>
<th>Column 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Food Group</td>
<td>Amounts offered each Child in attendance for six hours or more</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Milk and milk products</td>
<td>250 to 375 millilitres</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Meat and alternates</td>
<td>60 to 90 grams</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Bread and cereals</td>
<td>1½ to 2½ slices or 175 to 450 millilitres</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Fruits and vegetables</td>
<td>2 to 2½ whole fruits or 250 to 300 millilitres</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(13. Nutritional requirement, Day Nurseries Act)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Column 1</th>
<th>Column 2</th>
<th>Column 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Age of Children in Group</td>
<td>Ratio of Employees to Children</td>
<td>Maximum Number of Children in Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Under 18 months of age</td>
<td>3 to 10</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>18 months of age and over up to and including 30 months of age</td>
<td>1 to 5</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>More than 30 months of age up to and including 5 years of age</td>
<td>1 to 8</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>44 months of age or over and up to and including 67 months of age as of August 31</td>
<td>1 to 10</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
One of the rooms I spent time observing was the toddler room in a Brampton preschool.

According to the act, under the subsection of the toddler age group, the following instructions had to be followed.

A daily program plan of activities and experiences must be posted and available at all times to any parent of an enrolled child. Any variation of the daily program plan must be noted in a daily written record kept for this purpose.

Non-walking infants and children less than 30 months of age must be separated from other children during active indoor and outdoor play periods, except in the case of handicapped children.

Rest
Each child over 18 months of age up to and including 5 years that is in attendance for six hours or more in a day must have a rest period not exceeding two hours in length following the mid-day meal.

Outdoor play
Each child under 30 months of age that is in attendance for six hours or more in a day must spend up to two hours each day outdoors for play or walk in a stroller or both weather permitting, unless a physician or parent of the child advises otherwise in writing. (Ministry of Education, 2013)

The most astounding thing, and the reason I chose to show these preschools in contrast to the Butala preschool is that each of these requirements was followed to the exact minute, millilitre and ratio.
At one of my centres oatmeal was prepared for breakfast right down to the specific measurement. So much so that when an extra kid arrived, a message had to be sent to the cook to make an additional serving. Teachers constantly kept themselves to the right ratios. Plans for indoor and outdoor play were made and visibly posted. In the colder months teachers would stand outside staring at their wrist watches waiting for the exact minute to pass when they could call off play time and go back inside to the warmth. Children were put to sleep after lunch and this could be quite the task with a room full of toddlers. Backs were rubbed, songs were sung and blankets were secured with military efficiency, to get every child to sleep at the same time. Children who refused were physically held in place on their cots or beds to ensure protocol was being followed. Every movement, morsel of food and activity was planned in accordance with the Day Nurseries Act.

In stark contrast, in Butala no parent was informed about why their children were being sent to the preschool and often, as I saw, the workers at the school had to walk around the village recruiting children. There was no explanation and little understanding about the larger forces at works which created the *anganwadi* system. There were no curriculum documents, sometimes no physical classroom and no control over the children’s bodies that linked back to writing. The decisions made about how and when to move and feed the children were informed by the circumstances of the moment and not out of blind obligation. Although the workers in the centres hinted at having received training and having a certain number of children to feed and certain ratios to fulfill, there was no adherence to those demands and numbers were made up and filled into registers to make the paperwork show that the preschool was running as it should. In these moments where the reality was being transcribed into writing it was fabricated and the lived experience was hugely varied.
In Brampton preschools, text communicated, created, instructed, steered, persuaded and built bridges. All of the above examples demonstrate a unique moment in which text either translated into reality or didn’t. The difference between the two contexts is the difference between a text-based document like the CRC having influence or being null.

Geographies of Childhood

Superficially, the category of child presents itself as biological fact. As I explained in my conceptual framework I understand childhood to be a social construct. The force and meaning that the bodies of children are given are constructed as an “other” to that of “adult” (Holloway and Valentine, 2000). This historically specific view of children differs greatly from the understanding of children as miniature adults, as was the case in the middle ages. The innocent and isolated child is now understood to belong in highly confined spaces, principally, at least for a specified period of time, in a classroom. This sense of childhood emerged, as we have seen, in the west and then, through the process of international aid, is in the process of becoming universalised (Raman, 2000). The CRC is one such instrument that has delivered the perception of the modern, western, individualised and specialised childhood to the global south. However, this model of childhood does not apply uniformly across contexts in the global south where the lines between adult and child remain less clearly defined than they are in the West.

With the understanding that childhood is a social construction, I now turn to an analysis of how the preschool came to be a primary space for childhood. The UK has generally served as a historical model for the invention of sentimentalized childhood. Between the nineteenth century and World War I there was increased concern with childhood poverty and other issues of
Children’s rights and spaces

child welfare, which helped to create the understanding of children as sentimentally valuable. At the same time children went from providing income for households to being inactive in the labour force and staying indoors to be protected (Kehily, 2004). Thus the invention of childhood as a category was based on middle class European children. With this invention of a certain type of childhood, so too came a host of child-specific consumer goods and spaces: special toys, books and playgrounds, for example.

One such specific place was the school. In nineteenth century England, schools were created as a holding areas for the bodies of children in response to national problems of crime and pauperism (Walkerdine, 2004). As they stand today schools are designed by adults to socialise children into the narrowly defined constructs of childhood available. As Aitken states,

A major purpose of school control is to socialize children with regard to their roles in life and their places in society. It serves the larger stratified society by inculcating compliant citizens and productive workers who will be prepared to assume roles considered appropriate to the pretension of their race, class and gender identities. (1994, p. 90)

Spaces of childhood in the global north have historically been limited to school, home and controlled parts of the city. I found the spaces of children in Butala to be differently divided. In her case study which examines children in New York versus a village in Sudan, Katz (1993, 1994), found a similar contrast. While children’s spaces in both New York and Sudan were highly affected by globalisation and had similar trends by which increasingly specialized childhood spaces robbed children of labour-related experiences, they differed in the access that children had to space. Her study showed that, in Sudan, children were freer to use their space and
environments then children living in the West. In New York, however, as children grew, their use of space became increasingly limited (Katz, 1993).

My analysis of Brampton revealed a similar pattern. Ideas of childhood in Brampton were reflected in policies that shaped the spaces of children, specifically the preschool. In Brampton, overwhelmingly the space of children was controlled and children were moved from one structured space to another. For example, the majority of the children I worked with in Ontario preschools were driven into the school from their home in the morning. They were then moved around the preschool space by the instructions of their teachers. At the end of the day they were picked up, placed in a car and driven to a controlled extra-curricular activity or back home to restart the cycle the next morning. There was no unstructured time or space for the children to claim as their own.

Such ideas of childhood were less relevant, and less possible, in the non-Western context of my village. In Butala children went to and from school on their own and at multiple times of the day were unaccounted for. There were frequent times when a child could not be located because they were off playing in a field or with a friend. Although this freer and less structured time of children in Butala can be romanticized as a third world ideal, that is not why I bring it up here. I draw attention to it to highlight the imperialist undertones in the child rights project which (re)produce a specific western childhood that does not necessarily apply in Butala. The children of Brampton are constantly in spaces shaped by adults which create opportunity for text-based manipulations of reality; the children of Butala are more often outside of these bounds.

Discourses of childhood
In the many years I have spent in Ontario working with children in preschools, I have seen many discourses of childhood in action. I now unpack these discourses to further contribute to the examination of why the CRC works better in Ontario than it does in Punjab.

Child as Innocent

One of the first discourses of childhood that I observed continuously was the notion of the child as innocent. At almost every turn in the institutional life of children, their capabilities are undermined in favor of the adult-created notion that children are innocent and helpless. In every centre children were monitored closely and given very specific instructions of what was deemed appropriate in a specific time. They were constantly told what activity to do at what time, which toys were age appropriate, when they could go outside and what they could eat. For example, I once saw a child be told that he could either sit on the floor and throw a tantrum about not wanting to color, or he could sit on a chair and color. He was not allowed to do another activity, he was not allowed to sing; he was not even allowed to hop on the spot. In that moment, the main concern was not acknowledging the autonomy of the child but rather establishing the authority and expertise of the preschool supervisor. In every room I was in, sharp corners, dangerous substances, and most traces of adult life were removed from the brightly painted classrooms. The spaces of innocent children were intentionally marked off as non-adult spaces. There were never signs of non-innocent adult life such as sexuality, labor or politics. The classrooms were presented as neutral, secular and innocent although they were a thinly veiled production of a very specific interpretation of childhood; the child as the opposite of the adult.
Similarly, the Convention paints children as innocent and not able to make their own decisions in a number of ways. From its inception, the Convention was an adult-generated document, signed by adults, and then put into practice by adult politicians. Although it superficially stated that every child could participate in decisions affecting their own lives, it necessarily created a child that depended on adult-run state politics to grant human rights.

In Butala, there was an understanding of children as innocent but it could never rival the realities of life that burst through in every moment. Because there are no specialised places for children, the illusion of childhood as a separate sphere could not be maintained in the village. Of the three *anganwadi* centres, only one had an actual room and that was a spare room at the *Gurdwara*. This meant that the noise of village life, bombs fired in the distance military base, and hymns being sung over the loudspeakers could not be kept away with walls. Children’s games easily included farming, cooking, cleaning and the children helped out with all of these activities in non-play setting. The lines between work and play, adult and child and innocent and experienced were far more blurred.

*Child as Becoming*

Another prevalent discourse in Ontario schools was to see the child as “becoming”. Children were not constructed as having value in the moment, but were somewhere on the path to becoming something greater. Their value was in their potential as effective adults. To reach this end they would follow a series of ages and stages predicted by western developmental psychology. The clearest manifestation of this was in the set-up of preschool classrooms. When you walked into one of centers I worked in, there were multiple rooms. Immediately to the right
was an infant room with cribs and large soft toys with a few large numbers and letters displayed on the walls. A little way down the hall was the toddler room with less supervision, more complex toys and cots instead of cribs. This particular centre even had a room for kindergarten aged children. This kindergarten room had no furniture for sleeping and had many books, toys and even computers. Each room reflected a set of beliefs of the progression of children and each stage prepared children for the next. We had, in one particular centre, two children who were not potty trained and were nearing the end of their time in the oldest preschool room. They were admonished and told that this would not work when they reached kindergarten. In another room a young girl who was moving to an older classroom was told she had to learn to empty her cereal bowl when she was done eating because this would not be tolerated by the older children. This was the situation across the board for all the preschools I observed in Ontario. The very structure of the preschool was predetermined by developmental discourses of what children ought to be at that age. The stages, and corresponding spaces were used to police and mold children. They were constantly on their way to the next stage and thus on their way to becoming an adult.

Although life in Butala also had multiple elements of grooming children for future endeavours, there were any number of activities that they did that not only served a future purpose but were also valid in the present. There were farm tools that needed to be cleaned that only the small hands of children could reach. There were meals that young girls made so their mothers could be free to do other work. Young boys often drove tractors and helped during harvests. These task were specific for children in the moments in which they were. Physical spaces also reflected this. There were no specialised spaces for children. The preschool room was a Gurdwara room and children played in fields and roads that were also used by the rest of the village.
As Tarulli and Skott-Myhre explain, the Convention ontologically assumes a specific way of viewing childhood through ages and stages (2006). The developmental psychology discourses present in the Convention uses western psychology to position the child as becoming. As the authors state:

This delineation of life force into divisions of those who, on the basis of a selected number of arbitrary measures—for example, chronological age or certain perceptions of changes in the living form, such as puberty—are deserving of certain rights, such as “play” (1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child [CRC], Article 31) or freedom from the most insidious forms of labour exploitation (CRC, Article 32), is in turn inscribed in laws or juridical codes premised on jurisdictional, universal, or cosmic dispensation—codes that privilege the static being of rights over their processual becoming or eventness.

(p. 188)

This bias of the Convention is made even clearer when looking at Punjab and Ontario. Whereas childhood in Ontario is both a product and a reflection of the psychological paradigm, in Butala this discourse of childhood “becoming” is far less relevant. Thus state-based rights that privilege the developing individual will be far more applicable in Ontario than in Punjab.

Child At-Risk

Finally, the “at risk child” was, in the preschool system a hot spot for the politicised body of the Canadian child. Children were constantly constructed as being at-risk in the preschool environment. In the classroom children were told not to touch things, not to go to certain play
areas, and not to climb on things. For a child in an Ontario preschool, life was constructed as one giant risk. Teacher training was also created with this mindset. When I was watching children, a large part of my job was to assess risks and to keep accidents from happening. I had to have training in first aid, CPR, non-violent crisis intervention, epi pen use, fire codes and health codes. I had to apply sunscreen to every child and change gloves every time I started applying it on a new child so that skin conditions wouldn’t be transferred. Table edges in classrooms were secured, outlets were covered and hot water supplies were shut off so children wouldn’t burn themselves. Despite all this meticulous preventative activity, children still couldn’t be left to roam the classroom or be out of ratio with their caregiver. Risk was determined by the Day Nurseries Act and anything in the classroom that was not up to standard could result in the center losing its license. In quieter moments, where children did not require immediate tending to, the jobs of the teacher would be to imagine worst case scenarios and stop them from happening. Thus shoes were tucked away, winter puddles mopped up and toys that had touched mouths were disinfected with preschool-approved water to bleach ratios.

On one rare occasion where a group of children I was working with left the school to go on a field trip, each child had to wear a red shirt and each child would have the address of the preschool pinned to them. Children were to be counted and recounted every time we moved from one space to another. As teachers, we would guard the front and the back of the line and children were constantly reminded to stay in line and not talk to strangers. Some of the risks were real, others were imagined; some of the precautions taken were necessary, and others were a performance for the parents and the monitors of the Day Nurseries Act.

This perception of a child at risk however, could not exist in Butala. There was never any attempt to bombard children with negative instructions or constantly account for their safety. No
one in the village was a stranger and if a child left the preschool unattended there was a certain comfort in knowing they would get home somehow. There were also fewer things that would create risk for children. Half the time there was no electricity, no one had anaphylactic allergies, there were very few toys, much less toys with breakable parts, and no drive to constantly monitor and correct the behaviour of children. There was no funding for out of school trips, and if the money had been there, there was still no place to go. When the workers were not watching the children, they were bombarded with their own life problems or the many other tasks that anganwadi workers were to carry out. The constant obsessing over children was absent and when accidents happened they were dealt with accordingly, rarely did a centre get reprimanded or shut down for accidents with children. Children were essentially at the periphery of anganwadi life and both the children and the workers were happy to have them there.

However this idea of the child being “at risk” is the very foundation of a document like the Convention. The idea that children need protection from adults is not only a fundamental principle of the CRC but is also the assumption on which the entire document is built. Throughout the Convention there are articles that aim to protect children from labor, drugs, exploitation, conflict, abduction and detention, to name a few. These rights are necessary and useful in addressing the very real perils of children’s lives. As can be seen in the concluding observation reports for both countries, children face human rights violations within the justice system, labor exploitation and even armed conflict in India (United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2004, 2012). However, they are more effectively understood and utilized in a culture that understands childhood to be a time with its own unique risks and worthy of protection. In a space like Butala, where there is not a strong tendency to construct children as being at risk, these rights will not be as effectively understood and applied.
These varying discourses of childhood as innocent, becoming, and at-risk were three of the more prominent ones I saw in my time in Ontario preschools. They had an interesting relationship with text. As we have seen, they emerged from Western ideologues and history. They were theorised into the text of the Convention and then reproduced and applied onto the bodies of children (Kehily, 2004). What this means for children’s rights and spaces is that Western children have moved from being somewhat autonomous bodies, to being objects of control by the state. Text and life are in constant interplay and reinforce each other. Although childhood as a social construct is specific to space and time, the CRC constructs one childhood to be applied across many contexts. This is then imported into all ratifying countries.

In Butala, with an obvious gap between text and material life, there was little applicable theorisation of these discourses of childhood. As Indian scholar Vasanthi Raman states,

Sociology of childhood as a field of study is new and almost non-existent in India. Most studies have focused on child socialisation and child psychology. The recent spurt of interest in issues concerning children is a direct outcome of efforts to popularise the CRC by many NGOs and government and international agencies. The phenomenon of child labour has been the subject of research and activism. However, there has been little attempt to go into the meta-narratives. (2000, p. 4055)

Individuals working with children in Butala may have their own theories on childhood but there is no overarching ideology which is reflexively generated from the lives of Indian children. In the absence of such a guiding force, in Butala, adults who work with children are left to uniquely
interpret a colonially inherited childhood. Thus these universally applied, socially constructed discourses of childhood have very different outcomes in Butala then they do in Brampton.

**Mapping the CRC in Canada**

Understanding the weight of text in this context allows for an analysis of how the Convention on the Rights of the Child functions in a world where reality can be influenced by text. I will now look specifically at how the CRC works in Canada.

Canada signed and ratified the United Nation’s Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1991 under the Mulroney government, meaning that it was to be interpreted as law in Canada. Since then the document has been broken down, reproduced and re interpreted into multiple aspects of federal and provincial policies.

The Canadian government is based on the British parliamentary system and has three branches. There is the executive, made up of the Queen, cabinet and administration. There is the legislative branch made up of the Queen, Senate and the House of Commons. Thirdly there is the judicial branch made up of the Prime Minister, cabinet and court system (Government of Canada, 2014).
To make and debate policies there are three levels of government federal, provincial/territorial and municipal/local. Each is responsible for a different aspect of Canadian policy. For example, aboriginal affairs and citizenship are under the federal government while education and health care are provincial responsibilities; thus the realisation of the Convention falls onto multiple levels of government. The process of making laws and policies is twofold, first being processed in the House of Commons and then in senate for “sober second thought” (UNICEF, 2009). Because of this and the large amount of conversation and debate that happens around every act there is a lengthy process for laws to be made and put into action. Although ratification demands that the Convention be law, the reality is that various steps need to be in place before this is realised.

Traditionally the legislative branch of the federal government has had no obligation to international treaties as it was not required by the dualist system. This meant that on the parliamentary level, any interpretation of the Convention was brought up by a small number of individual parliamentarians. The Senate took interest in the CRC and in 2007 released a report
reviewing the Convention in Canada. There has not been an act to implement the Convention in its entirety but it shows up multiple times in federal law reform. Acts such as the Tobacco Control Act, Assisted Human Reproduction Act, Youth Criminal Justice Act and issues of Corporal Punishment area few of the many that have influence of the Convention in their reforms (UNICEF, 2009).

These government decisions come into contact with the preschool child in different ways. For example, in terms of funding issues, the federal government transfers money to parents under the 2006 Universal Childcare Plan in line with article 18 of the Convention which states that

For the purpose of guaranteeing and promoting the rights set forth in the present Convention, States Parties shall render appropriate assistance to parents and legal guardians in the performance of their child-rearing responsibilities and shall ensure the development of institutions, facilities and services for the care of children. (United Nations, 1989)

Also, on the provincial level, the Ministry of Education in Ontario has teacher training tools that explicitly address the convention. In their 2013 report Think, Act, Feel, they stated,

If, for example, we believe that children are part of our community and their voices should be heard in decisions that affect them (in accordance with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child), their input should be sought and considered in decisions about the classroom environment. (p. 13)

These are examples that show that the gap between reality and text is possible to bridge. There are moments where the conceptualised reality for children in written documents is transferred onto their bodies and spaces.
As previously mentioned, one of the first centers I interned in was a housing project for young parents who were ex-convicts. The preschool was built right into the building so that the parents, especially the mothers, could attend life skills workshops and other necessary classes. Both the building and the preschool were supported by government subsidies. In this space I witnessed children in a preschool setting that would not be there if not for the financial assistance provided by the government. Their life was influenced by decisions made around written treaties and policies. In the moment in which the children of this lower socio-economic status were in a preschool in Ontario, one could see that the CRC had been successfully interpreted and applied by the various legislative bodies in Canada. This was example in which the written word structured reality.

**Mapping the CRC in India**

The application of the CRC in India follows a different trajectory. The government of India is also made up of an executive, legislative and judiciary branch. Under the government are the twenty-eight states and seven union territories. The President is the head of the executive branch along with the Cabinet but the real head of the executive as well as the government is the Prime Minister. The legislature is where all law and policy is made and interpreted. It is made up of an upper house of two hundred and fifty indirectly nominated and appointed people and a lower house of five hundred and fifty-two directly elected people. Every state has its own executive, legislative and judiciary subsection and there are local self-government politics that are recognized in the form of Panchayati Raj (Government of India, 2014).
India signed the Convention on the Rights of the Child in November of 1992. Ideally this would mean that it was law in India but as is the case with Canada there has been no act to implement the whole thing as a legal framework. Instead it has been interpreted through the complicated legislative system and found place in different acts, policies and laws. For example, there has been an adoption of an act for free and compulsory education for children, an act prohibiting sex selection resulting in the aborting of female foetuses and a more comprehensive collection of data on children in general (Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2004).

In the time I spent collecting data on the ground in India, I cast a wide net. I was willing to meet with and speak to anyone who had heard of either the Convention or the Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS) under which the *anganwadi* system was run. The closer that workers were to children in Butala, the less likely they were to have policy documents. The people that had the most written information also had the least amount of time to meet me and the most fear of handing documents over to me. During one of my meetings with the Block Primary Education Officer in Jalandhar, I was handed a copy of the Mid-Day-Meal Scheme for elementary schools in my area. This specific document asked that, in accordance with the Right to Information Act, certain information be posted in schools every month, including the quantity of grain purchased, the daily menu and the community members involved in making the meal. This was followed by a page in Punjabi that asked that in accordance with the Right to Information Act, the following information be posted daily; how much wheat was used, how much rice was used, other utensils required, the menu of the day etc.
Interestingly, the page written in Punjabi had some words that were translated and some that were transcribed. That is to say words like rice or wheat were written in Punjabi as *kanak* and *chawl* but terms like “The Right to Information Act” had no translation and thus were simply transcribed using Punjabi letters. Also, not that after all the formal writing there was an additional hand written note by the Block Officer explaining what the new policy meant for schools.

Another example of this is in a document I collected explaining the legal consequence of sex selection. The document was created to be distributed to families to explain what sex selection is and how it is determined by the sperm; the man is responsible for whether or not you have a son. The paper continued to express, in Punjabi bullet points, the legal repercussions of
testing for gender. Since abortion was not illegal in India, the way to stop the crime of sex selection was to stop the testing for gender.

Again, the dissemination of this policy went from the legal framework in English, to a condensed Punjabi format, to a non-existent communication at the level of the women in Butala.

One of the rarest moments of connection I had was with two women in an office in a corner of Kapurthala. They worked under the Ministry of Women and Child Development and were familiar with the ICDS. After taking two buses into the city on one of the hottest days that summer, my cousin and I had a meeting with them and they allowed us to go through their files and photocopy whatever we wanted and found useful. It was here that I found hand written notes that one of them had made from a training workshop they attended on the development of
children. Scribbled on half a piece of paper were the principles of the CRC followed by the first article.

![Handwritten notes]

(18. Hand written principles of the CRC)

In a moment of research relief I found the space where the Convention was being used to address the ICDS. It was exactly as I would have imagined it; imperfect, hand-written and discarded in a filing cabinet in a cramped office in Kapurthala. It is safe to say that this was where the text stopped. Someone who had the CRC had orally transferred the knowledge to these two literate women who were then charged with continuing to implement it. The next level of workers under these women, the supervisor for the *anganwadis* in my area, had no written documents I could access and refused to meet with me to discuss the issue any further. By the time the *anganwadi* workers in Butala were given the information it was either distorted at best, or altogether non-existent. The original intention of the CRC, and the attempt to transform the realities of the
children it addressed could not be fruitful when the medium through which it worked, that of text, broke down halfway to the bottom. This was the case with nearly all the policy I read and collected. The higher up in the institutional ladder I went, the more evidence I saw of universal, modern and imported childhoods. Higher offices had documents in English; original policies were always written in English. They were then translated into Punjabi or hand written and eventually dispersed orally. As the policies left the worlds of the elite and the pages of the middle class workers they seemed to disappear.

It came as no surprise then that when I compared the policies I had collected with my research observations, the CRC began to fall apart. In writing the government passed multiple acts and then reported them as progress to the UN. The Committee on the Rights of the Child then acknowledged them as positive strides in the children’s rights movement. However, none of them held any force in Butala. As I showed, the requirement for free and compulsory education was not enforced. Children often did not show up to school. Regardless teachers still marked them as present so they could be paid. Making sex selection illegal did not change the alarming rates of female foetus abortion in Punjab (Ghosh, 2008). Clinics still provide these services. As for the data collection, as I showed in Butala, information was regularly fabricated and did not reflect the daily life. No matter how it was interpreted into legislation, the CRC stopped short of being translated into any real significant change in the lives of Butala’s children.

Access to information/text

It is important here for me to take a moment of reflexivity and comment on the process of mapping social realities as an example in of itself of how linked reality is to text in Ontario. I can
conceptualise and map the entire process of the UNCRC and the policies of the spaces of children sitting at a desk. As I explained in the methodologies section of this dissertation, for this component there was no fieldwork required. Everything about policy in Canada is mapped, uploaded to the internet and made accessible to anyone with an internet connection. Furthermore, there are built in processes of peer review or government approval (via the letterhead on policy documents) that validate the knowledge I collect, so I do not have to repeatedly question the validity of what I am reading. Reality is reflected in writing and that writing is easily accessible. This is important for the CRC to be able to function and this is clearly not the case for doing research in Punjab. There was no equivalent to this mapping process in my village. Lack of internet access, lack of policy document, printers, photocopiers, and curriculum documents made it near impossible to conceptualise the larger child rights picture. What information was discernable from word of mouth of people I interviewed was questionable in its validity. This is not an environment in which a text-based human rights document can flourish; in fact, it is an environment where human rights of people are easily abused. A lack of knowledge about rights is a violation of the CRC which says that children have the right to know about their rights (United Nations, 1989).

Conclusion

This section added to the existing analysis of children’s rights and spaces in Butala. Focusing mostly on Brampton, I started with establishing this second context, a content mediated by text. I conclude that the Convention on the Rights of the Child had more relevance in Brampton in every way. In contrast, in Butala, there was little influence of text and especially the
text of the CRC. While in Brampton the text of the ruling relations was easily accessible and
transparent, in Butala, a non-textually-mediated society, the texts of ruling relations were
difficult to access. It was important for me to add Brampton into the conversation about my
analysis of the CRC to highlight the inadequacy of the text of the CRC in Butala. For all the
reasons it worked in Brampton, and Ontario and large, it was equally insufficient in Butala and
Punjab.
Chapter 6: Conclusion

This thesis looked at the problematic of the Convention on the Rights of the Child as a text based document and how it lacks influence in realities that are not textually-mediated. Stemming from my Masters research which set out to look at the effects of the CRC in my village of Butala in Punjab, in this project I further considered why the document seemingly worked better in Canada than in India. My Masters research started out with the assumption that the presence of the CRC would be felt in my village because I understood all reality to be textually mediated. Since both Canada and India had ratified the document in the early 1990’s and subsequently made it into law in both countries, I was convinced that there would be comparable trajectories that could be mapped, allowing for insight into the efficiency of the CRC.

As a researcher I made the same mistake that most of the original contributors of the Convention made; I assumed all reality to be controlled by text. It wasn’t until I was deep into my Masters project fieldwork that I noticed a marked difference between the textually-mediated reality I took for granted and what I was seeing in my village. In Butala, there were no policy or curriculum documents, no photocopiers, no printers, literacy was low and most documents and signs were handwritten. The textual mediation that was fundamental to the methodology of institutional ethnography that I was using was simply not present (Campbell & Gregor, 2004). The ruling relations of text could not rule without text. This seemingly simple oversight, I realised, did not only leave the children of Butala outside the influence of the Convention, but also alienated all children in all similar realities.
As Luhmann points out in his social systems theory, there are any number of self-creating, non-human systems which use the minds, body and communication of humans to sustain themselves (1997). The CRC is one such system. When it was created, Article 42 stating that, “state parties undertake to make the principles and provisions of the Convention widely known, by appropriate and active means to adults and children alike” was put in a measure of compliance (United Nations, 1989; Mitchell, 2005). Also, ratifying state parties were required to submit reports two years after signing and every five years thereafter. Essentially, the Convention was drafted in a way that guaranteed its production and reproduction through text. It was the perfect autopoietic system. However, life in Butala was not in constant conversation with the systems of the CRC. Therefore it fell outside of the control (or influence) of the document. A review of the literature confirmed that the Convention was working in two very different ways in Canada and India.

I chose to continue working on the problematic that was uncovered in my Masters project because it was a natural extension of who I was as a border dweller; I was researching the Convention in the two contexts I had access to by virtue of my position between them. Also, the two countries, Canada and India, provided for an interesting comparison because they both signed and ratified the Convention around the same time, and they both had top down parliamentary democracies. Despite this, the complexities of both countries made for two very different contexts both of which were being addressed by the same human rights treaty. This is primarily what I set out to do with my PhD project; compare two contexts, not two countries.

To conduct my research I used aspects of different ethnographic methodological styles. Primarily situating myself as an analytic ethnographer I used participant observation to explore the problematic at hand. I also used parts of institutional ethnography where they were useful.
Institutional ethnography identifies a problem and then seeks to map it out as it manifests in textually mediated environments (Holstein, 2006). For obvious reasons this could only serve the part of my research based heavily in policy and would become inadequate when I was in non-text-dominate environments.

Specifically, for the part of my project in India, I spent six months in my village living in my grandparents’ home. I visited the anganwadi center on the days it was open and spoke to various officials involved in producing the spaces of children in Butala through government processes. I collected policy documents, took pictures, gathered songs, recorded observations and conducted interviews. The part of my project reflecting childhood in Canada came from years of observations of living in Ontario and working in, interning with, and observing various preschools.

Conceptually I situated myself as a sociologist of childhood. In the new sociology of childhood, childhood is understood to be a social construct, it is not constructed outside of race, class and gender, children are considered worthy of study in their own right, they are active participants in their own lives and ethnography is considered the best methodology for studying children. Researchers in this paradigm accept that by participating in research they are simultaneously reconstructing childhood. The growth of the popularity of this paradigm has mirrored the progress of the child rights movement. With overlap in ideologies and the value of ethnography as a methodology this conceptual framework easily reflected my own views about childhood and complemented my research.

The next two chapters detailed my rich description of the time I spent in Butala. Like many other rural villages in Punjab, Butala was deeply entrenched in complicated dynamics of
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caste, class, immigration, gender and age. Although Punjab was one of the richer provinces in India’s complex democracy, it was still influenced by the same corruption, lack of literacy and deviance that characterized other parts of the country. As I recounted the time I spent in the anganwadi system, a few things became clear.

There were multiple reasons that the spaces of children (in this case the anganwadi) did not manifest in the way that they was conceptualized at the federal level. For one, there were multiple levels of corruption; at every level from the federal down to the local there was lying, misplaced funds, and resources which were wrongfully distributed. Workers were underpaid or not paid at all and the burden of work was not reflected by the income level. The food that was given to the centers was of poor quality and was rarely ever cooked for the children. On the rare occasion that it was distributed in the homes it still never made it to the mouth of the child; it would be eaten by other family members. The anganwadis were not provided with a physical space and so it was left to the village panchayat to allocate space and in the case of Butala it was either not allocated at all, as was with two centers, or established in the preexisting space of the Gurdwara. There was no space built especially for the children. Caste and class dynamics played a big role in how education was valued. Many mothers failed to send their children to the preschool because they did not see it as important. They saw their children as destined to become laborers either in Punjab or in other countries.

Most importantly there was the role that text, or lack thereof, played in the success of the anganwadi reflecting how it was conceptualized in federal policy. Because of reserved seats for lower-caste individuals in government, and the public school system that was failing these same individuals, there was a class of semi-illiterate elites that were contributing to decision making. There were no written documents anywhere to be found at the actual anganwadi centers. The
only writing that took place was in hand written registers by workers to submit information back to the higher offices. There was a complete lack of monitoring the actions of workers through writing. Sign-ins were not needed, daily programming need not be submitted and no written evaluations took place. There were no curriculum documents, no reference materials and no written reminders of how life for the children in this center should be guided. Essentially, the deeply intrusive and controlling gaze of ruling institutions was absent as the medium through which they controlled, text, was absent from the space.

Thus, there were two particular moments of text failing to correspond with reality in Butala. Not only was text unable to influence the space of children in any real way, but also, reality in turn was not informing text. When an attempt was made to put the policies of the anganwadi in place in Butala they failed on multiple levels, and when the workers resubmitted information to the system through attendance records, census information or paperwork, it was fabricated. Also the research and ideologies that informed the text of the CRC were imported from western discourses of childhood. The communication between the non-human text of policy and the reality of the space in Butala was broken. The policy neither informed not reflected the childhood present in Butala.

To add complexity to the conversation I presented my observations on life in Brampton. This section provided an example of a reality controlled by text and further positioned me as a person who came from this specific place. In contrast to the context of my village, my time spent in Ontario preschools showed a strict adherence to the way spaces of children were conceptualized in writing. Children were monitored, fed, and moved in accordance with the Ministry of Ontario’s Day Nurseries Act. Their every moment was kept in line with how it was conceived by the policy makers of the Ministry. In turn, research that informed policy, and the
discourses of childhood present in government documents were informed by western childhoods. In Ontario policy both informed and reflected childhood. The communication between the policy texts and the material lives of children was dynamic and strong.

I used preschools as an example of spaces where the lives of children occur and how they are controlled by text as a means of exploring the larger issue of how the text of the CRC differently affects childhoods in different contexts. On my return from India, while trying to map out the processes of the ruling relations of these institutions, I struggled to come up with coherent maps. I quickly realized that my struggle was twofold. On the one hand, the CRC was not effectively being implemented in Punjab and so any map that I would come up with would be incomplete and incoherent. The second, more “meta” realization that I had was the process of creating this incomplete map was in of itself near impossible when working with a non-textually-mediated reality.

In Canada the map of how the CRC worked in the top-down system was not only more complete but was also far easier to create. I could sit at a computer, pull up policy documents, read reports and other author’s research and come up with a comprehensive picture. When trying to complete this process with the Indian side of the conversation, there were few documents online, very little reporting or research, questionable validity of sources and no sources whatsoever addressing local and rural realities. By virtue of trying to map out a reality not ruled by text, I found myself without access to text with which to conceptualize the reality.

Having come to this difficult point in my research I now question how to move forward in an environment that cannot be influenced by human rights in textual form and, perhaps, even actively discourages the written word from mobilizing people. What I haven’t been able to fully
understand is what moves life in Butala if it is not writing. In this unique moment where Butala plays with the lines of modernity and rejects certain discourses of childhood, how are children to have access to human rights? In my village almost every family, regardless of caste or class, has a cell phone but female foetuses are still killed in the womb. Children have more control over their lives and spaces but also more obligations towards their families and households. They have less access to the rights presented in the CRC but do not construct themselves as having rights, autonomy or bodily inviolability. The Western discourse of “children at risk” is not readily available to them.

What is left to be explored is how human rights are created by children. What do children’s rights look like in Butala, not the legal, universalist and individualist rights presented in the CRC but rather the lived experience of grass-roots, bottom up rights produced by the lives of the children themselves? Within the scope of this project I set out to look at institutions that attempt to dominate the lives of children. The obvious counterpart to this conversation would be how children perceive themselves and participate in the construction of their own lives. It is difficult for me to even imagine a world of rights outside of the Western-discourses present in the CRC. I have internalised the language and structure of the international human rights discourse presented in the Convention by virtue of my training as a sociologist of childhood and a product of a textually-mediated, global north context. However, living in Butala and spending time with the children of the village gave me a moment’s break from being a good, docile body and allowed me to reflect on a life outside of textually-mediated institutions. What I saw was children who were not subject to the rigid definitions of childhood that came from being controlled by an institution. This is not to say that children were free in a simple, romantic, “third-world” sense; there were still many things mediating interactions in the absence of text.
Women policed and monitored the actions of young girls, the economy dictated the actions and decisions of the young village men, and the ever-present threat of drugs and drug-related violence controlled the bodies of villagers of every age.

However, there were moments in which the norms dictating the lives of children were born of the children themselves. For instance, the way in which children contributed to the work of farming and thus the family’s income spoke to their abilities instead of universal assumptions of innocent childhood and labour laws. Lower-caste children could be seen in the early hours after harvest, picking wheat off the land that reaping-machinery had left behind. The wheat, which would have otherwise been discarded as a by-product of the industrialised farming process, was instead seen as an opportunity by these children to help feed their families. It was not framed as child-labor, exploitation, or abuse. The task was easier for the children to carry out and it was valuable to the families. Similarly, there was an upper-caste family in the village who did not have sons so their daughters drove the family tractor and tended to the cows every day. They did not conform to ideas that they should be protected but instead did what life required them to do to sustain themselves. For the most part, actions of children around issues of work did not conform to the requirement that children be protected.

The children could never quite live in a CRC-approved way. Their lives were deeply embedded in the contexts which the Convention could not possibly address. The children of Butala were a product of their religions, families, the Green Revolution, party politics, caste relations, a failing two-tiered education system and love. In all this, their actions were driven by the forces of the moment; in the absence of any real monitoring of the CRC or adherence to the universal childhood presented in it, they did whatever they needed to in order to eat, make money, get married or work abroad. The most notable thing is that the children were present.
They were not passive recipients of policy and a prescribed childhood status. They were a part of the world as it constantly moved and changed around them. They negotiated their space in it and contributed to the changes. This sociology of how they managed these moments would be the counterpart to this thesis which addressed the failing of the textually-mediation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.
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*The sociological review*. 62, 276-294.


Appendix 1: Research Ethics Board Approval

November 08, 2013

Miss Jaspreet Bal  
Ph.D. Candidate  
Department of Cultural Studies  
Queen's University  
Kingston, ON, K7L 3N6

GREB Romeo #: 6006386  
Title: "GCUL-010-11 Children's Rights and Children's Spaces"

Dear Miss Bal:

The General Research Ethics Board (GREB) has reviewed and approved your request for renewal of ethics clearance for the above-named study. This renewal is valid for one year from December 1, 2013. Prior to the next renewal date you will be sent a reminder memo and the link to ROMEO to renew for another year.

You are reminded of your obligation to advise the GREB of any adverse event(s) that occur during this one year period. An adverse event includes, but is not limited to, a complaint, a change or unexpected event that alters the level of risk for the researcher or participants or situation that requires a substantial change in approach to a participant(s). You are also advised that all adverse events must be reported to the GREB within 48 hours. Report to GREB through either ROMEO Event Report or Adverse Event Report Form at http://www.queensu.ca/ors/researchethics/GeneralREB/forms.html.

You are also reminded that all changes that might affect human participants must be cleared by the GREB. For example you must report changes in study procedures or implementation of new aspects into the study procedures. Your request for protocol changes will be forwarded to the appropriate GREB reviewers and/or the GREB Chair. Please report changes to GREB through either ROMEO Event Reports or the Ethics Change Form at http://www.queensu.ca/ors/researchethics/GeneralREB/forms.html.

On behalf of the General Research Ethics Board, I wish you continued success in your research. Yours sincerely,

[Signature]

Joan Stevenson,  
Ph.D. Chair  
General Research Ethics Board

c.: Dr. Karen Dubinsky, Faculty Supervisor  
Dr. Magda Lewis, Chair, Unit  
REB Ms. Danielle Gugler, Dept. Admin.