

# Binaries on a Circle: Engaging Whiteness on the Playground

Shagun Singha

## Abstract

*As scholars continue to colonize and de/colonize whiteness (Bhattacharya, 2019; 2020) within game studies, often tethering our efforts to tracing the binary of colonizer/colonized, we end up with our own disparate set of binaries. Thus, we begin to engage in the very practice that we are trying to turn away from. In contrast, this paper aims to challenge the polarities that continue to privilege games and play. I seek to explore the potential of a selection of playground games for the people who do not exist in such binary spaces. I hope to express how, over time, games can bear a multiplicity of experience and perception, rather than simply reinscribe dichotomies such as white/nonwhite or oppressed/oppressor. The paper will serve as an exploratory piece of writing to provide readers an opportunity to play with what remains unsettled about games, as well as reflect on issues that make us engage with our discomfort. I will do so by examining simple children's playground games such as hopscotch, ring around the rosie, and a classroom game of cricket as they are played by children of varied cultural and ethnic backgrounds in India. By focusing on such children's games, rather than modern video games, and on India, a country with a long history of European colonialism, I hope to challenge implicit biases in many Western conversations around games and play. In the analysis section, the paper will depict hopscotch as a game built on challenging established norms surrounding the intersections of ethnicity, community, and religious systems. Ring around the rosie will serve as an opportunity to discuss the role of women in play as well as notions of permission and restraint attached to certain playful spaces. A seemingly insubordinate game of classroom cricket will be used to demonstrate how children can adapt popular games as a way of surviving and overcoming the power struggles of authoritative academia replete with all work and no play. The paper will also piece together autobiographical fragments of my own intersectional experience as a South Asian woman of color. I hope to engage in playful reflexivity and self-referentiality as I uncover some of my own struggles with facets of my ethnic and cultural identity. I hope to problematize binaries that remain held together by prior generational silos and instead use the experience of playing to survive, challenge, and dismantle whiteness.*

## My Process

I've spent some time thinking about what I can share with you, the reader, what I can say about the state of play that exists in my mind, and how I am slowly coming to terms with it. While I do not have all the answers, I invite you on this playful journey of discovery. deKoven (2013) explores the complexities of negotiating a well-played game while refraining from ever defining the term. By discussing a myriad of variants within each game, he draws meaning from personal experience. Inspired by deKoven, I hope to explore the intersection of play and games not just through words but also by engaging in playful reflexivity and self-referentiality as I uncover some of my own struggles with fragments of my ethnic and cultural identity. My hope is that this paper will serve as an exploratory piece of writing and provide us with an opportunity to play with and reflect on seemingly unsettled topics such as ethnicity, religion, gender, and language. We will not embark on this journey in a straight line, rather we will walk in a circle. Circular paths are interesting as they force us to confront either end of the spectrum; they are no longer just two ends of a line. When pondering over the question of how my ethnic and cultural identity shapes the way I play, I felt some aspects of my identity surface. I attempted to outline these by sitting in a circle and placing index cards of various sizes representing pieces of myself around me. As I spun about trying to glue these pieces together, I realized that while I lacked linearity, a lot of what I wanted to say existed on a circle. For a long time, western thought has relied on defining whiteness as a binary between oppressed/oppressors. Through a confrontation of this assumption, I have discovered that the binary no longer serves me. I hope to play with this assumption by turning it into a circle, seeing how far I can stretch either end; I hope to play with form, structure, and what it represents for whiteness in games.

## Playground Games

I focus on playground games specifically in order to clarify three points of value play offers us. First, that play can illustrate an alternative to the binaries of oppressor/oppressed, colonizer/colonized, or white/other. Play has the potential to transcend these boundaries in everyday spaces inhabited by the youngest of us. This is because games themselves are not isolated from cultural dynamics. For a long time, games have upheld Eurocentric norms, trapped in binaries of winner/loser or rules/penalty. I aim to write about games instead as a tool for reflection and self-discovery. Second, I hope to use the games as metaphors themselves in order to engage in a fair amount of playful reflexivity and self-referentiality; I uncover some of my own struggles with more complex and fragmented facets of my South Asian

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## Author Biography

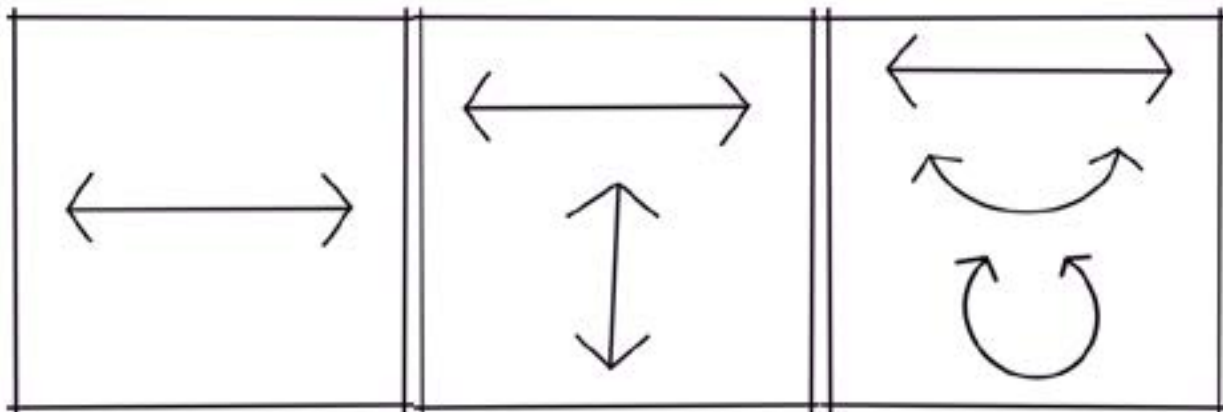
Shagun Singha is a third-year doctoral student in the Learning, Literacies, and Technologies program from Mary Lou Fulton Teacher's College at Arizona State University, USA. She has obtained her undergraduate degree in English Literature and master's degree in English Literature from Madras University, India. Her research focuses on the role of play, games, and post-qualitative methods in education.

identity as a woman of color. Transcending the binary is not always enough. Third, I hope to demonstrate how games, much like our experiences, are not static but rather enable us to move in different directions, using physical movement and embodied experience. Games such as *hopscotch*, *ring around the rosie*, and *cricket* are attached to playful spaces that offer variability in terms of physical movement but also in how they can be modified by the player.

### The Binary

Pendleton-Jullian & Brown (2018) lay out different functions of imagination on a continuum beginning with the process of perception and reasoning, leading up to free play. The continuum charts a movement starting with perception, moving on to reasoning, speculative imagination, experimental imagination, and finally ends with free play of imagination. Free play is described as a force that generates new possibilities and novel understandings. Thus, free play requires no center of gravity as it is born of surprise and awe; it is emergent and experimental and after radical novelty.

Figure 1: The Binary; Vertical and Horizontal Binaries; Binaries on a Circle



To understand the implications of such continuums, Lerman (2014) attempts to ‘hike the horizontal’ in the context of physical gesture. By doing so, Lerman problematizes both vertical and horizontal structures as hierarchical. The top is always too separate from the bottom; similarly laid flat, either end does not bear equal weight. If you imagine one dichotomy existing on a straight line, try shaping that line instead, into a circle (see Fig. 1). Before you know it, those dichotomies have become next-door neighbors and multiple perspectives are born. Allowing for multiplicity is not only a playful act but also embraces the coexistence of more than one idea. While hierarchical structures require one perspective to be released for another to be picked up, multiplicity makes, “the walls permeable between these distinctions” (p. xvi). This allows for multiple perspectives, however challenging, to be respected. The respect offered is authentic but can also be critical.

Bhattacharya (2020) imagines such liminality within a children's book titled 'HaJaBaRaLa' to highlight how inquiry requires surrendering one's will to "know and privilege a playful relationship with nonsense" (524). In this paper, nonsense becomes a way for Bengali people to make sense of the trauma brought on by centuries of colonialism, thus honoring the continuum of colonizers/colonized. However, this creates limited space for non-Bengalis, non-Bengali speakers who may be of Bengali ethnicity, as well as people of mixed ethnic backgrounds. Often, we get so wrapped up in trying to define the two ends of the dichotomy that we end up ignoring all the spaces in between. We also end up ignoring all the spaces not represented on the line and end up creating an altogether new dichotomy. We end up engaging in the very practice that we were trying to turn away from. This is especially common within the dichotomy of white/other. While scholars continue to colonize and de/colonize British rule in India (Bhattacharya, 2019; 2020), I am inspired to challenge the purities and dichotomies that have arisen in this process. Scholars often get so wrapped up in attempting to trace the binary of British/Indian that we end up with a completely different set of binaries of our own such as Bengali/non-Bengali, Indian/not-Indian-enough. Inspired by this conundrum, I began to notice multiplicity within the version of India that I know today. Multiplicity is not an exercise in reductionism but rather makes space for experience and perception. It allows us to discover the enormous potential that lies in our essential experiences.

In this paper, I do not speak on behalf of my people or the places I have lived but merely about my own encounters. I will begin the first section of this paper by taking you on a game of *hopscotch*, leaping through multiplicities within my ethnic identity. The second section of the paper aims to explore the binary that exists between the western/eastern views of restraint. I hope to highlight that there is enough space for more than one concept to exist. The third part will demonstrate the implications of modifying a game in the classroom. The fourth section will explore facets of power and positionality that I am currently grappling with during my residence in the United States. My hope is to replace 'superior' traditionalist endogamous identities that have existed in my mind with colorful multiplicity placed on the intersections of human experience. Additionally, if at any point you come across a language or script that you are not familiar with, I must tell you now that this is done on purpose. In exploring what play means to me I am also exploring the intersections and codes of my home, my language, and my culture. Anzaldúa (2012) perhaps says this best:

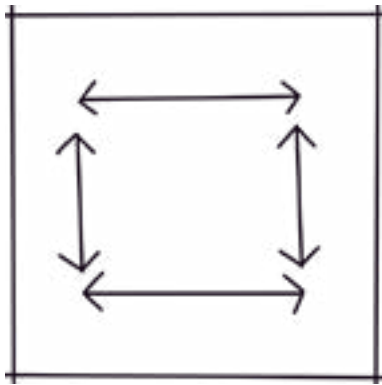
Until I am free to write bilingually and to switch codes without having always to translate ... and as long as I have to accommodate the English speakers rather than having them accommodate me, my tongue will be illegitimate. I will no longer be made to feel ashamed of existing... I will have my serpent's tongue—my woman's voice ... my poet's voice. I will overcome the tradition of silence. (59)

### **Playing in a Square**

*Hopscotch*, a game of mechanical rigor, is traditionally rooted in the linear and systematic structures of imperialism. It was first introduced to my country by the British as a game

where one crosses over a set of 8 or more squares leaping on one leg, with the result determined by a token. Much like a binary, it is sequential and determined by direction, meaning it begins with the lowest number guiding you to the highest. In each round, you're forced in a Sisyphean manner to return to the beginning. The game is also played on a flat surface, thus witnessed most often in playgrounds. Each game is mapped in a predetermined manner, marked into the ground, and bordered within squares. What is particularly interesting about *hopscotch* is that the goal of the game is to ultimately advance one's token across the squares. Your human body simply acts as a conduit for the token. There are also differing opinions as to how this can be done (Flanagan, 2009). Your token can be बजरी or even a piece of chalk. Traditionally the game has its own rules. You cannot step on a square claimed by another's player's token- as it is deemed that there is enough space for only one player. You can even try to rattle your opponent's composure with verbal taunts while watching for penalties as a player's field of action is fairly visible to opponents.

Figure 2: Playing in a square



When attempting to draw the binary of horizontal/vertical spectrums, I wanted to try and trace my experience instead, using a square (see fig. 2). It is always a bewildering experience for me to try and trace back the steps of who I was and where I came from. This is not to say that I am not purposefully and intentionally engaged in building on who I am now. But I have to admit I have been in a state of suspension ever since arriving in the United States two years ago. And so, in revisiting these provocations, I invite you to play a game of *hopscotch* with me. Much like one's experience, it allows you to hop in and out of bounded spaces until you can loop back once again. I want us to cross over the intersections of my experience as we leap.

I throw my token, a piece of बजरी towards the first square and begin to hop into one square at a time. *Square 1*—I was born in the southernmost part of the country, a tiny fisherman village of துத்தக்கடல் and lived there till I was three. When I watch video footage of me as a baby strapped onto my carrier, I see myself exploring தமிழ்நாடு, looking “on the forest as... a mother or father [that] provides food unconditionally to its children” (Ingold, 2000, p. 43). *Square 2*—I was put into school when I was two and a half years old and have been

learning ever since. *Square 3*—I had just learned to speak a few sentences of தமிழ் as my second language when I moved to the north to live with my grandparents. Here, I started to pick up bits of हिन्दी as a third language. *Square 4*—I stayed there till I was 17 years old until I returned to live in the south once more, attempting to relearn a language I had long forgotten. *Square 5*—My only constant is that I keep moving forward. *Square 6*—I have asked my parents if they know who they are, I don't think they do. *Square 7*—After repeated questioning, I am told by exhausted grandparents that I am 50% Punjabi (from pre-partition Pakistan), 25% Bengali, and 25% Afghani. How can the self be partitioned into fractions and percentages, I ask? *Square 8*—I am told that in a country where one's caste and ethnicity is one's identity, we have no caste and no unitary ethnicity since some of us are Hindu, some Christian, some Buddhist, and some Muslim—we all come from different creators.

I never learned to read Bengali, I never learned to read Punjabi, I can barely read தமிழ் and speak some हिन्दी. I certainly am not in touch with family from either Pakistan or Afghanistan. I wonder what it must be link in pre-colonial India, to have a homogenous identity, formed on the authority of tribal endogamy. It is entirely unfamiliar to me and yet I miss it. The binary of colonizer/Indian is no longer relevant to me. Similarly, the binary of British/Bengali cannot apply to me. These binaries which are still held together by my generation, fall apart when examined too closely. By virtue of my ethnicity, I exist in between and perhaps even outside this binary. So, I began to ask myself—what makes me whole/unitary? What was my “nonsense storybook”? I now offer you the piece of बजरी. It's now your turn to throw your token of choice and hop.

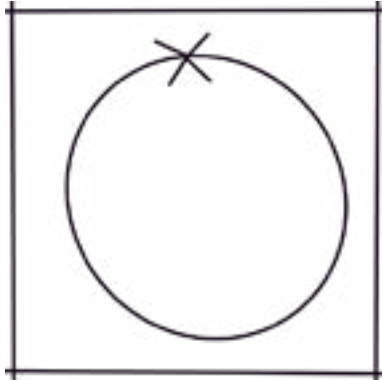
When examining the binaries on a square, I started to play with form but also numbers and colors, much like Flannagan's ongoing performance series of [mapscotch: bombscotch] (2012). What if I were to re-draw my squares in a 'nonsense' order, not 1 to 8 but rather the other way around? What if I used alphabets instead? What if my games weren't traditionally linear but in circles or triangles? What if they were filled with color? But *hopscotch*, much like games, is not apolitical—it requires deeper introspection. What if the game is too one-dimensional? What could I explore if I looked under the map, or within it? Much like Super Mario descending into his warp pipes, what would I find underlying the game of *hopscotch*? By allowing myself to explore these provocations, I began to question what neat little boxes I used to fit into. I needed to give myself permission to step out of them, as discussed later in the paper.

### Playing on a circle

The game, *ring around the rosie*, finds its roots planted in ritual and folklore. The song, also introduced to India via imperial forces, tells a dark tale (origins still debated) about a pandemic during the Great Plague of London. The game, meant to be a source of comfort and play for children, actually details the shape of a wound as a circular red mark around a red or “rosie” point. This wound was a symptom of the plague—a malodorous rash that developed

on the skin of sufferers, the stench of which was concealed with roses. The roses themselves were viewed as a precautionary treatment as it was believed that disease was spread through bad smells. The line *ashes and ashes*, symbolizes death and disease but also reincarnation and hope.

Figure 3: Playing on a Circle



People have told and re-told the story of *ring around the rosie* so many times that many different versions exist today—most often revealing significant details about the people and culture of its time. In India, this game is played in playgrounds and is beloved for its simplicity. The game involves holding other players' hands during which the song is sung out loud. Players dance in a ring, then suddenly stoop and squat, or in some cases fall to the ground. The last to do so pays a penalty and the circle is broken. That player then sits in the middle of the circle while the game continues. The circle is seen as a force that protects but perhaps also restricts (see fig.3). Let's explore this further.

I'd like to invite you to a game of *ring around the rosie*. We are going to hold hands and spin and sing, with the words evoking many stories and images. *Ring around the rosie*, —my sister and I were brought up at my grandfather's house by someone we called "ऊमा". On days that our grandparents were out, we would have sleepovers with ऊमा in the living room. She would tell us fantastical stories in हिन्दी and संस्कृत, of airplanes who could talk, deer that could think, and monkeys that could carry mountains. It was only later that I learned that these were all fragments of Hindu mythology. *A pocketful of posies*. —I remember a particular story of princess सीता who one day sees a deer prancing in the forest and asks her husband and brother-in-law if she can go play with it. They instead volunteer to go get it for her and draw a magic circle around her to keep her safe while they are gone. The 'enemy' however had sent that deer as a trap and tricks सीता into crossing over that line thus capturing her and flying away with her in his magic chariot. Here the circle is seen as something that protects against evil but also something that may be restrictive based on who draws it.

In contrast, Huizinga (1938) wrote about a magic circle for play. The circle served as a

bounded space, set apart from normal life. Inside the magic circle, different rules applied; things happened that were otherwise not sanctioned or allowed in regular spaces of life. Ever since, play and game scholars have referenced the magic circle in different ways (Bogost, 2016; deKoven, 2013). In eastern, or more specifically, Indian society, women are often imprisoned in a 'magic circle' and told that it will keep them safe; rules and cultural norms dictate what can and cannot be done. And so, I have begun to wonder what सीता's magic circle meant to me. Perhaps, more importantly, what play meant to her. Play in this story signified danger, while the magic circle represented safety. सीता did not walk into a magic circle and yet one was drawn around her. She was not allowed to run to the deer and play with it, instead, it was to be brought to her. She did not choose to cross over the circle and yet she was tricked into doing so. Bursting the bubble of the magic circle was "based less on the rules of the game itself and is instead based on which social behaviors and play practices" (Vossen, 2018, p. 210).

*Ashes, ashes.*—Animism to some extent allows us to perceive what we see in unexpected and varied ways. Instead of seeing something as it is, we see something as what it might be. Take the deer, who was in fact an 'enemy' disguised to entice सीता into play. Here play, in the form of curiosity, is enticing, troubling, out of bounds. Similarly, as we continue to hold hands and spin in our own circle, I notice that our bodies are creating a circle of their own. We know that when this game ends the circle will break—it is temporary and fleeting. It does hold the magic of play within it until we choose to stop playing.

When I look back at सीता's story I see just how desperately she wanted to own that deer. She was enticed by the idea of play, curious to capture it. But she was not allowed to, she was made to practice restraint. She was confined within her circle. As if possessing the deer meant she could own play better. You see, play does not live in an animal or even in us. "Play isn't doing what we want but doing what we can do with the materials we find along the way. And fun isn't the experience of pleasure, but the outcome of tinkering with a small part of the world in a surprising way" (Bogost, 2016, p.4). Even though leaving the circle is dangerous for सीता, perhaps exploring the margins of the boundaries, we often find ourselves trapped within, is the only way to truly satisfy our playful needs. Would she have been safer if she had accompanied her husband into the forest? Crossing that magic circle may have helped de-establish the way she saw the world. Could applying a more western-centric approach have helped save her or could the west benefit more by embracing animism? Does it have to be west/east?

*We all fall down!—Wasn't that fun?!* Oral fairy tales told and re-told often aren't based on accuracy. After all, ऊमा just wanted us to go to sleep and I just wanted to think about what playing with a deer could look like. So perhaps my "nonsense storybook" is in fact nonsense bedtime stories, told orally, transformed each night. The details never mattered. They were meant to make us fall asleep and to ascend into an imagined subconscious world where one could cross over the boundaries and circles of daily life, allowing for play with a deer. And



yet, underneath these stories exist histories of Hinduism and Buddhism and dichotomies of Hindus/Buddhists. These ideologies, as magical as they may seem, are spread across to generations of children, much like me.

Bogost (2016) explores the east/west's differing perspectives on restraint. He highlights how Eurocentric spaces base restraint on Judeo-Christian traditions of work/reward. The perceived benefits received from these are freedom and autonomy. However, restraint can also feel stifling, indecisive and obtrusive. When speaking about his understanding of eastern animism he states:

“[Marie Kondo] encourages tidiers to anthropomorphize their skirts and appliances and handbags and razors and all the rest. Her approach attributes a soul or a life to inanimate objects. This commitment to animism (a tendency more common in the East) ... gives KonMari an easy model for practicing... respect for objects...: think of them like kittens or hedgehogs.” (p. 131–132)

Marie Kondo's approach to the material is also one of restraint. Her inclination to anthropomorphize wearable objects is based on a choice to practice restraint. However, anthropomorphism places the human at the center of the universe, giving us ownership and the ability to judge how they make us feel. It essentially gives us the ability to pass a judgment of an object's worthiness. Buddhism as a religion also rejects attachment.

According to Hjorth & Nakamura (2002),

the links between the history of media and the history of racial stereotyping are strong. The romantic, inaccurate, and sometimes overtly racist visions of the oriental that circulate in contemporary film, video games, television, and other electronic media are part of a vocabulary of Signifying practices that are redeployed on the Internet by identity tourists. (p. 59)

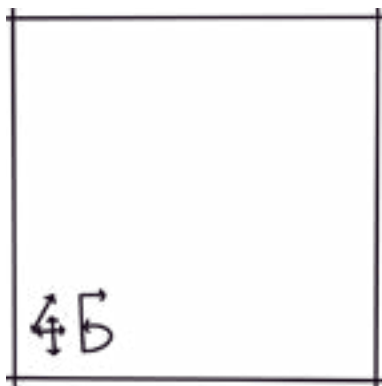
Further, Fickle (2019), advocates re-examining the infrastructure of artificial binaries like black/white, aesthetic/mechanic, story/game as a way of loosening the grip of such racial hierarchies to get a glimpse of how race is played out both in and through games. It is far easier to reject something that poses a threat to us than to engage with it more deeply. By staying within the binaries, we essentially practice restraint. But between this binary of the east/west exists the ability to play. Play elicits a desire to confront and even challenge restraint. “Playgrounds are places where we dig deep, where we mess things up and tear them asunder—ourselves included—in order to discover what else is possible. Not for useful ends, necessarily, nor necessarily for useless ones either.” (Bogost, 2016, p.248).

### **Playing with Multiplicity**

The game of cricket, much like the other two games mentioned above, is England's national sport. Passed on during India's colonial-era it is now claimed and fervently hailed as India's favorite sport. The game, played between two teams of 11, initially served as a source of competition and defiance against British rule. Today the game is played in most Indian schools

including the one I went to. During sports hour, on days that we felt like having more fun, we would modify the game equipment. “We improvised” is what I thought back then. The boys and girls were always made to play sports separately- our bodies were partitioned. The boys got to play with the actual cricket kits while the girls would play *cricket* with footballs instead of the red leather balls and use our legs instead of bats. This would cut down on the cost of having multiple cricket kits for so many students. I don’t think I quite understood how gendered this practice was. What always fascinated me though was how astutely it could be modified for those who were restrained enough.

Figure 4: Playing with Multiplicity



Let’s have a game of textbook *cricket*! And yes, I understand there are only two of us—bear with me. When I was in the sixth grade, I was introduced to a two-player modded version of the game. It was always played during classroom lectures and often required restraint on the part of the players so as to not get caught; it required a certain level of trust as well. There were no balls, bats, or safety gear; all you needed was a textbook. Two players took turns flipping pages of our books pretending like we were paying attention to the teacher—it’s all based on chance instead of skill now. If one of us lands on a page that ends with a four or six, we get points (see fig.4). This is because 4 and 6 are the highest score possible in the original game of *cricket*. There is no running involved, you move together across the pages of a textbook in a team. *Let’s try!*—We flip a coin to determine that I go first—*I got a 5—Wait, wait, the teacher is looking... We must practice restraint.* Bogost (2016) says, “restraint is always temporary... it merely defers distrust into the future” (p. 129). *You got a 6—छक्का!*—*I got a 4—चौका!*—*Oh dear, I think she sees us.* Having lived in the States for almost two years, I find myself suspended in spaces of uncertainty and restraint all the time. I find myself celebrating Indian festivals more than I ever did before. I celebrate Easter and Christmas when I miss my dad and grandmum who operated so closely to their protestant ethics of work and security. On the other hand, I celebrate Diwali and Holi when I miss my mum or granddad who believed in colorful displays of Hindu affection and abundance. *I got an 8-point! Oh, we must be quiet!* Which one of these do I really want to celebrate for myself—perhaps all or perhaps none? Perhaps I wish to step out of more binaries? *That brings your total to 6 and*

*mine to 5*. What do you think we should do next? Does one of us win? Do we keep going? Or should I leave this up to you—my reader?

Having been in school since the age of 2 years, my experiences around classrooms have always been illustrative. Most of my classrooms required that the teacher instill fear and moral panic in all of us. Instruction is centered on discipline, authority, and permission. My classrooms have always been heavily populated ranging from a minimum of 45 students to sometimes even 72. Everything, from the food we eat and the uniforms we wear to what language we speak, is surveilled. All of the above are also determined by your caste, religion, gender, and class. We may not speak, make eye contact, or drink water without permission. And so, playing a game of *cricket* in an environment such as this takes a lot of courage for any young child. This act of defiance suspends, and restructures educational systems rooted in predetermined outcomes and disciplinary values. In response to concrete learning outcomes, play enables an alternative mode of learning thus opening up potentialities in new unforeseen ways. In playful moments such as this, wonder emerges, while thought remains unconstrained. The act of disobeying established norms allows us to recompose educational potential as multiplicity.

Today *hopscotch*, *ring around the rosie*, and *cricket* belong to no one. Passed down in history, they are now Indian games as much as they are British. The piece of बजरी that I attempted to throw into a square, is a piece that a few seconds ago was a part of my grandfather's driveway. At the same time, my bedtime nonsense story is a small piece of the Hindu epic रामायण perhaps re-told in a disordered sequence. These games we have played today challenge and re-imagine what it means to play in and out of bounded spaces. The story told here does not speak to the Bengali or the Punjabi in me. It speaks to anyone willing to listen.

### Surviving the Game of Whiteness

According to deKoven (2013), rules get in the way of our freedom together. There are also times when it is remarkably useful to the community as a whole and to the players in particular to have the power to change some of the rules. When we play games together as a community, the rules start to emerge more clearly. *Hopscotch and ring around the rosie* have been a part of western and Indian culture and are thus written into our history; they require less of an introduction. Yet, a familiar structure is easy to alter. A textbook game of *cricket* however requires the original to be transformed—it is based on chance instead of skill. It is only when we start experimenting with the rules together do, we realize what might be the best way to play them. We employ strategies and start to reflect on whom we want to play with—perhaps *hopscotch* can be played alone while the other two may be played with a worthy competitor. Some rules are non-negotiable while others require change. Some games require you to defend yourself while others require too much of us.

It is necessary to acknowledge the indeterminacy of my argument as I am still coming to

terms with my relationship to whiteness. Each context I encounter offers me a new lens through which to understand my experiences. My engagement with reflections and provocations keeps me going and keeps me playing the game of discovery. My relationality allows me to be dealt into a game that still remains very much Eurocentric and binaried. The intersectionality and multiplicity of my experience empowers me to initiate a conversation that problematizes ideas of power, privilege, and positionality. Playing the three games here enables us to confront the status quo by offering new, and in my case, playful alternatives and approaches to contesting whiteness. I also acknowledge that sometimes words lack what experience can teach us; play embodied as movement, exploration, and experimentation deviates from and challenges the dominance of written and Eurocentric modes of expression.

In the 'game' of life, we must all hop, skip, and jump across playgrounds of our own making. Some of us have had to get used to playing games by altering and modifying the rules, and yet in a diametrically opposed parallel reality, some of us have had the privilege of never having to. However, in order to escape this binary, we must try to modify the games we play. For example, whiteness has largely been assumed to be America-centric. Whiteness, understandably, has also always been associated with race. But these binaries often have excluded experiences of those surviving western, Eurocentric, and colonial whiteness across the world. In developing countries, such as India, surviving whiteness has not just been about race but has also been about acknowledging the intersectionality of ethnicity, caste, religion, gender, and power. We all exercise power in different ways and contexts. When forced to confront my own positionality and privilege, I would be remiss to think that whiteness solely exists on a binary, between white/other. I exist as a person of color within Eurocentric countries but live on the outskirts of the neatly divided squares meant to represent my Indian-ness. Color is replaced with caste, ethnicity, class, and religion. That is a privilege in and of itself—to be able to survive without having to inhabit any one square. I am forced to be in competition with persons of color within Eurocentric spaces but benefit through privilege in my own country.

Upon moving to America in 2019, I began to grapple with the varying levels of cultural capital I have gained via my privilege in my own country and the loss of those very same privileges in a white-centric country. I had to re-learn what cultural capital was valued in an entirely new context. Am I an Indian citizen living in America, a visa holder, a tourist during fall break, or a resident alien? Can I be all those things or am I destined to remain international, global, nomadic? When writing this piece, I continue to receive reviewer feedback that framing colonial whiteness as a moment in history rather than a default helps remove some of its cultural erasure, even here in scholarship. I hope that by problematizing the games we play (Mukherjee, 2018), along with the tokens we play with, I can examine and challenge what whiteness looks like in today's world. Perhaps whiteness now hides away, disguised as cultural capital or even capitalism? How does whiteness, for a person of color such as me, become something not just to be survived but rather provide a sense of familiarity and therefore safety? Whiteness exists today not just as a system to be survived or fought but as power,

knowledge, capital, and privilege. How do I end up gaining from it in ways that others do not and is there really a fictional sense of morality I must grapple with?

Games are not exempt from discourses of whiteness. When applying the binary of win/lose to each game we see a curious pattern emerge. Each game stems from cultural and historic whiteness where the winner and loser have always been predetermined. However, the three games function on varying levels of currency and cultural capital. Winning in *hopscotch* means passing through each square only to return back to the beginning. Your body is thrust forward as the token weaves in and out of each square it inhabits. However, when modified the game of *hopscotch* can become so much more—infinite, dimensional, underground, and creative; the map and token no longer dictating which way to leap. Winning in *ring around the rosie* calls out to the concept of the last man standing. Your competitors are forced into being the focal point of a spinning path. But what if we weren't confined to our circles, our boundaries? I imagine a game that does not require you to smell of roses but invites you to spin in all directions singing your own tune. Finally, winning in the textbook game of *cricket* is a matter of racking up points until you are caught by your disciplinarian. The act of playing the game is taboo and yet a sign of survival. The game is modified as a tool for children to remain defiant in educational spaces. It disrespects, challenges, and decenters authoritative educational practices. Perhaps the game of whiteness rooted in its colonial past can be reimaged and “played with” not just “played by” people who have long existed on the margins, outside of the binary. I taught myself to play *hopscotch* across enormous distances while exploring my environments. I learned that the currency of exchange in this country is historically rooted in a continually shifting set of colonial structures asserting dominance over those considered not white enough. I spin my body around in circles trying to project myself as Indian-enough within academic spaces filled with systemic obstacles and disadvantages that have existed for entire generations before me. I no longer wait for permission to play *cricket* in the classroom as a way of breaking away from the binary between work/play and school/play.

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