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On the Move: Transnational South Asian Dancers
and the 'Flexible' Dancing Body

A Dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Critical Dance Studies

by

Anusha Lakshmi Kedhar

August 2011

Dissertation Committee:
Dr. Priya Srinivasan, Chairperson
Dr. Anthea Kraut
Dr. Marta Savigliano

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The Dissertation of Anusha Lakshmi Kedhar is approved:

Committee Chairperson

University of California, Riverside

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them I owe much gratitude for taking a chance on me back in 2004 and changing the course of my life.

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

On the Move: Transnational South Asian Dancers
and the 'Flexible' Dancing Body

by

Anusha Lakshmi Kedhar

Doctor of Philosophy, Graduate Program in Critical Dance Studies
University of California, Riverside, August 2011
Dr. Priya Srinivasan, Chairperson

“On the Move” combines ethnography and political economy to explore the complex racial politics in which South Asian dancers are immersed as they move across national borders as well as on local stages. Focusing on key South Asian dancer-choreographers in the UK in the late 20th/early 21st century, including Shobana Jeyasingh, Nina Rajarani, Subathra Subramaniam, Mayuri Boonham, and Akram Khan, as well as the transnational dancers they employ, I examine the way in which race, citizenship, and labor intersect in globalization in often conflicting and paradoxical ways. My research is propelled by an interest in the personal and professional lives of South Asian dancers, the effects of globalization on their dance practices, work, careers, and bodies, and how they negotiate the contradictions between the global, the national, and the local in and through dance.

I argue that South Asian dancers have developed an array of flexible practices in order to navigate the tensions between global capital and the nation-state, and that such flexible practices have been important in negotiating the contradictions between race and citizenship, reconfiguring social identities, and re-defining the contours of both South Asianness and Britishness. While I am critical of globalization, in particular its impact on labor flows and its toll on the body, I am also attentive to the power, creativity, strength, and flexibility of the dancing body to adapt to the inequalities and volatility of global capitalism. I suggest that late capitalism has created not just 'flexible citizens' but also flexible bodies. Despite efforts to regulate the transnational movements of racialized labor, South Asian dancers continue to make dance, and make dance work as a career; they continue to perform locally, nationally, and globally; and they continue to move in unruly and unpredictable ways. Thus the South Asian dancing body reveals not only the friction of bodily encounters in globalization but also the flexible corporeal tactics used by transnational dancers to move with, through, and against the often uneven and unequal flows of global capital.

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INTRODUCTION

On the Move: Transnational South Asian Dancers and the 'Flexible' Dancing Body

I sat in a deep *araimandi* position, lifted my elbows, extended my fingers into the *alapadma* hand gesture, and stamped my feet in complex rhythmical patterns. I was auditioning for the first time for a professional, contemporary South Asian¹ dance company in London. It was the end of 2003, and I was writing up my Masters thesis in Demography on women and migration in Uganda. As I sat hunched in front of a computer crunching numbers, I became increasingly wary of the career path I had chosen. The audition was one last ditch effort to see if I could make it as a professional dancer before I got too old and too inflexible. The company was called Angika, and was founded in 1998 by two South Asian women, Subathra Subramaniam and Mayuri Boonham.

After performing a short excerpt from a classical bharata natyam² piece of my choosing to demonstrate the quality of my technique, Subramaniam and Boonham then taught me a section of a duet they choreographed in 1999

¹ The term South Asian encompasses people from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and Nepal, as well as other smaller countries. It is the term most commonly used in the UK to describe the heterogeneous community of immigrants from the subcontinent as well as their cultural practices, including dance. Avanthi Meduri argues in her article "Labels, Histories, Politics: Indian/South Asian Dance on the Global Stage," (*Dance Research Journal*, Volume 26, Number 2, Winter 2008, pp. 223-243): "The South Asian label has achieved wide currency in the UK today. It manifests itself as a hegemonic category and is used to refer to the dances, literatures, theatres, folk forms, cultures, cuisines, film, and music of the people of South Asia" (224). In the UK, for example, bharata natyam is categorized as South Asian because it is a "national and trans-national form" that is "performed both within and beyond national borders" (227).

² Bharata natyam is a popular, classical Indian dance form. Once practiced in the temples of South India, it was brought to the stage in the early/mid 20th century and is now practiced widely in India and the Indian diaspora.

to see how well I could pick up more contemporary bharata natyam movements. The movement phrase began with a dynamic jump and a deep bend to the right, the right hand whipping across the body in a diagonal line from the upper left to the lower right corner. The sequence used mainly *pathaka*, the flat hand gesture and most basic and neutral of all the bharata natyam *mudras*, which lends itself to more contemporary looking movements; most of the time, the sequence used only one hand, challenging the symmetry of the traditional form; there was no repetition; and the phrase was fluid and covered space quickly in contrast to the restrained elegance of bharata natyam. It seemed that while a strong foundation in bharata natyam technique was paramount, it was also important not to be restricted to solely traditional ways of moving. It was exhilarating. Even though I stumbled and struggled to copy some of the movements which were new to me, I liked the way my body felt moving in a different way. I liked the dynamism that contrasted with the rigidity, symmetry, and predictability of traditional bharata natyam.

This was my introduction to British Asian dance,³ which broadly speaking combines classical Indian dance vocabulary with non-narrative themes and concepts, modern and postmodern choreographic structures, and an abstract aesthetic sensibility. It was thrilling to see how Indian dance could be stretched, pushed, deconstructed and reconstructed, made accessible, and

³ “Contemporary South Asian dance” is also known as “British Asian dance” to refer specifically to the hybrid practices of South Asian diasporic dancers in Britain. I use these terms interchangeably.

re-imagined in new and different ways. I was impressed that there was not only a demand and an audience for contemporary South Asian dance within mainstream British dance circuits, but also state funding available to produce contemporary South Asian dance works and pay dancers a decent, livable wage, something practically unheard of in the US where I had trained.

Seeing how young women, such as Subramaniam and Boonham, were making a living out of dance, as dancers, choreographers, directors, administrators, and educators, motivated me to pursue dance as a career, something I had never even considered until I moved to London. After my audition, I was hired to dance in Angika's first full-length ensemble production. I returned to the US while the company applied for my work visa. In February 2004, I flew back to London to start work on the new project, bubbling with anticipation at my first professional dance job. My excitement, however, was short-lived. When I arrived at London's Heathrow Airport, I was locked up in a room and my possessions were confiscated after my "intentions" for coming to the UK were deemed suspicious by one of the UK Border Agency's Entry Clearance Officers (ECOs). The officer's concern, he informed me, was that I was going to overstay my six-month work visa,⁴ try to illegally settle in the UK, and, eventually, be a drain on public resources. While they made inquiries into my immigration history in the UK, I was forced to stay in a small detention room with a few other people who were

⁴ I was granted a work visa under the Tier 2 category for the hiring of foreign "Creative Artists and Entertainers," a category which no longer exists within the UK immigration system.

also being investigated, including a recently married couple from India, a young man from China, and a businessman from the Middle East. After being held and questioned, I was informed by the ECO that I could enter the UK, largely because I was American and not from “Yemen or India or one of *those* countries.” He cautioned me, however, that if I did not leave at the end of my work permit, I would not be allowed back in the country again. While my brown body initially posed a barrier to my transnational movements, the political and economic capital of my American passport eventually granted me access, albeit limited, to enter the UK.

These lived experiences are indicative of the way in which the British nation-state has mobilized South Asian (dance) labor for capitalist/cultural production and made their bodies increasingly flexible while simultaneously and contradictorily limiting the ability of South Asian (dancing) bodies to stay, settle, and move freely within the space of the nation. I suggest that these contradictions between race and citizenship are revealed when we look at transnational South Asian bodies, including my own, as *labor* rather than simply as performers. To this end, I bring together *dance as labor* and *the choreography of migration* as part of a larger politics of movement that explores the complex negotiations in which South Asian dancers are engaged as they move across national borders as well as on local stages.

In particular, I focus on the transnational movements - on and off stage - of South Asian dancers in the UK in the late 20th/early 21st century and the

way in which race and citizenship intersect in globalization⁵ in often conflicting and paradoxical ways. I examine the works of prominent British Asian dancer-choreographers, including Subramaniam and Boonham, as well as Shobana Jeyasingh, Akram Khan, and Nina Rajarani, to learn how transnational South Asian dancers reconcile the contradiction between the demand for South Asian labor with the racialization of South Asians in the UK as foreign, other, and abject. I suggest that each dancer-choreographer has had a significant and unique impact on the development of British Asian dance. Jeyasingh, for example, was an early pioneer of contemporary South Asian dance in the UK. Through her brave experimentations and collaborations with popular, well-respected artists,⁶ she brought South Asian dance out of the periphery and literally on to center stage. Her construction of sharp, dynamic, intelligent, and athletic British Asian dancing bodies has become the standard against which all other British Asian dancers are measured today. Rajarani is one of the most successful South Asian dance entrepreneurs in Britain; she runs dance schools throughout the UK, a youth dance company, and a professional touring company. Subramaniam and Boonham, as co-founders of Angika, the only consistently all-female British Asian dance company, gave many South Asian women, including myself, the opportunity to make a living out of dance and a nurturing space in which to

⁵ While the transnational movement of labor and capital is nothing new (global trade was a central feature of colonialism and imperialism), I refer to the accelerated movement – of goods, capital, ideas, and labor – across national borders as the defining characteristic of our current era of globalization.

⁶ Jeyasingh's first work, *Configurations*, was a collaboration with experimental music composer, Michael Nyman.

explore our creativity. Moreover, Angika developed a unique collaborative choreographic process and a timeless movement aesthetic rooted in classical bharata natyam technique. Khan is the most internationally recognized and prolific British Asian dancer-choreographer. His kathak⁷-infused contemporary dance works that explore issues of race, citizenship, and belonging have shot him to fame in the last ten years and secured him a place in the annals of British dance history. Today, he is an international ambassador for British Asian dance and the global face of multicultural Britain.

I examine not only South Asian diasporic dancer-choreographers living in Britain but also short-term transnational migrant dancers, whose contract labor has been integral to the development of British Asian dance. The UK has become the global hub for South Asian dancers, drawing them in from around the world, in particular from India, through (post/neo)colonial flows of labor and capital. To this end, this dissertation moves between the UK and India (in particular, London and Bangalore), mapping the stalled, interrupted, and accelerated migrations of South Asian dancers as they ‘commute’ between the global south and the global north. I take a wider view of global interconnectedness, taking into consideration not just the global within the local, but also the local connections across the global.⁸ In so doing, I seek not

⁷ Kathak is a classical Indian dance form that became popular in the Mughal courts in northern India. Like bharata natyam, it was brought to the stage in the early/mid 20th century. It is also widely practiced and performed in India and its diaspora.

⁸ On November 4, 2009, Doreen Massey (“Geographies of Difference,” Talk at Tate Britain London, UK), gave the example of nurses from Ghana who are recruited to work in London. She commented

only to link these two dance economies but also to expose the unequal and uneven economic relations between labor and capital in globalization, and its effects on the (dancing) body.

In this dissertation, I argue that transnational South Asian dancers have developed an array of flexible practices in order to navigate the tensions between global capital and the nation-state, race and citizenship, migration and multiculturalism. British Asian dancers and choreographers, for instance, have forged strategic collaborations with mainstream British artists and practitioners, combined diverse choreographic methods, made themselves more versatile by learning multiple movement techniques, favored abstract over narrative choreography to make dance works more universal and accessible, performed in urban and rural areas, and hired white and migrant dancers in order to navigate shifts in the supply and demand of South Asian dance labor. In doing so, they have not only stretched but also re-defined the contours of both South Asianness and Britishness.

In the following sections, I will discuss how the relationship between global capital and the British nation-state has led South Asian dancers in the UK to develop increasingly flexible bodily practices, and how such flexible practices have been important in negotiating the contradictions between race and citizenship and reconfiguring social identities. I will also examine how the flexibility of transnational South Asian dance labor is constrained by the

that cities in the global north could not function without labor from the global south. In effect, nations such as Ghana and India are subsidizing the reproduction of London as a global city. Moreover, this "brain drain" that has helped reproduce London as a great global city has directly caused economic stagnation/stasis in cities in the global south.

inequalities and unevenness of global capital and the regulation of labor flows by the British state. I will conclude with an explanation of my methodological choices and an overview of the dissertation's main chapters. But, first, I begin with a brief note on the history of South Asian dancers in the UK in order to contextualize my subjects.

In Context: South Asian Dancers in the UK

While my focus is on dancers in the late 20th/early 21st century, the history of South Asian performers in the UK is not recent.⁹ The earliest dancers from the subcontinent, called *Les Bayaderes* by the French press, arrived in the UK in the early 19th century.¹⁰ Archival records show that another performing troupe from Bombay was contracted in November 1867 for three months by two impresario brothers from Manchester to perform in Egypt, Malta, France, and England.¹¹ In the early 20th century, Uday Shankar and Ram Gopal, two male dancers from India, moved to Britain and forged thriving careers as dancers and choreographers, performing widely in Britain and Europe. Although these early South Asian dancers made significant contributions to dance in Britain, their presence was relatively isolated and sporadic. Moreover, they were viewed largely as an exotic novelty rather than

⁹ Since as early as the 17th century, migrant labor from South Asia, including ayahs, lascars, indentured labor, and, even, performers have been arriving on British shores. For more information on the history of South Asians in the UK, see Rozina Visram's *Asians in Britain: 400 Years of History*, (London: Pluto Press, 2002).

¹⁰ Joep Bor, "Mamia, Ammani, and Other Bayaderes: Europe's Portrayal of India's Temple Dancers," in *Music and Orientalism in the British Empire, 1780s-1940s: Portrayals of the East*, eds. Martin Clayton and Bennett Zon (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2007), 39-70.

¹¹ Stranger's Home to the Under Secretary of State for India, "Correspondence regarding a group of destitute strolling players brought from Bombay in 1867 by Edward and George Hanlon," August 13, 1868, September 3, 1869, and September 16, 1869. L/PJ/2/47, British Library, London, UK.

an integral part of the cultural fabric of Britain. It was not until the mid/late 20th century, with the growth of a strong, vocal South Asian diaspora community in the UK, that a thriving, homegrown British Asian dance economy started to develop.

Fueled by a demand for cheap labor to spur Britain's postwar economic recovery, on the one hand, and a lack of economic opportunities in India following decolonization, on the other, South Asians began arriving en masse to the UK in the 1950s, a trend which continued steadily through the 1960s and 1970s.¹² Thanks to the 1948 British Nationality Act, which conferred full citizenship (at least in theory) to all Commonwealth subjects, many South Asians settled permanently in the UK. The sudden, large-scale immigration and settlement of South Asians, however, exacerbated relations between native, white British and their new, non-white neighbors. Racial tensions came to a head in the 1970s and 1980s following a series of violent riots up and down the country in which first and second generation South Asians (and blacks) clashed with both white British communities and a racist police state over widespread, systemic racism.¹³

After this heightened period of racial tensions between South Asians and white British, a number of British Asian choreographers emerged on the British dance scene. Jeyasingh started her own eponymous dance company in

¹² According to the Population Division of the United Nations Secretariat ("Trends in total migrant stock by sex," Revision 4, 1998), the number of international migrants increased from 75 million to 120 million between 1965 and 1990.

¹³ The most infamous of these race riots between whites and South Asians in Britain took place in Southall in 1979.

1988. She was one of the first British Asian artists to depart from tradition and incorporate more modernist aesthetics into bharata natyam. Her pioneering work paved the way for other young South Asian dancers such as Rajarani, Subramaniam and Boonham who launched their own dance companies in 1991 and 1998, respectively. The late 1980s and 1990s were a crucial period in British Asian relations. Both the state and British Asian artists were keen to portray South Asians in the UK in a different, more flattering light and bring South Asian dance into the mainstream by making it modern, accessible, innovative, and entertaining. Funded largely by the government through the Arts Council of Great Britain,¹⁴ British Asian dancers began touring widely, performing in theaters and festivals across the country. Not only did they bring the dance form out of the community hall and onto the concert hall stage, they also helped soothe public anxieties about South Asians living in Britain by displaying through their 'hybrid,' innovative choreography and flexible dancing bodies that South Asians could integrate into modern British culture.

While there have been a number of important articles and reports on South Asian dance in Britain that have drawn attention to the contribution of British Asian choreographers to dance in the UK, they have been analyzed largely within a postcolonial, diasporic rather than a global or transnational

¹⁴ The Arts Council of Great Britain, a non-departmental public body, was founded in 1946 to help promote and maintain British culture. It was divided into the Arts Council of England, the Scottish Arts Council, and the Arts Council of Wales in 1994. In this dissertation, I will refer to the body as the Arts Council for short.

context.¹⁵ Moreover, their focus has been on the choreographers and the way in which they negotiate cultural identity through their dance works, rather than on the dancers themselves. My research, which combines ethnography and global political economy, focuses on South Asian dancers as transnational labor, and positions the dancing body at the intersection of wider debates on immigration, race, and citizenship in the UK. By situating South Asian dancers within the context of labor and transnational migration, this dissertation aims to reveal the disjunctures, ruptures, and glitches in globalization that other discourses may overlook, and offer a necessary alternative to current social and economic theories, which laude globalization in terms of the putatively liberalizing force of its flows.

Flow vs. Friction: Globalization, the Nation-State and the Making of the 'Flexible' Body

Hybrid cultural forms, such as British Asian dance, have emerged not out of the seamless transnational flow of labor and capital, but out of the friction and 'sticky-ness' between global processes and nation-states. In response to the exclusion of South Asian dance from mainstream British culture, for example, transnational South Asian dancers have made their bodies and dance practices increasingly flexible and mobile in order to gain

¹⁵ See, for example, Chris Bannerman, "South Asian Diaspora Dance in Britain," http://salidaa.com/salidaa/docrep/docs/sectionIntro/dance/docm_render.html?dr_page_number=1, (accessed March 18, 2009); Andree Grau, "South Asian Dance in Britain: Negotiating Cultural Identity Through Dance" (Centre for Dance Research, Roehampton University, July 2001); Alessandra Iyer, *South Asian Dance: The British Experience* (London: Routledge, 1997). Alessandra Lopez y Royo, "Dance in the British South Asian Diaspora: Redefining Classicism," *Postcolonial Text*, (Vol. 1, No. 1, 2004), <http://postcolonial.org/index.php/pct/article/viewArticle/367/129>.

access to mainstream funding, venues, audiences, resources, and touring circuits, which have traditionally marginalized non-white dance practices.

British Asian dancers, such as Subramaniam and Boonham, have navigated the friction between race and citizenship by constructing a unique dance aesthetic and movement vocabulary that bridges authenticity and innovation, tradition and modernity. They experiment with South Asian dance structures and innovate through creative collaborations with non-South Asian choreographers and artists and non-traditional choices in music, costume, and lighting. Others, such as Khan, have created a movement aesthetic that shifts fluidly and blurs the boundaries between classical Indian dance and contemporary dance, constructing a truly hybrid British Asian body. Choreographic strategies such as these have allowed British Asian dancers to retain their cultural capital as 'authentic' South Asian dancers while also enabling them to secure state funding, attract diverse British audiences, forge thriving careers, and break into mainstream British dance venues, networks, and touring circuits.

While some scholars and cultural theorists¹⁶ have tended to theorize globalization in terms of the seamless flow of financial capital, electronic information, or mediated images, others more critical of global processes have suggested that we must address "power in relation to the flows and the

¹⁶ See Frederic Jameson, *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 1990); David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquire into the Origins of Cultural Change* (London: Wiley-Blackwell, 1989); Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: the Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota Press, 1996); Thomas Friedman, *The World is Flat* (New York: Picador, 2005).

movement,”¹⁷ and the fact that bodies, particularly racialized and gendered bodies, do not flow as efficiently as capital.¹⁸ Anna Tsing, for example, offers an alternative view of globalization by drawing our attention to the *friction* of bodily encounters, “the awkward, unequal, unstable, and creative qualities of interconnection across difference.”¹⁹ She argues that while some social theorists are intent on showing “an integrated globalism of everywhere-flowing money, people, and culture,”²⁰ “[f]riction refuses the lie that global power operates as a well-oiled machine”²¹ and belies globalization’s rhetoric of the free-flowing movement of people and cultures. Paying attention to “the sticky materiality of practical encounters,”²² Tsing suggests that the heterogeneous and unequal encounters of transnational bodies can lead to new arrangements of culture and power. Thus friction shows not only how global labor flows are impeded, but also how cultural connections are made at the point of these “practical encounters.”

Aiwha Ong suggests that the inequalities and unevenness of late capital have forced transnational subjects to become more and more flexible, making creative accommodations and arrangements with capital and nation-

¹⁷ Doreen Massey, “A Global Sense of Place,” in *Marxism Today* (1991), 25-6.

¹⁸ May Joseph, *Nomadic Identities: Performances of Citizenship*, (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota Press, 1999), 8.

¹⁹ Anna Tsing, *Friction: An Ethnography of Global Connection*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton, 2004), 4.

²⁰ Tsing 2004, 11.

²¹ Tsing 2004, 6.

²² Tsing 2004, 1.

states.²³ These 'flexible citizens' "respond fluidly and opportunistically to changing political-economic conditions to accumulate power and capital."²⁴ Building on Ong as well as Karen Shimakawa, who claims that the crisis over difference and national identity under globalization is "located and resolved *in/on* the body,"²⁵ I suggest that late capitalism has created not just flexible citizens but flexible *bodies*.

A focus on the transnational dancing body complicates and expands Ong's notion of flexible citizenship. While Ong focuses her analysis of flexible citizenship on elite, transnational Chinese subjects, my work examines South Asian dancers as transnational labor and the way in which flexible citizenship is enacted and produced by and through the moving, dancing body. Unlike other kinds of labor, bodies in performance can be read in multiple, and often contradictory ways simultaneously. Angika's performances around the UK, for example, were viewed by some British audiences as too ethnic and not mainstream or contemporary enough. On the other hand, for some British Asian communities, Angika's work was not ethnic enough, i.e. their experimentation strayed too far from 'tradition.' In Europe they were often considered representative of Indian/South Asian/Eastern culture, not British; in the UK, they were billed as British Asian dancers, separate but part of an imagined Britishness, while other South Asian choreographers such as Khan,

²³ Aiwha Ong, *Flexible Citizenship: The Cultural Logic of Transnationality*, (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 1999).

²⁴ Ong 1999, 6.

²⁵ Karen Shimakawa, *National Abjection: The Asian American Body Onstage*, (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2002), 131.

Rajarani, and Jeyasingh have been integrated into the British dance cannon. Thus citizenship gets read in different ways in and through dance and the dancing body.²⁶ As Priya Srinivasan notes, “citizenship is in process and is made visible by dance labor.”²⁷

Focusing on dancers reveals that flexible citizenship is not just a political strategy; it is a bodily tactic used to navigate the contradictions of late capitalism. Transnational South Asian dancers have been able to accumulate power and capital within an unstable, uneven, and uncertain global (dance) economy by making their bodies and bodily labor more flexible to the often contradictory demands of nation-states and global capital. Not only have they become more flexible in terms of their physical practices, they have also become more flexible in terms of their relationship to money, work, and family in order to adapt to international labor markets, negotiate stringent and racist visa regulations, and increase their chances for paid professional dance opportunities in the UK. Among a range of flexible tactics, dancers from Bangalore, for example, have learnt to ‘speak’ multiple bodily languages and adopt different movement styles to make themselves more marketable to funders and dance companies; made creative financial decisions to balance out periods of unemployment; juggled marriage, family, and work; and launched independent careers to circumvent racist politics in

²⁶ I thank Anthea Kraut and Priya Srinivasan for helpful conversations about flexible citizenship, flexibility, and the dancing body.

²⁷ Priya Srinivasan, *Sweating Saris: Indian Dance as Transnational Labor*, (Philadelphia, PA: Temple UP, 2011), 14.

the UK. Their flexibility has facilitated cross-border movements, broadened their access to transnational labor markets, increased their marketability, and helped them to accumulate power and capital in a volatile and uncertain economic climate. Flexibility has become both a consequence of late capitalism as well as a bodily strategy to cope with the volatilities and inequalities of global capital, and the heightened racism and paranoia of the UK towards South Asian migration.

Some South Asian dancers, however, have become too flexible; they no longer fit in with hegemonic definitions of race and citizenship.

Contemporary dancers of South Asian origin, for example, are often excluded from consideration for ethnic and minority arts funding because their dance practices are not legibly 'South Asian;' white dancers who are trained in bharata natyam are not cast for 'South Asian' dance roles; British Asian dancers who work within the traditional bharata natyam form are marginalized from mainstream British dance circuits because they do not demonstrate 'innovation.' While flexibility has helped dancers navigate the friction between race and citizenship, it has also posed a hindrance to their mobility. The nation-state redefines new borders and erects barriers to the movement of labor through technologies of race, immigration, and citizenship. Transnationality, in fact, has not been a liberating force for everyone as the term "free-market" might imply. Bodies, as noted earlier, do not flow as easily as capital. Dance as transnational labor reveals both the

body's flexible response to friction as well as the corporeal limits to flexibility and flow.

Between the Visual and the Kinesthetic: Theorizing Race in the UK

A focus on dance and the dancing body illustrates how South Asians are racialized not only within a visual economy of difference where race is embedded in the skin,²⁸ but also through a kinesthetic economy, where race is literally a moving signifier of difference. The hiring of both white and South Asian dancers has been important in expanding the meaning, composition, and visual and kinesthetic signifiers of South Asianness, and reconfiguring race to be more fluid and flexible. Dancers for Angika and Shobana Jeyasingh Dance Company (SJDC), for example, do not fit any cohesive description of South Asianness. They are multi-racial, multinational, and multi-ethnic. Moreover, they are conversant in multiple dance languages, including bharata natyam, kalaripayattu,²⁹ ballet, contemporary, and postmodern dance techniques. In this day and age when integration and the pressure for immigrants to 'speak English' have dominated debates on immigration in the UK,³⁰ these multilingual dancers offer an alternative model for the future of multicultural Britain that undoes previously held connections between race

²⁸ Robyn Wiegman, *American Anatomies: Theorizing Race and Gender*, (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 1995).

²⁹ Kalaripayattu is an Indian martial art form that originated in Kerala.

³⁰ In a recent speech, the current Prime Minister of Britain, David Cameron, blamed the rise of terrorism on the lack of social integration and the inability of immigrants to speak English. He warned that "immigrants unable to speak English or unwilling to integrate have created a 'kind of discomfort and disjointedness' which has disrupted communities across Britain." Nicholas Watt, "David Cameron says that immigrants should learn English," April 14, 2011 (<http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2011/apr/14/david-cameron-immigrants-learn-english>).

and citizenship, and illustrates how movement can destabilize entrenched racial stereotypes and imagine new notions of citizenship.

Similarly, Khan's deployment of an exoticism and otherness that is 'assimilatable' and acceptable within the bounds of state multiculturalism has helped quell anxieties about non-white migration, religious fundamentalism, social integration, and national identity in the UK. His flexible movement style and choreography of flexible citizenship allow him to stage an ambiguous racial identity that eases fears about Islamic fundamentalism, extremism, and the perceived inflexibility of British Asians to integrate into mainstream British society. Through an emphasis on innovation, rural touring, education workshops, choreographic residencies, and post show discussions with local audiences and rural dance communities, South Asian dancers, such as Subramaniam and Boonham, have made British Asian culture accessible to less diverse and more racially polarized parts of the UK. Their work on and off stage smoothes out the friction between Britishness and South Asianness, and mitigates public fears about the growing presence of brown bodies in the UK. Through choreography and performance, South Asian dancers challenge the colonial legacy of South Asians as foreigners and outsiders and make the British Asian body safe for public consumption, thereby re-imagining hegemonic notions of the South Asian body.

For the last few decades, as a result of racial tensions and, most recently, the global war on terror, the brown body has been racialized as violent, dangerous, and anti-British within the national imaginary. By the late

20th century, South Asians were no longer an outside threat but rather the 'enemy within' - Britain's very own 'folk devil.'³¹ The race riots of the 1970s and 1980s had racialized South Asians as violent, extremist, and anti-British in the media. Shaken by this period of heightened racial tensions in the UK, the country realized it needed to acknowledge and integrate Britain's growing (and growingly disgruntled) South Asian communities or face the prospect of a nation deeply divided along racial fault lines. In the late 1980s/early 1990s, the government turned to multiculturalism and the arts as 'soft' measures to integrate South Asians into Britain. The Arts Council followed a dual agenda of diversity and innovation with regards to ethnic and minority arts, including South Asian dance. This policy agenda served a number of purposes. It publicly recognized the presence and importance of Britain's ethnic communities (something South Asian cultural practitioners had been lobbying for),³² while at the same time shaping South Asian cultural practices by making visible only those dancers who demonstrated Britishness and their relevance in contemporary Britain, and marginalizing more traditional practitioners. This new direction in arts funding gave opportunities for the first time to South Asian dancers such as Jeyasingh and Rajarani to secure financial resources to launch their own dance companies, and gain mainstream visibility for South Asian dance. Crucially, it gave both the state

³¹ Claire Alexander, *The Asian Gang: Ethnicity, Identity, Masculinity*, (London: Berg Publishers, 2000).

³² Naseem Khan published a report for the Arts Council of Great Britain titled "The Arts Britain Ignores: the arts of ethnic minorities in Britain" (London: Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation and Community Relations Commission, 1976), which argued that Britain needed to fund ethnic and minority artists and give them more opportunities and exposure on national platforms.

and British Asian dancers a platform on which to re-define the contours of South Asianness in the UK.

For dance studies scholars, the body is not only the site of inscription but also the locus of subject formation and meaning making. Jane Desmond suggests that racial identities “are signaled, formed, and negotiated through bodily *movement*.”³³ She points out that social identities “are not immediately readable from the biological body...yet they are tightly tied to notions of physicality – *of what one does with one’s body*.”³⁴ The moving body, therefore, serves “both as a ground for the inscription of meaning, a tool for its enactment, and a medium for its continual creation and re-creation.”³⁵

This notion of the moving body as a site of “continual creation and re-creation” of meaning and culture is crucial to theorizing the body and race. It is not just skin or the body but the moving body that is the site for the construction and deconstruction of racial identities. Susan Manning, for example, argues that blackness and whiteness are not reducible to skin tone; rather they are “perpetual constructs onstage.”³⁶ Manning also notes, however, that for many dancers race is reduced to performers’ skin tone and is often based on an essentialized subjectivity.³⁷ The dual construction of race

³³ Jane Desmond, “Embodying Difference: Issues in Dance and Cultural Studies,” in *Meaning in Motion: New Cultural Studies of Dance*, (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 1997), 29 (my emphasis).

³⁴ Jane Desmond, *Dancing Desires: Choreographing Sexualities On and Off the Stage*, (Madison, WI: U of Wisconsin Press, 2001), 6, my emphasis.

³⁵ Desmond 1997, 50-51.

³⁶ Susan Manning, *Modern Dance, Negro Dance: Race in Motion*, (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), xv.

³⁷ Manning 2004, 180.

as fiction and essence points to the equally flexible and inflexible nature of how racial identities are formed and allocated. Anthea Kraut similarly notes that while the work of white female dancers who were influenced by Zora Neale Hurston's choreography were praised as innovative, the original dance stagings of Hurston, a black woman, have gone unacknowledged or been dismissed as "primitive" in the annals of American dance history.³⁸ Both Kraut and Manning point out the way in which racial identities are expanded and stretched through a kinesthetic economy of difference, while also being limited by the visual 'facticity' of skin tone.

If South Asian dancers as cultural intermediaries undo race through their flexible bodily practices, they are also constrained by colonial and postcolonial legacies of the brown body that intersect with orientalism³⁹ to reinforce the position of South Asians – migrants and diasporic citizens – as Britain's cultural and racial other. On tour in the UK, dancers, including me, would often be subjected to subtle acts of racism – a dirty look, a colonial-era chant, a fleeting comment, a prolonged stare, or an ignorant question – as well as more overt racism including direct racial epithets. There was a certain amount of fear when we stayed in all-white areas of the country while on tour. When we performed in Europe, we felt safe but exoticized. There, we

³⁸ Anthea Kraut, *Choreographing the Folk: the Dance Stagings of Zora Neale Hurston*, (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota, 2008).

³⁹ In *Orientalism*, (New York: Vintage, 1979), Edward Said defines orientalism as "a field of study based on a geographical, cultural, linguistic, and ethnic unit called the Orient" (15), which took root in the 18th century. It is the production of a discourse on the Orient from the perspective of the West. Orientalism therefore is not about the East but about making the East known to the West through an institutionalized Western knowledge of the Other.

would generally perform as part of Indian-themed festivals as embodied representatives of an authentic 'East,' despite living, working, and practicing in Britain. In these instances, the visual 'facticity' of the brown body reveals the limitations on the flexibility of South Asian dancers in the UK to transgress the fixity of racial categories.

Transnational Labor and the Negotiation of Work in Late Capitalism

In this dissertation, I foreground the personal and professional experiences of transnational South Asian dancers as business entrepreneurs, creative artists, and world travelers. Many British Asian dancers, such as Subramaniam, Boonham, Rajarani, Khan, and Jeyasingh, have capitalized on national politics and multicultural imperatives to perform citizenship to form their own dance companies, which in turn has created further opportunities for other young, amateur dancers to turn professional. The growth of a British Asian dance economy has not only allowed them to make a living out of dance; it has also afforded them financial independence; opportunities to travel, perform, and work abroad; and the means to create sustainable, thriving careers as dancers, choreographers, and teachers.

Dance has not only offered a career to many South Asian men and women who work in the UK as professional dancers, but it has also helped constitute subjectivities. Working as a professional dancer in the UK, for example, has reconfigured my understanding of myself as South Asian and instilled in me a more global race consciousness. For many female dancers, the professionalization of South Asian dance has allowed them to negotiate

the often conflicting goals of career, marriage, and children. As a number of authors have shown in different historical and geographic contexts, the space of the theater can, in fact, be a powerful force in shaping social identities, in giving migrant dancers an opportunity to create independent lives in and through dance, and in creating opportunities for them to navigate contradictory discourses of family, state, and nation.⁴⁰

The relationship between dance and labor is complex, shifting, and contested, and has been interpreted in multiple ways by dance scholars. While some have viewed dance in terms of its bodily labor, others consider dancers as (economic) labor, while others are interested in the work that dance does. Mark Franko, for instance, examines how dance was shaped by changes in work conditions and labor, as well as how dancers performed cultural work.⁴¹ He states, “dance [in the US in the 1930s] conveyed the physical experience of work in aesthetic and critical terms, bringing laboring bodies into visibility as historical agents.”⁴² Dance was thus not only a reflection of but also a vehicle for shifting ideologies and discourses on work and labor. Similarly, Maral Yessayan argues that the professionalization of dance and the construction of alternative labor markets for female dancers in Jordan not only reflects the changing conditions for professional Jordanian

⁴⁰ Tracy Davis, *Actresses as Working Women: Their Social Identity in Victorian Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1991); Adria Imada, “Hawaiians on Tour: Hula Circuits through the American Empire,” (*American Quarterly*, Volume 56, Number 1, March 2004, pp. 111-149).

⁴¹ Mark Franko, *The Work of Dance: Labor, Movement and Identity in the 1930s*, (Middleton, CT: Wesleyan UP, 2002).

⁴² Franko 2002, 2.

women; it has also given women a platform on which to negotiate often conflicting discourses of family, state, religion, gender, and nation.⁴³

Srinivasan theorizes the relationship between dance and labor in more corporeal terms. Taking a multifaceted approach to the notion of bodily labor, she argues that the effort involved in dancing and making dances is made evident through the body's sweat, blood, and tears as well as through the discipline of training and the work of costuming the dancer.⁴⁴ Her notion of dance as transnational labor is rooted in the dancing body's physical and cultural labor. She notes, however, that dance is an unrecognized form of labor: "If the dancing body's labor is accounted for in politico-economic terms, we begin to see her [the dancer's] work within the larger structure of production, labor and migration."⁴⁵

Building on the work of these scholars, I employ both macro and micro analyses of the relationship between dance and labor. On the one hand, I view South Asian bodies as transnational economic labor, i.e. professional dancers who migrate across countries to make a living. On the other, I also focus on the bodily labor of South Asian dancers, i.e. the work of dancers in re-imagining racial, gender, and national identities in the studio and on stage. While there are important distinctions between the notion of bodies as labor and bodily labor, I suggest that they are also closely interrelated and impact

⁴³ Maral Yessayan, "Performing Jordan in an Era of Transformative Globalization: The Emergence of Alternative Labor Markets and the New Working Female Dancer," PhD Dissertation, University of California Riverside, 2010.

⁴⁴ Srinivasan 2011.

⁴⁵ Srinivasan 2011, 12.

each other in significant ways. The flexible bodily labor/practices of migrant dancers from Bangalore, for example, has shaped their flexibility to move across national borders. Trained in martial arts, contemporary dance, and classical Indian dance forms, Bangalore dancers are highly sought after for their versatility and the high caliber of their technique. Their unique ability to work with different techniques and styles has helped to justify hiring them over British Asian dancers who are often trained in a single classical form such as bharata natyam or kathak. British Asian choreographers, such as Jeyasingh and Rajarani, regularly recruit and hire dancers from Bangalore to produce and tour work in the UK. The bodily labor of Bangalore dancers has helped Jeyasingh to forge a 'hybrid,' abstract movement aesthetic that has, in turn, enabled her to market her company to non-South Asian audiences and position her body of work within the mainstream British dance cannon. In this way, the bodily labor of these migrant dancers and their performances of British Asianness on stage have been integral to re-imagining and expanding increasingly rigid and exclusionary notions of race and citizenship.

Examining South Asian dancers as racialized labor also lays bare the limits to the flexibility of transnational dancers, and makes visible the friction between race and citizenship.⁴⁶ During the height of the recent global economic crisis, UK immigration policy tightened to keep British jobs for British people. Immigration policy was softened, however, to compensate for shortages in certain sectors of the British economy, including dance. The

⁴⁶ Srinivasan 2011.

easing of immigration restrictions for dancers did not apply to all types of dancers across the board. While foreign ballet and contemporary dancers (predominantly white professions) were put on a special shortage occupation list and allowed to bypass immigration laws,⁴⁷ South Asian (and other non-white) performers were often stranded without visas because they came from poorer countries, or were not classified as ballet or contemporary dancers.^{48,49}

As transnational bodies that move across both national borders and local stages, South Asian dancers occupy a unique position for understanding the effects of globalization on dance labor and the body. The UK, for instance, has exploited cheap, offshore labor to circumvent the immigrant 'problem' and at the same time keep pace with an increasingly competitive and cut-throat global economy. Dancers' labor, however, cannot be outsourced since the dancer and the product of her labor are housed within the same body. Karl Marx argues that capitalism has alienated the worker from the product of his/her labor.⁵⁰ In the case of dance, the product and the means of production cannot be detached so easily; "the dancing body as a laboring body disrupts traditional Marxist understandings of the act of labor, the means of production, and the product."⁵¹ Unlike the racialized labor of other migrants, which is often hidden offshore or invisibilized in the products we

⁴⁷ <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200809/cmselect/cmhaff/217/21714.htm>

⁴⁸ Zena Alkayat, "The new African dance," *Time Out London* (October 1-7, 2009).

⁴⁹ In conversation with "Sunita," a music promoter who organized for a group of Pakistani Sufi musicians to perform in the UK, (10/01/2009)

⁵⁰ Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*, Trans. by Martin Mulligan. Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1959.

⁵¹ Srinivasan 2011, 11-12.

consume and the services we enjoy, the labor of South Asian dancers cannot be separated from the consumption, distribution, and circulation of British Asian dance as a national cultural commodity. Employed to construct and perform Britishness on national and international stages, South Asian dancers are, in fact, highly visible in the UK. Moreover, as racialized labor, they are subject to measures by the state to regulate and limit the movement of non-white bodies, namely through anti-South Asian immigration legislation, citizenship restrictions, and multiculturalism policies that seek to contain and manage minority communities.

The friction between race and citizenship has created uncertain and unstable labor markets for South Asian dancers. Migrant South Asian dancers, for example, are refused entry to the UK, denied visas, and made to jump through endless bureaucratic loopholes to work in the UK. Funding for British Asian dance is generally project-based and therefore short-term, flexible, and temporary in order to limit and regulate the movement of South Asian bodies in the UK. Short-term funding for the creation and performance of British Asian dance work also means that migrant South Asian dancers, mostly from India, cannot establish residency. Citizenship restrictions prohibit migrant dancers from settling in the UK and lock them instead into a pattern of hyper mobility, in which they commute back and forth between the UK and India on multiple short-term, temporary work visas. Contrary to Lisa Lowe, who argues that the needs of capitalism contradict those of the nation-

state,⁵² these temporary, flexible work arrangements reflect the *complementary* needs of capitalist/cultural production for short-term skilled labor. Both global capital and the nation-state work together to make racialized labor increasingly flexible, mobile, and short-term in order to extract capital without enabling bodies to settle and obtain citizenship in the UK.

The nation-state in globalization has not disappeared or become defunct; rather, as Ong suggests, “the hyphen between the two has become reconfigured by capital mobility and migration.”⁵³ The nation-state, in fact, “continues to define, discipline, control and regulate all kinds of populations, whether in movement or in residence.”⁵⁴ Like the US, which “under siege from the global ‘outside’ might seek to reconcretize national difference on/through the racialized body,”⁵⁵ the UK uses immigration and citizenship legislation to delineate who belongs and who does not, who counts as British and who is considered un-British. It allocates race to particular bodies in order to establish new national borders within globalization.⁵⁶ Through the regulation of racialized labor, Britain ensures that its borders are flexible enough to fuel the needs of British capitalism but rigid enough to determine who can settle and who cannot.

⁵² Lisa Lowe, *Immigrant Acts: On Asian Americans Cultural Politics*, (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 1996).

⁵³ Ong 1999, 11.

⁵⁴ Ong 1999, 15, quoted in Shimakawa 2002, 130.

⁵⁵ Shimakawa 2002, 132.

⁵⁶ I thank Marta Savigliano for helpful conversations on race, nation, globalization, and the body.

The increased use of contract labor, which seeks to extract greater (financial as well as cultural and physical) capital from dancers, has forced dancers to work harder and faster for shorter periods. This has had implications not only for dancers' careers and long-term professional growth, but it has also taken a toll on dancers' bodies and their ability to move. Dancers push themselves to be stronger, more flexible, and more versatile in order to remain competitive. This has resulted in frequent injuries, broken bones, repeat sprains, and chronic pain. Whereas Srinivasan uses sweat to theorize the bodily labor involved in the work of dance,⁵⁷ I suggest that physical injuries point not only to the bodily labor involved in the production of South Asian dance but also the limitations to the dancing body's labor. While South Asian dancers have been forced to become increasingly flexible in their accumulation of capital in order to meet the ever-shifting and unpredictable demands of working as a dancer in late capitalism, temporary, sporadic, and short-term work regimes have also stretched transnational South Asian dancers to breaking point. In this way, examining South Asian dancing bodies as labor reveals globalization's toll on the body, and the limits to flexibility and flexible citizenship.

Reading Dance, Reading Dancing Bodies

Interested in both the micro and the macro, the intimate and the contextual, I move between reading dance and reading dancing bodies, between writing ethnography and writing political history. The two methods

⁵⁷ Srinivasan 2011.

are complementary. Ethnography helps ground the political history, while political history helps contextualize the ethnography. According to Ong, ethnography places human practices and subjects at the center of discussions on globalization. “An anthropology of the present” makes visible the “reciprocal construction of practice, gender, ethnicity, race, class, and nation in processes of capitalism.”⁵⁸

I employ various critical voices drawn from different ethnographic methods including auto-ethnography, oral history, feminist ethnography, intimacy, and gossip. James Clifford identifies four main approaches to ethnographic research and writing: experiential, interpretive, dialogical, and polyphonic.⁵⁹ While all are limited and limiting, he suggests that the use of multiple modes might help avoid the pitfalls of a single authoritative voice in ethnographic accounts. He notes that a purely interpretive approach, for example, excludes dialogue, while a purely dialogic style misses out on interpretation and contextualization. I use a diversity of approaches to reflect the diversity of my position as a dancer, employee, friend, confidante, and ethnographer.

Having been a professional dancer in London since 2004, I have, first and foremost, approached this ethnography from a personal place. This has been both a rewarding and taxing endeavor. On the one hand, it has afforded me a privileged ‘insider’ perspective, even more so because I began dancing

⁵⁸ Ong 1999, 5.

⁵⁹ James Clifford, “On Ethnographic Authority” in *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1998), 53-54.

in London before I began the Ph.D. and well before I began thinking about it from an ethnographic standpoint; on the other, it has been difficult to apply some critical distance and to look at my own positionality and my own body critically, especially retrospectively. While I do not make claims that auto-ethnography is more 'authentic' or 'truthful,' writing about myself has helped ground the ethnography in intimate details.

Oral history has also been an important part of developing a 'critical intimacy'⁶⁰ within my ethnographic research. While conventional academic writing can "flatten emotional content of speech,"⁶¹ oral histories bring out cadence, intonation, pregnant pauses, silences, and nervous stutters, as well as gestures, bodily movements, and twitches. They treat equally what subjects choose to tell as well as what they choose to hide from the interviewer.⁶² While they are the result of a shared project/relationship between ethnographer and subject, interviewer and interviewee,⁶³ they are nevertheless all partial, in the sense of being both incomplete and biased.⁶⁴

Women's oral histories are particularly fragmented and partial. Not only do women tend to remember the past differently to men, they are more likely to downplay accomplishments and not place themselves at the center of

⁶⁰ "Critical intimacy" is a neologism coined by Gayatri Spivak in *Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* (Boston, MA: Harvard UP, 1999).

⁶¹ Alessandro Portelli, "What Makes Oral History Different?", *The Oral History Reader* (New York: Routledge, 1998, pp. 63-74), 66.

⁶² Portelli 1998, 69.

⁶³ Joan Sangster, "Telling Our Stories: Feminist debates and the use of oral history," *The Oral History Reader* (New York: Routledge, 1998, pp. 87-100).

⁶⁴ Portelli 1998, 73.

narratives. "[T]raditional sources have often neglected the lives of women," according to Joan Sangster.⁶⁵ Oral history offers "a means of integrating women into historical scholarship, even contesting the reigning definitions of social, economic, and political importance that obscured women's lives."⁶⁶ However, as Susan Geiger reminds us, "Women's oral histories are not inherently feminist nor is the telling necessarily a feminist act."⁶⁷ Rather, a feminist approach to oral history and ethnography puts women's voices at the center; allows them to shape the research agenda by articulating what is important to them; and explores "why and how women explain, rationalise and make sense of their past."⁶⁸ Research on, by, and for women blurs the divide between self/other, partial/impartial, emotional/rational, subjective/objective.⁶⁹ It looks at women's everyday lives as worthy of research, and privileges the experiential over the factual and empathetic. Moreover, a feminist approach recognizes that dualisms are not just gendered but "objectivity is a strategy of male power."⁷⁰ Interviewing, for example, is an interactive process between the subject and the ethnographer in which we, as women, must "examine the context of the interview, especially inherent

⁶⁵ Sangster 1998, 87.

⁶⁶ Sangster 1998, 87.

⁶⁷ Susan Geiger, "What's So Feminist about Women's Oral History?" (*Journal of Women's History*, Volume 2, Number 1, Spring 1990, pp. 169-182), 169.

⁶⁸ Sangster 1998, 88.

⁶⁹ Lila Abu-Lughod, "Can There Be a Feminist Ethnography?" (*Women and Performance*, 5(1), 1990), 13.

⁷⁰ Catherine MacKinnon, "Feminism, Marxism, Method, and the State: An Agenda for Theory," (*Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, Vol. 7, No. 3, 1982, pp. 515-44), quoted in Abu-Lughod 1990, 14.

power imbalances, and always evaluate our own ethical obligations as feminists to the women we interview.”⁷¹

But what are our ethical obligations when ethnographic material is gleaned not from formal interviews, but through gossip and hearsay? Since I am a part of the British dance scene, but not from the UK, many dancers feel comfortable speaking to me about intimate details regarding their lives as well as the lives of other dancers. Some of my information, therefore, has come from overhearing conversations, or through gossip networks between dancers. According to Roger Lancaster, gossip “is the means by which people – especially women, but also men – share the information they need to plan meaningfully for the future and to cope with the realities of life.”⁷² In his study of intimacy and the Nicaraguan revolution, Lancaster admits that much of his information came by way of gossip, whispers, rumors, and murmurs. He argues that the clandestine nature of gossip mirrored the clandestine history of revolution, terror, and atrocity in Nicaragua. Similarly, in South Asian dance circles in London gossip travels through the same informal networks that are also responsible for information about auditions, performance opportunities, potential artistic collaborators, and available funding sources. Gossip is not trivial; it has an important function in society. It is not only intimate, but also practical; it facilitates and supports the building of networks, relationships, and friendships, and acts as a social

⁷¹ Sangster 1998, 94.

⁷² Roger Lancaster, *Life is Hard: Machismo, Danger, and The Intimacy of Power in Nicaragua*, (Berkeley, CA: U of California Press, 1992), 71.

lubricant.⁷³ In terms of ethnography, “gossip provides the very model for a reflexive, dialogical, critical anthropology in that it puts everything on the anthropologist’s side of the discourse as much at risk as everything on the other side.”⁷⁴

However, gossip can also quickly turn ethnography into eavesdropping, snooping, and spying. Such methods are not so different to colonial and neocolonial technologies of observation and control. Thus ethnography is not just produced by gossip, but also becomes itself a form of “illegitimate gossip, which is carried by the anthropologist across the borders of community, culture, ethnicity, society.”⁷⁵ Anthropology sorts other people’s dirty laundry in print/in public, and “generates ‘fictions’ about other people’s ‘realities.’”⁷⁶ Anthropology, in fact, has had a history of being manipulated by advertising, business interests, and governments to exploit and coerce. Trinh Minh-ha critiques gossip as a legitimate ethnographic method. She argues that ethnographic encounters are inherently violent because of the intimate knowledge one has of the other.⁷⁷ What I call the ‘intimacy paradox’ – that intimate relations engender both closeness and distance; trust and betrayal; love and violence – can also be applied to my relationship with the subjects of this ethnography.

⁷³ Lancaster 1992, 74.

⁷⁴ Lancaster 1992, 73-74.

⁷⁵ Lancaster 1992, 72.

⁷⁶ Lancaster 1992, 72.

⁷⁷ Trinh Minh-ha, *Woman, Native, Other: Writing Postcoloniality and Feminism* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press 1989), 67-70.

While I believe that my multiple hats have ultimately enriched this ethnography, it has not come about without struggle, doubt and difficulty. I have wrestled with myself about how to write about South Asian dancers in a way that is both intimate and balanced, personal and objective, sympathetic and critical. I worry that my interpretations may contradict the self-image of the dancers I write about. I worry that I have not included dancers who have made great contributions to British Asian dance. I worry that the small, personal details I find interesting will not be relevant to a broader readership. I worry that I have not said enough. I worry that I have said too much. At times I have felt too separate from my subjects - a fly on the wall, an eavesdropper, an interloper, a wallflower,⁷⁸ a lip reader, a spy; creeping in and out of conversations, jotting down notes in the dark, lingering in studios and dressing rooms. At other times, I have felt too entrenched in my subjects' lives. I hear about which choreographers treat their dancers better, which collaborators are nicer to work with, who pays their dancers more or less - things I probably shouldn't know. I have listened, observed, and overheard; interviewed, pried, and probed; danced, choreographed, and performed my way into the lives of these dancers. They are more than colleagues; they have become life-long friends. Through my writing, I have tried to write about them critically, but always with love.

⁷⁸ Marta Savigliano, "Gambling Femininity: Wallflowers and Femme Fatales", in *Angora Matta: Fatal Acts of North-South Translation*, (Middleton, CT: Wesleyan UP, 2003).

It is through the telling of stories – however fragmented, incomplete, and partial - that I have tried to reveal rather than conceal the contradictions, discomfort, and tensions in my research. I have also tried to make it clear to the reader where information was gleaned from gossip and hearsay and where I draw on personal experience, conversations, or interviews. Where necessary, I have changed names to protect the identities of my subjects. Despite the use of multiple voices and perspectives and an effort to simultaneously disclose and protect the sources of my ethnography, I am nevertheless aware that the position of the ethnographer is ultimately the one that holds the power. As Sangster points out: “Privilege is not negated simply by inclusion of other voices, or by denial of our ultimate authorship and control.”⁷⁹ I am attentive to the fact that, in the final analysis, I have ultimate control over what goes in and what doesn’t, as well as recognition in the form of authorship.

Dissertation Overview

“On the Move: Transnational South Asian Dancers and the ‘Flexible’ Dancing Body” focuses on three different groups of transnational South Asian dancers: female dancers, male dancers, and migrant dancers. Although they are by no means treated as distinct or mutually exclusive categories, each illuminates the contradictions and frictions between race and citizenship, and the effects of globalization on the (dancing) body, in unique and significant ways. In each chapter, my research is propelled by an interest in the personal

⁷⁹ Sangster 1998, 96.

and professional lives of these dancers, the effects of globalization on their dance practices, work, careers, and bodies, and how they negotiate the contradictions between race and citizenship in and through dance.

Chapter 1, "Dancing Intimacy, Dancing Intimately: Angika and the Choreography of British Asianness," focuses on Subathra Subramaniam and Mayuri Boonham, who co-founded Angika (1997-2008), one of the earlier British Asian dance companies. Drawing on my experience as a dancer for Angika from 2004 to 2008, I examine the company's performances of race and femininity - on stage and off - and their role in the construction of British Asianness and South Asian identity in the UK. I argue that Subramaniam and Boonham, in their capacity as cultural intermediaries were integral in brokering contradictions between race and citizenship in the UK. Integrating classical and contemporary styles, incorporating western production values, and touring widely in largely white parts of the UK, their flexible, hybrid practices helped market and rebrand the image of South Asians in the UK by creating performances that embodied the exoticness of ethnicity without the threat of otherness. Their work was viewed in various, often contradictory ways as British, South Asian, British Asian, traditional, modern, authentic, and innovative. I suggest that the flexibility of Angika's work to move in between these various categories of difference produced what Adria Imada calls an 'imagined intimacy'⁸⁰ between the native (white) population and

⁸⁰ Imada (2004) suggests that the role of performance in creating a perceived sense of intimacy between performers and spectators is important. She argues that hula dancers who performed around the US in the 1930s and 1940s created an 'imagined intimacy' between American expansionists and an

diasporic South Asians that enabled British audiences to engage with South Asians within the safe confines of the theater. This chapter not only looks at performances of femininity at the intersection of race and citizenship, but also foregrounds the intimate friendships and relationships between Angika's female dancers and the way in which work and dance gave us the flexibility and space to negotiate racial, gender, and national identities on and off stage.

If the 1990s saw the emergence of professional female South Asian dancers, such as Subramaniam and Boonham, the last decade has seen an increase in South Asian male dancers on British stages. Against the backdrop of heightened state violence and the vilification of South Asian men in the public sphere, I focus, in Chapter 2, "Between Stage and Street: South Asian Male Dancers and the Staging of British Asian Masculinities in an Era of Global Terror," on South Asian male dancers and performances of British Asian masculinity in the last ten years, particularly since the start of the global war on terror. I argue that British Asian choreographers deploy flexibility as a bodily, choreographic tactic to overturn increasingly rigid and exclusionary notions of Britishness and increasingly narrow conceptions of South Asians (men, in particular) as fundamentalists and extremists. Through flexible movement practices, they re-present South Asian men as safe, socially integrated, and 'hybrid' in contradistinction to the image of the British Asian male in the public sphere, who is seen to reject assimilation, and is jettisoned

exoticized notion of Hawaii, and that this intimacy not only excused, justified, and disguised white racism towards Hawaiians, but it also opened the door for violent American expansionism.

from the national imaginary and cast as the 'enemy within.' Feared on the street, the abject British Asian male body, in short, is made safe for public consumption on stage through flexible choreographic strategies.

Much of the labor employed to work for British Asian dance companies comes from India, in particular Bangalore. In Chapter 3, "A Tale of Two Cities: Bangalore's 'Flexible' Dancers and the Negotiation of Work in Late Capitalism," I turn my attention to a few of these transnational migrant dancers. The combination of the rise of British multiculturalism in the 1990s and India's economic liberalization in 1991 opened up new labor markets in the UK for professional dancers, created new job opportunities for dancers from Bangalore, and has increased the mobility of capital and labor between the UK and India over the last two decades. These new work arrangements, however, have been largely flexible, temporary, and subject to volatile market fluctuations and political trends. Bangalore dancers have responded to these increasingly temporary, exploitative, and uncertain work regimes and labor markets through creative strategies of flexible accumulation. There are, however, limits to their flexibility. While globalization has mobilized dancers from India, the UK has ramped up efforts to curb the mobility of transnational (dancing) bodies through various discourses of immigration, citizenship, and racism. I argue that while transnational Indian dancers have been forced to become increasingly flexible in their accumulation of cultural, financial, and even physical capital in order to meet the ever-shifting and unpredictable demands of working as a dancer in late capitalism, global processes have also

stretched transnational South Asian dancers to breaking point.

Simultaneously liberated and regulated, mobilized and stilled, Bangalore's transnational dancers lay bare the contradictory ways in which the British nation-state aligns with capital in order to exploit racialized labor without threatening the racial homogeneity of national identity.

"On the Move," in sum, is about the movement, mobility, and migration of South Asian dancing bodies in globalization – on and off stage, across national borders, and in local theaters. Adopting a decidedly critical view of global processes, it examines how dancers' movements are forced, curbed, interrupted, accelerated, and regulated by a British state eager to control the flow of labor; and how their bodies are broken, injured, pushed and stretched to the limit by global labor conditions and the demands of work in late capitalism. While I am critical of globalization's toll on the body, I am also attentive to the power, creativity, strength, and flexibility of the dancing body to adapt to the inequalities and injustices of global capitalism. Despite efforts to regulate the transnational movements of racialized labor, South Asian dancers continue to make dance, and make dance work as a career; they continue to perform locally, nationally, and globally; and they continue to move in unruly and unpredictable ways. Thus the South Asian dancing body reveals not only the friction of bodily encounters but also the flexible tactics used by transnational dancers to move in an age of globalization.

CHAPTER ONE

Dancing Intimacy, Dancing Intimately: Angika and the Choreography of British Asianness

This openly declared interest makes my reading the kind of 'mistake' without which no practice can enable itself.¹

This chapter is based on my work as a dancer with Angika (my “openly declared interest” in Spivak’s words) from 2004 to 2008. In 2004, I was hired by Angika to work as a dancer on *Bhakti*, Angika’s first full-length ensemble production. I was one of three South Asian female dancers hired for the new project. Including the directors Subathra (Suba) Subramaniam and Mayuri Boonham,² who directed as well as danced in their own work, we formed a five-women strong company. After a three-month making and rehearsal period, we premiered the new work in May 2004 and toured the UK in the autumn later that year, performing to enthusiastic, largely white, middle-class audiences all over the country.

Though on stage we were applauded generously for our performances, off stage, in urban and rural areas across the country, we were confronted with more widespread racism. On tour we often stayed and performed in all-

¹Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, (Boston: Harvard UP, 1999), 39, quoted in Mieke Bal’s “Three-Way Reading,” *Diacritics*, Vol. 30, No. 1, Spring 2000, 2. Also quoted in Bal’s book *Traveling Concepts in the Humanities: A Rough Guide*, (Toronto, Canada: University of Toronto Press, 2002), 286. Whereas Bal uses the quote to launch into a discussion on the multiple readings of Spivak’s *Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, I cite Spivak to foreground my personal involvement in my reading of Angika and the resulting intimacy between ethnographer and subject.

² In this chapter, I refer to Subramaniam and Boonham more informally by their first names, Suba and Mayuri, to convey to the reader the personal relationship I have with them. Elsewhere, I refer to dancers/choreographers with whom I do not have a personal connection by their last names.

white areas of the UK where we were on occasion called “Pakis”³ or told to “go back where we came from.” We also had to deal with the perception of promoters who were prejudiced about South Asian dance, and skeptical about where South Asian dance fit into their overall programming, what relevance it had for life in the UK, and whether it was too ethnic for mainstream audiences.⁴ Programmers would often refuse to book a South Asian dance company if the theater had already featured a South Asian dance performance (whether it was kathak, bharata natyam, classical or contemporary) that season, implying that there was an unofficial quota for ethnic and minority performances. By making dynamic, ensemble work that drew on Indian themes but was accessible and appealing to mainstream audiences, Angika not only developed a new aesthetic for British Asian dance, but also helped mediate the tensions between an increasingly racially heterogeneous society and a traditionally racially homogeneous notion of Britishness. In the late 20th century, at a crucial moment when the UK was grappling with a changing national identity and racial demographics, Angika helped broker these racial tensions through flexible movement practices.

In this chapter, I examine the company’s performances of race and femininity - on stage and off - and their role in the construction of British Asianness and South Asian identity in the UK. I argue that Suba and Mayuri

³ In Britain, ‘Paki’ is one of the most derogatory terms for someone of South Asian origin. While it was widely used up to the 1980s, it has since become politically incorrect to use the term. Nonetheless, it is still used as a racial epithet on occasion.

⁴ Delia Jarrett-Macauley, “Review on South Asian Dance in England,” (Oxford: Quality and Equality, June 1997), 34.

have acted as important cultural intermediaries by bringing South Asian dance from the periphery to the center of British culture and by constructing safe, hybrid British Asian bodies that were palatable to a (largely white) British public through various choreographic choices and strategies. I suggest that their performances produced what Adria Imada calls an 'imagined intimacy'⁵ between the native British population and diasporic South Asians that enabled British audiences to engage with South Asians within the safe confines of the theater. Through their community and education work, innovative approach to bharata natyam choreography, and extensive national touring circuits, Suba and Mayuri made South Asian bodies and bodily practices more accessible and familiar to British audiences, particularly in rural areas of the country where there are very few brown bodies, and, in this way, created greater intimacy – imagined or otherwise – between whites and South Asians in Britain.

While Suba and Mayuri's performances of contemporary British Asian dance created a perceived sense of intimacy that offered a different vision of South Asians in Britain, this imagined intimacy also masked increasing violence and racism against South Asians (men, in particular) in Britain. Indeed, within a political climate in which South Asian men have been increasingly vilified and racialized as violent and dangerous, performances by South Asian *female* performers, such as Suba and Mayuri, across the country

⁵ Adria Imada, "Hawaiians on Tour: Hula Circuits through the American Empire," *American Quarterly* (Volume 56, Number 1, March 2004, pp. 111-149), 135.

have served a particularly important function in soothing anxieties about South Asians moving in the public sphere, and in reaffirming a place for South Asians within the cultural fabric of British society.

I ask how Angika has helped to generate intimacy not only between South Asian performers and white British audiences, but also between the dancers themselves as friends, colleagues and women. Throughout its run as a company, Angika remained a steadfastly all-female group. Working, touring, performing, choreographing, and rehearsing together, the female dancers of Angika formed important and long-lasting personal and professional networks. I suggest that Angika was more than a company; it was a family for many migrant South Asian dancers, including myself. This chapter, therefore, also highlights the intimate friendships and relationships between the dancers as women.

Intimacy with, and my first-hand knowledge of the British Asian dance company, Angika, is the methodological framework for this chapter. I propose that intimacy offers a different vantage point from which to analyze complex issues of race and citizenship in the UK. Focusing on my professional experience as a dancer with Angika, my personal relationships with the co-founders and artistic directors, Suba and Mayuri, and my experience as an ethnographer of their lives and work, I examine how working with Angika has produced various intimate relations – between dancers; between dancers and audiences; between me and the subjects of my ethnography; between my position as subject and researcher. I also examine the conflicts, dangers, and

ethics of intimacy as a methodology. I look at intimacy not only on the micro level, but also within a larger political economy of state funding of (British Asian) dance.⁶ Intimate relations between the dancers in Angika, for example, were produced out of the fact that the state is the largest single funder of British Asian dance. State funding allowed Angika to re-hire dancers such as me for various projects over a number of years. Pressures to continue to receive state funding, however, had implications on our personal lives. As a dancer for Angika, I'd often wonder what would happen when funding ran out. Would I have to leave the country again? If Angika received funding again, would I be re-hired? What is the future of my career as a dancer? Intimacy therefore is employed not just as a way to analyze the personal lives of dancers, but also as a way to evaluate the macro political economy of South Asian dance in the UK and its effects on the dancing body.

There are various derivations for the English word intimacy. One school of thought suggests that it comes from the Latin *intus*, meaning "within", *intimus*, meaning "inmost" or "most secret," as well as the Latin word *intimare*, which means "to make known or familiar" or "to tell or relate." This etymology implies that intimacy is something that takes place both within us but in relation to another (an Other?) that is unfamiliar to us. Intimacy thus implicates both subject and object, self and other, and, in the case of performance, dancer and spectator. Intimacy also produces and is

⁶ I thank Anthea Kraut and Priya Srinivasan for urging me to address intimacy within the larger context of my project.

produced by telling or relating one's innermost feelings, thoughts, and desires. For the purposes of this chapter, I define intimacy as both an epistemology and ontology; that is, intimacy is not only a way of getting to know and becoming familiar with the other, but also the tangible, concrete, everyday intimate encounters with the other. As Kathy Weingarten suggests, intimacy is not just a relation but also a discourse of meaning-making.⁷ With this in mind, I also ask what broader meaning and impact these intimate bodily encounters have in terms of race, citizenship, identity, and work.

Drawing on Alison Mountz and Jennifer Hyndman's feminist approach to intimacy, I take the border, the home and the body as three intimate sites through which to flesh out the broader impact and import of Angika's work.⁸ In this chapter, I take the "border" to be the border between performer and audience, the "home" as the studio where the dance company functions as a kind of second family, and the "body" as the body of the dancer. These sites, I suggest, are where difference - between race and citizenship, Britishness and Asianness, self and other - is negotiated, and where intimacy is broached and breeched. To this end, this chapter privileges the analysis of intimate spaces - the studio, the home, the dressing room - rather than the stage.

⁷ Kathy Weingarten, "The Discourses of Intimacy: Adding A Social Constructionist and Feminist View" *Family Process* (Vol 30, issue 3, September 1991), pp. 285-305.

⁸ Alison Mountz and Jennifer Hyndman, "Introduction: Feminist Approaches to the Global Intimate," *Women's Studies Quarterly* (Vol. 34, No. 1/2), pp. 446-463.

I also privilege vignettes, stories, and anecdotes to decisive arguments or definitive conclusions. I suggest that stories are not only a way to express intimacy but they are also a way to create intimacy between my subjects and me, as well as between my readers and me. Stories illustrate rather than explain; they are fragments and by their very nature partial. Mieke Bal⁹ advocates for critical intimacy as a methodology. She suggests it is a productive mode of researching, writing, and reading 'texts', a methodological position in the humanities that is the antithesis of distance. Crucially, it entails keeping together what scholars tend to separate, that is form, content and context, and requires a "constructive exchange with the 'others' of cultural analysis."¹⁰

Ethnography and the Ethics of Intimacy

Ethnography is one of the most intimate scholarly encounters. Intimacy in ethnography is key to our understanding of the other and ourselves. Privileging touch, the haptic, and a close attention to detail, a focus on 'critical intimacy,'¹¹ mitigates against masculinist approaches that privilege objectivity and distanced looking, and seeks to correct unacknowledged complicity in relations of power.

While intimacy can be a powerful, resistive tool, it can also be a tool of betrayal and violence. Jacques Derrida, in his treatise on the politics of friendship, describes the contradictory, dual nature of intimacy as a

⁹ Bal 2002.

¹⁰ Bal 2002, 289.

¹¹ Critical intimacy is a neologism coined by Gayatri Spivak (Spivak 1999).

proximate relation, as well as a relation of distance.¹² According to Trinh Minh-ha,¹³ ethnographic encounters are inherently violent precisely because of the intimate knowledge one has of the other. This 'intimacy paradox' – that intimate relations engender both closeness and distance; trust and betrayal; love and violence – can also be applied to my intimate relationship to the women of Angika, the subjects of my ethnography. For this reason, I take a cautious and critical view of intimacy in this chapter. I consider intimacy as a discourse of meaning-making as well as a discourse of violence; as a tactic that produces both proximity and trust as well as distance and betrayal. While intimacy is an integral part of ethnography, it is also problematic. I try to address the ethics, violence, and politics of intimacy as well as its potential for deep personal connections.

I have an intimate relationship with my subjects. I have known Suba and Mayuri both professionally and personally for over seven years, first as an employee/dancer for Angika, then as a friend, and later as an ethnographer. I worked with Angika from February 2004, when the company produced its first ensemble work, until November 2008, when the company dissolved over artistic differences. After the break up of the company, Suba and Mayuri launched their own independent dance companies (Sadhana and Atma, respectively), both of whom I have worked for in the last two years.

¹² Jacques Derrida, *Politics of Friendship*, trans. George Collins. (London: Verso, 1997).

¹³ Trinh T. Minh-ha, *Women, Native, Other: Writing Postcoloniality and Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), 67-70, quoted in Roger Lancaster's *Life is Hard: Machismo, Danger, and the Intimacy of Power in Nicaragua*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 72.

They have become more than bosses or collaborators to me; they are friends, very good friends. Suba helped me get through my separation from my partner over endless cups of coffee and glasses of wine. Mayuri helped me get through the death of my grandmother. I attended Suba's wedding and was there soon after her first child was born.

While my work as a dancer for Angika has afforded me a unique "insider" perspective on the political economy of South Asian dance in the UK and given me crucial insight into the lives and careers of female dancers working in Britain, it has also made me reluctant to write this chapter. How can I be empathetic and critical at the same time? How do I strive to represent without standing in for Suba and Mayuri? How do I convey in an ethnographic account the intimacy and trust of our relationship without betraying it by undermining the very intimacy that has bound us over the years? Judith Stacey¹⁴ writes that the greater the intimacy between ethnographer and subject, the greater the danger of exploitation, while Minh-ha, as mentioned earlier, argues that ethnography is essentially exploitative. Much of what I have talked about with Suba and Mayuri I cannot put here in writing because it will hurt someone or be damaging to my subjects, which leaves me with purely positivist, factual, and objective information. How can I do a feminist ethnography without betraying feminist principles, and more

¹⁴ Judith Stacey, "Can there be a feminist ethnography?" (*Women's Studies International Forum*, Vol. II, No. 1, 1988, pp. 21-27).

importantly betraying some of the most meaningful female relationships I have?

Despite my difficulties, inner conflicts, and uncertainties about my ethical obligations to Suba and Mayuri, the fact that Angika no longer exists as a company is one of the reasons I feel compelled to persevere in writing this chapter. Because the company was founded by both of them, and neither one was willing to give rights to perform the works without the other, their work will never be performed live again. Costumes were destroyed. Music is copyrighted and can never be played again. What remains of the work are DVDs, brochures, programs, and funding proposals, stored in filing cabinets, computer databases, and university archives. It becomes even more imperative to record the impact of their work in some way, even if incomplete, fragmented, problematic and biased. But what if I mischaracterize them? Or present them in an unfavorable light? Is it worse to be misrepresented or partially represented? Or to be missing from the archive completely? Such questions weigh on my mind, but I must start somewhere. So I begin warily, reluctantly, nervously, carefully....

Formative beginnings: from South Asian migrants to British Asian citizens

Angika was founded in 1998 by Suba and Mayuri. Their early experiences as immigrants to the UK fundamentally shaped the direction of the company. Both women moved to the UK during formative periods in their lives and politically volatile and racist times in Britain. Mayuri moved to Birmingham as a young girl at the beginning of the 1970s after her family, and

other South Asian families, were expelled from Uganda by Idi Amin's regime. In the late 1960s/early 1970s, African nationalism and the forced expulsion of South Asians from Uganda, Kenya, and Tanzania led to the immigration of over 10,000 East African South Asians. Since many of them had British passports, they were able to bypass previous legal attempts to restrict immigration to only white settlers. The sudden wave of South Asian immigrants caused moral panics throughout the UK and increased pressure on the British government to restrict black and South Asian immigration.^{15,16} The government rushed through new legislation in a week, which was aimed specifically at curbing the flow of South Asian immigrants from East Africa. The 1968 Commonwealth Immigration Act introduced a requirement to demonstrate a "close connection" with the UK, and subjected all British passport holders to immigration controls unless they had a parent or grandparent who had been born, adopted, or naturalized in the UK. The Immigration Act of 1971, the most draconian anti-South Asian immigration legislation to date (which became law in 1973), further restricted primary immigration from the subcontinent by distinguishing between patrilial and non-patrilial citizens.¹⁷ Twenty-eight thousand refugees from Uganda,

¹⁵ Ian R. G. Spencer, *British Immigration Policy Since 1939*, (New York: Taylor and Francis, 1997), 141.

¹⁶ Enoch Powell delivered his now infamous "Rivers of Blood" speech on April 20, 1968 to a Conservative Association in Birmingham in which he expounded on the threat of black and South Asian immigration to Britain's national identity.

¹⁷ Patrilial citizens were those who were born or naturalized in the UK or had a parent or grandparent who was, effectively safeguarding the free movement of white people of British origin who had settled outside Britain and placing restrictions, once again, on the flow of black and South Asian immigrants. "The Act abolished the last vestiges of the old Empire-embracing concept of British subject or citizen"

including Mayuri and her family, arrived in 1972 before the legislation went into effect.

The 1971 Immigration Act, as well as previous immigration legislation, not only impacted South Asians looking to immigrate to the UK; it also racialized South Asians already within Britain as outsiders and second-class citizens within the nation space¹⁸ and inaugurated a period of heated racial tensions, which continued into the 1980s. During these tumultuous decades, a number of violent race riots between black and South Asian communities and the “native” British population broke out throughout the UK.¹⁹ Racial tensions culminated in 1989 with the ‘Rushdie Affair’ when British Asian Muslims protested the UK sale of *The Satanic Verses* (a book written by Indian-born Muslim Salman Rushdie and seen as blasphemous by Muslims around the world) by burning the book in public and vandalizing book stores and publishing companies. Although only a small number of British Muslims were involved in the book burnings and vandalism, the media depicted South Asians/Muslims as unpatriotic, violent, and a threat to the British public, British values, as well as national security and unity. South Asians were racialized as foreign, inferior, dangerous, and abject within the British national imaginary. With Britain coming to terms with its national identity in

(Spencer 1997, 144). Coincidentally, the same day that the Act became law (1 January 1973), Britain entered the European Economic Community, which allowed the free movement of labor between Britain and Europe. So while the ability of black and South Asian people to settle in the UK was being restricted, that of white Europeans was being opened up (Spencer 1997, 144).

¹⁸ May Joseph, *Nomadic Identities: The Performance of Citizenship*, (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota Press, 1999), 91.

¹⁹ Some of the most notable race riots include: Notting Hill 1976, Lewisham 1977, Southall 1979, Toxteth 1981, Brixton 1981 and 1985, Birmingham 1985.

the face of large-scale immigration from former non-white British colonies, the 1970s and 1980s were one of the most hostile periods in modern British race relations. It was at this time that Suba moved to the UK from Malaysia. As a teenager, not only did Suba have to fit in to adolescent culture in Britain, which she describes as difficult, but she also had to deal with anti-South Asian racism which was prevalent at that time.

For both women, learning bharata natyam was a way to hold on to cultural roots and take pride in their ethnic identity despite a political climate antagonistic to South Asian immigrants. Suba had learned bharata natyam in Malaysia and was eager to continue when she moved to the UK; Mayuri was inspired to learn dance after watching Bollywood films and classical Indian dance performances as a young girl in Birmingham. Their experiences as migrants to the UK fostered a desire to connect to South Asian cultural traditions and practices as a form of resistance, pride, and belonging.

While Suba and Mayuri were firmly rooted in bharata natyam, their early formative experiences as professional dancers - that is, prior to starting their own company - gave them unique insight in how to make South Asian dance accessible, how to run a professional company, and how to attract wider audiences outside the South Asian community. They learned how to make South Asian dance more universal without losing the specificity and cultural roots which they had so strongly planted and identified with. Both Suba and Mayuri did the majority of their bharata natyam training at the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, an Indian cultural institute founded in 1974 in

southwest London. There, they were given rigorous training under guru Prakash Yadagudde and given many opportunities to perform at community events and local festivals. Yadagudde was a seminal influence on the two choreographers. He grounded them in the traditional bharata natyam form, but also urged them to explore bharata natyam for themselves to find their own aesthetic. Yadagudde, for example, asked Mayuri to choreograph an item for her own arangetram, something generally not sanctioned by traditional gurus. Recognizing that Suba was eager and talented, Yadagudde fast-tracked her through the bharata natyam diploma course. Both Suba and Mayuri have repeatedly told me how grateful they are for his support and encouragement to experiment with the form, without which they would not have had the courage or initiative to start their own company.

The Bhavan also exposed Suba and Mayuri to other schools and styles. Each summer, the institute invited esteemed practitioners from India to lead summer school sessions for dancers wanting further training with teachers from India. Over the years, it has become common practice to invite top gurus from India, such as Leela Samson, Priyadarshini Govind, Kalanidhi Narayanan, and Chitra Visweswaran, among others, to teach for a short-term period (generally four to eight weeks) in major urban centers such as London, Birmingham, or Manchester. Students from around the country pay a (usually hefty) fee²⁰ to participate and learn from these esteemed teachers. These dance

²⁰ For example, students paid £350 for four days of classes with Kalanidhi Narayanan when she came to London in 2009.

intensives provide a forum for dancers to meet other dancers from different parts of the country, learn new styles, and increase their repertoire. Learning from different teachers has expanded and enriched British Asian dancers' movement vocabulary and style. It has also allowed UK-based dancers to develop their own, unique aesthetic unlike, for example, dancers based in the US who generally learn from one teacher in one particular style.

After finishing training at the Bhavan, however, there were very few opportunities for Suba and Mayuri to dance professionally. The only contemporary South Asian dance company at the time was the Shobana Jeyasingh Dance Company (SJDC). Suba auditioned for SJDC but was rejected by Jeyasingh because she hadn't trained in India and was therefore not considered a strong enough dancer. Aditi, a South Asian dance development agency, had just terminated its grant program for dancers to train in India and Suba did not have the money to fund herself. To vent her frustrations, Suba wrote an article for a South Asian dance magazine called *Extradition*²¹ titled "Dancer for Sale," in which she lamented the lack of opportunities for young South Asian dancers looking to dance professionally or get financial support.

While professional opportunities were few and far between, there was a national touring dance company for young South Asian dancers, YUVA, which gave young classically trained dancers an opportunity to work, and be

²¹ The magazine started in 1989 and was run by the organization Aditi – the National Body for South Asian dance until the organization's demise in 1999/2000. It was taken over by Kadam, a South Asian dance development agency in London, in 2002 with financial backing from the Arts Council of England. It was at this time that the magazine changed its name to *Pulse*.

choreographed on by established South Asian dancers. For many young dancers, like Suba, it was their first experience of dancing and touring professionally. Suba recalls that the choreography, which was more physical and contemporary than traditional bharata natyam dances and incorporated contact between dancers, is one of the formative experiences that inspired her to want to become a professional dancer and create experimental work.

It was not only the choreography but also the performing experience that was crucial to Suba's early development as an artist. YUVA toured the UK, exposing Suba and the other dancers to white and South Asian communities outside of London and British urban centers. On one occasion, Suba recalls with fear a time when a group of young, white men were singing "Rule, Britannia"²² as she got off the train in a small town in northern England. It was the beginning of the 1990s and British race relations were still raw from the riots in the 1970s and 1980s, which had torn apart the social fabric of the nation. Performing South Asian dance in predominantly white areas of the UK posed both a threat to the harmony of racial homogeneity as well as a potential opportunity to mitigate racism and cultural ignorance through performance.

Touring exposed Suba not only to widespread white racism but also intra-racial issues. One summer YUVA performed near Leicester for an audience made up largely of Punjabi Muslim men and women. The dancers,

²² "Rule, Britannia" is a British patriotic song, but is strongly associated with anti-immigration, racism, and British fascism. It also has strong colonial associations, as suggested by the chorus "Rule, Britannia! Rule the waves."

all young women, were wearing sleeveless tops. The costumes were designed to enable the dancers to execute the choreography, which incorporated contact work and required the dancers to push, pull, and grab each other. Any material on the sleeves would have made it slippery, according to Suba. During the show, the men began shouting “Cover those arms! Wear more clothes!” and continued heckling the dancers until they got off stage. Suba recalls they were genuinely shocked and scared. It was her worst memory as a performer. While there was an increasingly vocal and angry community of second and third generation South Asians who considered themselves British and wanted to be recognized as such, there was also resistance from the South Asian community to modernizing too much, too quickly, especially when it concerned South Asian women. This early formative experience made Suba realize that South Asian communities might not be the ideal target audience for the kind of work she wanted to do.

Early experiences as freelance dancers also taught Suba and Mayuri how (not) to run a professional dance company. After finishing their training with Yadagudde, they both worked as dancers for another dance company founded by a former student of Yadagudde. It was one of only two professional South Asian dance companies at the time. Although they knew of each other, Suba and Mayuri first met and formed a close bond while working for this company. They describe the experience as formative and character-building. Suba says matter-of-factly: “It really made me think about how you run a company, how you treat dancers, how you function as a

professional organization in a professional context.” Mayuri has also mentioned to me on a number of occasions that this first professional experience in a company taught her a lot about the kind of work she wanted to make in the future. The difficult experience had its advantages, however. It brought Suba and Mayuri closer together and made them realize they had a shared creative vision for how they wanted to work with the bharata natyam form. And it was here that they began to forge their own path as choreographers.

For their first choreographic project together, Suba and Mayuri re-choreographed some traditional solo items as duets. They were able to get a few performance opportunities, but mainly for small, South Asian community audiences. Their first opportunity to break into mainstream British dance circuits came when they were accepted to participate in Choreodrome, a residency for young contemporary choreographers from all movement styles and trainings to work at The Place Theatre in London and develop new ideas. It was during this time that they choreographed *Sudarshana*, a contemporary bharata natyam piece based on the *chakras* and emotions, which they later performed at *Resolution!*, The Place Theatre’s annual platform for showcasing short work by emerging choreographers. Whilst Suba and Mayuri had also been performing classical dance programs (usually set to recorded music) in various places around the country, it was the more experimental choreography in *Sudarshana* that made them a big success and launched their careers as contemporary South Asian dancers and choreographers.

Sudarshana received rave reviews from The Place, which paved the way for an extensive national tour. Suba estimates that they performed the work forty to fifty times. She describes the piece as “dancers on steroids.” “There was no repetition,” she told me. They put every movement they could think of in it, and danced non-stop to a fast-paced soundtrack. It made South Asian dance dynamic, energetic and spectacular, rather than cryptic, foreign, and esoteric. Much like Indian food and bhangra-influenced music, which were also gaining popularity in the restaurants and clubs in the UK at this time, *Sudarshana* was something audiences could consume quickly and easily without necessarily having a nuanced understanding of the *bharata natyam* form. If the contemporary edge gave Suba and Mayuri access to mainstream venues, professional opportunities, and widespread recognition within contemporary British dance circuits, the use of classical Indian dance vocabulary made them unique and provided them with cultural and financial capital from the Arts Council. Through particular choreographic strategies and creative and aesthetic choices, Angika retained the cultural capital and exoticness of ethnicity without the threat, stigma, or unfamiliarity of being too traditional or ‘different.’ In this way, they were able to move away from community performances and at the same time carve out a unique niche for themselves as South Asian choreographers within the broader landscape of contemporary British dance.

As South Asian immigrants from Southeast Asia and East Africa who subsequently moved to Britain, both women are the product of a double

diaspora. Neither South Asian nor British, they occupied a particularly nebulous, liminal space between the two. I argue that this insider-outsider, in-between, hyphenated quality uniquely placed them to be able to bridge tradition and modernity, navigate the contradictions between race and citizenship in the UK, and act as important cultural intermediaries between (white) British and South Asian communities.

Creating intimacy between performer and audience: Angika as cultural intermediaries

In her article, "Hawaiians on Tour: Hula Circuits through the American Empire," Adria Imada argues that hula dancers who performed around the U.S. in the 1930s and 1940s created an 'imagined intimacy' between American expansionists and an exoticized notion of Hawaii, and that this intimacy not only excused, justified, and disguised white racism towards Hawaiians, but it also opened the door for violent American expansionism. She suggests that the role of performance in creating a perceived sense of intimacy between performers and spectators was particularly important. Similarly, I suggest that Angika created an 'imagined intimacy' between South Asian dancers and white British spectators through performance, and that this sense of familiarity was crucial in challenging notions of race and citizenship and allaying fears about South Asians in Britain.

From the start, Suba and Mayuri shared a creative vision to make Indian dance more accessible to mainstream audiences. Their aim was to disrupt the perception of white audiences that Indian dance was an old,

ancient, culturally specific art form that could only be understood and appreciated by South Asian audiences. Suba and Mayuri wanted to make bharata natyam more universal, modern, and accessible even to those who were unfamiliar with the art form.²³ By doing this they could not only build a wider audience for Indian dance, but also have a sustainable career as dancers and choreographers.

Angika would sometimes perform in big, populous cities, including London, Manchester, and Newcastle, but more often the company would perform in rural and semi-rural areas of the country, largely for white audiences.²⁴ In order to receive funding from the Arts Council, applicants must prove that they have secured a certain number of bookings from theaters across the country. Rural touring is especially favored by the Arts Council because it services communities without access to the arts and/or diversity. This has helped to bring South Asian dance out of its base in Britain's urban centers, such as London and Birmingham, and into more rural and less diverse regions of the UK. As a dancer who toured with the company for five years, performing in over thirty cities in the UK, I rarely saw more than a handful of South Asian people in the audience. I remember on one occasion, at a theater in Halifax, an Indian family came only because we had passed out flyers to them earlier that day and had invited them personally. It

²³ "Mayuri Boonham, Q&A," <http://www.londondance.com/content.asp?CategoryID=3799> (accessed January 18, 2011)

²⁴ Although I do not have the statistics for Angika's shows, only 10% of audiences that come to watch SJDC productions are South Asian, according to Kalwant Ajmal and Linda Jasper, "Turnout and Straight Backs: The Shobana Jeyasingh Dance Company's Next Five Years" (Department of Dance Studies, University of Surrey, 1996) 7.

turns out they were less interested in the performance and more interested in seeing if I wanted to meet and talk to their son, an 'eligible bachelor.' After a show in one of these small white towns in middle England, my mind would begin to race: what did the audience understand? What did they get out of the performance? What did I get out of it? Were we just a group of pretty Indian women dancers to gawk at on stage? Did they understand what we were doing? Had they seen Indian dance before? Had they seen Indian bodies before? Would this change anyone's perception of South Asians in the UK? Why weren't there more South Asians in the audience? Why did we only perform for white people? Were we exoticizing ourselves?

Although there was usually an Indian or Chinese restaurant in these small towns, there were rarely any Indian or Chinese people apart from those that worked in the restaurants. I came to realize that dancing was a different but no less important kind of labor in these communities. By performing in these small English towns, people saw South Asians working on stage rather than in a restaurant kitchen or behind a cash register in a corner shop. I'd like to believe that by performing on these national rural dance circuits, Suba, Mayuri, the other Angika dancers, and I helped to shift, even if slightly, long-held notions of citizenship that equated whiteness with Britishness. With our performances, we could show that this too was Britain, and we were as British as they were. Touring in the UK not only helped communities re-imagine what Britishness could look like, it also helped me re-imagine myself as British.

Post-show question and answer sessions, a common feature while on tour, gave audiences further opportunity to engage with us. Most venues arranged for the company – the choreographers and the dancers – to field questions from local audiences after the show. Audiences were often curious to know what particular hand gestures meant; how long we had trained; where we came from; how we remembered all the movements; what the choreographic process was like; how we worked with the composers; etc. It was a chance to have a meaningful exchange with audiences unfamiliar with South Asian dance and culture; it was also a chance to challenge preconceptions (“Where are you from in India?”), debunk myths (“Do all the gestures mean something?”), and enlighten audiences on the choreographic process (“Who makes the movements?” “How do you remember everything?”). Occasionally, in the cities and towns with a larger South Asian presence, we would have a handful of South Asian audience members, some of whom were more familiar with Indian dance and culture. Those who stayed or wished to speak to us after the show were very encouraging of our work. Many were happy to see a classical art form being brought to a mainstream stage in a way that made it accessible to British audiences, and thanked us for doing that. They felt Angika’s work was an eye-opening experience insofar as it showed them how it was possible to make a traditional art form modern and fresh, with a broader, more universal appeal. It proved to them that it was possible for South Asian dance to be presented in mainstream theaters and venues and reach mainstream audiences.

Angika's educational work also served a similar function. Teaching dance in schools and in the community is a big component of touring in the UK. When venues program dance, they usually request companies to teach in local schools or organize workshops at the theater for local residents as part of the booking agreement. In addition to workshops, we would often conduct longer-term residencies with schools and youth dance groups to choreograph a curtain raiser, a short five to ten minute performance based on the principles of Indian dance and usually related to the concept of the piece we were presenting. The curtain raisers not only benefited young people interested in dance by teaching them a different dance style, exposing them to various choreographic techniques, and giving them the experience of performing in a theater, they were also highly advantageous for us. Curtain raisers brought in the parents, friends, and families of the young participants, and helped boost our audience numbers as well as introduce Indian dance to audiences that may not have normally attended. In Taunton, in rural Somerset in the southwest corner of England, I taught bharata natyam dance workshops to two groups of high school students at a school for the performing arts. None of them had learnt any Indian dance before and only a handful had heard of Bollywood (a measure of how unfamiliar they were with Indian dance movements and culture). In Whitehaven, a small, remote town on the northwestern coast of England with a largely white population, we conducted workshops with young children in the community. I taught them to dance the story of Red Riding Hood using Indian hand gestures,

expressions and movements. In the Lake District, I taught bharata natyam to students in a one-room school in the middle of the English countryside. In these remote areas of England, to be part of the cultural and creative landscape of a nation, to be seen as representatives of contemporary British culture rather than just service labor, was important in bridging race relations, forging new notions of citizenship, and disrupting notions that equated whiteness with Britishness.

Angika has consistently worked with concepts and themes rooted in Indian philosophy but interpreted them in an abstract, non-narrative, non-literal fashion. Each of Angika's productions paired a spiritual or philosophical concept drawn from Hinduism or Indian culture with an abstract concept, such as the body, mathematics, space, rhythm, time, or energy. Their first work, *Sudarshana*, for example, used the chakras (energy centers in the body) to explore the nine basic emotions in classical Indian dance; *Kala*, made in 2000, explored the cyclical nature of time and rhythm through the seven stages of man outlined in Hindu philosophy; *Bhakti* (2003) sought to express the concept of devotion and faith but through the body rather than through religious or mythological narratives like in traditional bharata natyam performances; *Ether* (2006) used geometric abstraction and the body to sculpt space in an exploration of the fifth element, 'Akasha'; and *Cypher* (2008) represented the divine goddess in Hindu mythology through mathematical and geometric patterns. The focus on Indian spiritual, philosophical, or religious themes allowed them to retain their niche identity

as a company rooted in bharata natyam and Indian culture; the focus on the abstract and the body allowed them the flexibility to explore themes in a non-literal, non-traditional way that made their work more accessible to white British audiences. Angika's productions did not require prior knowledge or understanding of South Asian dance. The lack of narrative, mythology, and facial expression aimed at non-South Asian audiences ensured their work garnered a broad base of support and had universal appeal.

It was not just the border between Britishness and Asianness that Angika broached through their choreography and performances, but also the border between Britain and Europe. In 1998, John Ashford, then director of The Place Theatre, invited Suba and Mayuri to perform *Sudarshana* in Oldenburg, Germany to represent the best of British dance. Suba told me that to be asked to represent *British* dance was "quite a big thing" for them, but also for South Asian dance more generally. Through their choreographic and aesthetic choices, Suba and Mayuri were able to shift bharata natyam from a traditional, community-practiced dance form to a modern, relevant, and national dance form. Their near-instant international success was in part due to their unique talent as dancers and choreographers, but it was also a matter of being in the right place at the right time. It was 1998: the UK was emerging from a dark period of racial tensions and riots, Tony Blair had just led the Labour Party to a landslide victory and ousted the Tories from power after almost twenty years of uninterrupted rule, the New Asian Kool movement

was taking off,²⁵ and multiculturalism was en vogue. There was, in short, a new era of tolerance and openness towards diversity. At the same time, with the rise of the European Union and “Fortress Europe,” it was also a time of upheaval and uncertainty with regards to national identity. At the same time that they were trying to embrace diversity, immigration, and a borderless Europe, European countries, particularly in western Europe, were also beginning to fear that the collapse of national borders would bring in waves of (unwelcome) immigration and threaten national identity and the (myth of) racial purity on which it was based. In light of this political climate, Ashford’s decision to send a delegation of British dance to Germany that included South Asian dancers was significant. Once marginalized from mainstream British dance circuits, South Asian dance was now being co-opted to represent “Britishness” abroad. Showcasing a British Asian dance company was a way to re-define Britain as an inclusive, tolerant and diverse nation, and present a bright and successful model of multiculturalism for the future of a unified Europe.

While performance created intimacy most of the time, it also created moments of disjuncture, tension, and distance between race and citizenship. In addition to touring in the UK, on occasion we were invited to perform in Europe (France, Spain, Italy, and Germany), usually as part of Indian- or Eastern-themed festivals. Though we lived and worked in Britain, we were

²⁵ Sanjay Sharma, John Hutnyk, and Ashwani Sharma (eds), *Dis-Orienting Rhythms: The Politics of New Asian Dance Music* (London: Zed Books, 1997).

always billed as an “Indian” act rather than British. As Indian dancers trained in the West, we were programmed because we could make Indian dance accessible, modern, and interesting to European audiences. However, being an all-female group, we still carried the orientalist trace of the exotic female Indian dancer, which made us marketable to European audiences. These festivals, in fact, were designed to be a window into Indian/South Asian arts and culture, and make European audiences more intimate with the “exotic East.” In part due to the lack of a strong colonial link with India, in most European countries India remains an exotic, mystical place - ancient, rare, cryptic, and devoid of a modern political history. As one of the ways in which the West domesticates and makes intimate cultures beyond the West, these spectacular exhibitions and festivals make India accessible to European audiences by providing festival-goers with an “authentic,” full sensory experience. Presenting India as a consumable good, the festivals included food stalls, fashion shows, art exhibitions, and spectacular street performances. In Lille, France, for example, the India festival featured stalls selling incense, sarees and silver jewelry, and makeshift restaurants serving ‘typical’ Indian food. In Zaragoza, Spain at the World Expo in 2009, the India Pavilion featured food, jewelry, and clothing stalls, and a bhangra group that did impromptu performances through the pavillion. Through performance and other displays of “authentic” Indian culture, these festivals provided European audiences a way to experience India without actually going there.

Dance was yet another way to consume India - visually, aurally, and kinesthetically.

If in Europe, we were wholly consumed, in some parts of England we were subjected to anti-South Asian racism and treated as abject 'foreigners within.'²⁶ In Manchester, we were followed and called 'Pakis' by a group of young, white boys on the tram. On another occasion, while teaching dance workshops at a local school, we were told that "we should go home," by which we inferred they meant India and not London. While as artists and cultural workers we were able to move and perform widely in rural, largely white areas of the country - places other South Asians would feel unwelcome or apprehensive about going to - we were not able to circumvent the visual facticity of skin color and the limits that the politics of race in the UK posed to the unfettered movement of South Asian dancers.

Touring, often in the most remote parts of the country, exposed international dancers such as myself to the complex issues around being South Asian in Britain, and opened my eyes to how brown bodies are racialized in the UK. In the US, during the 1970s and 1980s, I was racialized in the halcyon suburbs of Southern California within the model minority racial paradigm.²⁷ During the same period in the UK, black and South Asian

²⁶ Here, I draw on Julie Kristeva's book *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia UP, 1982) to describe the contradictory way in which we, as South Asians in the UK, are made visible through tools of British multiculturalism, on the one hand, and situated outside the nation through techniques of race and citizenship, on the other. This contradiction between something being at once inside and outside, familiar and foreign is the fundamental state of the abject, which "lies there, quite close, but cannot be assimilated" (Kristeva 1982, 7).

²⁷ South Asians (and Asians, in general) in the US are grouped for the most part under the model minority racial paradigm, which racializes South Asians as hard-working, high-achieving, passive,

settlers, and their children, were gathered together under the highly racialized and stigmatized category 'black.'¹ This was partly due to the history and legacy of British colonial rule in India, which racialized Indians as coolies and indentured labor. It was also in part due to the fact that because of Indian nationalist propaganda, which discouraged emigration soon after Indian Independence, settlers from the subcontinent only started to arrive in the UK in significant numbers in the 1960s, after a previous wave of immigration from the Caribbean (1940s/1950s). Young, second generation South Asians also appropriated the term as a sign of unity against white oppression and a "potent political signifier" that "redefine[d] notions of national identity and culture."²⁸

Around the 1980s, however, the category 'black' began to show signs of cracking. For the first time in Britain's postwar history, the balance of non-white immigrants tipped in favor of South Asians. Because of the massive influx of East African South Asians to Britain in the late 60s/early 70s, three decades of steady chain migration from the Indian subcontinent, and a growing second and third generation diaspora community, the South Asian population in Britain began to overtake the black British population. While race riots in the 1970s involved both blacks and South Asians, those in the 1980s, including Southall, saw the politicization of South Asians as a distinct

studious, successful, and wealthy. They are held up as a model for other immigrant/minority communities in the US. Growing up in a middle-class suburb in Southern California in the 1980s and 1990s, I was racialized under this notion of South Asianness.

²⁸ Joseph 1999, 98.

minority group. It was the Rushdie affair in 1989,²⁹ however, that definitively fractured the politics of blackness in the UK and constructed South Asians, not blacks, as the new 'folk devil,'³⁰ an internal 'problem' that needed to be addressed and contained.

In the 1990s, after decades of being positioned outside the mainstream, South Asians became racialized as unruly, violent, un-British and extremist. They were categorized as 'Asians', which carried a negative, working-class association. There was an urgent need on the part of South Asians to make themselves visible in a good light, to mark themselves as legitimate citizens who belonged in the UK and were very much a part of the fabric of modern British society. It was at this time that Indian dance was repackaged as 'South Asian.' Arts Council officers, US academics, venue managers and funding agencies were all implicated in this rebranding effort.³¹ Middle-class South Asian choreographers, such as Suba and Mayuri, helped to reinforce the notion of South Asian dance as hybrid, transnational, and separate from other 'black' or 'Asian' cultural practices. The 'South Asian' re-branding had a number of important implications. Firstly, it replaced 'black arts' and made

²⁹ In 1989, British Asian Muslims protested the UK sale of *Satanic Verses* (a book written by Indian-born Muslim Salman Rushdie and seen as blasphemous by Muslims around the world) by burning the book in public and vandalizing bookstores and publishing companies. The media depicted South Asians as unpatriotic, violent, and a threat to the British public, British values, as well as national security and unity. South Asians were racialized as foreign, inferior, dangerous, and abject within the media and the British national imaginary. This event in modern British history became known as the Rushdie Affair and soured already tense British-South Asian relations.

³⁰ Claire Alexander, *The Asian Gang: Ethnicity, Identity, Masculinity*, (Berg Publishers, Oxford and New York, 2000), xiii.

³¹ Avanthi Meduri, "The Transfiguration of Indian/Asian Dance in the United Kingdom: Contemporary *Bharatanatyam* in Global Contexts," *Asian Theatre Journal*, (Volume 25, Number 2, Fall 2008, pp. 298-328), 299.

Indian dance practices more visible not as a racialized practice, but as a geographic/regional tradition. It therefore helped separate South Asian dance from the highly racialized categories of 'black' and 'Asian' which had stigmatized South Asians up until then. The South Asian label also "functioned as an inclusive and democratizing category in the United Kingdom and made visible the dance forms of Indian/Asian minority communities living in Britain."³² In gathering Indian, Bangladeshi, Sri Lankan, and Pakistani communities under the same rubric, the South Asian label reflected the unique way in which Indian dance was practiced in the UK by all these various groups. Moreover, "[t]he South Asian label was transformative in that it transnationalized and hybridized the historical identity of Indian *bharatanatyam*."³³ Thus the semantic move to 'South Asian' was a way to shed the stigma of the category 'black' and 'Asian' under which South Asians had been racialized up until then, and make South Asian dance more mainstream.

As the previous incidents illustrate, the semantic move to repackage South Asian dance practices did not prevent South Asian dancers from experiencing racism. Being a part of a South Asian dance company in the UK definitively racialized me as British Asian, which meant that I was subject to a certain level of racism, exoticism, and misrepresentation. Dancing with Angika was more than a job then; it was an education in the contentious racial

³² Meduri 2008, 315.

³³ Meduri 2008, 298.

politics of modern Britain. It was in these bodily contact zones – theaters, festivals, studios - where Indian dance, Indian dancers, British Asians, and white British met, collided, and confronted each other that opportunities for intimacy between cultures and nationalities were created, but also moments of tension and contradiction between notions of race, nation, and identity.

“Working within the form:” negotiating authenticity and innovation through the British Asian female dancing body

The Sanskrit word *angika* means body. In the ancient theoretical treatise on Indian performing arts, the *Natya Shastra*, *angika* is one of the four types of expression, or *abhinaya*. It means to express through the body. The other three types of expression are *satvikam* (facial expression), *vachikam* (speech/narrative), and *aharyam* (decoration, including costume, make up, and jewelry). The sum of these modes of expression is supposed to create the ideal performance and is geared towards invoking an emotional response (*rasa*) in the spectator. Suba and Mayuri chose Angika as the name of their company in order to highlight their aesthetic and choreographic choice to focus on the body as a means of (abstract) expression rather than facial expression, storytelling, or external accoutrements. Mayuri suggests that by using “the symbolic gestures to mime lyrics/text in a stylistically formalized way I choose to become the thing being expressed through movement of the whole body and mind. This gives an accessibility so that audiences don't need to be fluent in 'reading' the bharata natyam movement language. I'd like them to see and wholeheartedly enjoy bharata natyam easily, as I do with any other

art forms such as painting, sculpture or other dance styles.”³⁴ She and Suba were concerned with making Indian dance universal, rather than culturally specific, hence the emphasis on embodiment rather than representation or narration.

To this end, in their hiring practices they sought dancers who displayed a strong technique in the physical aspects of the form, rather than the narrative or emotional aspects, which are also an integral part of bharata natyam. Being a contemporary South Asian dance company, it was also imperative for dancers to be able to unlearn, undo, take apart, and play with that classical foundation. The strong grounding in bharata natyam combined with the ability to experiment and be creative with the form was integral to Suba and Mayuri’s aesthetic direction for the company. When I first joined Angika, Suba and Mayuri, although they were not married to the traditional bharata natyam repertoire, format, or choreographic structures, they were adamant that they only worked “within the classical bharata natyam form.” Not only were they not trained in any other dance forms, they were not interested in combining bharata natyam with any other styles or techniques. Angika’s emphasis on experimenting within the classical dance vocabulary meant that there was a strong emphasis on bharata natyam training within the company. For each Angika project I was involved in from 2004 to 2008, the creation and rehearsal period began with a few weeks of daily, two-hour

³⁴ “Mayuri Boonham, Q&A,” <http://www.londondance.com/content.asp?CategoryID=3799> (accessed January 18, 2011)

classes with Mayuri and Suba's guru, Prakash Yadagudde, who they respectfully called "Guruji."³⁵ We would arrive at the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan in the morning in our jeans, scarves, and jackets, and, as per Guruji's dress code, change into practice saris and bindis and pay obeisance to him by touching his feet at the start of each class. Before beginning a grueling set of *adavus*, Guruji would often tell us to sit until the border of our saris touched the floor. This, apparently, was the ideal starting position. Because I was one of the taller dancers and had longer legs, my sari rarely touched the floor. I quickly learned to tie my sari lower than normal so that it would touch the floor, but this caused another problem - an exposed belly button - which was (unofficially) considered inappropriate. As a result, I would constantly be readjusting my *pallu* during class to ensure decency while pulling my pleats down to ensure I would not get admonished for not sitting enough and save my knees from undue pressure and strain to achieve a deeper *araimandi*.

Not wanting to draw attention to myself, I would generally stand at the back in part to avoid the direct gaze of Guruji and in part to be able to copy the movements of Suba and Mayuri in order to look more like them. Since all of Angika's dancers came from various parts of the world (US, Malaysia, UK, India) and were trained in different styles, training with Yadagudde (who taught the Pandanallur style) was a way to make us more synchronized. Coming from the softer Vazhuvoor style of *bharata natyam*, I

³⁵ Yadagudde, originally from Bangalore, moved to London in the 1970s to teach at the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, London's first cultural center for education in Indian arts.

would often be told to lift my legs more, make my head movements sharper, or swing my arms around faster. I lost the rounded curves and elegant softness of my previous training. Instead, I became more aggressive in my style, stomping harder, jumping higher, and spinning faster, in order to match the style of the other dancers in the company. But it was not always one way; we would also adopt the styles of the other dancers. Yadagudde would notice the way some of the other dancers did a particular movement and ask the rest of us to imitate that. We were asked, for example, to watch and copy one dancer who used her waist and hips, giving more curvature to the linearity of bharata natyam movements. The process of losing our individual styles and adopting a more hybrid one stripped us in part of our individuality and specificity as dancers. We were no longer recognizable as students of this guru or that, or experts in this style or that. As a result of Angika's transnational dancers, the way we moved and the vocabulary we drew on as a company became not only a conglomeration of many styles but also a unique movement aesthetic within the spectrum of British Asian dance companies.

After class, we would change out of our sweaty saris and air them out on the radiators in the large hall where we practiced. The saris were fine for traditional bharata natyam repertoire, but they were uncomfortable and restrictive, especially when wet with sweat, when it came to creating more experimental movement vocabulary. We were thankful to be free of the saris as they curbed our movements and our ability to stretch, extend, and

experiment with the form. Dressed in sweats and t-shirts, we would begin the creative process of choreographing. The question of how to innovate and experiment within the form, i.e. how to stay within the 'rules' of the form, while still making it innovative, modern, and accessible to a wider audience was always the starting point for developing the movements. Suba and Mayuri would set a task to be done either individually, in pairs, or as a group, depending on what section of the piece we were working on. Examples included: "as a group, make a sequence in a straight line using only footwork," "on your own, make a sequence that describes the various qualities of Durga,"³⁶ "in pairs, make a sequence that articulates only the top half of the body." Tasks would usually last fifteen to thirty minutes, followed by a sharing with the group. Suba and Mayuri would give pointers on how to re-work the sequence – speed up, slow down, lengthen, shorten, make it bigger or smaller, repeat, cut out, change levels – or they would combine individual sequences to explore complementary and contrasting movement qualities or different spatial arrangements and patterns.

The emphasis on working only within the form, while still trying to innovate with the form, meant that the line between what is and what is no longer bharata natyam had to be continually re-defined in the studio. Experimentation was encouraged but only up to a point. During the making of *Cypher* in the summer of 2008, four of the seven dancers were set a task to

³⁶ Durga is the embodiment of creative feminine force in the Hindu pantheon and was the conceptual inspiration for Angika's *Cypher* (2008).

choreograph movement that explored the shape and lines of an imaginary square in space. Each of us came up with a sequence that moved in a line from one corner of the square to the other. “Usha,” a dancer from Bangalore, slid her body along the floor, one arm outstretched in the *natya arambe* position. This transfer of a classic bharata natyam position to the floor, a plane normally not used in traditional bharata natyam choreography, led to a heated debate between Suba and Mayuri and the rest of the company as to whether this movement constituted an experimentation within or a radical departure from the form. Even though Angika’s previous work, *Ether* (2006), contained an entire floor sequence, Usha’s move to the floor was somehow a cause for concern in terms of the movement philosophy and aesthetics that defined the company. Because the company had built its reputation and ideology on working only within bharata natyam, the debate was not just a question of form but also a question of the company’s identity and uniqueness within contemporary British Asian dance, and therefore implicitly a question of the company’s ‘brand’ recognition, marketing strategy, and future funding.

Authenticity was negotiated and performed not just in the studio but also on stage. Before each show, we would chant *aum* on stage to sanctify the space, recite a prayer back stage, and do *namaskaram* together in the dressing room. These rituals not only lent a spiritual quality to the company, but also served to situate Angika’s work within a Hindu framework, and bolster the authenticity of the work as firmly rooted in bharata natyam and

Indian/Hindu traditions, despite the abstract nature of the work and the degree of experimentation and modification to the form.

The location of authenticity in the body/form/bodily rituals meant that Suba and Mayuri could bring in 'western' influences in other aspects of their choreography and production without losing the cultural capital of their identity as South Asian artists. While Angika carved out a niche for themselves by creating work that was distinctly South Asian and drew only on bharata natyam, the company's collaborations were very strategic and allowed them to break into and move fluidly within mainstream British dance circuits. Angika brought on mentors such as Jonathon Burrows and Russell Maliphant who are both well-respected contemporary dancers to give feedback on choreography, including suggesting the judicious use of repetition, juxtaposing music and dance, blurring transitions between sections, and playing with contrasts between movement, lighting, and sound; Angika's lighting designer, who was trained in western theater production and worked mainly with western dance and theater companies, would often bring lighting states for Suba and Mayuri to use as choreographic inspiration; Angika's costume designer made costumes for opera and theater and would take key elements from the traditional bharata natyam costume and transpose them onto more modern designs. The combination of maintaining 'purity' within the dance form and technique, but working with non-South Asian collaborators allowed Angika to maintain the authenticity of their South Asianness without being branded as traditional. It also gave their

performances the look of a professional, polished production, and made them more marketable to mainstream theaters and venues. This enabled them to easily and consistently secure funding from the Arts Council, whose policy agenda sought to increase funding for ethnic and minority artists but excluded traditional, community practitioners from applying.

State funding, according to the Arts Council, is intended to develop the professional South Asian dance artist, “[not] to replicate nor support existing or developing participatory community and grass roots activity.”³⁷ The Arts Council does not fund, for example, individual dance schools (such as The Bhavan where Suba and Mayuri trained), which specialize in training students in classical Indian dance forms. Innovation rather than tradition is seen as the cornerstone for developing a strong South Asian dance infrastructure.³⁸ This has set up an imbalance wherein South Asian dance practitioners who demonstrate innovation are funded and made visible within mainstream dance venues, while those who promote tradition and cultural heritage are marginalized to the community hall. While Angika toured nationally and internationally, the Bhavan, Suba and Mayuri’s ‘alma mater,’ continue to perform at community events and *melas*.

Angika’s emphasis on innovating within a traditional form allowed them to fill a gap in the South Asian dance market and increase their uniqueness and visibility. At the time that Angika formed, SJDC was already

³⁷ “Chaturang: a South Asian Dance Development Initiative,” (Arts Council of England, 1997), 1.

³⁸ “Chaturang” 1997.

moving into more contemporary dance circles. The company's work bore little resemblance to the bharata natyam form apart from an occasional *alapadma* or *araimandi*; Srishti, Nina Rajarani's company, did exciting ensemble work, but stayed within the framework of traditional bharata natyam aesthetics, vocabulary, costume, music, and choreography; and Akram Khan was working with kathak and contemporary dance. By only working within the vocabulary of bharata natyam, Suba and Mayuri separated themselves from their contemporaries, such as Jeyasingh and Khan, who drew more heavily on contemporary dance. By experimenting with contemporary choreographic structures, formats, music, lighting design and costumes, they separated themselves from community-level practitioners and more traditional choreographers like Rajarani who occasionally experimented with contemporary themes and group choreography, but were not interested in challenging the form. In this way, Angika carved out a niche in the British Asian dance market that retained their ethnic identity without being branded as traditional community performers, thus meeting the agenda of British multiculturalism and the Arts Council's funding goals of 'diversity' and 'innovation.'

Pushing innovation: shaping British Asian dance

Funding for South Asian dance is a relatively recent phenomenon. It began in earnest after Naseem Khan, an independent scholar, published a scathing report, "The Arts Britain Ignores," in 1976 that decried Britain's lack of support for cultural diversity in the arts. The Minority Arts Advisory

Service (MAAS) was established in direct response to the report to advise the Arts Council on ethnic and minority arts. Soon after, the Arts Council established a Cultural Diversity Unit to address the needs of minority artists in Britain.

In the late 1970s/1980s the first South Asian dance practitioners and organizations received funding from the Arts Council to carry out various projects. There was growing consensus that promoting ethnic and minority arts was a way to quell racial tensions, and at the same time a way to recognize the positive contribution of minorities to British society and culture and make Britain more inclusive. Government funding of ethnic and minority arts was seen as beneficial both for South Asian artists who had been marginalized from mainstream culture up until then as well as for the state which was concerned about social integration and national unity. The British government, and by extension its various bodies, including the Arts Council, began to place more emphasis on promoting shared norms and values, with an increasing focus on promoting the integration of minority groups, rather than the preservation of cultural heritage or tradition. Funders began to look inward at how to develop and promote South Asian dance practices within Britain rather than importing South Asian performance from the subcontinent.

In 1987/88, the Arts Council initiated a three-year development strategy for South Asian dance that encouraged innovation with regards to South Asian dance practices in Britain. This was further developed in 1997

with an initiative called “Chaturang,” another three-year South Asian dance policy agenda which “focused on the development of the professional dance artist, the establishment of networks and partnerships and extending the knowledge of South Asian dance both within and outside the dance profession.”³⁹ Some of the key objectives of the program were to strengthen the quality of work, support artistic professional development, provide management training for artists, develop audiences for South Asian dance, create regular and supportive performance circuits for South Asian dance artists, and develop new dance vocabulary. To this end, the Arts Council funded choreographic labs and workshops, research and development residencies, new commissions, showcases and platforms, and management training for South Asian dance artists. In fact, it was only after Jeyasingh set up her company in 1988, with the explicit aim to “produce imaginative, *innovative* and critically acclaimed work” (my emphasis) and offer “insights into the current and critical agendas of national identity and social integration,”⁴⁰ that her funding profile increased more than tenfold to roughly £100,000 a year.⁴¹ Jeyasingh “created a new *product* for the dance market, which the arts funding structure could recognize as fulfilling two objectives that it supported: innovative work and non-Western dance. This new product was both innovative in choreographic terms and yet rooted in a non-Western

³⁹ “Chaturang” 1997.

⁴⁰ *Shobana Jeyasingh Dance Company website*, www.shobanajeyasingh.co.uk (accessed January 7, 2011).

⁴¹ Ajimal and Jasper 1996.

tradition. This new direction...was rewarded with a rapid and successful rise in funding, status, and choreographic output.”⁴² (my emphasis).

In this way, the Arts Council determines who/what gets funding and who/what does not get funding, where South Asian dance is seen, and by whom. Some South Asian dance artists have lamented that “companies in receipt of regular funding [have] much easier access to the wider dance infrastructure and [can] raise their profile whereas those who [are] either less well-funded and unfunded [are] easily excluded from those circuits.”⁴³ In short, funding has raised the profile of some South Asian dance artists, namely those who demonstrate ‘innovation’ and an engagement with their ‘Britishness’ within their work, while marginalizing traditional, community and popular South Asian dance practitioners.

Angika benefited from the Arts Council’s policy of innovation with regards to ethnic and minority arts funding and was able to sustain a ten-year career thanks to state funding. In 2008, the company was awarded Regularly Funded Organisation (RFO) status, which funds more established companies for three-year blocks. Sustained long-term funding of contemporary South Asian dance has generated new labor markets for South Asian dancers. With more funding, companies have been able to hire more dancers, and for longer periods at a time. Angika, for example, was able to go from making duets to making dynamic ensemble work as a result of an increase in financial support

⁴² Ajimal and Jasper 1996, 11.

⁴³ Jarrett-Macauley 1997, 35.

from the Arts Council. Funding has also increased the number of dancers in the UK who are able to make a career out of dancing full-time, and has allowed dance companies to hire lighting designers, costume designers, managers and composers. This has increased the production value of South Asian work and made it more accessible and attractive to mainstream theaters and venues. Thus the Arts Council has not just been responsible for professionalizing South Asian dance in Britain; it has also been responsible for developing a new style of South Asian dance, making certain South Asian dance artists more visible than others, and determining the shape and growth of a specific kind of South Asian dance aesthetic.

When Suba and Mayuri dissolved the company in 2009, they had to forfeit their RFO status and its corresponding privileges. Suba recently re-applied to the Arts Council to be an RFO (now re-named National Portfolio Organisation) as director of Sadhana. Her proposal, however, was unsuccessful. This worries her for a number of reasons. After being in the field and making work in the UK for over ten years, she is still reliant on short-term funding through the Arts Council's "Grants for the Arts" program. While this was fine when she was younger and still making a name for herself, Suba now has a family and is looking for something more stable. The Arts Council has been a key player in the professional development of South Asian dancers and choreographers. Although, "[i]n percentage terms South Asian dance still receives very little from the integrated funding system in

comparison with other dance forms,"⁴⁴ the Arts Council is nevertheless the single largest funder of contemporary South Asian dance in the UK. With relatively few sustainable commercial outlets, South Asian performance, unlike film, visual arts and literature, remains particularly reliant on the state arts funding system.⁴⁵ Most companies, in fact, would not survive without Arts Council funding.⁴⁶ Without sustained financial support from the Arts Council, Suba tells me she will have to reconsider her long-term career options.

Suba is not only worried for her future in South Asian dance, but also for the future of British Asian dance more generally. SJDC is currently one of the only British Asian dance companies being funded regularly by the Arts Council. Although Jeyasingh draws on bharata natyam, the company's connection with the form is tenuous. None of her dancers are trained in bharata natyam and there are only faint traces of the bharata natyam vocabulary visible in her work. Without regular state funding, Suba wonders what will happen to the evolution of bharata natyam. Who is going to ensure its continued practice in the UK? Once so integral in the early funding and

⁴⁴ Jarrett-Macauley 1997, 11. According to an inside source at the Arts Council, South Asian dance accounts for about 4% of the total Grants for the Arts spent on dance.

⁴⁵ "The Arts Council's 1994/1995 corporate plan - Annex 2," 4.

⁴⁶ According to the UK Parliament website: "Very few of the organisations within the dance sector would survive without a basic level of regular subsidy. It may be possible to tour, and perhaps deliver education programmes reactively but it would be impossible to create new work without Government investment." "Funding of the arts and heritage," *UK Parliament website*, <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201011/cmselect/cmcumeds/writev/464/083.htm> (October 14, 2010).

support of bharata natyam based dance companies, the state may now be responsible for its potential disappearance or, at the very least, its stagnation.

Racializing the British Asian dancing body: authenticity and the role of white bharata natyam dancers

While Suba and Mayuri have been adamant about hiring only well-trained bharata natyam dancers, they have not excluded hiring non-South Asian dancers. Many of Angika's dancers were white. Bharata natyam dancers such as "Justine" and "Rose" were valued for their strong technique. Suba and Mayuri were more concerned with corporeal authenticity than racial authenticity. Moreover, it was also easier to get work visas for white bharata natyam dancers, rather than dancers from India, since they usually came from the US or the European Union, where work visas were easier to obtain or not required at all. The inclusion of white dancers stripped the form of strict racial and cultural associations; moreover, it helped audiences to view Angika's work more as a contemporary work of art rather than a culturally and racially specific performance. Hiring white dancers also expanded the meaning, composition, and visual codes of South Asianness, and made the notion of race in Britain more fluid and flexible.

Within the company, the lack of racial intimacy between the dancers was compensated for by a strong sense of cultural intimacy with Indian/Hindu cultural mores, religion, and practices. Rose grew up in a Hindu sect; Justine was told on numerous occasions she was Indian in a past life because of how well she danced and how well she adapted to Indian

people and culture. In addition, most of the white dancers had trained for an extended period in India, lending them an authenticity that was betrayed only by their skin color.

Recently, however, Mayuri has departed from her previous practice of hiring only well-trained bharata natyam dancers. For her new company, Atma, she actively recruited contemporary dancers without any training in bharata natyam in order to see “how their bodies might push the form in different directions.” In August 2009, I worked with Mayuri to research and develop movement vocabulary for her first project with her new company. I was the only bharata natyam trained dancer. In addition to myself, Mayuri hired two contemporary dancers (“Chloe” and “Kate,” both English) and one ballet dancer (“Maya,” who was half-Italian, half-Indian). We experimented in the studio for a few weeks. The research and development phase culminated in a work in progress sharing at The Place in September 2009. Mayuri conducted technique class each day to introduce the other, non-South Asian dancers to the basic vocabulary of bharata natyam. Her emphasis was not on forcing the dancers to master the technique but on giving them enough vocabulary so that they could then experiment and play with the form in their own way. Chloe picked up the movements quickly and looked the most “authentic” in my opinion. She had the better *araimandi* and could hold her gestures and elongate her fingers properly. Kate could remember the movements well but her body did not adapt as well as Chloe’s. The movements and postures seemed cumbersome on her body. Maya struggled

the most to remember the steps as well as the technique. Despite being trained in another classical form, ballet, she was not able to maintain the lines and symmetry fundamental to the bharata natyam form. The others would follow my lead and would refer to me if they had questions. I would also put myself in front during class, sitting deeper, extending my arms further, holding my gestures tighter. Because of my training and skin color, I felt the expectation that I was the authentic body in the room and therefore had to be extra proficient in my technique.⁴⁷

On stage, however, it was a different story. After a work in progress sharing in Newcastle, where we were rehearsing for a week, a woman asked why Mayuri had chosen to work with two Indian dancers and two contemporary dancers. Because Maya was (half) Indian and darker-skinned, they assumed she was also trained in bharata natyam, even though she was clearly the least technically proficient. Similarly after a showing in London, another choreographer commented that she was impressed that the 'two contemporary dancers' picked up the bharata natyam style so well. Again, the assumption was made that Maya, being brown, was another bharata natyam dancer. Skin trumped kinesthetics to racialize her as an authentic, brown dancing body.

This was not always the case, however. On occasion, kinesthetics

⁴⁷ Here, I draw on Anna Scott's auto-ethnographic study of authenticity, race, and dance in the context of the studio in "Spectacle and Dancing Bodies That Matter: Or, If It Don't Fit, Don't Force It," in *Meaning in Motion: New Cultural Studies in Dance*, ed. Jane Desmond, (Durham: Duke UP, 1997), 259-268.

trumped skin color in racializing dancers as authentic. For the making and touring of *Sivaloka* (Atma Dance Company), Mayuri hired three bharata natyam trained dancers (two of South Asian origin, one white) and one white contemporary dancer. Mayuri told me proudly that no one could tell the white contemporary dancer, “Elisa,” was not bharata natyam trained; no one questioned her authenticity because of her race because “she picked up the movements so well.” It also helped that Elisa looked almost identical to the other white dancer, Justine, who has over ten years of bharata natyam training. This visual trickery meant that it was difficult to distinguish which was an authentic body and which was not. In any case, the fact that the bharata natyam movements looked comfortable on Elisa’s body was more important than skin color in allowing her to pass as ‘authentic.’

The complex intersection between race, kinesthetics, and notions of authenticity was brought the fore again during rehearsals for *The Shiver* (Sadhana Dance Company) in 2010. For the first time in my dance career, I was the only brown bharata natyam body in the studio (apart from the choreographer, Suba). Although the other (white) dancers trained for many years in bharata natyam, I couldn’t help feeling that as a person of South Asian origin I should be considered a more authentic representative of Indian dance and culture. I would position myself at the front during morning warm-ups and technique class and offer up my advice on the way an *adavu* should be done. During a workshop I conducted with Irene, I took the lead and recited the *shollakattu* (rhythmic syllables) for the students. I was out of

practice, though, and couldn't say the right syllables in the right time. The students were confused and I tried to gloss over my mistake, but Irene noticed and took over reciting the syllables. I had to admit she was more fluent and comfortable saying the *shollakattu* than I was; her rhythm was more accurate; and the students could follow along easily. Having recently trained in India, her knowledge of bharata natyam pedagogy was far superior to mine. In the studio, the story was similar. Suba would often ask us to "watch Rose" or "do it like Rose." Having been a dancer for Shobana Jeyasingh's company, Rose's bharata natyam form and technique were given greater credibility and legitimacy. She was the gold standard to which we strove. Where did this leave me? Next to Irene, who was a young bharata natyam dancer who only recently finished her training and was therefore more familiar with teaching practices, and Rose, who was more experienced and had worked for more prestigious British Asian dance companies, I was the least authentic, knowledgeable, or experienced bharata natyam dancer in the room despite being older, having more years of training, and being the only brown bharata natyam dancer.

White bharata natyam dancers, such as Rose, however, have often felt inauthentic within South Asian dance companies. Recently, over brunch together, Rose told me how she has "become increasingly aware that her skin color is a problem" in getting dance jobs. In March 2011, she auditioned for Cirque de Soleil for a part which draws on exotic, orientalist movement tropes and has been played in the past by South Asian female dancers. Rose was told

that she did not get the part because although she had the right bodily training, she was the wrong skin color for the role. Similarly, she was discouraged from auditioning for the role of a South Asian female dancer for a contemporary physical theater company based in London, because the choreographer was looking specifically for brown women for his new production on multiculturalism and identity. I auditioned but was also unsuccessful. Although I fit the part in terms of ethnicity and skin color, I did not have a strong enough contemporary dance background. While the choreographer was looking for authentic South Asian bodies in terms of skin color, he was not interested in working with dancers trained in South Asian dance styles. For him, racial authenticity was located in the way the body looked, and not in the way it moved. "Shankar," a dancer from Bangalore, has also expressed to me on a number of occasions his frustration with multiculturalism in the arts and the constraint of not fitting into a neat, definable racial or ethnic box. Although he is from India, he is not trained in any Indian classical dance style; his movements draw largely on contemporary dance and some kalaripayattu. He has lamented to me that because his movement style does not match his skin color within the strict codes of British multiculturalism, he has found it difficult to get parts in dance companies or secure funding from the Arts Council. These contradictions between skin color and bodily training in casting South Asian dancers lay bare the fluid construction of racial/ethnic/cultural authenticity, and the way

in which skin color and movement intersect to racialize South Asian dancers in the UK in complex and contradictory ways.

Choreographies of seduction: sexiness as a strategy of intimacy

“Flirt with the audience. Play with them a bit more. Seduce them. Leave your gaze a bit longer.” Wait? Did I hear that correctly? You *want* me to seduce the audience? You want me to exaggerate my female sexuality for the pleasure of the spectators? Didn’t I just spend the last few years studying about and trying to deconstruct the exotic Indian dancing girl? And here I am being asked not only to use, but to play up that exotic femininity. The most surprising part is that I am being asked to do this not by a white choreographer, but by Suba. For *The Shiver*, we (Suba and the dancers, including myself) are working on what we have labeled internally “The Pleasure Section.” The piece delves into the emotions of pleasure and pain and the ambiguous line between them. This section forms part of a “Pleasure Cycle,” a scientific term for the cycle that begins with anticipation or desire, moves on to the sensation of pleasure from the consummation of that desire, and ends with the feeling of satisfaction after attaining the object of desire. There is nothing innocent about what we are doing on stage. Suba says we could theoretically be talking about a piece of chocolate cake, but it is clear we are invoking sexual desire, climax and gratification to choreograph this section. I oblige. I leave my gaze longer, tilt my head coyly, stick my hip out more, glance over my shoulder, and arch my back. I tease. I smirk. I flirt with

my eyes. This is science after all, right? This is choreography. And I am in control of how I want the audience to perceive me so it's ok. Right?

Flirting/seducing the audience and playing with their gaze has been a feature of Suba and Mayuri's work, as a company and as independent choreographers. In *Urban Temple* (2006), one reviewer noted how we "sashay upstage, hips swaying gently and looking over [our] shoulders like classical Indian pin-ups."⁴⁸ The movement of our Indian hips turned us into exotic "pin-ups" to be desired and gawked at. Costume design, in particular, has been a key part of Suba and Mayuri's "choreography of seduction." The sleeveless tops and form-fitting skirts in *Urban Temple* accentuated the curve of our hips and waist. Skin was also an important component of the costume. The costumes revealed key body parts. The loose, open-back tops in *Bhakti* were designed to reveal the lower back and midriff. The transparent slit in the long, hugging dresses in *Ether* was intended to show off our legs and hips, and the one-shoulder feature, inspired by the sari, accentuated our shoulders and necks. *The Shiver* costumes, comprised of a fitted halter top and transparent, three quarter length harem pants, were also designed to reveal just a sliver of our midriffs when we stretched or bent backwards and accentuate the shape of our hips, thighs and calves.

The publicity material for Angika's productions also accentuated the seductive prowess of the British Asian female dancing body. Mayuri and Suba (though Suba less often) were frequently pictured with their hair down

⁴⁸ Donald Huterer, "Angika," *The Times* (March 27, 2006).

and whipping around their faces or flowing across the page as they spin, twirl, jump and lean. Long, black wavy locks lend the image of these Indian dancing women an air of wild, dynamic abandon combined with a rootedness in tradition as they strike a perfect *bharata natyam* pose. They were often in dynamic, seemingly impossible positions, one jumping in the air in a perfect *aramandi*, the other balancing on a perfectly raised *swastikam*. In some digitally enhanced photos, Suba and Mayuri are re-positioned in space so they look as if they are able to fly or leap to superhuman heights. Most contemporary South Asian dance artists today employ professional designers to design their promotional material in order to appeal to mainstream theaters, promoters, and audiences. In the 1997 "Review of South Asian Dance in England" commissioned by the Arts Council, the need "to inform venues and promoters about South Asian dance, using appropriate language and visual material in the marketing process"⁴⁹ and the use of more imaginative visual aids to promote dance were cited as possible ways to increase the visibility and broaden the mainstream appeal of South Asian dance. The dilemma of how to increase the profile of South Asian dance within the mainstream without denying South Asian dance's particular strengths and roots⁵⁰ is solved neatly in this kind of image. Angika's photos marketed the Indian dancing woman as feminine, exotic, and sexy, something to be viewed and consumed - rather than feared - by the white British public. Through

⁴⁹ Jarrett-Macauley 1997, 45.

⁵⁰ Jarrett-Macauley 1997, 46.

choreographies of seduction and sexiness, their work created a sense of (imagined) intimacy between South Asians and white British audiences.

The intimacy of work: the studio as home, the dance company as family

While on stage the company was making work that helped bridge divides, in the studio things were beginning to fall apart. In 2008, Angika disbanded. It felt like a divorce, a family breaking up. What happened? Could they not work it out? Was it amicable and mutual? Was it sudden or thought through? Would there be work for us? Would we have to take sides and only work with one of them? As a friend of both Suba and Mayuri, I would get emails from my dance “sisters” asking me if I knew what happened. We (the dancers) had sensed there was some unspoken frustration between the two choreographers but the disintegration of the company was completely unexpected. Angika was in its tenth year and had just been made a Regularly Funded Organisation (RFO) of the Arts Council, which guaranteed them approximately £80,000 a year with which to run the company. Their work had been getting more and more sophisticated, riskier, and more well recognized, both nationally and internationally.

I suggest that Angika’s break up reveals what happens when flexibility reaches its breaking point. It also suggests that, as a state funded company, there are limits to intimacy as the basis for work.⁵¹ The friendships we formed over the years, and in particular the ten-year friendship between Suba and

⁵¹ I thank Anthea Kraut for helpful conversations on analyzing the break-up of Angika in terms of intimacy, flexibility and its limits. While I have gestured towards it here, this is an area that needs further theorization.

Mayuri, could not withstand the pressures to produce, perform, and conform to the state's funding regulations. The Arts Council's investment to turn dance companies into RFOs comes with increased monitoring and control of the company's work in both artistic and financial terms. RFOs are tied to the state through a contract, or 'funding agreement,' that governs the Arts Council's relationship with regularly funded companies. In order to receive long-term funding, for example, the state requires RFOs to come up with long-term business plans, concrete ways to increase the size and diversity of audiences, and strategies to grow the company in terms of profits and visibility. RFOs are assessed each year "for artistic quality, management, finance and public engagement" and are subject to annual reviews.⁵² As a condition of their continued funding, RFOs are also required to provide annual submissions, outlining the company's progress in terms of touring activities as well as "staffing, financial statements, number of performances, exhibition days, film screenings and educational activities and known and estimated audiences for these activities."⁵³ The annual submission documents are used not only to provide evidence of how Arts Council funding is being utilized, but also to report to the British Government and other key stakeholders.

⁵² According to the UK Arts Council's website: "Organisations are monitored for artistic quality, management, finance and public engagement. Each area is scored one of the following: met – outstanding, met – strong, met, potential, not met. Organisations are also monitored for risk. Risk is measured as high, medium or low, under the headings of: governance and management, operational, financial, environmental, compliance, and overall risk," <http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/funding/regular-funding-organisations/> (accessed August 7, 2011).

⁵³ <http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/funding/regular-funding-organisations/annual-submission/> (accessed August 7, 2011).

The financial structure of RFOs is built on a business model.

Companies are subject to a contractual agreement with the state that governs what kind of work they will perform, for whom, and where. Such a top-down business model did not align with the much more collaborative, small-scale, and grassroots way in which Suba and Mayuri ran their company, Angika. In the studio, the dynamics were much more akin to a small, family-run business than a big corporation. While more well-known British Asian choreographers, with greater resources, visibility, and clout, keep refreshing their pot of dancers by letting go of and hiring new dancing bodies to expand their movement aesthetic and ensure their choreography stays innovative and fresh, Angika chose to build a close intimate network of dancers, often re-hiring dancers, including me. In short, they privileged familiarity, friendship, and loyalty over the promise of new and virtuosic dancing bodies.⁵⁴

As an all-female dance company,⁵⁵ we formed a unique bond and close friendships with each other on and off stage. The fact that our work environment was also a homely environment was an integral part of fostering intimacy between the women in the company. Rehearsals were held in Mayuri's studio at the back of the home she built and shares with her husband. We worked from 9am to 5pm with a one-hour lunch break. Lunch hour was a particularly enjoyable time for female bonding. We would all

⁵⁴ I thank Priya Srinivasan for helpful conversations and insights on intimacy, labor, and dance.

⁵⁵ Angika began and continued to be throughout its existence an all-female dance company. Though it is more common for South Asian dancers to be female, SJDC and AKDC employ both male and female dancers in equal numbers, while Srishti has largely employed only male dancers. Thus, the fact that Angika remained staunchly women-centric was unusual even for British Asian dance companies.

traipse up Mayuri's narrow iron staircase that led up to the kitchen. We would warm up our food in her microwave, usually leftovers from home or packaged Indian food from the local grocery store. Our conversations inevitably revolved around food – "What did you bring?" "How did you make that?" "Can I try some?" "You *must* give me the recipe." Who was the best cook was always up for debate. Some days it would be me; other days we would agree "Anita" was the most creative or Suba the most authentic cook. Conversations about food would trail into conversations about men, families, and relationships. Usha couldn't use the kitchen at her host family's home. Her boyfriend in India was worried about her. Anita's boyfriend was chatting online with another woman. I met a guy I liked a lot but he hadn't called me yet. Justine's boyfriend wanted her to become vegan but she was struggling to give up her beloved biscuits. Mayuri's husband was off to Australia for an extended period of time to work on sculpture for a church in Sydney, and she wasn't looking forward to being apart from him for so long. Suba was thinking of moving in with her boyfriend but he lived outside London and she didn't want to give up her flat. We would all offer our advice and opinions. We collaborated in the studio, but we connected in the kitchen over food, friendship, and love.

The camaraderie fostered in the studio was reinforced on the road when we were on tour. We shared rooms, ate together, traveled together by train, and did tourist-y things together when we found the time. Being an all-female group and often traveling to remote places or late at night, we would

look out for each other. For us, all migrant dancers, far away from home and without any relatives in the UK, the company became like family. Being a part of the dance company provided financial as well as emotional support.

Moreover, because dancers came from all over the US, Europe, and Asia, working together day in and day out helped build an international professional and personal network amongst the dancers that outlasted the life of a particular production and continued even after the last tour date.

Since first meeting in 2003, Suba and I have met up regularly outside the studio, to watch performances, catch up on life, or chat about dance. We have confided in each other and helped each other through important and difficult times in each of our lives. She: the break up of Angika, the decision to get married, the joy of having a child. Me: the death of my father, the start and end of my marriage, and the loss of my grandmother. She has become more than a boss and artistic collaborator; she has become one of my closest friends in London.

Suba recently had a baby. She was heavily pregnant during the making of her company's last production, *The Shiver*, and while touring had to manage with a three-month old baby at home. On a grey, January day, I visit her at her home in the countryside just north of London. Her husband picks me up from the station and takes me to their house a few minutes down the road. In the car, I catch him up with all the latest news about my love life, my holiday, my family, and my travel plans for the next few months. When I arrive, Suba's in the kitchen feeding her son his dinner of potato, parsnip and

broccoli puree. The first thing I do after greeting Suba and wishing her a happy new year is pick up her son. He has changed so much since I saw him in November when we were on tour. He flashes me a smile, as if he knows how cute he is. She is feeding him and will soon get him ready for bed. They have finally got him into a routine, but she laments that she barely has time to read and respond to work emails let alone exercise and get back in shape. We catch up on life events over the past month or so since we last saw each other. There is talk of engagements, marriages, and divorces; newborn children and orphaned children; newfound friends and the painful loss of others. We catch up on the lives of mutual dance friends. "Did you know Justine is teaching Anita to dance tango in the forests of Kerala?" I ask her. "And, Angela is coming to visit from Berlin and is in a new production about Carmen;" "I'm going to see Rose dance with the English National Opera in February;" "Did you hear that Irene got the choreographer's residency at Sadlers Wells?" "Have you seen the clip of Nina's new work with an aerial company?" Our chatter centers around other people's lives. It is how we have always communicated. Suba's husband points out before we sit down for dinner, "Do you realize that all your conversations are about someone else?" In our defense, we say it is not gossip, we are just catching up about mutual friends and acquaintances. But it is our way in to talking about important things in our lives, such as love, work, family and friendships. Gossip is not just ontological, it is epistemological, a mode of knowing and interacting. Gossip is a useful part of the process of certain ethnographic encounters, not just a

byproduct of them. Paradoxically, gossip creates intimacy and trust between friends.⁵⁶

There is a negative side to this intimacy; while it builds closeness, it also has the potential for serious breeches of trust. Intimacy can often lead to greater betrayal. During the making of *The Shiver*, concerns over crediting and labor were raised by me and the other dancers. The choreographic process relied on the dancers to come up with material and organize it in time and space. We not only generated original movement but were also responsible for choreographing sections of the piece. Suba would set us tasks with directions such as “make a movement sequence based on the last time you shivered,” “make a trio based on an experience of pain that moves in a diagonal,” “make a standing duet with your backs to the audience,” or “make a contact duet in which each movement is a reaction to the other person.” Directions were open to interpretation not just in terms of the type of movement, but also in terms of timing, duration, pace, and spatial arrangement. Suba would instruct us to “play with,” “extend” or “edit” the sequence. But more often she would be happy with what we made and move on to another task. As a result we, the dancers, were given a lot of freedom to interpret the directions in whatever way we saw most appropriate and interesting to us. While at times the lack of clear instructions was frustrating,

⁵⁶ See Roger Lancaster’s book *Life is Hard: Machismo, Danger, and the Intimacy of Power in Nicaragua* (Berkeley, CA: U of California Press, 1994) for a lengthier discussion on gossip and ethnography.

it was also liberating and gave us more ownership over the movements and the work more generally.

These days, it is rare that dancers are taught movement by the choreographers. The distinction between dancer and choreographer has become increasingly blurred in today's contemporary South Asian dance economy. Choreographers draw more and more on tasks set on dancers to create the work; they exploit dancers' different trainings and bodily histories to develop their particular style or aesthetic. In other words, the choreographer's style/ stamp is constructed out of dancers' bodies. This contribution, however, is rarely recognized formally. As Anthea Kraut notes, "choreography" is an oft-contested term because of the power and privilege it can confer.⁵⁷ Influenced by such scholarship on dance, race, labor, and copyright, I began to wonder: where does dance labor end and choreographic labor begin? Is choreography just a question of authority, recognition, and power? Or is there a definable role that differentiates the two? Who owns my movements? How is my labor recognized (or not)? How is it hidden or disguised? Where is it revealed?

In a previous version of this chapter, I had included a critical analysis of the discussion with Suba about crediting and labor, and its significance in terms of choreographic copyright, power, and ethnographic authority. Weeks later, I went back to what I had written and omitted parts, rewrote others, and

⁵⁷ Anthea Kraut, *Choreographing the Folk: The Dance Stagings of Zora Neale Hurston*, (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2008).

held my finger on the backspace button until some sections were gone entirely. The program notes, however.....small, but significant difference..... disempowered.....silent.....choreographic decisions.....original movement material.....power.....more than just bodies.....question of capital....reluctant to acknowledge...modes of remembering and recording.....oversight.....difficult to broach.....

Although I think it is a valid exercise to theorize my labor as a dancer, it is not something I have ever discussed personally with Suba, apart from our initial conversation. I was concerned that I was misconstruing her side, or using the dissertation as a platform to have the last word. I was afraid I would betray my friendship with Suba. My personal and professional relationship with another choreographer had already suffered a setback because of a perceived betrayal of trust. I could not risk losing another friend and colleague. While the dance company was a nurturing and empowering feminine sphere, I knew that the intimacy generated in the blurring of our personal and professional lives also had the potential to lead to feelings of betrayal and breeches of trust. I was worried what Suba would say if she read it. Would she feel betrayed? Would she be offended? Would she want to even talk to me after? The answers to these questions were too grave to contemplate, the breach of trust too big to fathom. In the end, I made a decision that my friendship was more important to me than offering a critical perspective on dance, labor, copyright and power; I chose to sacrifice

disclosure for intimacy. What remains now is only silence, the dot dot dots, and the lingering questions marks left by the things I cannot say and cannot mention.

As Kamala Visweswaran argues in her essays on feminist ethnography, “partial knowledge is not so much choice as necessity.”⁵⁸ In my dual roles as friend and ethnographer I have felt doubly accountable to my subjects; it has been necessary to censor information that would be damaging both to my subjects as well as my relationship with my subjects. The silence that stands in for betrayal, however, does not necessarily signal the impossibility of a feminist ethnography or my unwillingness to speak out; rather it can be read as a form of resistance and “a marker of women’s agency.”⁵⁹ Like Visweswaran, who argues that “acts of omission are as important to read as the acts of commission constructing the analysis,”⁶⁰ I believe that what is not said can offer an important critique on feminist ethnography and the complex negotiations and accommodations I, as a woman and an ethnographer, make between intimacy, friendship, authority, silence, and betrayal. This ethnography, with its silences and omissions, has been driven by love, and a care for the lives of my subjects and my relationship with them. It is formed by an ethics of intimacy that delimits the contours of my analysis. As a partial narrative, in the sense of being both

⁵⁸ Kamala Visweswaran, *Fictions of Feminist Ethnography*, (Minneapolis, MN: U of Minnesota Press, 1994), 50.

⁵⁹ Visweswaran 1994, 50.

⁶⁰ Visweswaran 1994, 48.

incomplete and biased,⁶¹ it ultimately challenges a masculinist approach to ethnographic research that purports to offer objectivity, truth, and wholeness.

Conclusion

There are a number of complementary factors that led to the development of professional companies such as Angika in the last few decades. Postwar immigration from the Indian subcontinent radically changed the racial demographics of Britain, and led to increasingly anti-South Asian immigration legislation; violent, racially motivated clashes between South Asians and native (white) British; the rise of racist right-wing political parties; and a resurgence in nationalist fervor during the latter half of the 20th century and early part of the 21st century. This created a politicized community of British Asians, including South Asian dancers who were keen to make their voice heard as *British* citizens and prove that they belonged just as much as the white British population. The state, through the Arts Council, began a concerted effort in the 1980s to promote ethnic and minority arts as a way to potentially quell racial tensions and integrate Britain's ethnic communities after decades of social unrest. The Arts Council introduced cultural 'innovation' within its funding guidelines for ethnic and minority arts, which encouraged South Asian dancers to create 'hybrid' work that reflected their identity as both British and South Asian. Government funding of the arts created new professional opportunities for South Asian dancers

⁶¹ Portelli 1998, 73.

and generated new audiences for South Asian dance, which helped build and sustain a contemporary South Asian dance economy.

A British Asian dance economy has emerged over the last few decades largely through the concerted efforts of key South Asian female women who were important not only in turning South Asian dance from a hobby to a profession, but also in making South Asian dance a central part of British cultural life and lobbying for the visibility of South Asian dance on mainstream stages. Many women, including Suba and Mayuri, successfully secured government funding, launched South Asian dance companies, supported the development of professional dancers, made innovative South Asian dance works, toured them nationally on British dance circuits, and built an enthusiastic British following. Through the companies they founded, they have also provided professional dance opportunities, and generated a community of professional, South Asian dancers.

Focusing on Angika's performances of femininity and the close relations between women dancers in the company, this chapter has used the framework of intimacy to examine issues of race and citizenship in the UK from a different, more personal perspective. As a dancer, friend, and ethnographer of Suba and Mayuri, I have been witness to and part of these intimate encounters. On stage, in the dressing room, and in the studio, I have seen how Angika created intimacy between performers and audiences, as well as between the dancers themselves. While intimacy connotes a deeply private, localized, and personal emotional relationship with the other, its

wider implication and impact on race, citizenship, identity, and labor should not be dismissed.

I suggest that the timely emergence of female-led contemporary South Asian dance companies in the 1990s, such as Angika, and their flexible dance practices helped heal the deep racial wounds of previous decades which had created more distance than intimacy between (white) Britons and South Asians. In their capacity as cultural intermediaries, Suba and Mayuri helped negotiate the tensions between race and citizenship and satisfy both the demands of state multiculturalism to manage and contain diversity as well as South Asian desires for representation, visibility, and recognition within mainstream British culture. Praised for their 'hybrid' performances that blended 'classical' Indian dance with a contemporary British sensibility and performing for largely white middle-class audiences around the country, Angika forged a new British Asian identity, one that retained the exoticism and authenticity of ethnicity without the threat of otherness. Through their work, British audiences indulged in a sanitized version of South Asianness on stage that displayed the brown body as feminine, exotic, hybrid, and flexible, countering more hegemonic notions of the brown body as masculine, threatening, absolutist and extremist. Funded and supported by the state, Suba and Mayuri were, to an extent, ambassadors of British Asian culture who presented South Asians in the best possible light – ethnic, but modern; feminine, but strong; exotic, but accessible – and soothed postcolonial anxieties about South Asians (men in particular) in the UK. Thus South Asian

women performers such as Suba and Mayuri have been more than just entertainers; they have been central in promoting an image of Britain as a tolerant and diverse nation against a backdrop of increasing state paranoia and violence towards the South Asian body politic.

As international migrant dancers, many without any family or friends in the UK, working for Angika was also where we created long-lasting bonds. Practicing, choreographing, rehearsing, performing, and touring together created important friendships between the dancers. Through these intimate personal relationships, we also forged a transnational network of professional dancers, which opened the door for performance opportunities, international collaborations, artistic exchanges, and creative dialogues. The dance company was more than just a workplace; it was a family and we looked after each other as friends and colleagues.

CHAPTER TWO

Between Stage and Street: South Asian Male Dancers and the Staging of British Asian Masculinities in an Era of Global Terror

On July 7, 2005, four British men - three South Asian Muslims and one Jamaican-born British resident who converted to Islam – travelled south from Leeds to London by train. Closed circuit television footage shows the four men, “who led apparently ordinary lives,”¹ entering Luton train station, just outside the capital, on a typically gloomy, English morning. They look unassuming in their average, urban youth attire of jeans, T-shirts, and baseball caps as they pass through ticket barriers on their way to London. At around 8am, during morning rush hour, they strapped explosives to their chests, hopped on red double-decker buses and boarded trains on the underground subway system, and exploded themselves throughout different locations in central London, bringing the public transport system to a halt as well as killing themselves and over fifty commuters. While the threat of Islamic terrorism was nothing new in 2005 - the fears sparked by the September 11th attacks on New York and Washington DC in 2000 and the Madrid suicide bombings just one year earlier in 2004 were still palpable and fresh - what was different and more worrying about 7/7 was that it was carried out by British-born South Asians.

¹ “The bombers,”
http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/shared/spl/hi/uk/05/london_blasts/investigation/html/bombers.stm (accessed May 23, 2010)

Like the Rushdie affair in 1989² and the Bradford Riots in 2001,³ the 7/7 attacks called into question the allegiance of Britain's South Asian/Muslim communities to the nation. The failures of British multiculturalism and the spectacle of the brown man as the violent 'enemy within' loomed large as news spread that the suicide bombers were 'homegrown.' The public was shocked to realize that "[t]he killers are not terrifying monsters, but the kind of lads you see on the streets of any British town any day of the week."⁴ The British Asian suicide bombers demonstrated that allegiance to a transnational

² On February 14, 1989, the Ayatollah Khomeini issued a *fatwah* on Salman Rushdie, an Indian Muslim author, for the publication of his now infamous book *The Satanic Verses*, which the Ayatollah claimed was incendiary and blasphemous. Though most British Muslims publicly denounced the *fatwa*, the media latched on to stories of a small number of British Muslims (particularly men, who were the most visible, public protesters) who rioted in the streets of urban centers across the country, protesting the sale of the book in UK bookstores. Images of young, brown men, angry and "out of control" across the UK and the Muslim world were featured in newspapers and on televisions, sparking new debates on Britishness and citizenship. Not only did the Rushdie affair position the Muslim community and the government in opposing camps, it also pitted Muslims across the world against western secular liberalism, more widely, thus forging or at least consolidating and strengthening a collective, transnational Muslim masculinity.

³ Questions of South Asian men's allegiance to the nation re-surfaced in 2001 when on July 7th South Asian youth in Bradford, a working class city which has the second greatest population of South Asians in Britain, began rioting amidst rumors that the National Front, a far-right party that was banned in 1985, was to hold a meeting in the city. The Bradford riots were historical in the number of arrests and sentences made. There were 297 arrests in total. 200 jail sentences totaling 604 years were handed down, even though the majority of the accused handed themselves in to the police and had no relevant previous convictions. The number of sentences, in fact, was the most given for any one incident in British history. The image of "the foreigner within" and "the enemy amongst us" was fostered in and perpetuated by the media. Debates around the "failures" of multiculturalism and the need to define and reinstate "British" values became more and more urgent and pertinent to local and national politics. The government commissioned the Community Cohesion Review Team, chaired by Ted Cante, to investigate the cause of the riots as well as make recommendations for the future. The result was the Cante Report, which listed deep-rooted segregations between the South Asian and white communities and the failure of local authorities and institutions to address the root causes of racism as some of the reasons for the riots. Some of the recommendations made in the report included finding a more meaningful concept of citizenship, making immigrants take an oath of allegiance setting out a "clear primary loyalty to this nation", and engaging in an open and honest debate about multiculturalism in Britain. "Race Reports at a Glance," *BBC*, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/1703432.stm>, (December 11, 2001).

⁴ Jonathon Freedland, "Behind the banal street scene, a picture of devastation that will change our fears," <http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2005/jul/18/july7.uksecurity2> (July 18, 2005).

Muslim identity superseded allegiance to a British one, thus putting the terms of citizenship and the meaning of Britishness into crisis.

The rise of homegrown, Islamic terrorism reinforced the “folk devil”⁵ image of South Asian men, and led to two major shifts in the politics of race and citizenship in the UK. First, in the immediate aftermath of the attacks, established Muslim communities in Britain came under increased scrutiny, including invasive government surveillance and monitoring. Seemingly random police checks were carried out on young, brown men in public spaces;^{6,7,8} CCTV surveillance was increased in predominantly Muslim neighborhoods;⁹ police raided the homes of ‘suspicious’ Muslim men;¹⁰ and the government approved the use of control orders, which placed British citizens suspected of terrorist activity or associating with terrorists under indefinite house arrest without trial.¹¹ Unable to be deported or assimilated,

⁵ Claire Alexander in *The Asian Gang: ethnicity, identity and masculinity* (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 2000, xiii) argues that the idea of the violent ‘(South) Asian Gang’ has gained currency in and through the media as well as academia, which has latched on to notions of ‘South Asian criminality’ and turned South Asians into Britain’s ‘folk devil.’

⁶ “Ladies and rucksacks,” <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2005/aug/15/transport.july7> (August 15, 2005).

⁷ Jonathon Freedland, “The identity vaccum,” <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2005/aug/03/race.july7> (August 3, 2005).

⁸ “Terrorism Act 2000,” http://www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2000/ukpga_20000011_en_1 (Part V: Counter-terrorist Powers).

⁹ Paul Lewis, “Police under fire for Muslim CCTV surveillance scheme,” <http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2010/jun/18/muslim-cctv-scheme-police-row?INTCMP=ILCNETTXT3487> (June 18, 2010); Robyn Brant, “Birmingham CCTV system leaves police trust in tatters,” <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-10888985> (August 6, 2010).

¹⁰ “Questions over London terror raid,” http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/5066846.stm (June 10, 2006).

¹¹ Dominic Casciani, “Q&A Control Orders,” <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-12108075> (January 3, 2011); Dominic Casciani, “My life under a control order,” http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/8092761.stm (June 10, 2009).

Britain's South Asian/Muslim population has essentially been placed under a state of 'internal exclusion'¹² over the last decade.

In addition to limiting the mobility of British Asian men, there was a renewed fervor in the private and public sector to promote Britishness and coerce immigrant communities to integrate into mainstream British culture and adopt British values. Policies of British multiculturalism were heatedly contested in the media^{13,14} and politicians proposed revoking citizenship and the right to remain in the UK of those "who make it clear that they do not recognise any allegiance to [the UK], and could constitute a threat to national security."¹⁵ Citizenship and Britishness became increasingly, and more explicitly, equated with whiteness.

While on the street South Asian men have been vilified and constructed as the 'enemy within,' on stage South Asian male dancers have been praised for their performances and their contribution to contemporary British dance. Akram Khan, a young British Bangladeshi Muslim man, has

¹² Etienne Balibar, "Difference, Otherness, Exclusion," *parallax* (2005, vol. 11, no. 1, 19–34). Etienne Balibar argues that internal exclusion "has been repeatedly proposed as a *common structural feature* of all traditional forms of racism which survives their institutional critique and keeps producing discrimination, stigmatization of groups and preferential violence, [and] comes from the fact that globalization as such has, at least in principle, no exterior, a basic characteristic that it derives from its capitalistic market basis, and which is only reinforced by the working of political boundaries as mainly instruments of security and control of the flows of populations with absolutely unequal status and rights. In such a global space you cannot have external places for Otherness, you can only have ubiquitous 'limbos' where those who are neither assimilated and integrated nor immediately eliminated, are forced to remain" (31). In the UK, South Asians/Muslims occupy this uncertain, unstable 'limbo' position. They can neither be assimilated nor expunged; instead, they are subjected to various forms of internal exclusion/exile.

¹³ Michael Howard, "Talk about the British dream," <http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2005/aug/17/july7.politics> (August 17, 2005).

¹⁴ William Pfaff, "A monster of our own making," <http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2005/aug/21/july7.terrorism> (August 21, 2005).

¹⁵ Howard 2005.

risen to stardom in the last ten years and has been particularly praised for his work *zero degrees* which tackles notions of home and citizenship; *Faultline*, about post-7/7 British Asian men, is one of Shobana Jeyasingh's most successful and longest touring works; Nina Rajarani's *Quick!*, about cut throat South Asian business men in London, won the coveted Place Prize which recognizes the best of British dance. These works, which present South Asian men as safe, socially integrated, flexible British Asian citizens, counter popular (mis) conceptions of British Asian men as anti-British fundamentalists who reject assimilation.

In this chapter, I draw on these three choreographers - Jeyasingh, Khan, and Rajarani - and examine the way in which they construct the flexible South Asian male body in performance. I am primarily interested in the relationship between the racialization of South Asian men on the street and the performance of British Asian masculinity on stage, and the contradictions between the rhetoric of multiculturalism and the reality of racism. Employing various tactics, each choreographer, I suggest, deploys the South Asian male body in ways that soothe public anxieties about the movement of brown men in the public sphere and in ways that are assimilatable and acceptable within the bounds of British multiculturalism. While the labor of South Asian male dancers is mobilized to perform citizenship, South Asian male dancers as racialized labor are not afforded the same rights and privileges as (white) British citizens. Looking at the *labor of transnational dancers* as well as *dancers as transnational labor* lays bare not only the contradictions between race and

citizenship that converge at the nexus of the brown male dancing body, but also the flexible tactics employed by dancers to navigate these contradictions. I argue that examining how we read the South Asian male body in both these contexts sheds light not only on how South Asian men are racialized in complex and contradictory ways in the UK, but also how it is through flexible dance practices that the threat of the British Asian male body is made safe for public consumption.

To this end, I use both choreographic analysis to ‘read’ dances on stage, as well as ethnographic and historical accounts to ‘read’ dancing bodies off stage. In this chapter, I occupy the role of ‘ethnographer as spectator’ rather than interviewer or participant observer. As an ethnographer, there are multiple ways to embody the role of spectator. At times, we are wallflowers, standing back and observing the crowd at a performance.¹⁶ Sometimes we are spies, eavesdropping on conversations and jotting down notes in the dark. And at other times, we are unruly spectators,¹⁷ letting our minds wander away from the task at hand.

In this chapter, I take on these modes of spectatorship as well as another type of ethnographic engagement: gossip mongering.¹⁸ Some of my information about dancers comes from hearsay. Gossip is not trivial; it has an

¹⁶ For more on the ethnographer as wallflower, see Marta Savigliano’s “Gambling Femininity: Wallflowers and Femme Fatales”, in *Angora Matta: Fatal Acts of North-South Translation* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan UP, 2003).

¹⁷ For more on the ‘unruly spectator,’ see Priya Srinivasan’s *Sweating Saris: Indian Dance as Transnational Labor* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple UP, 2011).

¹⁸ I have tried to highlight these modes of spectatorship through the use of italics within the body of the chapter.

important function in society. In South Asian dance circles in London informal networks of communication are responsible for disseminating gossip as well as information about auditions, performance opportunities, artistic collaborators, and potential funding. As a friend and colleague to many dancers and choreographers in the UK, I am not only privy to gossip, I also occasionally spread gossip and use it as a form of information exchange. Like the numerous CCTV cameras that dot the urban London landscape, I too capture images and snippets of conversations, drawing conclusions and making assumptions based on incomplete data. Rather than negate the validity of this kind of dance research, I have chosen to include gossip in order to draw attention to the way in which the brown male body has increasingly become an object of surveillance by the nation-state. Gossip highlights the voyeuristic public gaze that South Asian male bodies are subjected to, and makes both the reader and me complicit in suspect surveillance practices. At the same time, gossip, as a more underground form of communication that functions below the radar of hegemonic structures of power,¹⁹ offers an alternative, contradictory viewing of brown male bodies, and opens up the possibility for brown bodies to speak back. In this way, I seek to highlight both the violence of gossip as well as its potential to counter hegemonic constructions of race and citizenship.

¹⁹ Roger Lancaster, *Life is Hard: Machismo, Danger and the Intimacy of Power in Nicaragua* (Berkeley: U of California Press, 1994), 74.

Shobana Jeyasingh: Parody as flexible practice

Faultline is one of the Shobana Jeyasingh Dance Company's (SJDC) longest running productions. Three years after it premiered in 2008, it continues to receive state funding to tour both nationally and internationally. The work directly addresses public stereotypes and pre-conceived notions of brown men, but also parodies them and in so doing makes the perception of South Asian men benign. Marta Savigliano argues that parodies are not necessarily associated with humor and can, in fact, be humorless, dark, and subversive.²⁰ Similarly, I suggest that the function of parody in *Faultline* is not to make fun, but to subvert and 'soften' the violent associations with South Asian men. In this way, *Faultline* allays fears about the 'unruly,' potentially violent South Asian male body in the public sphere.

Faultline is inspired by Gautam Malkani's book *Londonstani*²¹, which is a fictional account of a gang of South Asian youths in London. Released one year after 7/7, it was hyped as a "native" portrayal of the kind of young, brown man who might become involved in fundamentalist activities. Like *Londonstani*, *Faultline* is meant to be a direct though not as literal response to the uneasiness of being young, brown and male in a post-7/7 era. It is clearly, as one dance critic notes, about "the tensions and public anxieties surrounding Asian youth culture in Britain."²² Although the cast is evenly

²⁰ Savigliano 2009, 244.

²¹ It is one of a number of recent books about British Asians. Others include *Tourism* (2006) by Nirpal Singh Dalliwal and *Brick Lane* (2003) by Monica Ali.

²² Sarah Wilkinson, "Review of Bruise Blood/Faultline," <http://www.thestage.co.uk/reviews/review.php/25990/bruise-blood-faultline> (October 25, 2009).

split – three female and three male dancers – *Faultline* is more “about the men, how they move, how they look, how they talk, how they live.”²³

In addition to Malkani’s book Londonstani, Jeyasingh was inspired by the experiences of some of her male dancers in the aftermath of 7/7, many of whom were stopped and searched under the Terrorism Act both within Britain and when coming into the country.^{24,25} Shankar, one of the Faultline dancers complained to me that even though he is married to an EU national and has a spousal visa, he still gets stopped at the airport – “Where is your wife?” “Why isn’t she with you?” “Do you ever travel together?” When he goes through border control, he feels nervous and guilty even though he has not done anything illegal. As a South Asian male traveling alone, he is treated with greater suspicion. As South Asians from outside Britain, Shankar and I often discussed being brown in Britain but not feeling British Asian. He said that when he first came to London, he was oblivious to racism. But he soon learned that being brown was not looked highly upon by some people in the UK. He has been made to feel different in the UK because of his skin color and nationality. It is most palpable, he says, at airports and on the street. In London, he has learned not to go into certain neighborhoods or pubs where he might encounter racial violence. To

²³ Sarah Frater, “Faultline has fragmentary feel,” <http://www.thisislondon.co.uk/theatre/review-23388152-faultline-has-fragmentary-feel.do> (March 8, 2007).

²⁴ At the performance of *Through the Looking Glass, Brightly* (Queen Elizabeth Hall, London) on April 12, 2011, Jeyasingh was asked by journalist Yasmin Alibhai-Brown about how and why she created *Faultline*.

²⁵ Section 44 of the Terrorism Act gave police the right to stop and search. It was passed in 2000 but has been implemented more forcefully since the terrorist attacks in 2005. In January 2010, the European Court of Human Rights ruled that section 44 breached Article 8 (the right to privacy) of the European Convention. However, the British government felt that stop and search was an important power in countering terrorism and appealed the decision. While its use continues to be hotly contested, it is nevertheless still practiced.

many South Asian men, it is (some) white people who are the object of fear and suspicion. It influences where they choose to live and where they socialize. While on stage South Asian men have been mobilized through multiculturalism and globalization, they have also been curbed and restricted in significant ways that have shaped their mobility and movements off stage.

Faultline opens with a black and white documentary-style film projected on a large screen on stage.²⁶ The film features two young, South Asian men on the streets of London. The subjects seem unaware of the camera. At times, the men appear in the shadows, heightening a sense of mystery and suspicion for the viewer. The framing of these bodies as suspicious is further reinforced by the grainy, black and white look of the film reminiscent of CCTV footage. In this way, the film establishes the South Asian male body as an object of surveillance and fear.

Panning down to show a typical outer city London street with its iconic rows of white-trimmed Victorian terrace houses, the film locates the South Asian men firmly within a contemporary, British, suburban/outer city context. *South Asians have been expelled from the national imaginary in quite physical, literal ways through immigration and citizenship legislation; they have also been marginalized from the national imaginary through rhetoric and public opinion. Nick Griffin, the leader of the British National Party,²⁷ proclaimed, "London is no*

²⁶ The film was commissioned for *Faultline* and directed by Pete Gomes.

²⁷ The BNP used to be called the National Front and was a racist, fascist political party in the 1970s and 1980s. It has since renamed itself the British National Party, but it still espouses racist, fascist politics. In the last decade, it has been gaining political power.

longer British,"²⁸ implying that London had been ethnically cleansed of white people by a massive influx of immigrants. *The Daily Mail*, a right-leaning British newspaper, wrote earlier that same year that the children and grandchildren of immigrants should not be considered "British."²⁹ I think to myself: they are happy to eat a curry on a Friday night and dance to some bhangra beats at the local club, but we still remain outsiders, un-British. According to the director, Pete Gomes, the technique of layering images – the young men, the terrace houses, and residential streets – was used to make reference to more current events, namely the police raids that were occurring around the UK at the time on homes in largely Muslim neighborhoods in the years following 7/7.³⁰ The film was shot on the streets of Brick Lane in East London and Southall in West London, both of which are known for their well-established South Asian populations as well as being the sites of important anti-racist protests and riots in the 1970s and more recently gang violence.

When I first came to the UK, I was fascinated by the political history of South Asians in the UK because it was so different to my own history. British Asians seemed much more political, more visible within the national imaginary; it was also evident that they were also more overtly discriminated against than South Asians in the US. When I lived in East London (2002-2005), I would occasionally pass by the

²⁸ Nick Griffin said this on October 22, 2009 on Question Time, a news program in which a panel of politicians, artists, commentators field questions about current affairs from the audience.

²⁹ Sunny Hundal, "Apparently, I'm not British," <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2009/feb/26/daily-mail-immigration-britain> (February 27, 2009).

³⁰ Shobana Jeyasingh, *Faultline Education Pack* (London: Shobana Jeyasingh Dance Company, 2007).

Altab Ali Park in the neighborhood of Whitechapel. Ali was a 25-year old Bangladeshi clothing worker who was murdered near Brick Lane in the late 1970s by white skinheads. The area soon became the site of protests and demonstrations by Bangladeshi men and women against racism and discrimination. These events politicized the Bangladeshi community in East London, giving rise to the Bangladeshi Youth Movement as well as informal South Asian youth gangs. Southall, a largely Indian Punjabi area, has also been the site of infamous anti-racist protests and demonstrations. In 1979, Blaire Peach, a teacher and anti-racist activist, was killed after being knocked unconscious by police during a protest against a National Front rally in Southall. Two years later, amidst simmering racial tensions between the South Asian population and right-wing fascists, a race riot ensued after neo-Nazis and skinheads attacked South Asian youths. The associations of Brick Lane and Southall with gangs, violence, and young South Asian men on the streets of British towns and cities are deeply embedded within the national imaginary and cultural memory of Londoners. The choice to film in these two historic locations is thus strategic, political, and emotive, and is meant to link a particular geography (the outer city and suburban streets) with particular bodies (young, brown men) and a particular set of associations (fear, suspicion, violence, and terror).

The camera pans across the bodies of the two young men. There is no voice or music. The lack of sound adds an element of tension, a fear of the unknown. It also reinforces the visibility of the spectacle, and forces us to focus more closely on the appearance and body language of the two men. They dress in baggy jeans, white sneakers, and tracksuit jackets, all of which

have become by now signifiers of the young, outer city, British Asian man. They walk with a stylized, sloping swagger and a raised chin, trying to look 'hard' in case there is any potential trouble round the corner. One of the men seems angry and begins arguing with the other. He gestures rapidly and cocks his head in a show of confrontation and arrogance. The film ends with the two men about to cross the road. Without a clear dénouement, there is an uneasy tension about what might happen next, an artistic maneuver that plays on our pre-conceived notions of brown men as dangerous and suspicious.

If the film makes us anxious about the presence of "another, shadowier, Britain,"³¹ the dancing eases our fears. As the film finishes, three South Asian male dancers appear in front of the screen. Whilst the dancers seem to have walked off the film and onto the stage, there is a clear contrast between the male dancers and their celluloid counterparts. Jeyasingh's urban men are confident and hard working while the South Asian men in the film are conflicted and "mutinous," as evidenced by the burnt-out car that features in the film.³² According to one reviewer: "This duality is conveyed not only in the contrast between the film and the live action, but also in the movement style, with a kickboxing bravura alternating with looser Western moves and

³¹ Jenny Gilbert, "Review of Shobana Jeyasingh Dance Company, Queen Elizabeth Hall, London," <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/theatre-dance/reviews/morphoses-the-wheeldon-company-sadlers-wells-london-brshobana-jeyasingh-dance-company-queen-elizabeth-hall-london-brjames-thirre-barbican-theatre-london-1808817.html> (October 25, 2009).

³² Frater 2007.

Asian accents.”³³ Another reviewer also observes, “[t]he vocabulary of martial arts is also in evidence, but this is less combative than self-assertive.”³⁴ Moreover, we now see the South Asian male body within the safe confines of a black box theater rather than the unpredictability of an open, urban street, which has traditionally been associated with riots, suicide bombings, and gang violence whenever occupied by young, South Asian men. The natural divide that a proscenium stage sets up between performer and spectator further mitigates a reading of their bodies as threatening.

Through the choice of costume, a clear distinction is also made between the filmic and dancing bodies, and we are urged to read the dancers’ bodies in a different manner to South Asian men on a suburban British street. The dancers are dressed in black trousers, black button-down shirts, and brightly colored ties, their appearance more reminiscent of a corporate business executive than the young men in the film. As one reviewer notes: “The first story is told in film, a black and white grainy fragment of two Asian youths hanging around on the streets of what must be west London. They look bored and potential trouble. The live dancing tells the second story, one of confident metropolitans with slicked hair and sharp threads.”³⁵ Based on the men’s appearance on the street versus the stage, the reviewer makes a clear judgment between those who look like “potential trouble” and those

³³ Frater 2007.

³⁴ Luke Jennings, “Dirty deeds in Eden,” <http://www.guardian.co.uk/stage/2007/mar/11/dance> (March 11, 2007).

³⁵ Frater 2007.

who look like “confident metropolitans.” Whilst dress and clothing may seem trivial to a discussion of terrorism and violence, I argue that they are integral to a discussion of the spectacle of South Asian masculine subjectivity, which has increasingly relied on surface readings and snap judgments where things such as clothing become heightened signifiers of danger and difference.

Peter Hopkins argues that clothing has become an important signifier of violence and terror in the aftermath of 9/11 and the subsequent wars on Afghanistan and Iraq.³⁶ In the last decade, men’s traditional Islamic dress has become increasingly associated with religious fundamentalism and terrorism. In the UK context, I would argue that after 7/7 and the endless circulation of CCTV images of the suicide bombers, it is the suburban/outer city ‘uniform’ of baggy trousers, tracksuit bottoms, trainers/sneakers, baseball caps, and hooded sweatshirts that mark out the young, unruly South Asian man. The choice of the suit, therefore, is not casual or without significance. The suit, with its connotations of the west, capitalism, and global finance, dissociates the male dancers from the spectacle of the young, brown male hanging out on the street corner, and aligns them instead with the image of the corporate executive or city banker. In a sense, the suit brings the South Asian male body metaphorically out of the suburbs and margins of society, and into the financial heart of the city. As most of the suicide bombers and suspected terrorists have come from the suburbs of London or smaller British towns, it is

³⁶ Peter Hopkins, *The Issue of Masculine Identities for British Muslims After 9/11: A Social Analysis*, (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2008).

the outer city that has become the site of perceived danger, while the 'inner city' of London, occupied by city bankers and corporate executives, is considered safe. In talking about her choice to dress the dancers in suits and ties, Ursula Bombshell, the costume designer, writes: "The men are wearing the metrosexual uniform of the modern media world, exuding an air of slick confidence associated with this urban tribe."³⁷ Not only does the suit, then, confine the male dancers to the familiar space of the metropole, but it also tempers a reading of their bodies as hypermasculine and aggressive by turning them into "metrosexual" men, a term that has come to be associated with an ambiguous, more effeminate heterosexual masculinity.

The lighting is also a key device in re-framing the South Asian male dancers as performers to be looked at and enjoyed rather than objects to be surveyed and feared. In what I call the "paparazzi moment," the lighting simulates the flash of a camera and frames three male dancers in concentric boxes of light. Promotional material on *Faultline* states: "the trio of boys are framed in four squares of light, which enlarge in size growing outwards from the dancers who are freeze-framed, almost photo-framed, in an enclosed space growing to a larger snap-shot."³⁸ This idea of the "snapshot" suggests the dancers are consciously posing for the spectators, rendering the scene more playful than provocative, more full of attitude than aggression. This notion of the snapshot also makes us, the audience, into active participants in

³⁷ Jeyasingh 2007.

³⁸ Jeyasingh 2007.

the spectacularization of the brown male body. The lighting in fact was designed to give the effect of zooming in on the dancers in the first section and panning out on the dancers in the last section. We are the camera, the ones taking the picture, the ones looking at these bodies, not a CCTV camera or police surveillance. The South Asian male body is made safe for public consumption by turning the surreptitious act of surveying into a pleasurable act of looking.

Faultline further soothes public anxieties about the South Asian male body by taking movements that would otherwise be censored, surveyed, and deemed threatening in the public sphere and turning them into a parody of masculine bravado, thus making them permissible and even innovative on stage. The movements in *Faultline* draw on the gestures and postures of the stereotypical, young British Asian lad on the street. In the opening section, we clearly see the incorporation of pedestrian, street gestures such as the nonchalant “brush off,” the arrogant “shirt pull,” the confrontational “what are you looking at?” or the threatening “come on, I can take you” into a movement phrase. *The dancers had a hard time embodying the typical posturing and bravado of British Asian young men. One dancer who was gay found the choreography too heterosexual, too masculine. It didn’t suit his body, he said. Two other dancers found it difficult for other reasons. Both from India, they were not familiar with how to act like British Asian men. They had to watch videos and observe South Asian men on the street. They copied their walk, gestures, attitude and body language in order to create the movement material for Faultline.*

Another foreign South Asian male dancer from the original cast was unable to perform in subsequent tours of Faultline because he was deported to his country of origin. There was a lot of speculation around his sudden departure. I heard from some people that he was kicked out because he overstayed his work visa; some said he got involved in illicit activities; others told me he left because he hadn't paid taxes. The degree of rumor-mongering reflects the way in which brown men are perceived, first and foremost, as threatening and suspicious within the British national imaginary. In the immediate aftermath of 7/7, for instance, plain-clothes police pursued Jean Charles de Menezes, a young, Brazilian man, at a London underground station. At first the media reported that he was of a terrorist of Middle Eastern origin. Police claimed de Menezes was confrontational with the plain clothes' police officers, and that he made a move that indicated he might try and shoot the police officers. Later, after the initial sea of speculation, it was revealed that de Menezes was unarmed, he did not resist arrest, and was running away probably because the officer's were in plain clothes and therefore he was merely protecting himself. Instead of apprehending or questioning him, they shot him seven times in the back because they mistook him for a suspected suicide bomber. His death attests to the general climate of paranoia and fear after 7/7 around brown, male bodies in public spaces, and the desperate need to curb their movements at whatever cost. Gossip and speculation surround the brown body and shape their mobility.

Whilst the dancers' movements are meant to reference the aggressive gestures and stances of brown men on the street, they become in fact an abstract, stylized caricature of violence and danger. Jeyasingh cites hegemonic

constructions of brown men while simultaneously subverting those stereotypes by parodying the movements and body language of British Asian male youth. She uses parody as a choreographic strategy to confront public perceptions of brown men as well as undermine their validity.

Through particular framing devices, aesthetic choices, and choreographic strategies, the spectacle of violence and terror of the South Asian male body on the street is turned into a harmless sequence of masculine gestures, postures, and stances. The performance of bravado on stage caricatures the South Asian male, reducing him to a series of macho rituals and posturing. Here, on stage, the brown male body is no longer an object of aggression to be surveyed and policed but rather an object of entertainment. Against the backdrop of increasing paranoia and fear surrounding the South Asian male body on the streets of British towns and cities, *Faultline* uses the labor of South Asian male dancers to choreograph an alternative, more benign British Asian masculinity. Through parody and flexible choreographic strategies, *Faultline* addresses while still challenging the public perception of South Asian men. In so doing, she makes the brown male body safe for public consumption. Nevertheless, if the male dancing bodies on stage soothe public anxieties surrounding South Asian men in the UK, the actual dancing bodies in *Faultline* tell a different story of continuing suspicion, discrimination, and violence. Examining dancers as transnational labor shows the complicated arrangements and accommodations between multiculturalism, migration,

capital and nation, which interrupt, curb, and restrict as well as force, enable, and accelerate the mobility of racialized labor.

Akram Khan: Ambiguity, Liminality and Moving In-Between

My research on Akram Khan is based on archival research, choreographic analysis, and gossip/hearsay. I made a conscious decision not to interview Akram Khan for a number of reasons. Firstly, I was intimidated. I admit it. When I moved to London in 2002, Khan was just beginning to make a name for himself in the British contemporary dance world. As a dancer and choreographer in London, I came into contact with others who knew him. His name would pop up often in conversation. "Have you seen his new work, *Ma?*," "You have to check this guy out. He's unbelievable!," "He's the next big thing!" He was a legend in my mind before I ever saw him on stage. His star quality made me awe-struck and I knew that an interview would not be fruitful because I would find it difficult to be critical and discerning about someone I knew more intimately. Not interviewing him gave me the distance I needed to contextualize him and his work within the cultural politics of South Asian dance. Secondly, there was so much material available on him already in the public sphere from documentaries to DVDs to interviews, reviews, and newspaper articles. I became interested in how he was mythologized in the archive and the national imaginary. Thirdly, he was so polished and careful about his public persona. I thought a formal interview would not reveal anything I did not already know (even if this may not have

been true). So, instead, I immersed myself in the choreography of Khan as a public persona and iconic figure.

In the nine years I lived and worked in London (2002-2011), Khan went from an emerging talent to an international superstar. The speed and magnitude of his success has been incomparable. Today, he is perhaps the most well known, highly acclaimed, mainstream British Asian dancer-choreographer at home and abroad. He formed his company only in 2000 and made his first touring work, *Rush*, that same year. Khan's stellar rise to fame in the last decade, I argue, is not accidental or coincidental. As a young, South Asian Muslim male, Khan, his work, and his recent and sudden success must be examined in relation to the increasing racialization and radicalization of brown/Muslim men. Taking a Foucauldian view that subjects are not produced purely through their own agency, talent, or hard work, but by the social, political, and cultural conditions present at a particular moment in time, I ask: what were the conditions that allowed Khan to rise so quickly to fame?

I suggest that Khan's success is in part due to the way he re-choreographs a 'softer' British Asian masculinity that the white mainstream public is comfortable with by fashioning himself into a safe, postcolonial other. He does this in three distinct ways: by constructing a biography of self that aligns him in strategic ways with a white, mainstream public while still maintaining a position of comfortable alterity; by situating himself as a citizen that is both British and Bangladeshi, simultaneously inside and outside the

boundaries of the nation; and, by consciously shifting and moving between invisibility and hypervisibility in terms of his racial identity. In short, Khan's flexible choreographic maneuvers allow him to occupy a liminal space of privileged marginality from which he is able to re-negotiate the terms of how the young, brown male body is viewed in the UK.

To illustrate my argument, I draw on two of Khan's most well known works, *zero degrees* (2005) and *in-I* (2008). I examine how Khan deftly maneuvers between a Muslim masculinity, on the one hand, and Britishness/whiteness, on the other, in order to retain the cultural capital of his ethnicity while at the same time distancing himself from a hegemonic Muslim masculinity. It is not just through his staged choreography but also through the construction of his identity off stage that Khan constructs himself as a safe, postcolonial other. I suggest that Khan's public performances of self, what I call "auto-choreobiography," in TV and newspaper interviews, panel discussions, post-show talks, and documentaries equally constitute an important meta-performance or meta-narrative that arches over Khan's work.

"Auto-Choreobiography"

Khan is in his mid-thirties. He is a second-generation British Bangladeshi Muslim man, born and brought up in London in the 1980s and 1990s. In photos and public appearances, he always has a shaved head and often sports a goatee. His features are sharp, his eyes intense. He is often seen wearing a black hooded sweatshirt (often with the hood up), baggy jeans, and a dark leather jacket, looking very much like the average young, British Asian

male who has become so feared and vilified in recent years in the British and international media. He learnt kathak from Pratap Pawar from the age of seven, and went on to graduate from DeMontfort University in Leicester with a bachelor's degree in Dance and the Northern School of Contemporary Dance in Leeds with a postgraduate degree in Contemporary Dance. He served as Associate Artist at the Southbank Centre until 2005, the first non-musician afforded this status, and is currently Associate Artist at Sadler's Wells, London's most prestigious venue for contemporary dance.

In nearly all of his publicity materials and public engagements, Khan is described or describes himself as British Bangladeshi rather than the more common moniker British Asian. Khan's choice to label himself British *Bangladeshi* is significant. On the one hand he makes himself hypervisible, i.e. Bangladeshi, instead of part of a collective South Asian identity. Through the term Bangladeshi, Khan marks himself out not only as ethnic and other, but more importantly Muslim. On the other hand, he makes himself invisible by aligning himself with the universal, all-encompassing label of British, a much more cosmopolitan, multicultural term than English with its connotation of whiteness. With this fleeting reference to a diasporic, hyphenated identity he positions himself within that in-between, fluid space of flexible citizenship. Even as he positions himself as a second-generation Muslim male, he positions himself as outside that stereotype, simultaneously inside and outside, moving between identification and dis-identification in relation to his religious and national affiliations.

Khan's early forays into dance were prescient. His first public venture into dance was at the age of ten when he played Mowgli in an adaptation of *The Jungle Book* produced by The Academy of Indian Dance.³⁹ *Did a friend of mine tell me? Or did I read it somewhere? Or did I hear Khan mention it? There is so much information about Khan circulating in the public sphere that it is often difficult for me to figure out where, when and from what source I have learnt something about Khan.* While it may seem trivial, the choice of highlighting his role in *The Jungle Book* is significant in positioning and racializing Khan in very particular ways. The story describes how an English forest ranger in India at the time of the British Raj, discovers a young man named Mowgli, who has extraordinary skill at hunting and tracking, and asks him to join the forestry service. Later the ranger learns that Mowgli was raised by a pack of wolves in the jungle, thus explaining the reason for his almost superhuman talents. In *Jungle Book*, Mowgli is adopted by an Englishman, a wild boy from the jungle tamed by western civilization. In real life, Khan is metaphorically adopted by an Englishman, the film director Peter Brooks, who after seeing Khan play Mowgli, cast him in his production of the *Mahabharata*. As with the story of *Jungle Book* that recounts the civilizing of the native, Khan's story of being given his first break by Brooks transforms Khan from a wild native into a safe, postcolonial subject, adopted, nurtured, and recognized by the white mainstream public.

³⁹ The Academy of Indian Dance, now known as Akademi, is a London-based South Asian dance development agency that was founded in 1979 by Tara Rajkumar and is headed today by Mira Kaushik.

In addition to Mowgli, Khan has also made reference to Michael Jackson a number of times in relation to formative influences and turning points in his life. At a post-performance discussion I attended, Khan cited Jackson as a seminal influence on his decision to become a dancer. As a young boy, he says he copied the dance moves, like many young boys and girls of his generation, while watching the music video “Thriller” over and over again in his living room. *I have heard (and overheard) a number of people, including other dancers as well as Khan (in interviews, panels, and documentaries), narrate the “Michael Jackson” story several times. The constant re-telling of this particular aspect of Khan’s early dance history was curious to me. What kind of cultural capital did it provide him? How did it shape the public’s perception of Khan? How have I too participated in the cycle of gossip and mythmaking, regurgitating the Jackson story for others and dissecting it here as ethnographic material?* The choice of Michael Jackson aligns Khan with a black pop star who is famous not only for his innovative and mesmerizing dances, but also for the physiological changes which he underwent to make himself look more and more white in order to fit into mainstream norms of beauty. It references another non-white man who, through a corporeal transformation, was able to cross racial and ethnic barriers to appeal to mainstream audiences both at home and abroad. By associating himself with Jackson, he references an internationally recognized pop culture icon, and thereby both universalizes his appeal and familiarity and distances himself from culturally specific signifiers.

Khan similarly dis-identifies with an Islamic identity and broadens his appeal by associating himself with the Hindu/spiritual aspects of kathak rather than the Muslim/overtly religious references. Kathak, having been practiced in the courts of Mughal kings and emperors, is a form that is highly influenced by Muslim culture. Yet, Khan's mythology-inspired productions draw exclusively on Hindu characters, such as Siva (*Kaash* 2003) and Queen Gandhari (*Gnosis* 2010). He is quick to specify that his work draws not just on Indian mythology, but specifically on *Hindu* mythology.⁴⁰ Although he has more recently drawn on Islam [*Vertical Road* (2010)], Khan drew on the philosophy and dances of Sufism, which is associated with a more spiritual, abstract, and esoteric side of Islam. In an age when the British Asian male is largely discussed with reference to Islamic fundamentalism and absolutism, Khan's fluid forays into Hindu mythology and universal spirituality set him apart from the presumed religious fundamentalism of Muslims in the UK.

Khan is able to steer between identities not only in his work, but also in his personal life. His ambiguous sexual orientation is often a topic of conversation/gossip. In the dance community, his recent divorce from a South African dancer fueled speculation once again about his sexuality. I am not interested in uncovering the 'truth' or spreading gossip for the sake of it. What I find interesting is how he occupies a liminal space even in his personal life that allows him to be viewed in multiple ways, and move in different circles. While the South Asian Muslim male is racialized as threatening, Khan's suspected homosexuality lends him an effeminacy

⁴⁰ *Gnosis*, Sadler's Wells theater in London (November 28, 2009).

that makes him less dangerous in the public eye. In this way, his ability to construct an ambivalent sexuality is another kind of flexible practice that helps him navigate discourses of race and citizenship in the UK.

As a story Khan chooses to tell and re-tell, Khan's personal biography and choices are as important a performance as the ones he puts on stage. The multiple iterations of his history circulate through various channels, including print, digital, and gossip, direct, indirect, virtual, and real, and influence how audiences read his dancing body. Through various flexible tactics, Khan positions himself within a sphere of comfortable alterity, as ethnic but not an extremist, making him a brown, Muslim man that the white mainstream is at ease with. This is true in how he chooses to narrate his personal history as well as in how he choreographs himself in his work.

Zero Degrees (2005)

On July 8, 2005, exactly one day after the 7/7 terrorist attacks, Khan premiered his work *zero degrees* at Sadler's Wells, London's most prestigious venue for contemporary dance, and coincidentally not far from one of the suicide bombing sites. The confluence of these two "performances" must be examined as more than just coincidence; both events inform how we read the brown, male body in motion. Media images and newspaper headlines would still have been fresh in the minds' of those men and women who attended the premier on July 8th. In the days following the attacks, Khan's choreography of a different performance of British Asian masculinity most certainly lingered in their minds as they returned to their homes and offices, discussed the 7/7

attacks with their families and friends, and debated the state of British multiculturalism and immigration in pubs and living rooms across the UK. *On the day of the attacks, London's public transport system was shut down. Many of us were stuck at tube stations, bus stops, and offices. Unable to get home, we headed to the pub to watch the news, converse with others about what was happening, and release some of the tension created by the terrible attacks. Amid 'stiff upper lips' and pints of beer, we discussed the day's event with a mixture of incredulity, sadness, and resilience – as well as fear and worry. White liberal friends of mine admitted that they would think twice now about getting on the tube or a London bus if they saw a young, South Asian/Muslim-looking man. British Asian friends felt that the progress made in the last ten years with regards to relations between South Asians and white British would be completely reversed as a result of the attacks. I argue that as a young, South Asian, Muslim male, Khan's stellar rise to fame in recent years must be examined in relation to a wider picture of increasing state paranoia and violence against the brown, male body in the UK and globally in the last decade, particularly since 7/7. Although Khan was already beginning to take the contemporary dance world by storm, *zero degrees*, which is arguably his most celebrated work to date, was the tipping point that pushed him into full-fledged stardom. One of the reasons for this, I argue, is the way Khan distances himself from post 9/11 and post 7/7 hegemonic representations of brown, British Muslim males through particular choreographic strategies employed in *zero degrees*.*

Zero degrees is the result of an artistic collaboration between Khan and Moroccan-Flemish contemporary dancer and choreographer Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui. Like Khan, Cherkaoui is a young, second generation Muslim man who grew up in Western Europe in the 1980s and 1990s during the tail end of a period of heightened racial tensions and inchoate multiculturalism. Both dancers have seen the increasing racialization of brown, Muslim men over the last few decades and were keen, with *zero degrees*, to show another face to the very negative, western-dominated representations of Islam in the media.⁴¹ *Zero degrees* draws on the true story of Khan's harrowing train journey from Bangladesh to India, during which he shares a carriage with a dead man and encounters suspicious border guards. Using dance and spoken word, the work reflects on citizenship, belonging, and the nature of cultural, national, and metaphysical borders.

I have seen zero degrees twice, both times at Sadler's Wells (London), where the work first premiered. I have also watched it in the comfort of my living room on DVD. Both viewing experiences, live and recorded, have furnished me with different but equally important information, insights, details, and impressions that I have used to construct the analysis that follows. One tends to be more instant and fleeting, while the other allows you to linger, pause, rewind, and fast forward; one is often fragmented, while the other can be more coherent and chronological. One is more amorphous and prone to memory lapse, while the other stays fixed as an object to

⁴¹ "Desi DNA," <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=th3H2h9uukY> (accessed May 30, 2010).

return to. These two viewings have informed my analysis, which is a mix of impressionistic, emotive responses to the work and more thoughtful, detailed analysis.

The piece opens with Cherkaoui and Khan sitting in identical poses, side-by-side, cross-legged at the front of the stage. They stare pensively and directly at the audience before recounting in perfect synchronicity the story of Khan's train journey. Their tone and cadence are so well matched that they sound like one voice. I think to myself how many hours they must have rehearsed in the studio to achieve this simple yet painfully precise effect. Their synchronized movements, gestures, and expressions make you think you are seeing double, two images of the same body. In Islam, there is the notion of the *ummah*, the collective body that links all Muslims around the world together in a transnational network of brotherhood. Through a technique of mirroring and reflection, Cherkaoui and Khan urge us to read their bodies as a collective unit, as two parts of the same Islamic whole. Be it Bangladesh, Britain, or Belgium, Cherkaoui and Khan suggest that all Muslims are connected by a religious identity that transcends national borders, a concept which in recent years has been manipulated and distorted by Al-Qaeda and other terrorist networks to recruit young, Muslim men and promote Islamic terrorism.

However, whilst Khan constructs this notion of a transnational collective Islamic identity, he also dismantles it by distancing himself from any pan-Islamic affiliations and highlighting, instead, his allegiance to a collective national identity, i.e. British. Khan's choice to use the story of his

journey from Bangladesh to India, I suggest, is not just experiential but also anecdotal. Once united under the British Empire, Bangladesh and India are now separate countries; the former, one of the poorest countries in the world, is dominated by a conservative, Muslim government while the latter is a secular, democratic nation with a booming economy. Through this strategic narrative in which he travels from Bangladesh to India, Khan forces audiences to map him along a more symbolic route from seemingly anti-modern Islam to western, liberal secularism. In this way, he eschews early on any pan-Islamic or fundamentalist reading of his body on stage.

In another scene, Khan narrates an incident on the train in which the border police confiscate the passports of all the passengers, including Khan's. He reflects on "how much information a passport holds" without which "you have no identity," emphasizing the many forms of capital a passport/British citizenship confers. Khan watches carefully as his passport gets passed from one guard to another. He says that because his is red (i.e. British) and the others are green (i.e. Bangladeshi), he is able to keep track of it more easily. At one point, however, Khan is no longer able to see where his passport is or who has it. Worried and indignant, Khan thinks to himself that he is a British citizen and will enlist the help of the British Council should the guards abscond with his passport. In these small details, Khan speaks volumes about citizenship and belonging. By contrasting his red passport with the green one of the Bangladeshi nationals and by reaffirming his status through his rights as a British citizen, Khan distances himself from a reading of him as

Bangladeshi, and therefore an outsider and instead plants himself firmly inside the nation as a legitimate British subject.

He marks himself out not only as British but also western. Having been on the train for hours and threatened with further delays from the border guards' extensive security checks, Khan becomes nostalgic for some modern creature comforts, including "MTV, running water, and a hot shower." Though he is of Bangladeshi origin, Khan longs for the West, signaling once again his allegiance and feelings of belonging to Britain. Towards the end of his train journey, Khan realizes that "it doesn't matter where you come from. When you go to someone else's country, you submit, you leave behind your rules." Not only does Khan construct Bangladesh as "someone else's country," Khan's comments also reference and sustain the prevailing discourse on immigration and citizenship in the UK, which, in the last decade particularly since 9/11 and 7/7, has abandoned the multicultural, 'salad bowl' model in favor of 'melting pot' strategies and policies to encourage South Asian, particularly Muslim, communities to *integrate* into mainstream, British (read: white) society.

Khan aligns himself with western modernity not only through spoken word and theater, but also at the corporeal level. He moves with ease from the precision of kathak to the fluidity of contemporary dance, blurring the boundaries between the two. The iconic rhythmic foot stamping of kathak shifts subtly into a sideways shuffle across the stage. The verticality of a

kathak *chakar* bends with a sudden release and curve of the spine.⁴² While in my own practice and as a dancer for a contemporary South Asian dance company I often struggle to undo my classical training, I envy the way both approaches to movement sit comfortably in Khan's body; neither seems like a foreign language. Ultimately it is not just his ability as a kathak dancer, but his ability as a kathak dancer to do contemporary dance that has allowed him to breakthrough the barriers that ethnic dance artists face. Through the flexibility of his bodily movements, he shows audiences that he has integrated his British and Bangladeshi identities as seamlessly as he has kathak and contemporary dance. In this way, he retains the cultural capital of ethnic difference without marking himself out as un-British or too foreign.

In this liminal space of privileged marginality, Khan is able to circumvent hegemonic notions of the young, Muslim male as violent and absolutist. While 7/7 reinforced an image of brown British men as terrorists and extremists whose affiliation with a collective transnational religious identity, i.e. Muslim, was fundamentally at odds with their affiliation with a collective national identity, i.e. British, in *zero degrees* Khan celebrates Britishness, integration, and western secular democratic values. In so doing, he constructs a British Asian masculine identity in which transnational and national allegiances are not in conflict nor mutually exclusive, but one in

⁴² For more information on the multi-layered significance of the upright spinal column Khan's work and kathak, more generally, see Royona Mitra's articles "Dancing Embodiment, Theorising Space: Exploring the 'Third Space' in Akram Khan's *zero degrees*," http://www.akramkhancompany.net/html/akram_essay.php?id=3 (accessed May 15, 2011) and "Cerebrality: Rewriting Corporeality of a Transcultural Dance," <http://www.digitalcultures.org/Library/Mitra.pdf> (accessed May 15, 2011).

which the two, British and Muslim, co-exist. In countering dominant notions of a brown, Muslim masculinity and offering an alternative way of reading British Asian male bodies, he enables (largely white) audiences to engage with the brown, male body in a non-confrontational manner. By deploying an exoticism that can be assimilated into the nation, Khan makes his work palatable within the bounds of British multiculturalism. This has also made him and his work highly marketable and accessible as a British cultural product.

In-I (2008)

Unlike *zero degrees*, *in-i*, which premiered at the National Theatre⁴³ on September 18, 2008, is possibly Khan's most criticized work. *I was discouraged by bad reviews and a hefty ticket price from going to see the performance. Friends who had seen it were uncompromising in their criticism of the piece. "He can't act! She can't dance!"; "It's so superficial"; "Don't waste your money. I heard he simulates peeing on stage."* I had never heard such bad press with regards to Khan's work.

Despite all the warnings, I had to see for myself what the fuss was about. A collaboration between French actress Juliette Binoche and Khan, in-i is a dance theater piece that sees both collaborators stepping outside their favored artistic medium. The main premise for the work is a torrid love affair, full of anger, angst, lust, and passion, between Binoche and Khan. Like zero degrees,

⁴³ The National Theatre, which opened in 1976 and is located in London, is one of the UK's most prominent publicly funded theatres next to the Royal Shakespeare Company. It is not traditionally a dance venue. Collaborating with a big name like Binoche, however, allowed Khan to 'infiltrate' this iconic British establishment, and reach wider and more diverse audiences. It was certainly seen as a coup for his career to work with Binoche and be featured at the National Theatre.

Khan uses the narrative to explore larger issues around race, religion, and citizenship. Similar to *zero degrees*, Khan choreographs a British Asian masculinity that counters hegemonic notions of the brown, Muslim male as fundamentally violent, anti-western, and un-British. However, while in *zero degrees* he distances himself from a hegemonic, brown, Muslim masculinity by actively aligning himself with core western values and British citizenship, in *in-i*, he re-choreographs a hegemonic British Asian masculinity by aligning himself with whiteness.

In-i begins with Binoche recounting a story about watching Federico Fellini's film *Casanova* in the cinema when she was fourteen years old. Anish Kapoor's⁴⁴ striking red wall, the backdrop to *in-i*, flickers with light to suggest the interior glow of a movie theater. Binoche sits in a chair with her back to the audience, the position of which makes it clear that we, the audience, seated in rows of plush, red seats behind her, are supposed to be watching this "film" and re-living this memory along with her. Moreover, our gaze is set up from the very beginning to view Khan from the perspective of Binoche, a white woman. Khan becomes hypervisible to our adopted white, female gaze; he becomes the object of our collective desire. This tactic of hypervisibility is not new for Khan. In *Samsara*, choreographed for Kylie Minogue's *Showgirl*, Khan makes himself hypervisible through the use of large screen film projections of his image in order to gain recognition within mainstream popular culture and ensure his choreographic authority over

⁴⁴ Anish Kapoor, a London-based sculptor, was commissioned by Khan to construct the "set" for *In-I*.

Minogue's movements.⁴⁵ Royona Mitra argues that Khan makes himself hypervisible in order to position himself as sole author and assert his authority over Minogue's kathak-inspired movements on stage.⁴⁶

In *in-i*, the strategy of hypervisibility is employed for slightly different purposes. Khan appears in the downstage right corner of the stage. His appearance triggers Binoche to remember that while watching the film she became infatuated with a man in the theater who was seated in front of her. She describes being fascinated by the back of his head, the way he moved; she confesses that she "fell in love with the light on his cheekbones." As Binoche is recounting her feelings of infatuation with this stranger, Khan begins moving, brushing the back of his head and turning his head in profile. Binoche states matter-of-factly "I love the way he moves." The lighting projects multiple shadows of Khan's body against the 'screen.' In this way, Khan's hypervisibility draws attention to the way in which the brown, male body is racialized and sexualized by white desire.

The movement sequence that follows further demonstrates Binoche's desire to possess Khan. She begins stalking him around the stage. She blocks his path, walks aggressively towards him, grabs his buttocks, wraps her arms around him, and takes hold of his leg so he can't move. At one point, Binoche places Khan in a sort of lover's chokehold, a move which teeters on the uncomfortable edge between sexual violence and passion. Khan continues to

⁴⁵ See Royona Mitra, "Akram Khan Re-writes 'Radha': The 'Hypervisible' Cultural Identity in Kylie Minogue's 'Showgirl'" in *Women & Performance Journal* (Vol 19, Issue 1, 2009).

⁴⁶ Mitra 2009.

reject her advances. He runs away, brushes her off, pushes her hands off of him, and wriggles out of her violent embraces. But Binoche is aggressive, persistent, lecherous, and menacing. She demonstrates her psychotic desire to possess Khan.⁴⁷ Finally able to capture him, Binoche wastes no time in trying to kiss him. He turns away, covers his mouth, but eventually relents to her persistent advances. They kiss on stage and embrace. Binoche has finally caught her prey; she now possesses her exotic bird.

But the initial romance is short-lived. During one scene in which a lover's tryst is enacted, Binoche and Khan exchange heated insults:

JB: *You're a mummy's boy.*

AK: *You're white!*

JB: *I don't see you.*

AK: *I am not your Casanova.*

Through this seemingly innocent dialogue of a lover's quarrel, Khan touches on quite profound issues regarding the invisibility of whiteness, the desire to be seen, the hypervisibility of the raced body, and the hypersexualized non-white male body. In this scene, Khan calls out Binoche's whiteness and racializes her (*you're white*). Binoche acknowledges the invisibility of Khan as a subject (*I don't see you*). And Khan draws attention to Binoche's notion of the brown, male body as a hypervisible object of sexual desire (*I am not your Casanova*). With this last line, Khan tells us in no uncertain terms that he is not to be viewed as an object of sexual desire.

⁴⁷ What is interesting is that her body is not read in that way. Her obsession with Khan is read, instead, as the harmless throes of a girlhood crush rather than the violence of whiteness to possess a racial other.

Neither is he to be viewed as an object of fear. In a solo dance sequence we see Khan fighting with imaginary demons that pull him up from behind by his shirt collar, push him around, and cause him to fall. He begins to recite broken syllables “Ka. Ah. Mm”. He is trying to remember the Arabic alphabet but all he can think about is Sara, a white girl he is in love with. He begins to confess to the audience: “I was invisible to her. She was the angel...I wasn’t white like she was. I wanted to be white so she’d notice me....I wanted her to see me....” Khan wants to be seen as white in order to be made less visible as other. Khan then starts to tell us about how, upon learning of his love for a non-believer (*kaffir*), the mullah pulled a knife on him, asking him if he would sacrifice his life for his mother or whether he’d sacrifice his life for this *kaffir*. To the latter he says no but confesses that he felt like he was not only betraying Sara, but also himself and everything he believed in. In declaring (at least inwardly) an allegiance to Sara, Khan situates himself in opposition to the mullah. While Binoche’s lecherous gaze shrouds him in a cloak of invisibility (she doesn’t “see” him but rather exoticizes him and makes him hypervisible as an other, similar to Frantz Fanon’s “Look! A Negro!”),⁴⁸ Sara offers the possibility for Khan to increase his visibility and raise his status within British society.

Through his desire to be seen by a white woman, he shows audiences that he might be racially other, but he really wants to be like them. Khan

⁴⁸ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York: Grove Press, 1994).

positions himself very carefully as “white but not quite.”⁴⁹ The story about the mullah marks him out as ethnic from a Muslim immigrant family. However, his opposition to the mullah marks Khan out as a non-fundamentalist Muslim man. His desire to be white, his struggle to learn Arabic, and his love for a white girl all draw attention to Khan’s desired and perceived whiteness, making him a Muslim male that the British public does not fear, and is therefore comfortable with. In countering dominant notions of a brown, Muslim masculinity and offering an alternative way of reading the British Asian male body, he enables British audiences to engage with the brown, Muslim male in a non-threatening manner.

Khan’s body is made safe not only by aligning with whiteness, but also through Binoche’s ‘non-dancing’ body. A collaboration between an actor and a dancer, *in-i* sees both Khan and Binoche stepping out of their favored means of artistic expression to create something new. Although the piece was criticized widely as much for Binoche’s inability to dance as for Khan’s poor acting skills,⁵⁰ I argue that there is something interesting that takes place in the ‘failure’ of these two highly accomplished performers to appeal to critics and audiences. Their inability to cross over into each other’s genre reifies their uniqueness and skill in their respective artistic fields. The fact that she can’t

⁴⁹ Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994).

⁵⁰ Judith Mackerell, Review of “In-I,” <http://www.guardian.co.uk/stage/2008/sep/19/dance> (September 19, 2008); Alistair Macauley, “The Exquisite Agony of Love, with a Movie Star and a Choreographer,” <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/10/04/arts/dance/04khan.html> (October 3, 2008).

do what he does and he can't do what she does heightens their individual artistic genius.

His 'failure' to act and her 'failure' to dance also serves another purpose. Because Binoche is not a trained dancer, and even after training with Khan cannot dance very well, Khan is forced to reign in his corporeal presence on stage, in order to not look too virtuosic next to Binoche. He must restrict the full range of his bodily movements to level the playing field, so to speak. In addition, because Binoche is unable to keep pace with Khan's dancing, she literally limits Khan's ability to move, using movement to "playfully disrupt [sic] his determined patterns."⁵¹ Known for his speed both in terms of footwork and turns, in *in-i* Khan's quick-paced movements are tempered by Binoche's "softer movements [which] are grounded and easy, a gentle contrast to his extremes."⁵² (my emphasis) By balancing out his "extreme" movements, she contains and tames Khan's dancing body. Engaging in histrionics, it is Binoche who is wild and out of control.

The fact that Binoche cannot be contained by Khan not only tempers his ability to shine on stage, but also poses a threat to Khan's status as an icon and superstar. *Khan told another dancer friend that he did not enjoy working with Binoche at all. She was too much of a "diva" – moody and difficult to work with.* Because of her international reputation as an actress, Binoche automatically

⁵¹ David Jays, "In-I," http://entertainment.timesonline.co.uk/tol/arts_and_entertainment/stage/dance/article4820377.ece (September 28, 2008).

⁵² Zoe Anderson, review of "In-I, National Theatre, London" <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/theatre-dance/reviews/ini-national-theatre-london-937345.html> (September 22, 2008).

had greater 'superstar' capital going into the collaboration. This extra-textual information informed how we saw her in relation to him, and lent her greater power and visibility than Khan. Presented like a play or a film, *in-i* also favored Binoche by calling attention to her role as an actress on screen, rather than a dancer. The fact that it was presented on the National Theatre stage, famous for theater not dance, also placed Binoche in her element and Khan outside of his, giving her the advantage in terms of visibility and audience perception.

Nevertheless, Khan's collaboration with Binoche, a famous and celebrated white woman, whether 'successful' or 'unsuccessful' in the public eye, increased Khan's visibility as a performer and broadened his appeal within mainstream British dance and theater circles, giving him even greater flexibility to accumulate power and capital.

Exporting British multiculturalism: the transnational labor of Akram Khan and the production of a national cultural commodity

Khan is the most international and one of the most well funded British Asian choreographers. Performing in China, the US, and Europe, Khan has become Britain's number one cultural export.⁵³ I suggest that it is in part because of his ability to present himself as an ethnic but not an extremist within a heightened climate of fear towards young, brown, Muslim men that Khan has been so generously funded by the British government and used to

⁵³ Even Shobana Jeyasingh, an older, female choreographer who whilst more established and better funded nationally does not enjoy the same international reputation and clout as Khan. Her company generally tours nationally with occasional forays into Europe.

“represent British arts on a global scale.”⁵⁴ Unlike other British Asians/Muslims, he deploys an exoticism that is palatable and assimilatable into mainstream British culture. Not only has he been assimilated, he has been fashioned into an ambassador of British culture, integral in promoting an image of Britain – both at home and abroad - as a tolerant, multicultural nation against a backdrop of increasing state violence towards the South Asian body politic. By now a national cultural commodity, Khan is exported worldwide by the state and sold on the global dance marketplace as a *product* of a successful, postcolonial Britain.

In 2008, Khan was sponsored by the British government to go to China to work with the National Ballet in Shanghai on a new choreographic work. Out of this collaboration came *bahok*, which means carrier in Bengali, Khan’s native tongue. *Bahok* is the first company work in which Khan has not danced. This has been an interesting and important departure for Khan, not only artistically but also strategically. It has meant that his work is not attached to his physical body. Khan’s company, for example, is often touring in one country while he is working in another. Recently, at the beginning of 2010, Khan was in Japan working on his new production, *Gnosis*, while *bahok* was being performed in my hometown in the US. His labor now extends beyond his body and into his body of work. In other words, his labor is no longer just transnational but supranational, spanning multiple locations across the globe

⁵⁴ TS Warren, “Late night with Akram Khan,” <http://www.ottawapress.ca/stage/stage.aspx?iIDArticle=14498> (April 24, 2008).

simultaneously. Karl Marx argues in his theory of alienation that capitalism has alienated the worker from the product of his/her labor.⁵⁵ In terms of dance, the product and the means of production cannot be detached so easily. In Khan's case, however, by stepping out of his own work he has found a way to separate his body from the final product, without being alienated from his labor. This separation between labor and product has meant that Khan can be in several places at once, and can therefore create more work and earn more cultural and financial capital for himself as an artist, as well as for the British state than before.

While Khan's shows, as British cultural commodities funded by the British Council, travel the globe more freely to theaters in China, India, Europe, Canada, and the US, earning profits for Khan and his company, his raced body prevents him from moving as easily. Race and gender, in short, have posed an impediment to his transnational mobility. Khan is repeatedly stopped each time he goes to New York because of his name (Muslim) and the way he looks (brown, male). On a trip to perform in New York in 2008, Khan was taken to an interrogation room at the JFK Airport and questioned extensively by immigration authorities.⁵⁶ Nevertheless, as a British citizen and a cosmopolitan artist, Khan is still able to move with greater mobility than his dancers, many of whom are Muslim and come from Algeria, Morocco, Slovakia, and India.

⁵⁵ Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*, Trans. by Martin Mulligan (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1959).

⁵⁶ Warren 2008.

Khan has been outspoken, in fact, about the difficulties in working with international dancers, particularly from Muslim countries. In 2008, he was invited by then Prime Minister, Gordon Brown, along with a select group of artistic directors to discuss the state of British arts. When asked about how he felt about representing British arts on a global scale, he said "I went straight into how the Home Office treats foreigners. I told them that if I want to work with international artists, Arabic artists, they're put off coming to this country because they're treated like shit. They were a bit shocked."⁵⁷ He argued that Muslim immigrants are treated unfairly both before they arrive, in terms of obtaining work visas, as well as once they arrive at the border, where they are overly scrutinized. While the state promotes Khan's work for its celebration of diversity and its contribution to British culture, it also impedes the making of such work through racist immigration laws and policies. Because of Khan's cultural capital as a superstar within the British contemporary dance world, he has been able to lobby government and obtain work visas for foreign dancers. For the majority of dance companies, however, this is not the case. Looking at Khan and other South Asian/Muslim dancers as laboring bodies moving within the circuits of global capital, not just as dancing bodies moving on stage, reveals that his vision to "journey across boundaries to create uncompromising artistic narratives"⁵⁸ is not

⁵⁷ Warren 2008.

⁵⁸ Akram Khan Dance Company website, www.akramkhancompany.net (accessed April 7, 2010).

always smooth, and is fraught along the way with contradictions, hurdles, and interruptions.

Nina Rajarani: Going with the Flow (of Global Capital)

Nina Rajarani trained at the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan under Prakash Yadagudde and started her own dance company, Srishti – Nina Rajarani Dance Creations, in 1991, and a youth touring company, Yuva Culture, in 2006. She has been a long-time recipient of project-based Grants for the Arts funding from the Arts Council, and has also run a successful bharata natyam dance school for the past two decades. Despite being one of the early pioneers of British Asian dance, Rajarani has not had the same level of success or mainstream visibility as Jeyasingh, for example.

In September 2006, however, just a little over a year after the July 7th bombings in London, Rajarani's work *Quick!*, won the Place Prize, a UK-wide prize and the largest choreographic prize in Europe that awards £25,000 to the most innovative British choreographer.⁵⁹ Using a pastiche of dance, film, and live music, *Quick!* looks at twenty-four hours in the working life of four South Asian businessmen in London. Some reviewers felt it was “a floor-show standard entertainment piece, a dated cultural collage that takes nothing forward.”⁶⁰ The Place Prize panel of judges, however, showered *Quick!* with high praise as a “work of unstoppable energy [that] places Bharatanatyam

⁵⁹ The Place Prize runs every two years, each time commissioning twenty UK-based choreographers to create new dance works to be performed at The Place in London. The Place Prize's aim is “to put contemporary dance in the limelight, celebrating and illuminating it for audiences both familiar and new” (www.placeprize.com).

⁶⁰ Sarah Frater, “Mind boggingly bad,” <http://www.thisislondon.co.uk/theatre/review-23369348-mind-bogglingly-bad.do> (October 2, 2006).

firmly in the world of London business.”⁶¹ Many South Asian dancers in London, including me, were surprised by the award. I had seen her work performed during the semi-final round of the competition and was unimpressed. The concept seemed glib; the dancing was fast-paced and skillful, but hardly innovative. Despite being maligned for its conceptual and choreographic contribution, I would argue that *Quick!* was commended and rewarded financially for its ability to position South Asian dance as part of rather than anathema to global capital and modernity. In light of the 7/7 attacks just one year earlier, I suggest that this latter point was a significant factor in *Quick!*'s success.

While the 7/7 attacks exhibited an abject British Asian citizen, one who, using his own body, disrupted capital flows to protest the West and the British nation-state, *Quick!*, portrays a fast-moving, mobile, white-collar businessman, and showcases a model British Asian citizen who moves seamlessly with the flows of global capital, is westernized, and labors tirelessly for the capitalist needs of the state. *Quick!*, with its fast-paced choreography and its compression of a twenty-four hour day in fifteen minutes, presents a postmodern body, ever-mobile and quick to respond to the changing needs of capital. 7/7, on the other hand, shows the way in which the rapid flows of late capital have atomized and alienated others to the point

⁶¹ “Nina Rajarani wins £25,000 Place Prize for Dance, sponsored by Bloomberg,” <http://www.theplace.org.uk/658/news/nina-rajarani-wins-25000-place-prize-for-dance-sponsored-by-bloomberg.html> (accessed February 16, 2010).

where their only recourse is to use their own bodies to stop the flow of capital.

Juxtaposing these two performances against the current backdrop of globalization, I read the performances of *Quick!* and 7/7 as two different embodied responses to the logic of late capitalism. While 7/7 seeks to destroy the various vehicles for capitalist production including transport, financial centers, and the body, *Quick!* surrenders the body to the mechanisms of capitalism. I argue that 7/7 shows globalization's inability to contain the excessive desires of British Asians while *Quick!* attempts to bring the South Asian male body back into the field of late capital. It is this containment of diversity/otherness within neoliberalism, I argue, that favored *Quick!* to win a British dance prize and represent the nation.

At first glance, the performance of the 7/7 bombings in central London seems to bear the hallmarks of late capital and postmodern aesthetics. David Harvey argues that accelerated turnover times in production and consumption have compressed space and time, and have led to the production of events, or spectacles, instead of the production of goods.⁶² Similarly, the attacks can be read as the production of an event, or a choreographed spectacle. In addition, the way in which the bombs were

⁶² David Harvey in *The Conditions of Postmodernity: Origins of Culture*, (London: Wiley-Blackwell, 1991) argues that changes in the way we experience time and space constitute a major factor in the recent transformation of the political economy. The logic of "flexibility" and its attendant time-space compression, which Harvey argues has permeated everything from labor processes to consumption habits to knowledge, has given way to a postmodern aesthetic marked by ephemerality, spectacle, instability, and the commodification of culture (156). Moreover, the time-space compression has led to an increased disconnection to a single place and the erosion of spatial boundaries. These changes in the way we experience time and space have infused cultural forms with a postmodern aesthetic (197).

detonated at precisely the same time in multiple locations throughout London demonstrates the way in which innovations in communication and technology have eroded spatial boundaries, allowing the same event to be experienced at the same time in geographically dispersed locations. The twenty-four hour, uninterrupted media coverage immediately following the bombings also attests to late capital's time-space compression. Images were slowed down, repeated, speeded up, spliced, edited, reprinted, copied, and distributed across the Internet and across the world in a matter of seconds.

The 7/7 bombings can also be read as a failure of capitalism to contain the excessive desires of racialized subjects.⁶³ The suicide notes and videos left by the bombers suggest that the motivation for the attacks stemmed partially from alienation and a dissatisfaction with western capitalism. One bomber left a note that stated: "I and thousands like me are forsaking everything for what we believe. Our drive and motivation doesn't come from tangible commodities that this world has to offer. Our religion is Islam, obedience to the one true God and following the footsteps of the final prophet messenger."⁶⁴ His disidentification with the "tangible commodities" of capitalism is coupled with an identification with Islam. Alienation,

⁶³ See Grace Hong, *The Ruptures of American Capital: Women of Color Feminism and The Culture of Immigrant Labor* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006). Hong argues that while racialized and gendered subjects "emerge from the conditions of 'flexibility' that constitute the logic of late twentieth-century global capital," (108) their cultural forms are not necessarily saturated by capital or completely commodified as postmodernist theories would suggest. "This," she argues, "would preclude the possibility of culture as a site for contestation and crisis" (109). Moreover, postmodernism, with its assumption of differentiation or "flexibility" as random and neutral pastiche, elides histories of racism and inequality inaugurated by colonialism and perpetuated by neocolonialism. Examining the specific relationship of racialized labor to late capital reveals capital's crisis.

⁶⁴ Matthew Chance, "Britain's home-grown terrorists," <http://edition.cnn.com/2005/WORLD/europe/07/14/homegrown.terror/>, (July 14, 2005)

unemployment, and lack of opportunity, in fact, have been cited as the main causes of extremism.⁶⁵ Dr. Daud Abdullah of the Muslim Council of Britain notes: "We have social exclusion, we have a sense of not-belonging, a sense of alienation. We have alien ideas, frustration, and humiliation. When you add the international dimension to this, all of these factors feed into the mindset of our youth, and it's demonstrating itself in this outrageous behavior."⁶⁶ Thus these acts are not purely postmodern; they reflect a deep desire for meaning and belonging. According to John Gray, the ideology of Islamic fundamentalism is not anathema to capitalism and the West; rather it is "a byproduct of globalization's transnational capital flows and open borders,"⁶⁷ and, I would add, its inequities and injustices.

The 7/7 attacks can be read as a choreographed resistance to capitalism and globalization in another way. Targeting specifically London's public transport system, the series of coordinated terrorist bomb blasts hit three tubes and one bus during morning rush hour, killing commuters on their way to work. The bombings caused major disruption not only to the city's transport system but also to the UK's mobile telecommunications infrastructure, crippling even if only symbolically the lifelines of late global capital.⁶⁸ In this way, the bombings were intended to provide a strong counter

⁶⁵ Michael Kimmel, "Globalization and its Mal(e)contents: The Gendered Moral and Political Economy of Terrorism" in *International Sociology* (Vol. 18(3), 2003: 603-620).

⁶⁶ Chance 2005.

⁶⁷ John Gray, *Al Qaeda and What it Means to be Modern* (The New Press, 2003).

⁶⁸ Seen in this light, it is not a coincidence that the bombers' attempts to disrupt the flow of global capital came while the UK was hosting the first full day of the 31st G8 summit and a day after London

narrative to the rapid and seamless flow of global capital in late capitalism. Olivier Roy writes: "The Western-based Islamic terrorists are not the militant vanguard of the Muslim community; they are a lost generation, unmoored from traditional societies and cultures, frustrated by a Western society that does not meet their expectations. And their vision of a global ummah is both a mirror of and a form of revenge against the globalization that has made them what they are."⁶⁹ 7/7, and the ideology that underpinned the attacks, undermined the myths of universal emancipation and limitless growth that globalization and postmodernism claim to bring.

Furthermore, the bombers chose not only to block the circulation of capital, but to immobilize capitalism's most important tool of production: the body. Unlike the four businessmen in *Quick!* who participate in the rat-race of global capitalism, the four suicide bombers chose to render their bodies useless for churning out profit by engaging in the most anti-capitalist act: suicide. Like SanSan Kwan who argues that stillness works to apprehend a global city, I argue that the suicide bombers' attack on London's capitalist arteries can also be read as a symbolic protest to not only "temper the effects of rapidly circulating commodities and consumers across transnational spaces" but to resist capital's co-optation of the body.⁷⁰

was chosen to host the 2012 Summer Olympics, two events which privilege and rely on the smooth flow of capital.

⁶⁹ Olivier Roy, "Why do they hate us? Not because of Iraq," <http://www.nytimes.com/2005/07/22/opinion/22roy.html> (July 22, 2005).

⁷⁰ SanSan Kwan, "Hong Kong In-corporated: Falun Gong and the Choreography of Stillness." *Performance Research* 8.4, 2003: 11-20), 14.

By bringing the image of the exceptionally violent, anti-capitalist British Asian body into the world of late global capital, *Quick!* attempts to contain the racialized subject's excessive body. During the "boardroom" sequence, the four male dancers along with the four male musicians gather around a large table. Using dance and the recitation of rhythmic syllables, the men simulate the rapid-fire exchange of words in a heated debate. The dancers use sharp, linear hand movements, intense foot stamping, and dynamic leaps to enhance the effect of the "argument." The musicians play the rhythms frantically on their instruments, as the pace continues to accelerate. The men challenge each other, display their macho bravado, and try to outdo each other in speed, intensity, and precision. While the display of physical aggression by brown men is something that has historically been censored and curbed by the police, the Home Office, the courts, and other institutions of power, here on stage around a boardroom table the aggression is read as humorous and familiar, something we can all relate to. The threat of physical violence that the aggressive brown male body engenders on the street is sublimated into the enactment of a friendly battle of wills between the dancers on stage. The aggression shifts from the space of the outer city to the space of the office in the heart of the City, London's financial and banking district, relocating the brown body to a more familiar, western capitalist setting and thus making it safe for public consumption.

In the "traffic" sequence, it is not the setting that shifts but the bodies themselves that morph into cars on a street in central London. The dancers

stand on their knees in a line across the back of the stage. Behind them plays a video projection of cars stopped at a traffic light on a London street. The dancers impatiently edge in front of one another, imitating the way drivers anticipate the change of the stoplight from red to green. While the suicide bombers used their bodies to cripple London's transport system and impede the movement and mobility of people and capital, the dancers use their bodies to aid rather than block the seamless flow of capital. Their bodies become the vehicles that navigate the conduits of the city. By depicting young, brown men going with the flows of capital rather than against them, Rajarani choreographs a British Asian masculinity that distances itself from one global hegemonic model (i.e. the anti-western Islamic terrorist/fundamentalist) while aligning itself with another (i.e. the transnational business executive).⁷¹

Representations of time are also indicative of the piece's alignment with a late capital, neoliberal sensibility. The piece opens with the four businessmen, already dressed in their office clothes, sleeping on the floor. A digital clock, projected downstage left, appears and begins counting time, signaling in no uncertain terms that this is a world dictated by the demands of time. An alarm rings and jolts the men out of their slumber. The four businessmen rush to get ready with the familiar frantic movements of

⁷¹ See R.W. Connell, *Masculinities* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), who suggests that those masculinities that are dominant today are the ones that serve global capital. A new form of masculinity, which he calls a *transnational business masculinity* (16), reflects the flexible, calculative, and egocentric masculinity of fast capitalism (17). This new hegemonic masculinity gets deployed through the circuits of global capital, transnational corporations, and mass media.

someone who is late for work. The already fast-paced language of bharata natyam is accelerated, adding to the overriding sense of urgency in the piece. As the work's title suggests, the dancers move at breakneck speeds to adhere to late capital's demands for ever-faster turnover times and the hyper-extraction of profits. The music is also unrelenting. Like the dance, the rhythmic syllables which the vocalist recites are sharp, precise, but hurried. A film projection of the streets of London's financial district plays in fast-forward mode behind the dancers, making it seem as if the businessmen cannot keep up with the pace of modern life. As if to make us even more aware of time, the digital clock projection shows minutes passing more quickly than real time so that twenty-four hours in the life of these businessmen seems to pass remarkably quickly in fifteen minutes. The compression of time in late capitalism has also been accompanied by an erosion of spatial boundaries.⁷² This is clear from the staging of *Quick!*. The opening scene of the bedroom is quickly transformed into a subway carriage on the London Underground, transporting the businessmen to their city office. The subway then turns into the office boardroom, which then literally becomes the bar at a pub, transforming the stage yet again into a completely different space.

Thus, through its staging of the South Asian male body as a businessman moving seamlessly within the flows of capital and adapting to the demands of a fast-paced urban working life, *Quick!* paints a very different

⁷² Harvey 1991.

picture of South Asian men in London to the one circulating in the national imaginary since 7/7. Commissioned and choreographed in the wake of the suicide bombings, I read *Quick!* as a choreographed response to bring the South Asian body back into the fold of the nation by resituating the image of the violent, threatening brown body within more familiar, safe, and iconic British economic, cultural, and urban spaces, i.e. the city office, the pub, and, most symbolically, the Tube.⁷³ I suggest that *Quick!* turns the South Asian male body into a good capitalist worker, and transfers the aggression associated with brown men on the street onto battles in the office boardroom. The choreography of neoliberalism divests these bodies of danger, and is rewarded generously by corporate money and national media attention, as evidenced by the work's Place Prize award. *Quick!*'s presentation of a South Asian male body antithetical to the suicide bomber's enables Rajarani not only to win a UK-wide dance prize, but also gain recognition or 'citizenship' within the polity of mainstream British culture.⁷⁴ The publicity has also given her international touring opportunities and allowed her to move more freely within the circuits of global capital.

While *Quick!* has been extremely beneficial for Rajarani's career and given her cultural leverage to negotiate more funding/sponsorship, forge creative collaborations, and market her work to a wider base, the same cannot

⁷³ The depiction of the businessmen in *Quick!* using the Tube to get to work is of particular significance since it was the same public transport network that the suicide bombers blew up on 7/7. Thus, I argue that the Tube in both of these "performances" functions as an important signifier of global capital flows.

⁷⁴ Rajarani was awarded an MBE (Most Excellent Order of the British Empire) by the Queen in June 2009 for her services to South Asian dance in Britain.

be said of her dancers, who, according to a former dancer, did not receive any portion of the prize money and were not credited for their choreographic labor. Rajarani has complete choreographic authority over the movements. In fact, on her website there is no mention of the male dancers who performed in the company's various productions. They are completely invisible, their names and identities erased from the choreographic archive. Only their dancing bodies in recorded performances remain as evidence of their labor. While *Quick!* continues to circulate and earn Rajarani profit and global recognition, the labor of the her male dancers goes unacknowledged and is made invisible through Rajarani's position as sole choreographer and creator. *Even though Rajarani's choreography is derived largely from movement material generated by the dancers, they are given no artistic recognition or credit for assisting in creating the movement, according to some of her ex-dancers. This is one of the reasons several former dancers have chosen not to renew their contracts with the company.* Like the South Asian businessmen in the piece, whose labor is used to fuel capitalist greed, the dancers who created and performed *Quick!* were also exploited for capitalist gain in the West.

The high turnover of dancers in Rajarani's company attests to the poor labor conditions as well as the dispensability and substitutability of the migrant South Asian male dancer. Most of Rajarani's dancers are from India.⁷⁵ *According to a number of different sources, this is because she is able to pay them less*

⁷⁵ In *Pulse* magazine (Autumn 2009), Rajarani advertised specifically for male dancers, and markets her company as an all-male dance company.

than the minimum wage, and make them work longer hours because they have no, or few, family members or friends in the UK. I have heard from ex-dancers, funders, and other choreographers that a number of dancers have complained to the Arts Council over Rajarani's unfair treatment with regards to accommodation, rehearsals, and payment. Although I was unable to get dancers to divulge exactly how much they made (money is often a sensitive subject), it was likely less than £350 per week, which is Equity Minimum for dancers in the UK.⁷⁶ According to former dancers, Rajarani justifies paying foreign dancers less than British dancers by housing them in shared accommodation, a labor practice carried out by many Indian dancers in the West who house Indian artists and musicians in order to reduce labor costs. By placing them all in one house, Rajarani is also able to exert a fair degree of control over their movements outside of rehearsals. Without the ability to drive in the UK, their movements were restricted even further.

Not only do male dancers from India provide her with extra financial capital, they also endow her with added *cultural* capital. Rajarani has built her reputation as director of an all-male dance company, the only one in the UK. She has used this to market herself and her work to theaters and schools throughout the country.⁷⁷ Moreover, having an all-male dance company allows her to shine, to stand out. Whenever she performs with male dancers, she has a central role, while the male dancers are largely consigned to the

⁷⁶ Equity Minimum (i.e. minimum wage) for Ballet and Dance as of April 2009.

⁷⁷ Rajarani offers to teach workshops in schools on preventing gang violence and extremism as part of the national curriculum on citizenship. http://www.britishcouncil.org/arts-performanceinprofile-2010-srishti_nina_rajarani_dance_creations.htm (accessed May 16, 2011).

background. Rajarani employs male dancers to construct a unique identity as a contemporary South Asian female choreographer. White modern dancers at the turn of the century, such as Ruth St. Denis, deployed a similar tactic of dancing with male dancers in order to construct themselves as modern women and artistic pioneers.⁷⁸ However, unlike St. Denis, Rajarani choreographs more contemporary movements on the male dancers and more traditional movements on herself. This enables her to satisfy funding requirements for British Asian choreographers to create 'innovative,' contemporary work without losing the cultural capital of her 'authenticity' as an esteemed exponent of bharata natyam. Moreover, this choreographic strategy allows her to maintain her status as a solo female artist while still choreographing group productions that appeal to British audiences and 'western' sensibilities.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have focused on South Asian male dancers and performances of British Asian masculinity in relation to the heightened racialization of brown men in the last ten years. An attention to South Asian male dancers as economic and physical labor refutes globalization's rhetoric of universal mobility and equality. In an era of global terror, the brown male body has become an object of fear and violence. Paranoia around the movements of South Asian men has increased, along with invasive surveillance practices targeted at South Asian/Muslim communities.

⁷⁸ Srinivasan 2011.

Dance and choreography have been integral to re-defining race and citizenship in an era of globalization and global terror. While many South Asians/Muslims are abjected from the national imaginary, Khan, Jeyasingh, and Rajarani deploy an otherness that is acceptable and assimilated. They embed race within notions of Britishness while simultaneously undoing, as cosmopolitan artists, previous alignments between race and citizenship.⁷⁹ As globalization increasingly blurs political and cultural borders, the nation-state seeks to re-establish national borders and manage diversity by racializing some bodies as British and others as abject and 'unassimilable.' Race, therefore, is not inherent to bodies, but is allocated to bodies in order to re-define the contours of both South Asianness and Britishness.⁸⁰ South Asian male dancers are choreographed as safe, socially integrated, 'hybrid' British Asian citizens in contradistinction to the fundamentalist British Asian male, who is seen to reject assimilation, and is therefore jettisoned from the national imaginary and cast as the 'enemy within.' Feared on the street, the British Asian male body is made safe for public consumption on stage through various flexible choreographic strategies.

⁷⁹ See Marta Savigliano, "Worlding Dance and Dancing Out There in the World," *Worlding Dance*, ed. Susan Foster (London: Palgrave, 2009), pp. 163-190.

⁸⁰ Marta Savigliano (Professor, University of California, Riverside), e-mail to the author, June 2009.

CHAPTER THREE

A Tale of Two Cities: Bangalore's 'Flexible' Dancers and the Negotiation of Work in Late Capitalism

Globalization must be viewed as "a set of lived experiences full of ironies and contradictions...a powerful process of institutional change rearranging and reinforcing unequal human relations rather than merely intensifying connectedness."¹

As a dancer for Angika from 2004 to 2009 and someone who was relatively active in the British Asian dance community, I became acutely aware that many South Asian dancers working in London were in fact not from the UK but from India, specifically Bangalore. Although there were South Asian dancers from all over the world in London, there seemed to be a disproportionate number from Bangalore. In fact, for the last two decades, during the height of British Asian dance, much of the labor of British Asian dance companies has come from the world's "back office."² Why Bangalore? Why London? What connected these two global cities? Over the last thirty years, choreographers have looked to India for dance workers to fill a gap in the British dance market and provide much-needed skilled labor for the production of contemporary British Asian dance works. During the 1990s, when contemporary South Asian dance was taking off and women such as Shobana Jeyasingh and Nina Rajarani were launching their own companies, there was a perception that "suitably trained and experienced practitioners

¹ Xiang Biao, *Global Body Shopping: An Indian Labor System in the Information Technology Industry*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 2007), xvii.

² Since India liberalized its economy in 1991, a number of multinational corporations have outsourced their business processing and customer service operations, which are carried out by cheap Indian labor in Bangalore, hence the nickname, "the world's back office."

are not currently available in this country.”^{3,4} Indian dancers were valued for their “wider movement experience” which was seen as “essential to meeting specific needs” of South Asian dance companies in Britain.⁵ Today many UK-based dancers still feel “relegated to second place when performances are being cast in favour of their India-based counterparts who are regarded as better trained, more adaptable and versatile.”⁶ Other South Asian choreographers in the UK believe that culture and parental pressure are to blame. Many amateur British Asian dancers, and their parents, more importantly, do not see a career in dance as lucrative, prestigious, or even viable. Burdened with postcolonial diasporic pressures to overachieve in order to overturn the racist legacy of colonialism, South Asian dancers are more likely to take up medicine and law than dance as a profession.

While these all seemed like valid explanations for the dearth of (good, professional) British Asian dancers, I was keen to explore the issue from the perspective of the Bangalore dancers, and what impelled them to move. The economic liberalization of India’s private sector in 1991 opened up national borders, and led to greater mobility of capital and labor between India, the UK and the West more generally. For some dancers in India who are not interested in doing solely traditional work, working in the UK presents an

³ Delia Jarrett-Macauley, “Review on South Asian Dance in England,” (Oxford: Quality and Equality, June 1997), 26.

⁴ Subathra Subramaniam, who had trained with Prakash Yadagudde from the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan in London, auditioned to be a dancer for Jeyasingh’s company but was told by Jeyasingh that she didn’t get the job because she hadn’t trained in India.

⁵ Jarrett-Macauley 1997, 26.

⁶ Jarrett-Macauley 1997, 40.

ideal opportunity to experiment with contemporary dance, which has only recently garnered the attention of Indian audiences. In addition, making a career out of dance in the UK is seen as more economically viable than dancing professionally in India.⁷ International experience, particularly dancing in London, is also seen as a way to advance one's career as a dancer in India if dancers choose to return home. The prospect of an adventure abroad has also been a draw for many Indian dancers, many of whom have never left India. Thus not only does working in the UK hold the promise of financial gain, but it also offers prestige, adventure, and valuable professional experience. But did working in London live up to their expectations? Why do some keep returning while others return for good? What happens to them when their contracts expire? Are they forced to leave? Or do they choose to return? Is working in London beneficial or detrimental to their careers? What do they do when they return to Bangalore? How do they sustain themselves financially? What has been the impact on the development of a contemporary dance economy in Bangalore? My initial efforts to get answers to my questions began in London as I became friends with some of the Bangalore dancers with whom I danced and worked. In 2008, I received a Fulbright scholarship⁸ from the US government to research dance in India, which gave

⁷ Dancers in the UK are paid between £350-400 a week for the making, rehearsing, and touring of the work, while dancers in India are generally paid for performances, if at all.

⁸ The fact that this research was made in part through a Fulbright scholarship is important. My own body has been mobilized by the global north, the US, to flow into a country in the global south, India, to study the 'other.' Research outcomes from Fulbright scholars have historically been used to influence government policy in various countries, sometimes for political gain. Like British Asian dance companies that extract Indian labor for cultural production in the UK, I too have extracted information from my subjects for knowledge production that will be housed and disseminated by

me the opportunity to go to Bangalore to explore the other end of the transnational traffic of South Asian dancers.

Doreen Massey argues that globalization scholars must examine not only the influence of the global on the local, but also the local connections more globally,⁹ e.g. how dance communities in cities such as London and Bangalore are connected and how economic, cultural, and legal changes in one place have direct implications on the other. By bringing India and the UK into the same temporal and spatial framework of transnational labor flows, I hope to show how globalization connects people but through unequal arrangements of power, money, and capital.

A brief note on methodology

Research for this chapter was done in London and Bangalore. Like the transnational dancers who are the subject of this chapter, the writing travels between these two cities, though not always seamlessly. Movements are often unexpected, sudden, disorienting, and disjointed. Warning: you may suffer jetlag or feel unsettled. This is to be expected. Globalization has not mobilized bodies in a smooth fashion. There are periods of stillness and unemployment, and moments of turbulence and frequent mobility in which you are constantly being uprooted. Travel has become a way of life for most dancers. I have moved with my 'subjects' across borders and stages, but my mobility

American institutions of power. An attention to the direction of global flows and the sites of production, whether creative or intellectual, is an important aspect of globalization and one I aim to keep at the forefront of my analysis of the connection between Bangalore's transnational dancers and South Asian dance in London.

⁹ Doreen Massey, "Geographies of Difference," Talk at Tate Britain (London, UK), Nov 4, 2009.

has been significantly greater than theirs thanks to the political capital of my American passport and the ease with which it lets me travel. Unlike the dancers in this chapter, I am able to move more smoothly between India, the UK and the US, and weave their stories together into a narrative, albeit a disjointed one, of globalization, labor, and human connections. This chapter, therefore, is as much about the labor of Bangalore dancers as it is about my transnational labor as an Indian-American dancer and scholar, and my own flexibility as a cosmopolitan figure.

Flexible Citizens, Flexible Bodies

Work, labor and the global economic system underwent drastic changes in the 20th century. David Harvey argues that recession, oil shocks, stagflation, and the need to maintain competitiveness on the global market led to the collapse of Fordism in the 1970s and paved the way for a new type of capitalist production which he terms *flexible accumulation*, which was characterized by extreme competition, the dismantling of unions, fewer labor regulations, and the privatization of national industries.¹⁰ Flexible accumulation has given rise to free trade, free markets, and the move of manufacturing to third world countries in the late 20th/early 21st. In addition, it has led to increasingly flexible work regimes and contracts (part time, temporary work), which have allowed employers to pay workers less and/or withhold benefits, and given them the flexibility to hire and fire workers at

¹⁰ David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change*, (London: Wiley-Blackwell, 1991).

will. Women and non-whites have been particularly exploited by this new labor regime. Transnationality, in fact, has not been a liberating force for everyone as the term “free-market” might imply.

While the increased transnational mobility of labor under globalization has made labor more vulnerable, Aiwaha Ong suggests that it has also engendered ‘flexible citizens’ who “respond fluidly and opportunistically to changing political-economic conditions to accumulate power and capital”¹¹ and make cultural accommodations with global capital in order to navigate increasingly volatile and uncertain market forces in late capital. I suggest that flexible accumulation has created not just flexible citizens but flexible bodies. Similar to Ong’s elite, multiple passport-holders, Bangalore’s transnational dancers speak multiple bodily languages that facilitate cross-border movements, and help dancers navigate and adapt to different cultural, national, and work environments. Transnational dancers have developed flexible practices and strategies in response to conditions of economic insecurity; flexibility is also what shapes the way in which they constitute their subjectivity. However, unlike the global elite, transnational dancers do not carry the political capital to flexibly navigate nation, class, race, and ethnicity for personal gain. Bangalore dancers are vulnerable to fluctuations in market forces and state power. What enables their flexibility? What regulates it? How does the nation-state articulate with capitalism in late

¹¹ Aiwaha Ong, *Flexible Citizenship: The Cultural Logic of Transnationality*, (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 1999), 6.

modernity to shape, direct, and limit these border crossings? What has been the cost of flexibility at the bodily level? How does the British nation-state impact dancers' lives even beyond/outside of its political borders? What strategies of flexible accumulation do they deploy? While dancers have responded to increasingly fragile, temporary, and uncertain work arrangements (contracts, training, labor) by becoming more and more flexible both in terms of their physical practice in order to make themselves more marketable to different companies, as well as in their negotiation of money, family, and time in different national contexts, their ability to move across national borders is limited by nation-states through technologies of immigration, racism, and multiculturalism. Dance injuries from excessive training and performing and physically intense choreography also reveal globalization's pressure on the body to be increasingly mobile and flexible and the limits to flexible practices and strategies at the bodily level. I argue that looking at dancers and the dancing body reveals how globalization has engendered a mobile and flexible labor force of dancers, while at the same time regulating and restricting its mobility.

Neocolonial labor flows/'Body shopping'/'benching'/hyper-mobile work force

My search to understand the transnational migration of South Asian dancers from Bangalore to London led me first to Attakkalari Centre for Movement Arts, a contemporary dance training institute and repertory company based in Bangalore, where many of the dancers that work for British

Asian dance companies got their start. Attakkalari was founded in 2000 by Kerala-born dancer Jayachandran Palazhy, who I met in 2008 and 2009 during my Fulbright research. He trained in bharata natyam and kalaripayattu in India before obtaining a contemporary dance degree at the London Contemporary Dance School. He worked with Shobana Jeyasingh in London briefly and started his own company, Imlata, which made and toured work in the UK in the 1990s. In the late 1990s Jayachandran decided to return to India. He told me he was keen to invest his energies in developing contemporary dance in India. He first set up his institution in Cochin, but it was very difficult to find funding to keep the organization running. He scouted out other cities, including Chennai, Mumbai and Delhi, but found Chennai too conservative, Mumbai too commercial, and Delhi too political. Bangalore, with its nascent Information Technology (IT) industry and good weather, was an outward-looking, global city, and the perfect place to nurture contemporary dancers as well as a contemporary dance audience. With a grant from the Tata Corporation, which funds the institution to this day, Jayachandran was able to set up India's first full-time professional contemporary dance program. Since there are not many dancers already trained in (western) contemporary dance, Jayachandran has set up Attakkalari as both a training and performing institution.

He hires dancers from various backgrounds, some with training in commercial dance in the film and television industry, some with training in classical Indian dance, some with martial arts training, and some with no

formal training at all. He looks instead for dancers with creativity, versatility and strength. Flexibility to adapt to different styles of moving is valued over training and technique. Attakkalari takes these untrained or minimally trained dancers and offers them a three-year contract, a monthly stipend, and free training in contemporary and classical dance, including bharata natyam, kalaripayattu, ballet, and contemporary dance technique. In exchange, Jayachandran choreographs work on the dancers to perform all over India. The dancers benefit from the training and a steady income, while Jayachandran benefits from a stable supply of dancers on which to make work and develop the company's repertoire and his reputation as a choreographer.

The hardest part, he tells me, is keeping dancers. Jayachandran has lost many good dancers to the UK through a creative 'brain drain.' Even though Jayachandran offers dancers longer contracts and a good salary in relation to average Indian wages in the hopes of preventing Attakkalari dancers from being lured by job offers in Britain, it is difficult for him to compete with London-based companies, which offer dancers more money (in the short-term), international prestige, and the opportunity to tour in Europe.

Attakkalari has become a major, albeit unwilling, 'supplier' of dance labor to South Asian dance companies in the UK. During one of our conversations, Jayachandran asked me pointedly: "What is your take on the influence on Bangalore on London?" Treading carefully, I said, "A lot of the labor is coming from Bangalore...there is a lopsided connection between the two

places that still has...er, um...traces of colonialism." "It's neocolonial," he interjected. Confident now that he agreed with my assessment, I elaborated on my view of the cycle of labor and production in which Bangalore dancers are hired on a short-term basis as raw materials, and their physical labor is used to make work and earn money for UK based choreographers. I argued, however, that there is a potential upside to this dynamic. A lot of dancers are now returning from Europe and starting to develop interesting work in Bangalore. "This is a positive thing, no?" I ask him. "I don't agree," he quickly replies. "It would have been much more productive if that type of relationship was not there. A lot of dancers in Shobana's company [SJDC] and even in Akram's company [AKDC] came from Attakkalari...To develop a scene, there needs to be a critical mass. They [i.e. companies in London] were depleting the mass. Dancers didn't have any means to resist...they didn't have the mental space to visualize [an alternative]...you [i.e. the dancers] feel what you are offered on a temporary basis is much better, but they don't consider what is my long term fulfillment as an artist and how do I make a community so that my work is recognized...for a young person it's very difficult to resist..."

He assures me he is not against dancers working abroad. In fact, he believes the experience is beneficial for young dancers to see professional theaters and how a company is run, but "they are being used in the UK. They give all their creative time to something else and then there's nothing to show for it and they haven't developed a constituency here...and that's very

sad...They don't get any National Insurance [social security] even though they are contributing to it." In short, their labor only benefits British choreographers and British audiences. He adds, "It's not by design; the system is just like that. The UK complained that nurses are being poached by Canada, but in turn they were poaching South African nurses..." The same thing is happening with dancers, he notes. The long-term development of contemporary dance in Bangalore has suffered because of this labor depletion. The creative drain of dancers from Bangalore to London has stalled the growth of a contemporary dance economy in India, and created an uneven terrain wherein labor is extracted from the global south for cultural production in the global north.

While Jayachandran has used longer contracts as an incentive to keep dancers and more, importantly, to ensure the future survival of his company, some dancers have felt confined by the contractual agreement. Usha, for example, quit her job as a dancer with Attakkalari. She joined in 2005 but decided to go freelance in 2008, just before her contract was to expire, because she didn't like the restrictions placed on her with Attakkalari. Although she was paid a good salary at Attakkalari [Rs.4000 (£55) a month initially and later Rs.6000 (£85) a month plus Rs. 3,000-4,000 (£40-£55) per corporate show), she said the contract "felt like a trap." The contract stipulated that dancers would get paid some of their earnings only when they completed the full term of the contract. This was to ensure that dancers did not break their contract early. Usha said that Jayachandran was fearful that dancers would

take up jobs in Europe, mainly London, where many of his most talented dancers had already gone.

Ironically, when I met Usha she was about to leave for London to work with Angika on its latest production, *Cypher*. She was excited, but visibly nervous when I met her. She was supposed to leave for London a few weeks earlier but got a call from the choreographers the day before her flight was scheduled to depart informing her that Angika's funding application to the Arts Council had been declined and the project was on hold until further notice. Since she had already quit her job and had turned down other employment opportunities, Usha could do nothing but wait. When I met her, she had just been notified that funding had been approved and her flight had been re-booked for the next day.

Due to the volatility and unpredictability of funding and capital flows, British Asian dance companies require a mobile, flexible work force that can accommodate these sudden changes. In his study of Indian IT workers, Xiang Biao shows how globalization has made third world labor increasingly flexible, temporary, and disposable through a system of global 'body shopping,' "a uniquely Indian practice whereby an Indian-run consultancy (body shop) anywhere in the world recruits IT workers, in most cases from India, to be placed out as project-based labor with different clients."¹² He argues that the volatility and uncertainty of late capital market forces have engendered the creation of a mobile workforce that can easily respond to

¹² Biao 2007, 4.

market fluctuations with minimum time lag. With most IT projects lasting only six months or less, “temporary and multiple labor mobility became the norm in the industry.”¹³

Similarly, a volatile and uncertain dance market in the UK has created an increasingly mobile and flexible work force. Dancers, such as Usha, are asked to be available for work but are frequently given confirmation only just before work is to begin. In the IT sector, this is known as “benching.”¹⁴ Indian IT workers who are on temporary work visas are “put on the bench,” i.e. made to wait indefinitely, before starting employment or during periods of unemployment without being paid or given a nominal stipend. While dancers are not obligated to honor or renew their contracts if funding does not come through or if they find other work in the interim periods, most dancers have declined other offers in anticipation of working in the UK so are forced to wait out gaps or delays between contracts. Dancers (and, to a lesser degree, companies) are forced into a precarious position in relation to capital. If funding does not come through, as happened initially with Angika’s project *Cypher*, dancers are left without employment or compensation. It is a gamble, but one which many Bangalore dancers like Usha take for the opportunity to work in London, which they feel is prestigious, will lead eventually to greater opportunities, cultural capital, personal satisfaction, career advancement, and

¹³ Biao 2007, 18.

¹⁴ Biao 2007, 5.

financial gain. As a result, many dancers end up locked into a pattern of frequent and forced mobility.

Between 2004 and 2009, I was issued six different work permits for contracts that lasted six months or less. Since my work permits were sponsored by Angika, I was not allowed to work for anyone else. My only option was to return to the US and wait for the next contract to begin. In between contracts, while in the US, I was, for the most part, un/underemployed and had to rely on the financial support of family. Since Indian dance has not been professionalized in the US to the degree that is has been in the UK, dance jobs were not as readily available as they were in London. For this reason, I put up with this less than ideal work arrangement for a number of years. These short-term work permits made me increasingly mobile but less and less flexible to make choices that would benefit me professionally and financially. As a scholar, however, I have enjoyed considerably more flexibility and mobility to move more freely across national borders. As an American academic, I occupy a more cosmopolitan position within the global politics of labor. My intellectual labor is valued over my physical labor, and has given me more freedom than my Bangalore colleagues to travel between the US, the UK, and India.

Nevertheless, as a migrant dancer on multiple short-term contracts with British Asian dance companies, I was often subject to the same frustrations with visas and difficulties in developing a career in dance as Bangalore dancers in the UK, such as Shankar. Like me, Shankar, a dancer

from Bangalore who worked for the Shobana Jeyasingh Dance Company (SJDC) from 2004 to 2009, was locked in a similar pattern of hyper-mobility. For five years, he was on several multiple, short-term work permits. After each work permit expired, he had to return to Bangalore until the next project began. In Bangalore, he complained that there were no opportunities to keep fit, continue training, or perform. Attakalari was focusing less on training dancers and more on starting to build a company of dancers, but Shankar could not commit to the required three-year contract if he wanted to continue working with SJDC in the future. Moreover, since Attakalari was concentrating its efforts on building a company, it decided to close its classes to only company members, preventing non-company members, like Shankar, from being able to continue their training in contemporary dance.

In particular, UK visa regulations stipulated that foreign workers could arrive only just before the start date on the work permit and were required to leave as soon as the permit expires, which was usually a day or two after the last show. This prevented Shankar from being able to look for work with other dance companies, make professional contacts, and grow and expand as dancers in the UK or become independent choreographers. Shankar was confined to work only for the company that sponsored his work permit. Visas are only granted for the length of the contract and dancers cannot work for any other company while on the work visa or in between contracts. While this arrangement benefited British Asian dance companies and ensured dancers were more or less beholden to the company if they wanted to return to the

UK, it was extremely stifling for foreign dance workers. Not only could Shankar not work with other companies in London, he was not able to work with companies in Bangalore because he never knew when the next SJDC contract would begin, since the availability of work was largely dependent on funding from the Arts Council. Arts funding policies, which tend to fund only short-term projects and short-term tours rather than the long-term operations of a dance company, exacerbate the transient nature of migrant South Asian dance workers today and limit the possibility for settlement of foreign dancers. Like many foreign dance workers, Shankar was essentially stuck in a pattern of frequent and forced transnational mobility.

These forced returns to India and extended periods of stay outside the UK made him ineligible to apply for permanent residency despite having worked for the same company for four years (foreigners need to work three years full-time before applying for permanent residency). While migrant South Asian dancers like Shankar have been integral in filling a labor shortage in the UK, and have played an important role in establishing a British Asian dance aesthetic and creating major dance works that have become part of the British dance cannon, British immigration and citizenship legislation has made it increasingly difficult for foreign dancers to settle in the UK. The immigration and state funding system for the arts facilitates short-term movements in and out of the UK that benefit the British economy, but impedes long-term settlement of immigrants in the UK. This combination has created a fragile, unstable, and unpredictable labor market for the

professional migrant South Asian dancer. Contrary to Lisa Lowe, who argues that the needs of capitalism contradict those of the nation-state,¹⁵ these temporary, flexible work arrangements reflect the *complementary* needs of capitalist/cultural production in the global north for “a smooth flow of immediately available short-term skilled labor”¹⁶ from the global south and the desire of western nation-states to limit the settlement of non-white immigrants. While global capital has mobilized flexible bodies for production in the global north, it has also restricted their mobility within the nation-state through racial discrimination and strategic regulations on citizenship. The nation-state colludes with capital to profit from racialized labor without granting them citizenship or settlement rights. In order to survive and adapt to increasingly flexible, temporary, and unpredictable work regimes in late capital, dancers are forced to keep moving back and forth between countries, uprooting each time, never settling in any one place.

Flexible Bodies/Injuries/Out-of-placeness

Moving between London and Bangalore, transnational dancers have learnt to be flexible according to the needs of the labor markets in both places. Dancers have become increasingly versatile and creative in order to meet the demands of increasingly temporary and uncertain work regimes. Flexibility and flexible accumulation have been important strategies to market themselves to transnational labor markets, and hedge bets regarding future

¹⁵ Lisa Lowe, *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics*, (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 1996).

¹⁶ Biao 2007, 6.

employment prospects. Their bodies have learnt not just to be flexible physically but to be flexible to time differences, different cultural values, different family structures, different ways of moving through a city. With each border crossing, their bodies are molded to be more flexible 21st century subjects. There are, however, limits to flexible accumulation. Injuries, racial bias, and feelings of being out of place suggest that there are limits to cultural accumulation, even for the most flexible transnational dancers. The body makes visible both the flexibility and fragility of labor in globalization.

Anita is one of the strongest, most flexible dancers I know. I first met her in London in March 2006. We had both been hired, along with a French bharata natyam dancer, to work on Angika's new production *Ether*. The first thing I noticed about Anita was that she was tall, painfully skinny, and had a cute, pixie haircut. I soon realized, though, that there was nothing weak or cute about her body. During rehearsal, she would launch herself into a handstand with no support, arch her back seemingly all the way to the opposite wall. She could do the splits and bend backwards with ease. I was astonished by her strength and flexibility. Dancers with only bharata natyam training, like myself, have difficulty moving in that way. My turnout is not as wide, my back is not as flexible, and my arms are not as strong. In the US, I trained only in bharata natyam, where the emphasis within Indian communities was on preserving cultural traditions rather than creating a contemporary aesthetic.

Anita's flexibility is the result of multiple trainings. She began learning bharata nataym at age thirteen in Bangalore, where she grew up. She also learnt kathak for two years, and has trained regularly in kalaripayattu for the last few years. Anita also trained at the Attakkalari Centre for Movement Arts. She was one of six selected from an audition of over 120 dancers who came from all over India, including kalaripayattu practitioners from Kerala, film dancers from Mumbai, and classical dancers from Bangalore and Chennai. Anita tells me she was not selected for her dancing necessarily, but her ability to pick up quickly, her "openness to training," and her sensitivity to learn. At Attakkalari, she trained for six hours a day in contemporary dance, bharata natyam, and kalaripayattu. By the end of the course, she was able to do flips, cartwheels, and headstands alongside *adavus* and *jathis*. She also trained in partnering work. Initially, Anita says she was reluctant to touch anybody or be touched, especially by male dancers, since in bharata natyam dancers rarely touch each other in performance. With practice, though, she became more and more comfortable with partner work and contact work.

Anita's flexibility in terms of technique has made her an attractive commodity to British Asian dance companies, including Angika and the SJDC. In 2005, Anita came to London for the first time to work for SJDC on the creation and touring of *Flicker*. Working for Jeyasingh made Anita's body even more flexible and versatile. Rehearsals would begin with company classes in ballet, capoeira, bharata natyam, contemporary dance, and

kalaripayattu. In the studio, the dancers would use these various movement vocabularies to create movement phrases based on specific tasks set by Jeyasingh. This raw movement material would then be crafted, edited, modified, and re-composed by Jeyasingh to make the final dance product. Susan Foster suggests that independent choreographers today encourage dancers to train in different techniques rather than adopt a single aesthetic vision based on a particular choreographer (e.g. Cunningham, Graham), style (e.g. modern, postmodern, classical), or form (e.g. ballet, bharata natyam); choreographers now “require a new kind of [dancing] body, competent in many styles.”¹⁷ Foster calls this the “hired body.” This is especially true of British Asian choreographers who have been pressured by the Arts Council and multicultural rhetoric to perform a hybrid British Asian identity that embodies both tradition and innovation and displays cultural and ethnic uniqueness as well as social integration. Due to the demands of late capital on racialized (dance) labor, Indian dancers have developed into highly flexible subjects, capable of switching from arabesques to *araimandis* with grace and ease. As a result of all these different trainings Anita’s body is like a rubber band. She admits she was not the strongest dancer in the company, but she had the physical flexibility to pick up a range of movements quickly. Her lithe and supple frame has learned to bend to the various demands and expectations of the choreographers she has worked with.

¹⁷ Susan Foster, “Dancing Bodies,” in *Meaning in Motion: New Cultural Studies of Dance*, Jane Desmond (ed), (Durham NC: Duke UP, 1997), 253.

The flexibility of Bangalore dancers has made them attractive commodities to South Asian and non-South Asian dance companies alike. Shankar has worked for Tavaziva Dance, a contemporary African dance company based in the UK, and DV8, a physical theater company that uses dance, text, and theater. In February 2010, I attended a production titled 'Wild Dog' at The Place Theatre. I had not met Shankar yet in person so my initial perception of him was shaped by the way he moved. He had a commanding presence; no matter what else was going on on stage, my eyes were drawn to him. His movements were precise, intense, and full of attack. He could kick high, lunge low, leap, fly and slide across the stage. In one movement motif, Shankar arched his back, reached his head toward the floor, and then undulated his spine forward again, articulating each vertebra with control and precision. His spine was so malleable it seemed to be made out of clay instead of bone.

There are limits, however, to their cultural accumulation. Anita complains that her body went through a lot of changes when she started doing contemporary dance after doing bharata natyam for almost ten years. She had a lot of aches and pains, knee and back injuries, and remembers not being able to walk in the mornings after rehearsals for *Flicker*. Jeyasingh's choreography is known to be particularly taxing on the dancer's body. One ex-SJDC dancer said that she left the company in part because she was tired of being injured and feeling run down. Pain and injury is one of the reasons Anita left the company after only one season. Another dancer who auditioned

for SJDC was relieved not to get the part because the choreography was so fast-paced, unrelenting and painful on the body. The body is literally immobilized due to its required use under late capitalism. Dance lays bare not just globalization's impact on labor flows, but also its toll on the physical, material body.

The constant back and forth also took a toll on Shankar's body. He would often suffer injuries when he returned to London to work for SJDC. Shankar attributes the frequent injuries to a lack of consistent training/dancing; in between contracts, there is no consistent source of money to continue training and keep the body fit and healthy. He tries to swim, go to the gym, and take professional dance classes offered in London as often as he can, but they all cost money and "when you're not working this is an added burden." SJDC's work is physical, fast, sharp, and disjointed. Unable to cope with jumping straight into intense rehearsals and classes, Shankar was often in chronic pain and suffered recurring injuries in his shoulder, neck, and knee. Because of his injuries, Shankar has been unable to dance consistently; ironically, it is the labor of dance that stops him from moving. In late 2010, Shankar injured his neck in rehearsals with SJDC before going to India to perform in Bangalore, Mumbai, and Delhi. He did not have money for acupuncture or massages, and the company would not cover the cost, so Shankar learned to perform through the pain. When I met him six months later he still had not completely healed. While Jeyasingh benefits from pushing her dancers' bodies to the limit and has built her reputation for razor

sharp, fast-paced, and precise choreography on the backs (and knees and shoulders and ankles) of dancers, the dancers suffer long-time injuries in exchange for short-term contracts that offer no basic citizen rights such as social security or healthcare. Broken bones, torn ligaments, and sprained ankles immobilize dancers. Injuries show that dancers do not endlessly and effortlessly flow across the stage, and that movements are frequently interrupted. They lay bare the restrictions on flexible citizenship and the limitations on mobility within globalization. In this way, temporary, flexible work arrangements have simultaneously increased dancers' mobility and their ability to move. Dancers' injuries show how globalization has literally stretched transnational dancing bodies to breaking point.

The limits of flexible accumulation are made visible not only through their bodily labor, but also through the body *as* labor. As an Indian passport-holder, rather than Aiwaha Ong's elite, multiple passport-holders,¹⁸ Anita is blocked at the UK border, questioned, and interrogated in order to work in the UK. In 2008, Angika was booked to perform in Zaragoza, Spain at the World Expo. Anita was forced to make multiple trips to the Spanish embassy to secure a visa to perform there. The Spanish embassy kept delaying and making Anita jump through endless bureaucratic loopholes. Until the eleventh hour, we were unsure whether Anita would be able to travel with us to Spain. Anita has been making efforts to return to the UK for the last two years but has been unsuccessful. The increasingly draconian immigration

¹⁸ Ong 1999.

restrictions on foreign workers, bureaucratic red tape, high fees and long processing times have made choreographers more and more reluctant to hire foreign dancers. Although it has always been an expensive and lengthy process for British Asian companies to apply for work permits for foreign workers, it has become near impossible in recent times.

Up until recently, migrant dancers had to be sponsored by a dance company, theater, or arts organization, and have secured a work contract or performance dates prior to entering the country. The company had to apply for the permit through the Home Office and demonstrate that they had adequately advertised, searched for and failed to find a resident UK worker who could fill the position. Under this system, many contemporary South Asian dance companies, including Angika, Srishti and SJDC, were able to hire a number of migrant South Asian dancers, including Anita, myself, and other dancers from India, US, and Malaysia, by proving that they could not find adequately trained dancers in the UK.

This simple work visa scheme was replaced in 2005 with the Points Based System (PBS), a much more complicated and convoluted immigration system introduced by Tony Blair's Labour government in response to the global war on terror and concerns over Britain's global economic competitiveness. Citing the need to balance the needs of business with the wider impact of migration on Britain (i.e. on national security and stability),

the government introduced PBS to “meet both the public’s concerns”¹⁹ regarding immigrants as well as to “respond flexibly to changing economic and labour market needs”²⁰ in order to achieve “the right mix of skills to help keep wealth creation, employment and productivity high and rising”²¹ within the current climate of global trade and worldwide recession. The PBS works by identifying shortages in the labor market - namely shortages in highly specialist skills, shortages due to unattractive wages or conditions, or shortages due to insufficient investment in skills - and awarding points to skills that might fill those gaps in the labor market. Emphasis is placed on recruiting first from the UK labor market and establishing tighter resident labor market tests (e.g. more extensive advertising, higher qualification requirements, etc.), while at the same time being aware not to harm the UK’s global competitiveness.

In terms of the contemporary South Asian dance economy, the PBS has made it increasingly difficult for dance companies to hire migrant dancers, maintain continuity in terms of company dancers, and plan long-term operations. The system, which is convoluted, confusing, and expensive, has also made it near impossible for freelance choreographers and smaller-scale dance companies with limited resources to hire foreign dancers. The move to a points based system has been criticized by the Arts and Entertainment

¹⁹ “Controlling our borders: Making migration work for Britain,” Home Office/HM Government (February 2005), 5.

²⁰ “Managing Migration: The Points Based System,” Home Office/HM Government (December 2009), 1.

²¹ “The Economic Impact of Immigration,” Home Office/HM Government (June 2008), 3.

Taskforce (made up of dance companies, organizations, promoters, and choreographers, including, notably, Akram Khan) for making it more difficult to get foreign dancers to work and perform in the UK.²² Both temporary and longer-term work visas require applicants to earn a minimum number of points based on previous earnings, formal educational qualifications, maintenance funds and language ability.²³ This new scheme, however, does not adequately cater for or recognize the skills acquired by experienced dancers. Points are based on past earnings and academic qualifications, both of which elude many dancers who often do not have university training, do not earn throughout the year, take on unpaid work, have little liquidity to prove availability of maintenance funds, and whose total earnings cannot compare with an applicant who is a doctor or businessperson. There is an “overemphasis on formal qualifications at the expense of professional experience or training.”²⁴ The English language requirement also unfairly discriminates against South Asian and non-western dancers who may not necessarily need English for the job. In addition, visa processing times and biometric requirements under the PBS have increased, making it difficult to

²² “Position Paper on a Points-Based System: Making Migration Work for Britain,” National Campaign for the Arts (20 March 2006); “National Campaign for the Arts response to the Migration Advisory Committee call for evidence on Forthcoming analysis on Tier 1, Tier 2 and dependants under the Points Based System for immigration,” National Campaign for the Arts (11 June 2009).

²³ The PBS is based on the division of migrants into five categories: Tier 1 (Highly Skilled Workers), Tier 2 (Sponsored Skilled Workers), Tier 3 (Partners and Family Members), Tier 4 (Students), Tier 5 (Temporary Workers). Tier 1 is further subdivided into General, Entrepreneurs, Investors, and Post-Study Workers. A sponsor/job offer is not required to obtain a Tier 1 visa. Instead, applicants must meet the minimum requirement of 85 points, which is based on previous earnings, formal educational qualifications, availability of maintenance funds, and English language ability. This information is accurate as of June 2011.

²⁴ “Managing Migration” 3.

guarantee that dancers, who are often called to perform at short notice, will be there for particular performances. I have had to turn down a number of offers to perform because of visa processing times.

The recent global economic recession has put pressure once again on ensuring that there is a “British job for every British worker.”²⁵ Some migrant categories (Tier 1 – highly skilled migrant) have been terminated altogether²⁶ while quotas have been placed on the number of visas (Tier 2 – skilled migrant) a company can grant for foreign workers. Artists, including dancers, have to apply under the Tier 2 (General) category, unlike elite and internationally recognized sportspeople. Previously a distinct visa category (Creative and Sports people), artists must now compete for a limited number of visas under the Tier 2 (General) category. Migrants coming under Tier 2 can initially stay up to three years, depending on the length of their contract. However, because of the short-term project-based nature of Arts Council funding, most South Asian dance workers enter under the Tier 5 (Temporary Workers) category for performers, entertainers, coaches, and sportspeople coming to work in the UK for less than twelve months. These changes reflect the increasingly temporary and flexible nature of dance work in the UK, and the way in which immigration legislation works to allow short-term labor flows while inhibiting long-term settlement.

²⁵ Speech made by Gordon Brown on September 10, 2007.

²⁶ In December 2010, British Prime Minister David Cameron stopped all applications to this category indefinitely.

In 2009, the newly elected Tory government introduced labor shortage lists to fill gaps in the UK workforce that cannot be filled by a settled worker. The Arts and Entertainment Task Force was able to lobby to put skilled ballet dancers and skilled contemporary dancers on the shortage occupation list, which means that non-EEA (European Economic Area) migrant dancers do not need to meet the Resident Labor Market Test (RLMT). Recognized companies can recruit migrant dancers if they have performed at or been invited to perform at venues of the caliber of Sadler's Wells, the Southbank Centre or The Place, either in the UK or overseas; attract dancers and/or choreographers and other artists from all over the world; or are endorsed as being internationally recognized by a UK industry body such as the Arts Councils (of England, Scotland and/or Wales).²⁷ Some of the recognized UK contemporary dance companies include Scottish Dance Theatre, Rambert Dance Company, and, notably, Shobana Jeyasingh Dance Company.

While in theory this should help ease restrictions on recruiting migrant dancers, in practice dancers must still meet the highly discriminatory points based system, which doles out points based on qualifications, future expected earnings, English language ability, and availability of maintenance funds, which many foreign dancers, particularly those from the global south, do not have. Dancers from India have had to ask friends and family to lend them money in order to temporarily inflate their bank balances and meet the

²⁷ "Government Approved Shortage Occupation List for Tier 2 of the Points Based System" Home Office/UK Border Agency, (29 April 2010), <http://www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/sitecontent/documents/workingintheuk/shortageoccupationlist.pdf>

maintenance funds requirements for their visas. Moreover, while dancers are on the occupation shortage lists at the moment, these lists are reviewed every six months. In future, shortages in the dance sector, which experiences fast turnover times and short project durations, may be overlooked. In addition, sponsors must have a license before recruiting non-EEA migrant dancers, privileging bigger, more established companies and excluding independent, freelance choreographers and smaller-scale companies. Suba has mentioned that she would like to hire dancers from India, such as Anita, but it has become increasingly difficult because of the convoluted immigration laws and expensive fees. Due to the difficulty in hiring non-EU workers, British Asian dance companies have re-structured their hiring practices. Some choreographers have chosen to hire less qualified, less experienced dancers from the UK and Europe; while others have started to hire contemporary dancers (who are in greater supply) and train them in bharata natyam. Transnational labor exposes the myth of seamless global flows, and reveals that cultural accumulation is limited by the nation-state's desire to control its borders and the composition of its citizenry.

A feeling of out-of-placeness also exposes the myth of flexibility and the limits of cultural accumulation. Anita has become so flexible that her movements are no longer seen as "Indian." In India, she would often lament to me that critics and audiences did not know how to understand or appreciate contemporary dance. Her work draws on bharata natyam, kalaripayattu, ballet, and contemporary dance, but is not legibly "Indian." As

a result, she feels marginalized and out-of-place in her home country, and struggles to find audiences without compromising her artistic vision for dance. Other contemporary Indian dancers have been similarly critiqued by audiences and the media for lacking a specific cultural or national identity in their dancing. At a performance of young contemporary Indian dancers, a notable dance critic stated, "In this exploration and search for new, personalised movement expressions one saw nothing of impulses triggered from years of practice in Indian dances...In the globalised world, boundaries specifying cultural identities are being erased and the strongest manifestation of this would seem to be the Contemporary dancer who now has an international identity."²⁸

If in India Anita is not Indian enough, in the UK she felt too Indian. In 2008, Anita and I, as part of Angika, performed at a *mela* (an outdoor Indian festival) in Gunnersbury, an area in the suburbs of London with a large population of South Asians. The festival featured South Asian music, dance, food, fashion as well as various booths and stalls, including one for Indian head massages and another for henna tattoos. Anita was continually perplexed by Indians in Britain. To her they were not 'real' Indians at all and she balked at their 'authentic' displays of cultural heritage. "This is *not* India!" Anita exclaimed at me, frustrated and furious with how India was being depicted in Britain. When I asked her to tell me what she thought was "the real India," she couldn't articulate it, but she said it definitely wasn't head

²⁸ Leela Venkatraman, "Freedom of expressions" *The Hindu* (June 24, 2011).

massages and henna! Anita was also shocked and disappointed by white British people. She had expected them to speak English perfectly and with beautiful accents; instead she found that, like many countries, there are pockets of the population that are uneducated, have poor grammar, are inarticulate and vulgar in their speech, and speak with incomprehensible accents. Clearly a legacy of colonialism, Anita's image of the British as proper, educated, and refined was shattered after coming to London. Migration and the messy, unruly encounters it engenders between national and diasporic citizens, colonial and postcolonial subjects ruptures received notions of history and authenticity. While her accumulation of 'physical capital' through different dance trainings has given Anita the flexibility to work in transnational labor markets, it has not prepared her for the contradictions and tensions between nation and diaspora, colonialism and postcolonialism, and the alienation and feelings of out-of-placeness that globalization has exacerbated.

Making work work: strategies of flexibility and capital accumulation

Marriage has been a key strategy of flexible citizenship. Only those foreign dancers who found partners in the UK, including myself, were able to stay permanently and begin to build careers in dance, independent of any specific company. Marrying European citizens gives dancers the freedom and flexibility to look for other opportunities to work as a dancer in the UK. With a spousal visa, foreign dancers are able to work for multiple companies without running the risk of having to leave the country and return to India.

While this has been helpful for heterosexual South Asian dancers, homosexual South Asian dancers do not enjoy the same benefits. In the UK, gay marriage is not legal, only civil partnerships. These require the couple to prove they have been living together for two years in order to be eligible for a (unmarried partner) visa. This is near impossible for migrant dancers who are on short-term work visas.

While some dancers, through marriage, have found a way to stay in the UK and develop a career in dance and choreography, however fraught by British racism, many other Bangalore dancers have not been able to remain in the UK and have found 'commuting' between London and Bangalore unsustainable as a long-term career plan. Initially migrant dancers would save up their wages from London to cover their basic costs in Bangalore in between contracts. While working in London, many Bangalore dancers would stay with friends and family or rent rooms for cheap in order to save as much of their earnings in British pounds to cover them when they returned to Bangalore. Thanks to a favorable exchange rate, working in London gave dancers the financial flexibility to hedge bets against uncertain economic times and sustain themselves during periods of unemployment. The financial capital Usha accrued by living with a family and keeping her daily expenses low sustained her temporarily through a period of unemployment when she returned to Bangalore. Shankar used his savings from his London wages to cover him until the next contract with SJDC began. Anita was able to use her savings to move out of her parents' home for the first time and live on her

own. But these were only temporary stopgap measures. Migrant dancers quickly learned that the flexibility of financial accumulation was finite and temporary, and could only be replenished with another contract.

With drastic budget cuts to the arts and severe restrictions to immigration imposed in the UK in the last two years, however, returning to London has not even been an available option for many dancers. Instead, they have had to find longer-term ways to sustain a career in dance in Bangalore. Transnational dancers have used strategies of flexibility and flexible accumulation to navigate uncertain economic times and increasingly fragile and temporary work regimes. They have drawn on their physical, cultural, and financial capital to launch and sustain careers in dance, negotiate contractual agreements and family pressures, and market themselves as contemporary choreographers and leaders in contemporary dance.

Shankar

Shankar's ability to adapt to different dance techniques has made him attractive to South Asian dance companies; his flexibility, however, has also proven to be a disadvantage. Contemporary British dance companies think he is too South Asian because of his skin color and his work experience with SJDC or not contemporary enough because he has not trained at one of the major schools in the UK (e.g. London School of Contemporary Dance or Northern Contemporary School); South Asian dance companies, on the other hand, think he is too contemporary because he does not have formal training in any South Asian dance form. He says that if companies only look at his CV

he does not get called back for auditions very often because people cannot place him. His lack of identifiable training in a South Asian dance form confuses funders and dance companies. Within multicultural discourse, ethnics are situated into particular categories that are associated with particular traits, characteristics, behaviors, and movements within the national imaginary.²⁹ Because he is so flexible and conversant in multiple techniques, he is not readily identifiable and cannot be hailed as an ethnic. His training and physical movements contradict the visual signifiers of his racial identity.

Due to the difficulties in trying to find work as a contemporary dancer who happens to be South Asian, Shankar is attempting to launch his own company. But he has run up against similar problems, even with the inside contact at the Arts Council I gave him. He is not considered South Asian enough to be funded by the Arts Council. State funding requires British Asian dancers to be ever more flexible, to demonstrate their ability not only to straddle Indian and British culture, but to integrate them in ever more innovative ways.³⁰ However, the flexible South Asian subject must not be too flexible. Shankar's body moves in a way that cannot be easily recognized as South Asian. South Asian dancers must be flexible enough to meet the

²⁹ Rey Chow, *The Protestant Ethnic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, (New York: Columbia UP, 2002).

³⁰ Alessandra Lopez y Royo, "Dance in the British South Asian Diaspora: Redefining Classicism," *Postcolonial Text*, (Vol. 1, No. 1, 2004), <http://postcolonial.org/index.php/pct/article/viewArticle/367/129>.

demands of a multicultural state, but not too flexible that they cannot be managed by multiculturalism and boxed in by narrow ethnic categories.

Shankar is aware of the contradictory nature of multicultural arts funding in the UK, but he knows he has to navigate it if he wants to succeed. He recently choreographed a fifteen-minute duet called *Arranged Marriage* for Resolution!, a platform for young choreographers at The Place Theatre in London. While the choreography was contemporary and did not draw on South Asian dance forms or necessarily address the issue of arranged marriage, he chose the title because he thought it would be compelling to a western audience. The soundtrack also featured Indian instruments and beats. In choosing a topic so closely related to South Asian culture and so contested within the British media and the western imaginary more generally, he was able to better market himself as a South Asian choreographer and situate his work within a more recognizably South Asian context.

Dinesh

“Dinesh” is a young, male dance from Bangalore. I was introduced to him by Usha after inquiring about up and coming contemporary choreographers in Bangalore. Usha told me that Dinesh had recently returned from dancing with various companies in Europe and is starting a dance collective of young, contemporary dancers in Bangalore, which aims “to create a fun filled working atmosphere and work with people from various art forms while creating an open platform for people to showcase their

talents.”³¹ I met Dinesh at his apartment/studio in Bangalore in February 2009. He was animated and talkative, and had an infectious enthusiasm. Like many Bangalore dancers who work in Europe, Dinesh trained with Attakkalari for five years where he became proficient in kalaripayattu, capoeira, contemporary dance, and partnering and floor work before working abroad. I asked him why he moved to Europe. He went initially to audition for SJDC, but he realized he had a different aesthetic to Jeyasingh. Instead, he worked for modern dance companies in Ireland, Germany, France and Austria, including Rex Levitates Dance Company (Dublin), Constanza Macras Dorky Park (Berlin), the Companie Keleminis (Marseille) and Willie Dorner (Vienna). He also learnt ‘Flying Low’ technique with David Zambrano in the Netherlands, obtained a postgraduate degree in choreography from the Salzburg Experimental Academy of Dance in Austria, and worked with a few contemporary dance companies in Vienna. He attended the famous Impulse Dance course, which brings dancers and choreographers from all over the world to train in different techniques and choreographic methods. Dinesh describes it as “an international dance supermarket.” For five weeks, he participated in four workshops everyday and attended performances every night. He acquired different techniques and styles of moving that have now become a part of his movement vocabulary.

Armed with an arsenal of contemporary dance and movement techniques, Dinesh was keen to return to Bangalore to work with other young

³¹ Collective’s Facebook page, (May 26, 2011).

dancers in the city and expose Bangalore audiences to (western) contemporary dance. When I met him in 2009, he had just started a collective with a few freelance dancers, including Usha. Drawing on the various dance trainings he accumulated in Europe, in particular the “flying low” technique, he hoped to create a new dance aesthetic in Bangalore. Dinesh felt that contemporary dance in the city relied too much on fusing bharata natyam or kathak and western style dancing and incorporating a lot of decoration, ornamentation, and abstract shapes. He “appreciates their hard work....but is not convinced about the approach.” Instead, he wanted to model his work after some of his choreographic idols, including postmodern choreographers Jonathon Burrows and Meg Stuart and physical theater company, Ultima Vez. In the studio, as we talk, he directs the other dancers in the group to deconstruct technique, use text and spoken word, undo cultural signifiers, and draw on personal experience to create new movement material.

Although Dinesh is the driving force behind setting up the collective, there is no single choreographer. The group collaborates to come up with the choreography. They suggest ideas to try out, and watch and give feedback on each other’s work. There is a convivial atmosphere in the room; it’s buzzing with creative energy. The collective has attracted like-minded dancers who have a similar vision for dance in Bangalore. Usha now feels she doesn’t need to go to London to find exciting contemporary dance opportunities. When I ask Dinesh how the collective aims to make a living, he says that he is planning to put on regular groups shows in the city and make money off of

ticket sales. He is against corporate funding, which many dance companies in Bangalore rely on. He says that choreographers have to make too many compromises, modify their choreography, and take on board suggestions from the sponsor. For one corporate show, the executives suggested: “this piece is very nice but it would be better with some candles.” He laughs and tells me in disbelief that he once did a corporate show for a jeans company and had to dance in jeans as a kind of product placement.

In a city built on corporate capital, Dinesh is trying to find a sustainable economic model for making and performing dance while still retaining artistic integrity and independence. By pooling their ideas, skills, resources and sharing in the ticket sales, Dinesh, Usha and the other dancers in the collective are constructing alternative economies of dance and livelihoods that rely neither on corporate capital nor on working for companies in the West. Instead of continuing a cycle of perpetual mobility as dancers for companies in the UK or making commercial work for western corporations/global capital, they are forging their own paths as independent choreographers.

Sundari

While Dinesh and the collective have eschewed corporate capital by pooling their resources, other dancers have capitalized on the influx of corporate sponsorship in Bangalore to launch their own companies. The liberalization of India’s economy in 1991 and the subsequent IT boom in the last two decades has flooded India’s urban centers with western capital. In

recent years, multinational corporations in Bangalore have started staging 'corporate shows' in which dancers are commissioned to choreograph and perform 'contemporary' or 'fusion' items to entertain executives, VIP guests, and foreign visitors. Performed for the global business elite, these dances are used to stage India as a progressive, modern, and cutting edge nation on the global stage. Corporate sponsorship has given rise to a nascent yet vibrant contemporary dance economy in the city, opening up new labor markets for professional dancers and choreographers, such as "Sundari."

I first met Sundari in 2008 in Bangalore. She was one of a handful of contemporary Indian choreographers in the city and had recently started her own company. She lives in a top-floor open plan apartment in Bangalore's Malleswaram neighborhood, where many dancers live. We chat in her living room, which also doubles as her company's studio space. She multitasks, making tea for me, pouring some juice and putting out biscuits for her son and his friend, fiddling with the DVD player to get a video of her company's work to play, and talking to me at the same time. She tells me she was an understudy for SJDC in 2003 for the production of *Phantasmatron*. We exchange stories about the dance scene in London, about how it is to work for SJDC and Angika, about what is important to us in terms of dance and choreography. She said the experience of working with Jeyasingh was invaluable to her career, but she also realized that she wanted to take her work in a different direction. Jeyasingh's choreography, she said, was too abstract and emotionally cold for her taste. She missed the expressional aspect

of bharata natyam. After having a family, she wanted to continue to dance but it was no longer possible to work abroad. She was also interested in trying to find a modern dance vocabulary and aesthetic that was uniquely Indian. So, in 2004, soon after her first son was born, she decided to start her own company, which employs three or four dancers at any given time.

Most of the company's funding comes from corporate shows. Sundari and her company perform at awards shows, annual days, product launches, or important dinners for international corporate executives at corporate houses. Paying sometimes ten times as much as local government-sponsored performances, corporate shows have provided the necessary start-up capital for Sundari to set up and sustain her own contemporary dance company in Bangalore. She tells me that she charges Rs. 25,000 to 40,000 (£350-£550) per corporate show, though prices can go up to Rs. one lakh (£1400) per show. She usually has about three or four dancers, and shows are around six to ten minutes. The performances are held in five star hotels or at the company headquarters. Sundari's company does three or four shows a month, or sometimes none at all. She uses the profits from commercial performances to cover her and her dancers during 'drier' performance periods or to compensate for low-paying performances. In addition to offering performances as entertainment, the company also makes money by offering stress reduction movement classes and dance workshops for busy software engineers and other IT personnel and business people in the "Electronic City" (the IT corridor of Bangalore). Through corporate performances, young

women have been able to form their own dance companies, support themselves and provide full-time career options to other young dancers.

Moreover, by charging high rates for corporate shows, they have been able to make “more experimental, artistically fulfilling” work on the side without worrying about ticket sales or appealing to mainstream audiences. In 2009, for example, Sundari choreographed a dance theater piece based on the true stories of women who frequented local beauty salons in Bangalore. The work was staged as a site-specific work and took place inside a small beauty salon that could accommodate a maximum of fifteen people. While the work did not bring the company widespread recognition or gross a lot of money, the choreographic process, which involved listening to the sometimes comical, sometimes tragic stories of women in the community, was deeply fulfilling for Sundari and the two other female company members.

Having her own company rather than working as a dancer in London has given her the flexibility to have a family without sacrificing a career in dance. Sundari has strategically used corporate capital to negotiate her personal and professional life. Corporate capital has not only made dance a financially viable career option for Sundari, it has also given her a platform on which to negotiate shifting notions of gender and work within national and global politics. Kanchan Mathur argues that “there is a need to redraw the map of women’s bodies and create spaces for women to enable them to

experience a new sense of the self.”³² I suggest that dance has been one such arena where women have been able to construct and sustain independent careers. While women have increasingly been restricted by complex accommodations between capital, nation, family, and state under globalization, the studio and the stage have afforded women the flexibility to balance personal obligations with professional goals. In this way, neoliberal economic reforms and the influx of global capital have created new transnational economies, which are, in turn, creating new economies of dance with profound effects on Indian dance practices, and on the lives of dancers, such as Sundari.

Anita

Over the last few years, Anita has worked as a freelance dancer for a number of contemporary dance companies in Bangalore, including Nritarutya and Shiri, doing mostly corporate shows. In one year, she estimates that she did close to 200 corporate performances. Although it was quite lucrative and the income was steady, she could not keep doing “those” choreographies, which she found meaningless and unfulfilling as an artist. This last year, she decided she was not going to do any commercial performances. Instead, she put her energies into choreographing an evening-length solo, which she toured at festivals around the country, including Interface (Calcutta), Ignite (Delhi), and Kalagoda (Mumbai). Although she did not make as much money

³² Kanchan Mathur, “Body as space, Body as site: Bodily integrity and Women’s Empowerment in India,” *Economic and Political Weekly* (April 26, 2008), 63.

from her solo performances as she did from corporate shows, each performance was enough to sustain her for a month or two. To supplement her income and occupy herself in between performances, she also writes as a dance critic for a magazine, exhibits her sketches and drawings, and choreographs on occasion for other dance companies. Through a strategy of flexibility and diversification, she has been able to protect herself against volatile market fluctuations in an uncertain economic climate.

In February 2009, Anita choreographed a piece using dancers from another Bangalore-based contemporary dance company. She negotiated a contractual agreement in which she would be responsible for the choreography, while the company would provide all the resources, including the dancers, studio space, administrative matters, and marketing. In exchange the company would retain rights to the piece, but Anita would be listed as choreographer and receive royalties each time it was performed. Through this work arrangement, Anita was able to promote herself as an individual choreographer (rather than a dancer in a company) without having to invest any financial capital to start and sustain her own company.

Still, she laments to me that there are not enough performance opportunities or platforms for the number of dancers Bangalore is producing. Certain companies have monopolized corporate bookings by marketing themselves as contemporary dance companies for corporate shows, which has left little room for freelance dancers or smaller companies. While there is a saturated market of dancers in Bangalore, there is a dearth of dancers in UK.

Although this should mean that it would be easy to work in London as a foreign dancer, the UK's political boundaries have become more and more rigid and immigration restrictions have become increasingly difficult to navigate around. While capital determines the direction of global labor flows, the nation-state through immigration restrictions regulates the pace and timing of these flows.

Anita last worked in the UK in 2008 on Angika's final production, *Cypher*. We have both since moved back to our respective homes, in large part because of UK visa restrictions. As we talk on skype half way across the world amid the horns honking in Bangalore and the birds chirping in southern California, she jokes with me that she doesn't dare look towards the UK as a possibility since it has become near impossible to obtain a visa in recent years. Suba and Mayuri, since devolving Angika and starting their own companies, have not been able to offer her work for this reason. While both Suba and Mayuri have expressed to me individually that they would like to hire non-EEA dancers, including Anita, because they feel there is a lack of well-trained, creative dancers in the UK and Europe, they are reluctant to go through expensive and complicated visa applications for Bangalore-based dancers with no guarantee that their applications will be approved. While once there were a number of dance migrants from India working in the UK, today there are only a few.

Anita has tried to maneuver around these strict visa regulations by applying to an MA at Roehampton University (London) in South Asian Dance

Studies. Roehampton University offers an MA, a postgraduate diploma and a postgraduate certificate in South Asian Dance Studies, the only postgraduate global arts course currently available in Europe and North America that is focused specifically on the study of South Asian performing arts. The course offers modules on South Asian dance in relation to globalization, diaspora, postcolonialism, multiculturalism, migration, and transnationalism. It is targeted largely at producing South Asian dance scholars rather than practitioners and aims to provide students with “skills and knowledge necessary to work broadly as cultural and creative entrepreneurs in the international domain of arts production.”³³ The positioning of South Asian dance within the hallowed grounds of the university is significant. It has situated South Asian dance alongside rather than separate from western classical and contemporary dance forms, and ensured it has institutional legitimacy as a contemporary, global art form.

Although Anita has received an offer letter from Roehampton and borrowed money from friends to “show maintenance funds,”³⁴ she is nevertheless worried about the approval of her visa application. An increase in the amount of maintenance funds required has been one attempt to weed out the legitimate candidates from the bogus ones. In the last year, the UK has

³³ <http://www.roehampton.ac.uk/postgraduate-courses/south-asian-dance-studies/index.html?WT.srch=1&gclid=CMilu5i04aUCFUps4wodhSeK4g> (accessed December 10, 2010)

³⁴ According to UK immigration law, visa applicants must show a certain amount of available maintenance funds. General migrants must show that they have had £2800 for the three-month period before applying. Students must show that they have enough funds to cover tuition for a year, and £800 per month for each month of the course up to a maximum of nine months. (<http://www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/>)

been cracking down on student visas, especially from Asia and Africa, as the government feels the visa category has been abused by many immigrants who use student visas to enter the country and then settle permanently in the UK. Nevertheless, under the current British immigration system, it is the simplest way for her to enter the UK. Moreover, on a student visa, according to UK laws, she will be allowed to work three days a week (roughly twenty hours), giving her the opportunity to earn money and increase her visibility as a dancer in the UK. Anita feels that a degree from the UK will also give her legitimacy and credibility to speak about dance with more authority when she returns to India.

Jayachandran

As mentioned at the start of this chapter, for the past decade labor has been extracted from Bangalore, specifically from 'body shops' such as Attakkalari, and sent out to produce culture in London and other western centers of capital. Every two years since Attakkalari was founded in 2000, Jayachandran re-routes those flows back to India with the weeklong Attakkalari Biennial Festival, which invites contemporary dancers and companies from all over India and other countries around the world to perform in Bangalore.

In 2009, when I attended, over twenty companies performed at the festival. Half were from India, while the other half were from South America, West Africa, Western and Northern Europe, the US, South Korea and

Canada.³⁵ The city was buzzing with dance that week. There were three to five events taking place on any given day of the festival. On one day I saw a West African-Dutch dance collaboration, a contemporary dance company from Chennai, and a German hip-hop dance theater group. By positioning Indian contemporary dance artists on equal footing with contemporary performers from around the world, the Biennial collapsed boundaries of east and west, north and south, inside and outside, local and global, boundaries that have been, I would argue, exacerbated not erased by globalization. Jyoti Argade suggests that international festivals such as the Attakkalari Biennial, much like the influx of consumer goods to India in the last two decades, have brought the global to the doorsteps of Bangalore's citizens.³⁶ Through the consumption of contemporary dance from all over the world, Bangalore's (middle-class) audiences engage in a new form of consumer citizenship that "redefines India's modernity from a post-colonial condition into a globalized potentiality."³⁷

In addition to dance, the festival also organized talks and seminars, including one that I attended titled "Body, Movement, Technology, and Thought," which featured a diverse panel, including scholars, choreographers, and dance aficionados. Held at the Alliance Française and open to the public, it was a chance for practitioners to engage the local public

³⁵ Jyoti Argade, "*Chronotopia* – Bangalore Contemporary Dance and the Embodiment of Historical Memory" (Society of Dance History Scholars, University of Surrey), June 2010.

³⁶ Argade 10.

³⁷ Argade 6.

in discussions concerning contemporary dance in India. Sadanand Menon, the lighting designer and manager of a Chandralekha Dance Group, a well known modern dance company in India, posed the question: why is contemporary dance so under-developed in India? He argued that in part it is due to a “terminological obfuscation” in which Indian nationalists in the 20th century invested dance with a ritual, spiritual, and ancient quality and made it divine, thus making the dancer a divine instrument and the spectator a devotee. This, he argues, “killed any critical faculty of dancers and dance-goers.” The (under) development of contemporary dance in India is also due in part to the persistence of neocolonial relations between India and the west. Professor Sundar Sarukkai, from the Centre for Philosophy at the National Institute of Advanced Studies in Bangalore, argued that there is “an asymmetrical process of mixing that takes place,” wherein the global south/east provides the labor for the production and consumption of culture in the global north/west. Cultural workers from India receive none of the profit, credit or rights to the work and must return home when its labor is no longer required. Because there are more opportunities to dance outside Indian than within India, “Indian contemporary dance is externally rather than internally driven,” he argues. If the consumers of Indian contemporary dance are elsewhere, i.e. in the west, Sarukkai wonders how much say Indian dancers have in defining the notion of contemporary.

Discussions such as these are important as much for what they say as for what they do. Not only do they draw attention to the inequities of

globalization, they also redress them by re-centering India within contemporary cultural production. Through dance and debate, the Biennial Festival organized by Attakkalari re-oriens Bangalore and, at least for a brief moment, enables Bangalore's citizens to reposition their city within the heart of national and global culture.

Conclusion

The combination of the rise of British multiculturalism in the 1990s and India's economic liberalization in 1991 opened up new labor markets in the UK for professional dancers, created new job opportunities for dancers from Bangalore, and has increased the mobility of capital and labor between the UK and India over the last two decades. These new work arrangements, however, have been largely flexible, temporary, and subject to volatile market fluctuations and political trends. Bangalore dance workers are hired for short-term projects to create and tour new work in the UK. When the contract expires, they are sent back home to India until the next project begins, which could be in three months, six months, or not at all, depending on a number of factors, including funding approval from the Arts Council in the UK. The labor of Indian dancers is not necessarily cheaper (all dancers, regardless of nationality, are paid Equity Minimum³⁸ and foreign dancers are paid round trip airfare making them in a way *more* expensive to hire than local dancers); however, it is certainly more 'flexible,' in a number of ways. Many Indian

³⁸ Equity Minimum in the UK stipulates that the minimum wage for dancers is approximately £350-£400 for a five or six day workweek.

dancers, for example, train in multiple dance forms and styles and can adapt to the more contemporary aesthetic of British Asian choreographers; they are willing to work on a temporary basis in return for the perceived prestige of working in London; and they take advantage of a favorable exchange rate to use savings from their UK earnings to cover themselves (at least in the short-term) during periods of unemployment in between contracts. In this chapter, I have focused on a number of Bangalore dancers who work or have worked in London, and the way in which they have responded through creative strategies of flexible accumulation to increasingly temporary, exploitative, and uncertain work regimes and labor markets.

I have also examined the limits to their flexibility. While globalization has mobilized dancers from India, the UK has ramped up efforts to curb the mobility of transnational (dancing) bodies through technologies of immigration, racism, and citizenship. Short-term contracts make Bangalore dancers ineligible for residency and citizenship in the UK; because of the sporadic nature of work, intense rehearsal and performance regimes, and the lack of training opportunities and health care benefits during periods of unemployment, they suffer long-term injuries; migrant dancers' employment prospects have diminished due to changes in British immigration law, budget cuts, and national arts funding policies; their careers are often stifled by the sporadic and short-term nature of work; and racial bias and narrow ethnic categorization have prevented Bangalore dancers from jobs and state funding in the UK. The UK has benefited from globalization's unequal, neo-colonial

economic arrangements to extract labor from India for national cultural production, while ensuring that the nation remains untainted by brown bodies by imposing residency and citizenship limitations, flexible labor regimes, and immigration restrictions. In this way, the nation-state articulates with capitalism to curb dancers' mobility.

Thus, I argue that while transnational Indian dancers have been forced to become increasingly flexible in their accumulation of cultural, financial, and even physical capital in order to meet the ever-shifting and unpredictable demands of working as a dancer in late capitalism, injuries, stifled careers, citizenship restrictions, racism, and typecasting demonstrate the multiple ways in which global processes have stretched transnational South Asian dancers to breaking point. Simultaneously enabled and restricted, mobilized and stilled, Bangalore's transnational dancers lay bare the contradictory ways in which the nation-state aligns with capital in order to exploit racialized labor without threatening the racial homogeneity of national identity. Nevertheless, in spite or maybe because of globalization's inequities and injustices, transnational dancers are also constructing alternative arrangements with capital. Some have become increasingly more flexible to adapt to volatile market fluctuations and a racist and exploitative immigration system, while others are becoming active cultural producers, circumventing traditional centers of power and capital, and re-orienting global labor flows.

CONCLUSION

On Movement, Mobility, and Migration

This dissertation has been written on the move. In the US, the UK and India. In cafes, libraries, living rooms, and studios. On buses, trains, subways, rikshaws, tubes, and planes across the Atlantic and Indian Oceans. It has been written in airport lounges in Los Angeles, scrawled shakily on notebooks while riding buses through central London, and jotted down on the backs of receipts on train station platforms in Bangalore. It has been scribbled in pocket-sized notebooks, and typed on my laptop while sitting in cramped airline seats - shoulders hunched, neck squashed, fingers quietly typing. Not only have I traveled in writing about transnational South Asian dancers, but the writing itself moves. Shifting between disciplines, I have at times moved freely in academic circles as a dance scholar, and at others jumped into the world of the stage as a dancer and choreographer or stepped back into the shadows as an ethnographer. As a result, the writing moves in a circular, slightly chaotic fashion.

In this dissertation, I have looked at the movement of dancing bodies across national borders and the actual movements of dancing bodies on stage in order to tease out the relationship between the movement of labor and movement as labor, between the choreography of migration and the choreography of dance, between bodily labor and economic labor. I have examined what kinds of movements are sanctioned, where and by which bodies as well as who gets to move and who does not. I have queried the

movement, mobility, and migration of South Asian dancers with regards to negotiating the relationship between race and citizenship. I have suggested that dancing bodies make visible the shifting, complex tensions between race and citizenship. At times, these two terms are aligned, and at times they are at odds. At times they also construct each other, almost collapsing the difference between them.¹ By examining transnational South Asian dancers, ultimately what I have been moving towards is an understanding of the relationship between globalization, the nation-state, and the (dancing) body.

Flexibility has formed the theoretical framework for this dissertation. I have argued that flexibility not only draws attention to globalization's toll on the body, but also makes visible the power, strength, and creativity of dancers to negotiate the pressures and inequalities inherent within globalization in and through their bodily practices. The preceding chapters illustrate the increasingly unpredictable, unequal, and volatile conditions of labor markets in late capitalism, and the various flexible tactics developed and deployed by South Asian dancers to negotiate the contradictions between the nation-state and globalization. I have argued that while globalization and the nation-state have limited the flexibility and mobility of dancers through technologies of race and citizenship, dancers have also become more flexible, moving with,

¹ Because of the fluidity and flexibility of these terms, the distinction and relationship between the two is not always well defined. While I have made an effort to map the tensions between race and citizenship throughout this dissertation, I also recognize that these terms are complex and the relationship between them requires much more time to think through. I thank Anthea Kraut for pushing me to consider these issues.

against and through global flows of capital to stay afloat in turbulent racial and economic climates.

It is the condition of late capital that labor must constantly move. So I keep moving to survive. Since 2004, I have been on nine different work permits, each one valid for six months or less. I have paid approximately \$10,000 in transatlantic flights, accumulated roughly 60,000 air miles, lived in five houses, and stayed on innumerable couches, spare rooms, and floors. With one foot in the UK and the other in the US, my limbs have been stretched and pulled across continents and oceans. I am not as flexible as I once was though. I am near my breaking point. The jetlag affects me more than it used to. I feel the time difference weigh on me; it settles in my bones and makes my joints creak. I am tired of being on the move. I am tired of moving. I want to stand still.

As I write this, however, I am on the move once again. I am flying back to London to audition for a well-known South Asian dance company. It is another short-term contract, subject to state funding and visa approval, of course; it offers no benefits, or the possibility of long-term settlement in the UK. I long to plant some roots, but dance keeps compelling me to move. I keep coming back, like some transatlantic bird that flocks to London every year for the dance season. The gravitation pull of the city is strong. It draws South Asian dancers from all over the world into its orbit and keeps them hovering around, ready and waiting for the next vacancy in a dance company or the next project to be funded.

So this journey ends where it began – on a plane ready to depart for England. We begin to pull away from the terminal. I fasten my seatbelt, stow my tray table, and turn off my laptop. The engines roar and the body of the plane shakes with anticipation. We are about to take off.

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