UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SAN DIEGO

Racial Encounters: Queer Affiliations in Black and South Asian Diasporas

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

in

Literature

by

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University of California, San Diego

2016

DEDICATION

For my grandmother,
Savitri Sharma

and my parents,
Aravinda and Mridula Kini

In memory of
Rosemary Marangoly George

EPIGRAPH

If, as the saying goes, the past is another country,
then all memory is diasporic.

Rosemary Marangoly George

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Signature Page……iii

Dedication……...iv

Epigraph……...v

Table of Contents……vi

Acknowledgements……vii

Vita……...x

Abstract of the Dissertation……xi

Prologue……...1

Chapter One
Diasporic Relationality: Queer Memory Discourses and Narratives of Indian Indenture……13

Chapter Two
Black British Cinema and the Queer Politics of Memory…….……47

Chapter Three
Black-South Asian Intimacies and the Legacies of Colonialism……..…….73

Chapter Four
Transnational U.S. Exceptionalisms: Neoliberal Bollywood……...……..100

Epilogue……...127

Bibliography……134

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Racial Encounters: Queer Affiliations in Black and South Asian Diasporas

by

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Doctor of Philosophy in Literature

University of California, San Diego, 2016

Professor Lisa Lowe, Co-chair
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Racial Encounters: Queer Affiliations in Black and South Asian Diasporas examines diasporic Black and South Asian cultural production to chart the shifting politics of race, gender, and sexuality in British and U.S. imperial projects. I argue that diasporic Black and South Asian cultural production together comprise an important body of work that collectively archives histories of British colonialism in South Asia, Africa, the Caribbean, and the United Kingdom, and the post-World War II ascendance of U.S.-led global capitalist imperialism. Drawing from the multiple itineraries of the

cultural texts themselves, the project traverses a series of historical contexts and geographic locations, including the legacies of African slavery and Indian indenture in postcolonial Trinidad, anticolonial movements in British East Africa, Black British identity formations in Thatcher-era Great Britain, and multicultural discourses in the post-9/11 United States. In each of these contexts, South Asian and Black diasporic subjects are variously positioned in relation to each other in a network of possible configurations: as colonized subjects of empire with differentiated access to the conditions of life and freedom; as workers in racial and sexual divisions of labor; as political actors in anticolonial and anti-racist movements; as partners in various kinds of intimacies; as postcolonial immigrants and racialized minorities. Through readings of an array of 20th and 21st century literary, cinematic, cultural, and historical artifacts, this dissertation investigates how the relational positioning of Black and South Asian diasporic formations expresses the dominant logics of Anglo-American empire, and also reveals the possibilities and limitations of multiracial, anti-imperial solidarities. Employing a queer feminist analytic to foreground the intersectional workings of race, gender, sexuality, class, and nation, I read the body of texts assembled here as an archive of, on the one hand, the differential locations of Black and South Asian diasporic formations under imperialism, and on the other, critically resistant cultural and political practices, including forms of diasporic memory-making and queer feminist modes of affiliation and coalition that refuse the comforts of solidarities forged through analogy and equivalence.

Prologue

There is a tremendous paradox here which I cannot help relishing myself; that in the very moment when finally Britain convinced itself it had to decolonize, it had to get rid of them, we all came back home. As they hauled down the flag, we got on the banana boat and sailed right into London. That is a terrible paradox because they had ruled the world for three hundred years and, at least, when they had made up their minds to climb out of that role, at least the others ought to have stayed out there in the rim, behaved themselves, gone somewhere else, or found some other client state. No, they had always said that this was really home, the streets were paved with gold and, bloody hell, we just came to check out whether that was so or not.

--Stuart Hall, "The Local and the Global: Globalization and Ethnicity"

I.

I begin with a photograph. Two young South Asian men, perhaps nineteen and twenty years old, pose in front of a city bus or coach. In their style and posture they mean to perform a kind of hip and cool masculinity, London mod style. They are dressed in fashionable suit jackets and skinny ties, one of the men wears horn-rimmed glasses, their thick black hair tousled just so. The man on the left leans against the bus. His body is in profile, but his head is turned so that he faces the camera, a slight smile on his face. His right hand sits in his pant pocket; his other hand stretches across the body of the bus. The man next to him, his brother, occupies the photo's center. He faces the camera, left hand on his hip, his right hand resting on his brother's shoulder.

The two men in this photo, my maternal uncles, were recent immigrants to Great Britain, having arrived in London in 1965 from newly independent Kenya where they, along with my mother and two other brothers, were born and raised. Like migrants from other decolonizing nations, their presence in London was marked by a rising tide of anti-immigrant sentiment, most notably indexed in Enoch Powell's infamous "Rivers of

Blood" speech, delivered on April 20, 1968 at a meeting of the Conservative Political Centre in Birmingham:

> A week or two ago I fell into conversation with a constituent, a middle-aged, quite ordinary working man employed in one of our nationalised industries. After a sentence or two about the weather, he suddenly said: "If I had the money to go, I wouldn't stay in this country…I have three children, all of them been through grammar school and two of them married now, with family. I shan't be satisfied till I have seen them all settled overseas. In this country in 15 or 20 years' time the black man will have the whip hand over the white man." I simply do not have the right to shrug my shoulders and think about something else. What he is saying, thousands and hundreds of thousands are saying and thinking—not throughout Great Britain, perhaps, but in the areas that are already undergoing the total transformation to which there is no parallel in a thousand years of English history…Those whom the gods wish to destroy, they first make mad. We must be mad, literally mad, as a nation to be permitting the annual inflow of some 50,000 dependants, who are for the most part the material of the future growth of the immigrant-descended population. It is like watching a nation busily engaged in heaping up its own funeral pyre.

On the right of the photograph, an elderly, white British woman walks by. She is not meant to be in the photo, but there she is, slightly out of focus, her body blurred by movement. She is dressed all in white, in a long coat with a white hat and white handbag, pearl earrings clipped to her ears. Her face is turned toward the two men. Her eyes look closed, as if she has just blinked, and her mouth is set in a thin line. The camera seems to have captured the after-effects of what looks to be a rather distasteful look on her face, a grimace directed at my uncles as she passes them. Perhaps she is muttering something under her breath.

My uncles clearly want to be seen in this photograph. They are young, handsome men in London, out on the town. But the intentionality of the photo—to capture them in all their hip masculinity—is interrupted by the intrusion of the white British woman into

the frame. If the camera was meant to capture the youthful joy of these two immigrant men, it also recorded something else: their racialization at the ostensible end of the Empire. Their presence in Britain was, as Kobena Mercer has written, "a reminder and remainder of its historical past" (7). For my uncles and for other racialized immigrants arriving in the capital city of the so-called Mother Country in the decades after World War II, this was not the end of the Empire so much as its rearticulation in another form.

What did the woman say to herself, I wonder, as she passed these two men on the street? Did my uncles hear her? Did they notice her facial expression? Did they respond somehow? And if so, what did they say? What could they say? What did they want to say?

Looking again at the photo I am reminded of a scene from Michelle Cliff's *No Telephone to Heaven*, in which Clare Savage, now a student at the University of London, witnesses a march by the National Front while she sits in her art history class:

> Chants. Shouts. Noise slamming against the glass of the well-appointed, high-ceilinged room. KAFFIRS! NIGGERS! WOGS! PAKIS! GET OUT! A banner—white bedsheet with black paint—went past. KEEP BRITAIN WHITE! The voices rose and invaded the room further, forcing the professor to raise his voice, in anachronistic disdain cursing the "blasted miners." As if this phrase would embrace any public display which inconvenienced him. Some of the students smiled—miners, fascists, what did it matter?...[O]utside the jargon smashed clear through his [the professor's] words, louder, louder: NIGGERS, CLEAR OUT!...As if in response, as if there could be a dialogue, a poster appeared the next day on a bulletin board outside the cafeteria in Senate House. WE ARE HERE BECAUSE YOU WERE THERE. (137)

We are here because you were there.

II.

Racial Encounters: Queer Affiliations in Black and South Asian Diasporas examines

diasporic Black and South Asian literature and cinema to chart the shifting politics of race, gender, and sexuality in British and U.S. imperial projects. I argue that diasporic Black and South Asian cultural production together comprise an important body of work that collectively archives histories of British colonialism in South Asia, Africa, the Caribbean, and the United Kingdom, and the post-World War II ascendance of US-led global capitalist imperialism. Drawing from the multiple itineraries of the cultural texts themselves, the project traverses a series of historical contexts and geographic locations, including the legacies of African slavery and Indian indenture in postcolonial Trinidad, anticolonial movements in British East Africa, Black British identity formations in Thatcher-era Great Britain, and multicultural discourses in the post-9/11 United States. In each of these contexts, South Asian and Black diasporic subjects are variously positioned in relation to each other in a network of possible configurations: as colonized subjects of empire with differentiated access to the conditions of life and freedom; as workers in racial and sexual divisions of labor; as political actors in anticolonial and anti-racist movements; as partners in various kinds of intimacies; as postcolonial immigrants and racialized minorities. In placing these multiple historical contexts in relation to each other, and by interrogating the contradictions and convergences that they engender, one of the larger aims of this project is to contribute to the work of interrogating dominant narratives of progress that trace an inevitable development from colonialism to postcolonialism to neoliberal globalization. I argue that this narrative of development only finds coherence by relegating colonialism and empire to the realm of history, as the marker of a prior era of racial violence that has not only ended but has been supplanted and resolved by the commitment to market freedom and benign diversity discourses that

marks the contemporary so-called "postracial" moment.

In contrast to this dominant progress narrative, I situate cultural production as the site at which the residues of colonial and imperial power relations are negotiated, contested, remembered, and reimagined. The texts assembled in this study thus not only *represent* histories of colonialism, indenture, war, slavery, anticolonial resistance, and migration, but they also *theorize* the legacies of those formations on our neoliberal present. Through readings of an array of 20th and 21st century literary, cinematic, cultural, and historical artifacts, this dissertation investigates how the relational positioning of Black and South Asian diasporic formations expresses the dominant logics of Anglo-American empire, and also reveals the possibilities and limitations of multiracial, anti-imperial solidarities. Employing a queer feminist analytic to foreground the intersectional workings of race, gender, sexuality, class, and nation, I read the body of texts assembled here as an archive of, on the one hand, the differential locations of Black and South Asian diasporic formations under imperialism, and on the other, critically resistant cultural and political practices, including forms of diasporic memory-making and queer feminist modes of affiliation and coalition that refuse the comforts of solidarities forged through analogy and equivalence.

This dissertation is both informed by and contributes to recent transnational feminist, queer, and Black studies scholarship on diaspora as an alternative framework of comparison in the critical study of race, gender, and empire. The ubiquity of diaspora in academic discourse and its uncritical deployment as synonymous with such terms as "transnational," "migrant," and "exile" has led Khachig Tölölyan to remark that diaspora is "in danger of becoming a promiscuously capacious category that is taken to include all

the adjacent phenomena to which it is linked" ("Rethinking Diaspora(s)" 8). Critics of diaspora often define it as a project of recovery, as the means by which a literal or metaphorical return to a lost homeland necessarily restores or recuperates the wholeness and completeness of a fragmented diasporic subject.[1] As I employ it here, diaspora is decidedly not a project of recovery or return, directed only by a nostalgic engagement with a coherent past; rather, diaspora is an index of the *impossibility* of recovery, an acknowledgement that the past is not something to which one can return. Nonetheless, the past continues to work on the present, often upending and unsettling it, opening up more questions and refusing to provide easy answers. In this context, what does it mean to remember? As Lisa Yoneyama writes, "How [can] acts of remembering…fill the void of knowledge without reestablishing yet another regime of totality, stability, confidence, and universal truthfulness[?] How can memories, once recuperated, remain self-critically unsettling?" (5).

In his evocative essay "Dilip Kumar Made Me Do It," British Pakistani writer Ziauddin Sardar describes his family's weekly trips to the movies during his adolescence. Growing up in East London in the 1960s, Sardar's family was part of the burgeoning British Asian community, many of whom migrated from the subcontinent to London and other industrial cities as a racialized labor force after World War II. As Sardar notes, Indian cinema was central to British Asian community formations in this period; the weekly excursions to the cinema offered British Asians like Sardar's mother and her friends an opportunity to revel in the collective pleasures of watching films of the

[1] See, for example, Frank Wilderson's "Grammar and Ghosts: The Performative Limits of African Freedom."

"golden era of Hindi cinema" amongst other British Asian migrants whose experiences of postcolonial displacement and British racism contributed to the everyday sense of exclusion and unbelonging. Films (and film songs) became one of the bases upon which diasporic British Asians maintained cultural ties to the subcontinent and transmitted cultural knowledge to younger generations.

Perhaps most striking about Sardar's account of the role of cinema in collective identity formation is his lack of conventional nostalgia usually associated with the concept of diaspora. India and Pakistan are not romanticized in Sardar's memories as static objects of diasporic longing for identification or reconciliation in the face of loss and displacement. Rather, Indian cinema (and later in the essay Pakistani television serials) allow for a conception of British Asian cultural identity that is always, as Stuart Hall argued, "a matter of 'becoming' as well as 'being'" not "eternally fixed in some essentialised past" but "subject to the continuous 'play' of history, culture and power" ("Cultural Identity and Diaspora" 225). Indeed, Sardar's essay offers a complex theory of the role of culture (in this case popular cinema) in the production of diasporic identities, community formations, and politics:

> Asian Britain was incorporated by the social institution of Indian cinema in which it had a double emotional investment. Firstly, as a prime cultural referent Indian films reflected the diversity and density of life "back home" and provided a direct emotional link with the subcontinent. Secondly, it furnished a subconscious agenda for the future—problems to be avoided, social issues to be addressed, cultural goals to be sought, ideological possibilities to be explored—through the empowerment of being migrants in Britain. Indian films were thus much more than entertainment—they were a source of contemplation, as well as a reservoir of aesthetic and cultural values. They brought different elements of the community together and through this adhesive offered the prospect of rising above the dilemmas the subcontinent had not resolved (22).

In contrast to the conventional rendering of diaspora as a concept rooted in a romanticized fiction of the homeland of the past, this passage resignifies diaspora as a dynamic, future-oriented concept. The homeland is characterized here by its diversity and density, by its ongoing dilemmas as opposed to the static conception of the diasporic homeland frozen in time. The homeland here is not necessarily a place to which one longs to return, but rather is the sign of the unresolved political and ideological tensions that animate conceptions of both national as well as diasporic identity. Further, the diaspora emerges in this passage not only as a site of inauthenticity or disconnection, but as an empowered space of creative imagination wrought by the experience of migration. The temporal structure that undergirds conventional theorizations of diaspora is thus reorganized into what Fatima El-Tayeb calls "permanent productive dislocation directed at the future" (xxxv). In the context of the cultural texts I examine here, this future orientation, as opposed to a nostalgic backward glance of recovery, emphasizes diaspora as an analytic of difference and relationality, as the means by which multiple and sometimes contradictory histories of colonialism, racism, heteropatriarchy, and nationalism come into productive contact with each other, without assuming that those histories are analogous or the same.

To say that this project is an investigation of the relational locations of Black and South Asian diasporas is to insist that race is inseparable from other categories of social and political difference. As such, my understanding of diaspora is situated within a framework that theorizes race as mutually constituted in and through the categories of gender, sexuality, nation, ethnicity, and class. This framework, which Kimberlé Crenshaw has famously termed *intersectionality*, draws on the foundational work of

Black feminist theorists and activists (including Audre Lorde, the Combahee River Collective, Barbara Smith, and Patricia Hill Collins) as well as work in the broader fields of transnational feminist and queer studies, women of color and postcolonial feminisms, and queer of color critique. As I argue below, an intersectional deployment of diaspora foregrounds its utility as a "comparative analytic of difference," which allows for a more thorough interrogation of the increasingly uneven distribution of power that underlies celebrations of multicultural progress. While coalition and collectivity are often articulated through the recognition of commonality—for example, identification through a shared history of violence or trauma—women of color and postcolonial feminisms and queer of color critique are broadly concerned with the formation of collectivity through difference. As Grace Hong and Roderick Ferguson remind us, "[T]he mobilization of difference by women of color feminism and queer of color critique was intended not to erase the differentials of power, value, and social death within and among groups…but to highlight such differentials and attempt to do the vexed work of forging a coalitional politics through these differences" (9). The possibility of *coalition through difference* that is the focal point of women of color and postcolonial feminisms and queer of color critique offers a "comparative analytic of difference" that forms the basis of how I employ diaspora in this project.[2]

Brent Edwards' "The Uses of Diaspora" is indispensable here. Responding to varied responses to (and misreadings of) Paul Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic*, and the simplistic and reductive celebrations of diasporic hybridity that mark the institutional incorporation of diaspora studies into the US academy, Edwards traces an intellectual

[2] See Hong and Ferguson, *Strange Affinities*, 12.

history of diaspora in Black studies in order to rearticulate the utility of its critique. Situating diaspora in a genealogy of Black internationalism, Pan-Africanist movements, and Black British Cultural Studies, Edwards charts the emergence of diaspora in Black studies not as a way to theorize nostalgia or the possibility of diasporic return, but as an index of material difference between and among various constituencies:

> A return to the intellectual history of the term itself is necessary because it reminds us that diaspora is introduced in large part to account for difference among African-derived populations, in a way that a term like Pan-Africanism could not. Moreover, diaspora points to difference not only internally (the ways transnational black groupings are fractured by nation, class, gender, sexuality, and language) but also externally: in appropriating a term so closely associated with Jewish thought, we are forced to think not in terms of some closed or autonomous system of African dispersal but explicitly in terms of a complex past of forced migrations and racialization—what Earl Lewis has called a history of 'overlapping diasporas.' (64)

As characterized by Edwards, diasporic critique thus carries with it a comparative methodology that is internal as well as external. In other words, the "uses of diaspora" are twofold: 1) to interrogate the material and discursive conditions that cohere in the formation of different, seemingly bounded constituencies; and, 2) to account for the multiplicity of subject positions produced by the intersections race, gender, sexuality, class, nationality, ethnicity, caste, etc., that operate *within* those constituencies. As a comparative analytic of difference, diaspora is no longer simply a descriptive category used to name and contain populations of peoples living away from their homelands. Rather, by placing Edwards in conversation with Hong and Ferguson, diasporic critique foregrounds an analysis of uneven relations of power (as they converge and cohere under the signs of race, gender, sexuality and nation) and the productive forms of relationality

engendered by those dynamics between and amongst Black and South Asian diasporic formations.

I develop this relational concept of diaspora in the following four chapters. The first, "Diasporic Relationality: Queer Memory Discourses and Narratives of Indian Indenture" offers a critical reading of Shani Mootoo's short story "Out On Main Street." I argue that "Out On Main Street" offers a queer, relational model of diaspora as an alternative to both the neoliberal Indian state's mobilization of diasporic nationalism and to dominant theories of comparative diaspora studies in the social sciences. Chapter two continues to theorize and define a relational model of diaspora. "Black British Cinema and the Queer Politics of Memory" focuses on the contested political formation of "Black Britain" in the 1970s and 1980s as a sign of coalitional anti-racist and anti-imperial organizing among working-class African, Afro- and Indo-Caribbean, and South Asian migrants in the (post)colonial metropole. I read two Black British films, Maureen Blackwood and Isaac Julien's *The Passion of Remembrance* and Stephen Frears and Hanif Kureishi's *Sammy and Rosie Get Laid*, to examine the gendered fault lines through which queer and feminist cultural producers articulated relational solidarities attentive to difference. I also demonstrate how a queer Black British politics enables a critical interrogation of the residues of empire in both British racism and elite postcolonial nationalism. Chapter three, "Black-South Asian Intimacies and the Legacies of Colonialism," considers representations of Black-South Asian intimacy in M.G. Vassanji's *The In-Between World of Vikram Lall* and Mira Nair's *Mississippi Masala*. Read alongside W.E.B. Du Bois' *Dark Princess*, I argue that contemporary South Asian diasporic cultural production uses Black-South Asian intimacies in order to explore the

contradictions and losses engendered by the differentiated positionings of Black and South Asian subjects in both the colonial and postcolonial period. The final chapter, "Transnational U.S. Exceptionalisms: Neoliberal Bollywood," contributes to recent ethnographic and historical accounts of South Asian, Muslim, and Arab racializations in the post-9/11 U.S. by expanding the field of inquiry to include a critical consideration of Bollywood cinema. I examine uses of iconographies of the U.S. Civil Rights Movement and U.S. and Hindu nationalist discourses of Islamophobia in two recent Bollywood films, Karan Johar's *My Name is Khan* and Kabir Khan's *New York*, to consider the transnational circulation of neoliberal diversity discourses as a central feature of U.S. empire in the War on Terror.

Chapter One
Diasporic Relationality: Queer Memory Discourses and Narratives of Indian Indenture

> The Indian Diaspora spans the globe and stretches across all the oceans and continents. It is so widespread that the sun never sets on the Indian Diaspora…[Overseas Indians'] industry, enterprise, economic strength, educational standards and professional skills are widely acknowledged. They live in different countries, speak different languages and are engaged in different vocations. What gives them their common identity are their [sic] Indian origin, their consciousness of their cultural heritage and their deep attachment to India.
>
> --Report of the High Level Committee on the Indian Diaspora, 2001

In August 2000, Indian Prime Minister Atal Vajpayee, head of the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), formed the High Level Committee on Indian Diaspora. Made up of several high-ranking officials from within the BJP, the committee was commissioned to "make a comprehensive study of the global Indian Diaspora [sic] and to recommend measures for a constructive relationship with them" (v). A year and a half later, the committee published an almost 600-page report that includes twenty-three chapters devoted to histories of Indian migration to various regions across the globe and the diverse community formations engendered by migration, including information on cultural and religious practices, political involvement, and relations with India. As Brij V. Lal has argued, India's engagement with its diasporas was limited following independence in 1947 when "overseas Indians" were encouraged to "identify themselves with the interests and aspirations of [their] countries of residence" (10). It was not until the later decades of the 20th century that India would reevaluate its relationship to its diasporas in the context of its economic liberalization initiatives and the material successes of privileged Indian nationals living in the US, Canada, the United Kingdom and Australia. The formation of the High Level Committee on Indian Diaspora, the

publication of its report, and the subsequent adoption of a number of its policy recommendations thus heralded a kind of high point in the state's courting of diasporic communities as "invaluable human resources" for India's neoliberal global capitalist ambitions.

The report of the High Level Committee (hereafter the HLC report) offers a unique vantage point from which to query the critical potential of diaspora analysis for South Asian literary and cultural studies. Most scholarly accounts of diaspora in South Asian contexts focus on the dislocation and displacement of subjects caught between two seemingly bounded though necessarily imagined localities: the nation/homeland (most often India) and the diaspora/hostland (most often Britain, Canada, or the United States). This dyadic structure presumes a particular narrative telos of migration: one departs (through choice or coercion) from the national homeland to settle in the diasporic hostland but is forever turned backward, gazing nostalgically at the lost homeland of the past and desiring an eventual return in the future. The "imagined community" of the nation consolidates in the diaspora through individual and collective attempts to recreate and recuperate the "authentic" religious, cultural, linguistic, and social traditions as a way to alleviate loss.[3] As Sandhya Shukla has written, the nation has remained "a basic building block" of South Asian diasporic formations: "Being from another nation confers a sense of identity and creates the means for membership into a broader set of social arrangements" ("Locations for South Asian Diasporas" 559-60). Numerous scholars (particularly those working in critical ethnic, feminist, and/or queer studies) have

[3] "Imagined communities" is, of course, Benedict Anderson's term. See *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*.

complicated investments in national(ist) nostalgia through their deployment of diaspora as a critique of the nation.[4] Here, diaspora functions as the means by which the regulatory, exclusionary, and often violent consolidation of the nation form can be called into question. Diaspora in this sense allows for modes of collectivity that operate in excess of and in contradiction to religious and cultural nationalisms, and exclusionary national identifications based on normative conceptions of gender and sexuality.

Yet, even as diaspora can be put in the service of critique of the nation, the HLC report is a powerful reminder of ways in which the postcolonial nation-state *relies* on the diaspora for its coherent self-definition. Indeed, as Khachig Tölölyan has written, "To affirm that diasporas are the exemplary communities of the transnational moment is not to write the premature obituary of the nation-state, which remains a privileged form of polity" ("The Nation-State and its Others" 5). My interest in the HLC report comes from its mobilization of diaspora as a problem of knowledge for state sovereignty. I read the report as an instantiation of ways in which the Indian state attempts to exercise and extend its sovereignty through the production of knowledge about "overseas Indians." Though ostensibly addressing the historically uneven, incommensurate conditions of migration and settlement that constitute multiple Indian diasporas from the late 19th century to the present, the report nonetheless relies on ahistorical, nationalist constructions of the Indian homeland to resolve those incommensurabilities through the production of a singular, undifferentiated diasporic *national* subject who can be recruited

[4] For example Gopinath's *Impossible Desires*, Prashad's *The Karma of Brown Folk*, Vijay Mishra's *Literature of the Indian Diaspora*, and Niranjana's *Mobilizing India*.

back into the national fold, and who can then be compared to other national diasporic subjects.

In what follows, I offer a genealogical critique of the HLC report through a critical reading of Shani Mootoo's 1993 short story "Out On Main Street." As outlined by Michel Foucault in *Society Must Be Defended*, genealogy is a method of knowledge "insurrection" that calls into question the "power-effects" of empiricist, positivist, scientific Truth: "Compared to the attempt to inscribe knowledges in the power hierarchy typical of science, genealogy is…a sort of attempt to desubjugate historical knowledges, to set them free, or in other words to enable them to oppose and struggle against the coercion of a unitary, formal, and scientific theoretical discourse" (9-10). I argue that in its invocations of diasporic formations borne out of colonial indenture, "Out on Main Street" enables a genealogical critique of the nationalist ideologies through which the Indian state attempts to consolidate its power over the diaspora. First, the story contests the state's production of an undifferentiated Indian diasporic subject in its refusal to forget histories of colonial indenture or subsume them fully to diasporic formations engendered by neoliberal globalization. Rather, the story formally and thematically mobilizes what Fatima El-Tayeb has called "queer memory discourses" to insist on a continual reckoning with histories of colonial violence and displacement as they flash up in the present. Second, through this deployment of queer memory, "Out On Main Street" imagines alternative social and political formations that are rendered illegible within dominant theorizations of diaspora in the social sciences, particularly those that traffic in typological comparisons. Put simply, I read "Out On Main Street" for its pedagogical and

methodological theorization of diaspora as a *relational* analytic, which I will continue to elaborate upon in subsequent chapters.

Nations and Diasporas: Reading the High Level Committee's Report

Over the past two decades, diaspora has emerged as an important critical framework with which to narrate and theorize the migrations and displacements of South Asian peoples from the late 19th century to the present. Under the analytic rubric of diaspora, scholars have produced a substantial body of work on South Asian communities in the United Kingdom, Canada, and the United States, and to a lesser extent Trinidad and Tobago, South and East Africa, Mauritius, Guyana, and Fiji.[5] These studies detail the varied political and economic conditions under which South Asian migration has historically taken place, generally organized historically into "two relatively autonomous archives designated by the terms 'old' and 'new.'"[6] In this configuration, "old" diasporas signify diasporic formations constituted through the logics of colonial capitalism, mostly through indentured labor migrations to the Global South following the abolition of the British slave trade, "before the world was thoroughly consolidated as transnational."[7] "New" diasporas, on the other hand, signify the movements, migrations, and settlements

[5] This literature is extensive, but some key texts include the following: Avtar Brah's *Cartographies of Diaspora*, Gayatri Gopinath's *Impossible Desires: Queer Diasporas and South Asian Public Cultures*, Tejaswini Niranjana's *Mobilizing India: Women, Music, and Migration Between India and Trinidad*, Vijay Prashad's *The Karma of Brown Folk*, R. Radhakrishnan's *Diasporic Mediations: Between Home and Location*, Sandhya Shukla's *India Abroad: Diasporic Cultures of Postwar America and England*, Gayatri Spivak's "Diasporas Old and New: Women in the Transnational World," and Peter van der Veer's edited volume, *Nation and Migration: The Politics of Space in the South Asian Diaspora*.

[6] Mishra, *Literature of the Indian Diaspora*, 2-3.

[7] Spivak, "Diasporas Old and New," 87.

of working and professional classes to the Global North in the latter half of the 20th century under the signs of postcoloniality and globalization. For many scholars of South Asian diasporas, distinctions between old and new diasporas are crucial in underscoring that diasporic formations are always embedded in dynamic, historically specific relations of power.[8]

At the risk of stating the obvious, then, the formation referred to as *the* South Asian diaspora is more accurately rendered in plural terms—South Asian diaspora*s*—to account for the historically contingent and uneven production of cultural, linguistic, religious, national, and regional heterogeneity, especially as these intersect with the less frequently commented upon differences of race, gender, sexuality, caste, and class. I argue that the state's production of an undifferentiated diasporic Indian national subject is the outcome of a project of forgetting, in which the gender and sexual histories of colonial indenture are subsumed by the state's neoliberal ambitions. In contrast, Mootoo's "Out On Main Street" offers us a subject who "remembers" the differentiated workings of indenture in the past, and its legacies on the present and future. I read "Out on Main Street" not only as a *representation* of the residues of British colonialism

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[8] Some recent scholarship has questioned whether the rubric of diaspora can be so easily mobilized to describe such different conditions. For example, the essays collected in *Global Indian Diasporas: Exploring Trajectories of Migration and Theory* "share a strongly ambivalent feeling towards the mainstream issues highlighted in the 'South Asians in diaspora' discourse" (10). In his introductory essay, Gijsbert Oonk identifies four historical "currents" of South Asian migration: trade, indenture, post-Independence/post-WWII migrations, and "twice-migrants." According to Oonk, the diaspora concept as it is conventionally theorized fails to adequately account for the constitutive political, economic, and cultural differences between these currents. See also Susan Koshy's introductory essay in *Transnational South Asians* where she refers to the South Asian diaspora as a "neo-diaspora" to "locate [its] origins in the modern period" as opposed to the "classical" Jewish diasporic tradition (3).

embodied in multiply displaced postcolonial subjects, but also as a text that *theorizes* diasporic subjectivity, not as inherently nostalgic for times gone by and places left behind, but formed in relation to the material racial, gender, and sexual dynamics of colonialism, indenture, nationalism, and globalization. As such, I engage "Out On Main Street" as a genealogical critique of the unified diasporic "Indian" subject posed by nationalist accounts of diaspora.

Although the High Level Committee's report does not use the specific qualifiers "old" and "new," it does elaborate on historical distinctions between different "waves" of migration to acknowledge the "tremendous complexity of the phenomenon of Indian overseas migration" (vii, xi). In addition, the report goes to great lengths to differentiate between the Non-Resident Indian (NRI) and the Person of Indian Origin (PIO), state categories created by the Foreign Exchange Regulations Act of 1973 that have since entered the mainstream political and cultural imaginary of Indian diasporas.[9] Yet, these distinctions prove to be of little relevance to the report's ultimate aim. Rather, this nominal acknowledgment of historical difference is precisely that which must be resolved in order to produce a uniform and coherent Indian diaspora that can be mobilized for the

[9] The HLC Report defines a Non-Resident Indian as "Indian citizens, holding Indian passports and residing abroad for an indefinite period"; a Person of Indian Origin is a "foreign citizen of Indian origin or descent" (viii). Though unacknowledged in the HLC report, the NRI is a deeply class-inflected category. Arvind Rajagopal writes in *Politics After Television*: "Their education and affluence, coupled with their claims of identity as Indians, rendered NRIs an apotheosis of the Indian middle class, exemplifying what 'Indians' could achieve if they were not hampered by an underdeveloped society and an inefficient government. Thus, 'Indianness' came into its own, finally, but its being elsewhere was crucial to this achievement" (241). I would add that the NRI is not only a classed position but also a gendered and sexualized one, often rendered as male and heterosexual. See also Amitava Kumar's *Passport Photos*, Vijay Prashad's *The Karma of Brown Folk*, Vijay Mishra's *Literature of the Indian Diaspora*, Inderpal Grewal's *Transnational America* and Gayatri Gopinath's *Impossible Desires*.

state's economic and political interests. Thus, while one might read the report's extensive country and region specific chapters as an attempt to, in the report's terms, "do adequate justice" to the uneven construction of Indian diasporas, this attention to historical, geographic, and cultural difference is ultimately homogenized through an appeal to nationalist discourses of nostalgia, authenticity, and reproductive continuity (xi). Consider the following passage:

> Deep commitment to their cultural identity has manifested itself in every component of the Indian Diaspora. The members of the Diaspora are, together with Indians, equally the inheritors of the traditions of the world's oldest continuous civilization. Members of the Indian Diaspora have done remarkably well and seldom sought conflict with their fellow citizens—in every major region of the globe, *whether they are descendants of indentured labourers or of highly qualified professionals*. The members of the Indian Diaspora are naturally keen to pass on their value systems, which have been an essential part of their success—to coming generations, and they would welcome the mother country's support in this endeavor. (xxvii, emphasis mine)[10]

The ideological work performed by this passage is manifold. According to the state, to be Indian—whether in the diaspora or within the territorial boundaries of the Indian nation-state—is to have a "deep commitment" to the value systems and cultural practices of "the world's oldest continuous civilization." "India" and its value systems are rendered as timeless and continuous, unaffected by history, despite centuries of conquest, trade, colonialism, migration, border-drawing/crossing.[11] For the diaspora this commitment manifests itself "whether they are descendants of indentured labourers or of highly qualified professionals." In other words, the heterogeneous histories and nonequivalent

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[10] See also chapter 28 "Culture," 403-413.

[11] For a critique of this Hindu nationalist tendency to render "India" as "timeless," see Van Der Veer's *Religious Nationalism: Hindus and Muslims in India*, especially chapter five, "Conceptions of Time."

political contexts that are the conditions of possibility for diverse diasporic formations are, as Bakirathi Mani and Latha Varadarajan argue, "consolidated in order to produce a single history of cultural, economic, and political affiliation to India" (51). As such, diasporic subjects are no longer positioned in excess of the Indian nation-state, but "together with Indians" are centrally constituted within the imagined purview of the "mother country."

Also worth noting in this passage is the prevalence of the language of reproduction: in addition to "mother country," the passage also references the desire to "pass on" cultural values to "coming generations" through the logic of inheritance, what Mani and Varadarajan call "filial piety and familial loyalty" (47). I would push their claim further to suggest that this reproductive language is actually an inscription of heteropatriarchy as a central regulatory technology of the postcolonial nation-state, as well as nationalist discourses of diaspora rooted in heteronormative notions of nostalgia, continuity, and inheritance.[12] The Indian state thus essentializes the terms of cultural and national identity through what Lisa Lowe has called a "vertical generational model of culture" that forestalls the recognition of difference and heterogeneity by insisting that Indian culture—whether national or diasporic—is "transmitted 'vertically' in unchanging forms from one generation to the next" (*Immigrant Acts* 64). Invoking Stuart Hall's conception of cultural identity as a "matter of 'becoming' as well as 'being,'" Lowe argues that attention to "'horizontal' cultural practices would reveal the instabilities and

[12] For critical engagements with hetero-reproductive diaspora discourses, see scholarship on "queer" diasporas: Gopinath's *Impossible Desires* and Eng's *The Feeling of Kinship*. See also Jacqui Alexander's *Pedagogies of Crossing* on heteronormativity and the postcolonial nation-state, and Alys Eve Weinbaum's *Wayward Reproduction* for a discussion of the constitutive role of reproduction to discourses of race and nation.

transformations that attend any kind of identity formation forged in the "continuous 'play' of history, culture and power."[13] I turn now to Shani Mootoo's "Out On Main Street" as an exemplary engagement with such "horizontal" cultural practices and identity formations in South Asian diasporic contexts.

Subaltern Diasporas, Queer Memories

Published in 1993 as the title story in Mootoo's first collection of short fiction, "Out On Main Street" is narrated in its entirety in first-person dialect from the perspective of a Vancouver-based queer Indo-Trinidadian woman. The unnamed narrator and her girlfriend Janet are both descendants of Indian laborers brought to Trinidad during the period of colonial indenture and they have migrated to Vancouver in order to escape the societal censure that marked their queer union in Trinidad. The narrator tells us about her experience buying *meethai* at an Indian sweet shop in Vancouver. Little happens in the story in terms of plot; rather, Mootoo's focus is trained on a series of encounters that take place between the narrator and the small cast of characters who populate the evocatively named "Kush Valley Sweets," including Janet, the shopkeeper and his wait staff, groups of South Asian women customers, two drunk white Canadian men, and a white Canadian lesbian couple with a taste for "exotic" Indian cuisine.

Early on in the story, the narrator explains that she and Janet rarely visit the Indian shops on Main Street: "We is watered-down Indians—we ain't good grade A Indians. We skin brown, is true, but we doh even think 'bout India unless something happen over dere and it come on de news…Mostly, back home, we is kitchen Indians:

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[13] See Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora."

some kind of Indian food every day, at least once a day, but we doh get cardamom and other fancy spice down dere so de food not spicy like Indian food I eat in restaurants up here (45). Right away, a series of spatial and temporal relationships are laid out, wherein multiple migrations—between India, Trinidad, and Canada—correspond to the process of "watering down," both in terms of culinary spiciness and cultural authenticity. The passage thus reconfigures the racial, gender, and sexual binary logics that often structure studies of migrations, diasporas, and emergent cultural identities—namely homeland/hostland, nation/diaspora, heteronormative/queer, old/new, here/there. For the narrator of Mootoo's story, diasporic subjectivity is not only constituted through a singular struggle between allegiance to a distant Indian homeland of the past and the displacement she feels in her Vancouver present (as it would be defined by the terms laid out in the HLC report), but is mediated by an earlier colonial indentured labor migration, marked by the memory of the day her "Naana and Naani step[ped] off de boat in Port of Spain harbour over a hundred and sixty years ago" (45-6). This triangulated configuration—between India, Trinidad, and Canada—both extends and disrupts the conventional narrative telos of migration such that India is decentered as the site of past rupture and eventual return. Diasporic nostalgia in "Out on Main Street" is, in effect, rerouted through—or perhaps unrooted by—the history of colonial indenture to Trinidad; the dyadic structure the homeland and the hostland, and the desires that each normatively signifies, are blurred. "Here" and "dere" function as unstable signifiers that index the complexities of naming one's relationships to past and present times and places—to multiple temporalities and spatialities already embedded in colonial racial, gender, and sexual relations of power.

Consequently, I argue that "Out On Main Street" can be read as a Foucauldian genealogy of Indianness as it has been defined by the Indian nation-state and its nationalist diasporic imaginary. In "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," Foucault writes that genealogical critique "opposes itself to the search for origins" (140); rather, "it disturbs what was previously considered immobile, it fragments what was thought unified; it shows the heterogeneity of what was imagined consistent with itself" (147). Foucault's genealogy thus breaks with the prevailing reproductive and causal narrative logics of lineage and contests the stability of supposedly universal, self-evident Truth. Genealogical critique reads against the grain of lineage to account for the gaps and contradictions in the production of knowledge. Put another way, as seen in the passage from the HLC report discussed above, the state bases its conception of Indianness in the "traditions of the world's oldest continuous civilization" (xxvii); Indianness is rendered as a transcendant, immutable essence, available to authentic Indians across time and space, nation and diaspora, through a "deep commitment" to the value-systems and cultural traditions that have remained undoubtedly consistant, singular, and pure since their origin in antiquity. A genealogical account of Indianness, on the other hand, would not attempt to ascertain the "essence" of Indianness nor recuperate its uncontaminated origin in the past, but would look for (or in Foucault's terms, *listen* for) those forms of historical knowledge and experience that must be subjugated, erased, evacuated, and disavowed in order for an essential and unitary notion of Indianness to find coherence.

For the narrator of "Out On Main Street," India does not figure as the primary object of diasporic desire because of the ways in which narratives of Indian nationalism

and neoliberal economic growth rely on the forgetting of indenture.[14] As Tejaswini Niranjana notes, "One cannot…talk about Trinidad without talking about India, over 40 percent of the island's population being of subcontinental origin, the descendants of indentured laborers taken there between 1845 and 1917. The obverse, however, is clearly not true. One can talk endlessly about India without the Caribbean or most other Third World regions…featuring in the conversation" (19). This disavowal and forgetting of what Monisha Das Gupta, Charu Gupta, and Katerina Teaiwa term "marginalized diasporas" coheres in part because of the positioning of the Non-Resident Indian subject as the paradigmatic figure of diaspora. Unlike privileged NRI subjects who have migrated to the US, Canada, and the UK for highly skilled, professional jobs in the sciences and computer technology industries as the sign of India's successful entry into the global neoliberal marketplace, histories of colonial indenture remain obscured in nationalist imaginaries.[15] Because the figure of the indentured laborer does not signify the "progress" embodied by the NRI, the material realities of the indentured laborer remains outside the purview of the neoliberal state, except as they can be interpellated through the nationalist appeal to "culture," as demonstrated above.

"Out on Main Street," narrated from the perspective of what Tejaswini Niranjana calls the "subaltern diaspora," destabilizes the material and discursive (re)inscription of privileged diasporic subjects back into the nation by rejecting the cultural nationalist

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[14] For a comprehensive overview of the history of South Asian indenture to the Caribbean, see Madhavi Kale's *Fragments of Empire*.

[15] This is not to presume that the subject of the "new" diaspora is necessarily economically privileged or upwardly mobile. Junaid Rana, in *Terrifying Muslims: Race and Labor in the South Asian Diaspora*, complicates the assumed class homogeneity of post-World War II diasporic formations in the US and UK.

logics of patriarchy, blood purity, and authenticity.[16] While the state's mobilization of diaspora discourse figures the lost homeland as the primary site of authentic cultural identity, the narrator's multiply diasporic positioning—indexed in her self identification as a "kitchen Indian" as opposed to a "good grade A Indian"— disallows any easy recuperation of authentic Indianness. "Back home" signifies Trinidad, where markers of authentic culture are always already compromised or "watered-down" through generations of geographic and political distance from India. For example, the narrator notes with humor that Janet knows next to nothing about the religious or mythological basis for the Hindu festival of Diwali: "She say, 'It's the Hindu festival of lights, isn't it?' like a line straight out a dictionary…All Janet know is 'bout going for drive in de country to see light, and she could remember looking forward, around Divali time, to the lil brown paper-bag packages full a burfi and parasad that she father Hindu students used to bring for him" (47). In addition to a lack of religious knowledge, inauthenticity is also figured linguistically, in the narrator's inability of speak a regional Indian language: "Indian store clerk on Main Street doh have no patience with us, specially when we talking English to dem. Yuh ask dem a question in English and dey insist on giving de answer in Hindi or Punjabi or Urdu or Gujarati. How I suppose to know de difference even! And den dey look at yuh disdainful disdainful—like yuh disloyal, like you is a traitor" (47-8).

While these examples of religious and linguistic inauthenticity might seem like fairly unexceptional examples of distance from dominant cultural ideologies and practices, they retain a deeper significance when read in relation to the narrator's

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[16] Niranjana, *Mobilizing India*

perceived lack of gender authenticity. Through her performance of butch queer masculinity, the narrator is not only subject to mundane forms of ridicule but also to increased surveillance and violence in public spaces:

> And den is a whole other story when dey see me with mih crew cut and mih blue jeans tuck inside mih jim-boots. Walking next to Janet, who so femme that she redundant, tend to make me look like a gender dey forget to classify. Before going Main Street I does parade in front de mirror practicing a jiggly-wiggly kind a walk. But if I ain't walking like a strong-man monkey I doh exactly feel right and I always revert back to mih true colours. De men dem does look at me like if dey is exactly what I need a taste of to cure me good and proper. (48)

In the terms set by nationalist heteropatriarchy, the narrator's nonnormative and "inauthentic" gender performance places her outside the binary logic of proper Indian womanhood and virile masculinity such that she looks "like a gender dey forget to classify." In contrast to Janet, "who so femme that she redundant," the narrator's masculinity—the crew cut, blue jeans, "jim-boots" as well as her inability to perform a "jiggly-wiggly kind of walk"—are a pale imitation of normative, authentic reproductive heterosexuality. The only remedy or "cure" to these multiple forms of deviance, according to the nationalist male gaze to which both Janet and the narrator are subject, is a violent assault of normative virile masculinity. Read in relation to the threat of the misogynist and homophobic violence that would "cure" the narrator "good and proper" of her nonnormative gender performance, the earlier examples of religious and linguistic inauthenticity take on much graver consequences, especially in the context of the gender and sexual histories of colonial indenture to Trinidad.

With the British abolition of slavery in 1833, British colonial plantation owners in the Caribbean sought out alternate pools of cheap labor, culminating in the establishment

of the system of indenture lasting from 1837-1917, which Madhavi Kale calls an "imperial labor reallocation" (5). During this period, approximately 500,000 "free" South Asian laborers (as well as significant numbers of Chinese, African, and Portuguese) were recruited into indenture contracts, sometimes by choice, sometimes coercion. In the colonial context, the discursive production of indentured labor as "free" was crucial in differentiating it from the "unfree" labor of slaves; this distinction, however, did little to assuage Indian critics of indenture, who continued to view it as slavery in another form. In response to these critiques, British colonial officials sought to reframe indenture as the benevolent fulfillment of the colonial civilizing mission, offering destitute Indians not only the promise of economic mobility, but also the abandonment of the oppressive system of caste hierarchy.[17] As Lisa Lowe notes, however, these debates about the relative "freedom" of Asian indentured laborers in relation to "unfree" African slaves can be read against the grain of liberal capitalist progress to index a "modern racial governmentality in which a political, economic, and social hierarchy ranging from 'free' to 'unfree' was deployed in the management of the diverse labors of metropolitan and colonized peoples" (*Intimacies* 24).

As part of a larger colonial system of racialized labor management, indenture was central to the production of gendered subjects, as the work of numerous feminist

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[17] Kale writes, "The strategy and system of indentured labor migration from India to (first) Mauritius and the British Caribbean was an important, if overlooked, feature of the liberal compromise, enabled that crucial dichotomization of slavery and freedom, even as substantially less "free" labor and social conditions not only persisted but indeed proliferated under the aegis of empire and its (coercive) civilizing mission. This imperial labor reallocation strategy characteristically and contradictorily made good the promise of imperial liberalism to release people from the fixities of place, custom, and birth into mobility and the opportunity to rise above their "traditional" station" (175).

historians makes clear. For example, Rhoda Reddock argues that the invisibility of women's domestic work and the devaluation of their paid labor intersected with the gendered hierarchies of "Brahmanic-Sanskritic" religious traditions, thus resulting in the "historic conflation of interests between migrant Indian men, struggling to improve their socio-economic and caste position…and the colonial capital and state's desire for a stable and eventually self-reproducing and cheap labour force" (79). This conflation of interests, according to Reddock, continues to resonate well into the present, most notably in historical research that uncritically reaffirms colonial understandings of family, class, gender, and morality such that Indian women are rendered as dependents rather than workers. To counter these critical maneuvers, Reddock's feminist analysis illuminates the ways in which opposition to the recruitment of women for indenture functioned through the deployment of gendered discourses of morality:

> By the early twentieth century the recruitment of women became a much more serious issue as complaints were being made to the Government of India and increasing opposition was emerging against the 'slavery of Indian men and the prostitution of Indian women'…[W]hile the realisation of men's life potential was seen in terms of their labour and work, for women who were also workers, it was seen in terms of the necessity to control their sexuality. (82)

These discourses of morality were especially oppressive to single Indian women, who, again, were subject to both Hindu-Brahmanical patriarchies as well as colonial British discourses of domesticity. These anxieties over the sexual morality of indentured women were ostensibly "resolved" through the implementation of legal measures restricting women's paid labor on the plantation, effectively relegating them to the domestic sphere. As Madhavi Kale notes, "Indentured labor was peculiarly suited to imperial, post-emancipation conditions because it recognized and implicitly capitalized on a racial

differentiation…within the empire by contributing to naturalizing, universalizing a bourgeois-imperial sexual division of labor that was not only predicated on but also reproduced women's banishment to the domestic" (174). This process of naturalizing the racial and sexual division of labor was reinforced by increased physical violence against women, particularly in domestic spaces, as a means of asserting coercive patriarchal control over their sexualized, laboring bodies.[18] As such, we can read indenture as part of a gendered system of racialized labor management structured by violent sexual morality discourses.[19]

In order to ascertain the residues of these gendered and sexualized histories of indenture in "Out On Main Street," I turn to Gayatri Gopinath's formulation of "queer diaspora." As an analytic reading practice, queer diaspora refuses the heteronormative, reproductive, and masculinist terms upon which both the nation and diaspora find meaning. Gopinath argues that "[s]uturing 'queer' to 'diaspora'…recuperates those desires, practices, and subjectivities that are rendered impossible or unimaginable within conventional diasporic and nationalist imaginaries. A consideration of queerness, in other words, becomes a way to challenge nationalist ideologies by restoring the impure, inauthentic, nonreproductive potential of the notion of diaspora" (*Impossible Desires* 11). "Queer," in this sense, does not simply signify nonnormative sexualities and sexual practices, but also indexes a particular critical posture attentive to multiple histories of colonial violence. If the state's normative account of diaspora relies on a nostalgic desire

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[18] Reddock, "Freedom Denied."
[19] See also Tejaswini Niranjana's "Left to the Imagination" in *Mobilizing India* for a discussion of the centrality of the "woman question" to anti-indenture political organizing.

to recuperate the wholeness and completeness of the homeland, queerness "reorients the traditionally backward looking glance of diaspora" such that nostalgic longings for lost origins are subverted by the violences of heteronormative formations of nation, family, and community (3): "Rather than evoking an imaginary homeland frozen in an idyllic moment outside history, what is remembered through queer diasporic desire and the queer diasporic body is a past time and place riven with contradictions and the violences of multiple uprootings, displacements, and exiles" (4). Thus, it is not that a diasporic quest for originary coherence is simply misguided, but rather that such an undertaking is structurally impossible for queer subjects, whose relationships to the nation and the diaspora are always already in excess of those formations. This queer impossibility is not, however, yet another form of stagnating loss, but rather functions as a site of generative possibility—what Fatima El-Tayeb calls "productive dislocation" (xxxv)—in which alternative, excluded, and disavowed subjects and practices can be mined for their disruptive, anti-nationalist potential.

Keeping Gopinath's formulation of queer diaspora in mind, Mootoo's text, narrated as it is from the perspective of the disavowed and subaltern diaspora, can be read as a refusal of that disavowal itself. By placing a sexually deviant descendent of indentured laborers at the center of her work, Mootoo offers an alternate, queer form of knowledge—which I identify as its genealogical critique—that disrupts hegemonic nationalist historical narratives of material success, national loyalty, and heteronormativity reliant on the continued forgetting of indenture. Indeed, the primary formal strategy of the text—the first-person dialect narration—makes a radical intervention into the narration of (post)colonial history. The dialect narration might

conventionally be read as the exemplary sign of authenticity in which the narrator's performance of authentic Indo-Trinidadianess materializes in her Trinidadian creole accent, thereby signaling that the reader is in the presence of the "real thing." Read against the grain, however, the dialect accent is the very sign that "remembers" and bears witness to multiple forms of gendered and sexualized colonial violence that continue to resonate in the present of the story, including the indentured labor migrations that brought the narrator's grandparents to Trinidad, as well as her own queer migration in the era of globalization. In Benjaminian terms, the first-person dialect marks the memory of colonial violence "as it flashes up in a moment of danger" (255). Thus, in the very form of the story the braided histories of multiple migrations, multiple diasporic times, and multiple histories of colonial violence erupt into the present and recirculate as a counter-discourse to the state's hegemonic form of knowledge production and national identity that rely on the forgetting of indenture for coherence.

As an alternative form of historical knowledge production, "Out On Main Street," can thus be read as an example of what Fatima El-Tayeb has recently called "queer memory discourse." As a form of counter-memory, queer memory discourses are "not built on linear notions of roots and authentic origins, but on the grounding of a community embracing its 'inauthentic,' fractured nature rather than resolving it through a projected, unambiguous past" (43-4). The queerness of "Out On Main Street," then, lies not only in the identifiable forms of gender and sexual nonnormativity embodied by the narrator, but more importantly in the story's refusal of originary authenticity mobilized by queer memory. If the story begins by narrating a series of crises in authenticity—Janet's lack of knowledge about Hinduism, the narrator's inability to speak a regional

Indian language, her masculine gender performance—it ultimately rejects the devaluation of inauthentic subjects by denaturalizing authenticity itself. For example, in describing her attempts at normative gender performance, the narrator says, "I jiggle and wiggle in mih best imitation a some a dem gay fellas dat I see downtown Vancouver, de ones who more femme dan even Janet" (50). Importantly, the narrator does not base her performance of femininity on Janet, who earlier is described as being "so femme that she redundant" but rather "dem gay fellas…who more femme dan even Janet." Femininity for the narrator is not a fundamental characteristic of cisgendered women like Janet. Rather, the most authentic femininity resides in the bodies of "gay fellas." The very idea of authentic masculinity and femininity tied respectively to authentic maleness and femaleness is thus completely disrupted in the story.

This disruption of authentic gender is mirrored in the narrator's interaction with the proprietor of Kush Valley Sweets. I quote their exchange at length because it so vividly captures the narrator's refusal of authenticity politics:

> "One piece a meethai—dis one!" and I point sharp to de stick a flour mix with ghee, deep fry and den roll up in sugar. He say, "That is koorma, Miss. One piece only?"
>
> Mih voice drop low all by itself. "Oh ho! Yes, one piece. Where I come from we does call dat meethai." And den I add, but only loud enough for Janet to hear, "And mih name ain't 'Miss.'"
>
> He open his palms and indicate de entire panorama a sweets and he say, "These are all meethai, Miss. Meethai is Sweets. Where are you from?"
>
> I ignore his question and to show him I undaunted, I point to a round pink ball and say, "I'll have one a dese sugarcakes too please." He start grinning broad broad like if he half-pitying, half-laughing at dis Indian-in-skin-colour-only, and den he tell me, "That is called chum-chum, Miss." I snap back at him, "Yeh, well back home we does call dat sugarcake, Mr. Chum-Chum." (50)

To the shopkeeper, the narrator's lack of knowledge about the "correct" names for the variety of sweets signals that she is an "Indian-in-skin-colour-only," that her lack of knowledge of Indian cuisine speaks to a much greater, more fundamental cultural and national inauthenticity, which includes her gender nonnormativity. In this passage, the shopkeeper is set up as the representative of the Indian nation, ridiculing the narrator for her misnaming of the sweets. His question, "Where are you from?" places the narrator both geographically and culturally outside the bounds of the Indian nation, while his insistence on calling her "Miss" reinscribes her within the confines of a gendered nationalist imaginary. It is important to note here that the narrator denies both these forms of policing in her refusal to name the place she calls home. She unapologetically insists on calling the sweets by the names she knows and rejoins the shopkeeper by calling him "Mr. Chum-Chum" which, in Anita Mannur's astute reading, "refus[es] to grant primacy to his logic of namings," either of the sweets or of herself (43). The revelation later in the story that the shopkeeper himself is from Fiji (rather than from India) further undercuts any investment "Out On Main Street" might have in originary authenticity. The very figure made to stand in for the authentic Indian nation proves, in terms of the nation's absolutist, masculinist logics, to be something of a sham himself, attesting to the very constructedness of the state's definition of Indianness. Mannur notes the "historical irony" of this revelation: "Both [the narrator and the shopkeeper] are descendants of diasporic workers, presumably descended from indentured labor brought to work in sugar cane fields, and now, both owner and customer feud over the 'authenticity' of meethai—a food in which sugar is the primary ingredient" (45). Mannur goes on to argue that this irony binds the narrator and the shopkeeper together into a "nascent fraternity," despite

their apparent hostility toward each other, based on their shared condition as products of colonial labor migrations. As I argue below, we might also read "Out On Main Street" as an exploration of the limits of forms of collectivity or identification based on shared histories of colonial trauma or exploitation.

Diaspora and Difference: Queer Affiliations

Before proceeding further, I want to emphasize that my move to center a subaltern diasporic subjectivity (in this case, the narrator of Mootoo's story) in place of a privileged diasporic subjectivity (the NRI) should not be read as a recuperative form of inclusionary identity politics. Seeking recuperation and inclusion for disavowed or dispossessed subjects does nothing to question the very terms and foundations upon which that disavowal and dispossession take place, which is a central drive of genealogical critique. To quote Foucault again:

> Genealogy does not pretend to go back in time to restore an unbroken continuity that operates beyond the dispersion of forgotten things; its duty is not to demonstrate that the past actively exists in the present, having imposed a predetermined form to all its vicissitudes…On the contrary, to follow the complex course of descent…is to identify the accidents, the minute deviations…the errors, the false appraisals, and the faulty calculations that give birth to those things that continue to exist and have value for us. ("Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," 146)

Following Foucault, my intent has been to destabilize the ease with which nationalist projects construct false unities that sustain their own political interests, to reveal the "errors, false appraisals, and faulty calculations" that differentially produce value, in this case how the Indian state produces a unitary Indian diasporic subject whose coherence depends on the continued disavowal of subaltern histories and knowledges. Put another

way, I am not interested in recusing the indentured laborer from the throes of forgotten history in order to include her in the Indian state's conception of diaspora. In my work, diaspora is not simply an objective, descriptive category used to name migrant populations living away from an imagined homeland. Rather, I have sought to foreground diaspora as an *epistemological project* produced out of particular historical conditions and with both implicit and explicit political investments. I want to elaborate then on this politics of knowledge by examining comparative methodologies in diaspora studies, especially as they have been developed in sociology, anthropology and other social sciences, and argue that "Out On Main Street" gestures toward an alternate method of comparative knowledge.

In the social sciences, diaspora studies often functions as a positivist knowledge project intent on producing objective, quantifiable knowledge about histories of migration, displacement, and globalization. Some studies debate which groups may accurately be termed diasporas using a set of established criteria gleaned from the Jewish diaspora, which is positioned as an "ideal type" against which other diasporas are compared.[20] Other studies employ typologies in order to differentiate between diasporic formations, but these typologies often assume a kind of multicultural equivalence.[21] While difference in historical context or national origin might be central to these typologies, the model of comparison they offer presumes that each diaspora is wholly

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[20] See, for example, William Safran's "Diasporas in Modern Societies" and Gabriel Sheffer's *Diaspora Politics*.

[21] The best example is Robin Cohen's *Global Diasporas: An Introduction* which uses the following typological breakdown: 1) Victim diasporas (Jewish, African, Armenian); 2) Labor (Indentured Indians); 3) Imperial diasporas (European colonial settlers); 4) Trade Diasporas (Chinese, Lebanese); 5) Cultural diasporas (Caribbean communities).

distinct from another, which does little to illuminate the ways in which diasporic formations are constituted in relation to each other in uneven networks of power. In the introduction to their edited volume *Strange Affinities*, Grace Hong and Roderick Ferguson argue that the "modern nation-state formation presumes the comparability of nation-states" where each is rendered as discrete and culturally unique; typological accounts of diasporas function in a similar way, as seen in the HLC report. In a lengthy chapter titled "Other Diasporas: A Global Perspective," the unitary Indian diaspora consolidated by the state is held up against other seemingly discrete, national diasporic constituencies to compare the ways in which other nation-states have attempted to recruit diasporic allegiance to the nation. In this sense, the comparative methods of social scientific research on diasporas are very easily appropriated by nationalist projects.[22]

Scholarship in the fields of Black diaspora studies, and transnational feminist and queer studies, however, offers a different understanding of comparative work, which aims to deconstruct the ideologies of discreteness observed by Hong and Ferguson. Brent Hayes Edwards, for example, warns us that we should be "skeptical of an overarching concern with the movement of groups considered as discrete or self-contained" ("Diaspora" 83). Rather, diaspora critique should "compel us to focus on the ways in which those movements always intersect, leading to exchange, assimilation, expropriation, coalition, or dissension."[23] Similarly, Robin Kelley and Earl Lewis have both conceptualized diasporas as "overlapping" rather than as self-contained

[22] In fact, the HLC report specifically cites Cohen's typological model, as well as other foundational diaspora work from the social sciences.
[23] See also Edwards' "The Uses of Diaspora."

formations,[24] while Avtar Brah's foundational work in *Cartographies of Diasporas* employs a transnational feminist theorization of relationality:

> [T]he concept of diaspora concerns the historically variable forms of relationality within and between diasporic formations. It is about relations of power that similarise and differentiate between and across changing diasporic constellations. In other words, the concept of diaspora centres on the configurations of power which differentiate diasporas internally as well as situate them in relation to one another. (183)

Importantly, Brah defines diasporic critique as a critical analysis of power as it is unevenly produced and distributed through the categories of race, nation, gender, and class. As an analytic diaspora illuminates power relations *within* those formations assumed to be unitary (the Black diaspora, the Jewish diaspora, the Indian diaspora, etc.) and *between/across* multiple formations that are assumed to be discrete but are actually continually (re)produced in relation to each other. Conceptualized in this manner, concepts of affiliation, coalition, collectivity, and indeed, even community, are rendered not as stable, "given" configurations of identity or experience, but as dynamic, shifting arrangements produced at particular historical and temporal conjunctures. Returning to the encounter between the narrator and the shopkeeper in Kush Valley Sweets, Brah's work enables an interrogation of theorizations of diaspora based solely on the shared historical experience of indenture. Such formulations assume that a shared history reconciles the very real, material gender and sexual differences that position the narrator and the shopkeeper as antagonists in Kush Valley Sweets. Put another way, in my reading of "Out On Main Street" diasporic affiliation and collectivity do not depend on the

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[24] Kelley, "How the West was One: The African Diaspora and the Re-Mapping of US History" and Lewis, "To Turn As on a Pivot: Writing African Americans into a History of Overlapping Diasporas."

similarity of shared experiential history for coherence or resolution; the potential for diasporic affiliation, identification, and collectivity is actually grounded in difference, in the "productive dislocations" that resist resolution, and the relationalities that exceed investments in equivalence, discreteness, and unified conceptions of national identity.

In his essay, "Challenging the Cultural Mosaic," Sebastian Schneider argues that Kush Valley Sweets constitutes what Mary Louise Pratt has called a "contact zone." Pratt defines a contact zone as "the space of colonial encounters, the space in which people geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict (6). Being attentive to the relationships engendered by contact zones "emphasizes how subjects are constituted in and by their relations to each other…in terms of copresence, interaction, interlocking understandings and practices, often with radically asymmetrical relations of power (7). In employing Pratt's influential term, Schneider reads Kush Valley Sweets as the site in which multiple histories and subjects of colonization and migration come into collision with each other, in ways that reproduce and extend colonial relations of power in the present. Building on Schneider's useful analysis, I want to suggest that Kush Valley Sweets is marked as a specifically *queer* contact zone. While the name Kush Valley Sweets denotes the Hindu Kush mountains in contemporary Afghanistan and Pakistan, the name also connotes the Hindi/Urdu term for happy, *kush*, colloquially used to mean "gay."[25] Marked as a queer space, Kush Valley Sweets not only functions as a site in which colonial social relations are played out in the present, but also as a space where resistance to colonial gender and sexual relations might

[25] See Paola Bachetta, "When the (Hindu) Nation Exiles Its Queers."

emerge. To the extent that contact zones are marked by "radically asymmetrical relations of power," Kush Valley Sweets, as a queer contact zone, does not eradicate or resolve those asymmetries, but rather puts them to productive use in the forging of alternate, queer forms of affiliation and collectivity. As I argue below, these alternative networks of affiliation are made precisely along the axes of race, gender, and sexuality as modalities of difference.

Soon after her interaction with the shopkeeper, the narrator describes the entrance of "two big burly fellas," two white Canadian men with "eyes red and slow and dey skin burning pink with booze" (52). The intrusion of the two men radically alters the dynamic of the sweetshop, as "de calm in de place get rumfle up." One of the men, described as taking a "deep Walter Raleigh bow" greets the customers with a garbled *salaam*: "Alarm o salay koom." The narrator is initially amused by the presence of the two white men in their drunken stupor, but her reading of the situation quickly shifts when one of the men, whom she calls Pinko, engages the shopkeeper, Mr. Chum-Chum, in conversation:

> "Where are you from?"
> Chum-chum say, "Fiji, Sir."
> "Oh! Fiji, eh! Lotsa palm trees and beautiful women, eh! Is it true that you guys can have more than one wife?"

As I argued above, the question "Where are you from?" initially posed by Chum-Chum rendered the narrator inauthentic by placing her outside the constitutive limits of the Indian nation. Here, the same question is posed back to Chum-Chum by Pinko, not only placing Chum-Chum outside the limits of Canadian national identity but also reinscribing him within the confines of an orientalist colonial racial hierarchy—note that Chum-Chum refers to Pinko as "Sir," while he used the diminutive "Miss" for the narrator. Moreover,

by asking if Fijian men are allowed to engage in polygamy, Pinko recuperates the image of the hyper-sexualized colony or, in Anne McClintock's evocative phrase, the *porno-tropic*, "a fantastic magic lantern of the mind onto which Europe projected its forbidden sexual desires and fears" (22). Read alongside the earlier interaction between the narrator and Chum-Chum, this scene with Pinko speaks to the complex negotiations of power, privilege, and subordination at play in the queer contact zone of Kush Valley Sweets. If Chum-Chum once occupied the privileged position of the Indian nation, policing the narrator's deviant performance of gender and sexuality within the rigid, heteronormtive logics of authentic, "proper" Indian womanhood, here Chum-Chum occupies the subordinate position of deviance—of a hyper-sexualized, colonized masculinity set against the heteronormative masculine sexuality of the Anglo colonizer.

This exchange between Pinko and Chum-Chum causes one of the other South Asian women customers, Giraffebai, to express sympathy for the shopkeeper: "I can't stand to see our men humiliated by them, right in front of us…Brother, we mustn't accept how these people think they can treat us. You men really put up with too many insults and abuse over here. I really felt for you" (53-4). In this display of sympathy, Giraffebai understands the racially overdetermined interaction between Pinko and Chum-Chum to be structured also by an uneven distribution of masculinity in the colonial context. Within this schema, Pinko occupies the space of the properly heterosexual colonizer, while Chum-Chum's masculinity is understood to be compromised. Chum-Chum's supposed emasculation is made even more injurious because it occurs, as Giraffebai says, "right in front of us." In other words, the very *publicity* of his emasculation, especially with South Asian women as witnesses, transforms Chum-Chum into an object of pity for Giraffebai.

This sympathy is short-lived, however, once it becomes clear that Chum-Chum's response to his emasculation by the white men is to reassert patriarchal control over the women customers. By making unwanted advances at Giraffebai and Janet, the male serving staff shore up their compromised masculinities through overt displays of heteropatriarchal desire. As the narrator observes, "De atmosphere in de room take a hairpin turn, and it was man aggressing on woman, woman warding off a herd a man who just had dey pride publicly cut up a couple a times in just a few minutes. One brother walk over to Janet and me and he stand up facing me with his hands clasp in front a his crotch, like if he protecting it" (55). Tellingly, the narrator is not the object of heteropatriarchal desire; rather the waiter's protection of his genitals signals that that narrator's butch queer presentation is another threat to normative hetero-masculinity. In response to this overt display of patriarchal authority, Giraffebai and the narrator share an important moment of identification in their mutual opposition to the racial and patriarchal systems that render women as objects of male desire:

> "Whoever does he think he is! Calling me dear and touching me like that! Why do these men always think that they have permission to touch whatever and wherever they want! And you can't make a fuss about it in public, because it is exactly what those people out there want to hear about so they can say how sexist and uncivilized our culture is."
> I shake mih head in understanding and say, "Yeah, I know. Yuh right!"

Notice that Giraffebai is critical not only of a patriarchal system that allows men to claim ownership of women's bodies, but she is also critical of the image of "uncivilized" Indianness it represents to a white mainstream, which ultimately reinscribes colonial patriarchy onto the bodies of colonized women. To reiterate, what I find so compelling about this series of interactions is how masterfully the story depicts the shifting power

relations and allegiances between the characters but never in simple vertical configurations. Rather, power in "Out On Main Street" is always presented through interlocking systems of racial, gender, sexual, and national difference.

Like the performance of sympathy for Chum-Chum, the moment of recognition and identification between the narrator and Giraffebai is short-lived, dissipating with the revelation of the narrator's queer sexuality. Sandy and Lisa, a white lesbian couple, enter the shop and proceed to greet the narrator and Janet with much affection:

> While we stand up dere chatting, Sandy insist on rubbing she hand up and down Janet back—wit friendly intent, mind you, and same time Lise have she arm around Sandy waist. Well, all cover get blown. If it was even remotely possible dat I wasn't noticeable before, now Janet and I were over-exposed. We could easily suffer from hypothermia, specially since it suddenly get cold cold in dere...As we were leaving I turn to acknowledge Giraffebai, but instead a any recognition of our buddiness against de fresh brothers, I get a face dat look like it was in de presence of a very foul smell. (57)

While the narrator has already been marked by her deviant performance of gender, this chance encounter with Sandy and Lise places her butch masculinity within the confines of a queer sexual politics founded on visibility. If the narrator "wasn't noticeable before," the public displays of affection by Sandy and Lise toward Janet "over-expose" them to the other characters in the shop, which culminates in the narrator's recognition that her positioning in the shop has shifted, particularly in relation to Giraffebai. Yet another injection of difference, in this case queerness, undoes any sense of identification that Giraffebai might have had with the narrator. Their shared experiences of patriarchy are not enough to sustain the affiliation they might have shared, just as the identification between the narrator and the shopkeeper based on their shared colonial migration histories fails to coalesce into any tangible form of connection.

While the failures of these relations might suggest that "Out On Main Street" sees the labor of producing diasporic affiliation as futile, the story nonetheless repeatedly emphasizes the strategic utility of these affiliations forged across difference, suggesting that it is their very contingency that makes diasporic affiliations politically effective. In my reading, this ultimately compels a shift from comparative methodologies of discreteness and typology to a relational model of interaction and entanglement. In what is perhaps the story's most powerful moment, the narrator expresses the depth of her frustrations about authenticity politics to Janet. "De thing is: all a we in Trinidad is cultural bastards, Janet, all a we…Chinese people, Black people, White people. Syrian. Lebanese. I looking forward to de day I find out dat place inside me where I am nothing else but Trinidadian, *whatever dat could turn out to be*" (52, emphasis mine). While "Out On Main Street" is populated almost entirely with South Asian characters, this moment in the text speaks to the larger racial entanglements produced by British empire. While it might seem as if the narrator simply wants to replace an exclusionary Indian national identity with an apparently heterogeneous and inclusive Trinidadian one, the contingency of that identity formation, "whatever dat could turn out to be," compels us to imagine and theorize the relationships between multiple racial and ethnic communities—Chinese, Black, White, Syrian, Lebanese, Indian—in ways that do not reproduce the benign, static, and wholly discrete conceptions of diaspora cultures found in dominant social sciences. For a project concerned primarily with the entanglements of Black and South Asian diasporic formations in Anglo-American empire, such as this one, the model of diaspora articulated in "Out On Main Street," leaves open the field of possibilities for

understanding the unpredictable, shifting relations of these formations across geographic and historical contexts.

By way of conclusion, then, I want to return to the dialect narration. The story begins with a question posed by the narrator: "Janet and me?" (45). Rather than the narrator staging a point of narrative departure herself, this question suggests that an earlier question has been asked of the narrator, to which her story, indeed "Out on Main Street" in its entirety, is the response. In other words, the opening of the story is staged such that the reader enters into the narrative mid-conversation, interpellated relationally to the narrator as her interlocutor. The story ends with a question as well, this time posed by the narrator herself. After observing the dissipation of her brief relationship with Giraffebai, the narrator asks the reader, "So tell me, what yuh think 'bout dis nah, girl?" (57). In posing her own final question to the reader, the narrator defers any clear resolution to the story. Loose ends remain untied, and the final question is left unanswered by the text. Instead, the reader is called upon to critically position themselves in relation to the narrator based on the story we have just been told. Read in this way, "Out on Main Street" seems less invested in forging a definitive relation with the reader; on the contrary the story seems to critically engage relationality as a site of ongoing negotiation, rather than narrative resolution. This open-endedness marks the possibility that the reader might engage the narrator in ways other than Giraffebai and the shopkeeper. Indeed, what we are left with at the end of the story is the possibility of alternate modes of affiliation, of what Gayatri Gopinath has called queer forms of affiliation, which may be "achieved…through the recognition and acceptance of the difference of the other rather than through an attempt to narcissistically mirror the self in

the other" ("Archive" 189). While it is impossible to assume that such forms of queer affiliation between the narrator and the reader will necessarily and always coalesce—or that they should cohere definitively at all—the text itself can be read to, in Gopinath's terms, "produce moments of affective relationality that open the door to new ways of conceptualizing the self and others" in the face of residual forms of colonial power (167).

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Chapter Two
Black British Cinema and the Queer Politics of Memory

In the previous chapter, I used Shani Mootoo's "Out On Main Street" to develop a relational definition of diaspora. Unlike Indian nationalist accounts of diaspora, which attempt to consolidate the vast, uneven, and historically differentiated migrations of South Asian peoples around the world into a singular, diasporic national subject who is aligned with the state's neoliberal ambitions, Mootoo's story centralized a queer Indo-Trinidadian woman, the descendant of indentured laborers brought to Trinidad during the colonial period. This character is decidedly not the NRI subject whose class and gender privilege appeals to the Indian state. Rather, the narrator of Mootoo's story is part of the subaltern diaspora, those who have historically been disavowed by the Indian state. In its refusal of the nationalist politics of authenticity, the story challenges the Indian state's attempts to "forget" subaltern diasporas, and instead insists on remembering and reckoning with these subaltern histories. At the same time, the story also complicates the ways in which diaspora has been deployed by dominant social sciences. If the social sciences have presumed the coherence and discreteness of diasporic formations, "Out On Main Street" instead alerts us to the forms of relationality that emerge in the contacts of diasporic peoples cut across by differences of race, gender, class, sexuality, and national origin. The story hints at other formations and social groupings, but acknowledges their contingency—"whatever that could turn out to be." I argued that a relational model of diaspora thus complicates both the nationalist consolidation and incorporation of old and new diasporas, as well as the dominant critical tendency to view diasporic formations as discrete, rather than relational and overlapping. To view diasporic formations as

relational allows for attention to difference, to more nuanced, inclusive, and complicated renderings of the experiences and politics of diasporic peoples.

This chapter continues and elaborates on my discussion of diaspora as a relational concept, though this time in another historical and political context: Britain in the 1980s. In the late 1960s and early 70s, "Black" emerged as a coalitional political identity adopted by working-class Caribbean, African, and South Asian migrants living in the United Kingdom. Rather than a sign of racial identity, Black British identities allowed these various racial and ethnic groups to come together under a *political* identity based on their shared experience of British racism and the legacy of colonization. As Stuart Hall has described it:

> Black is not a question of pigmentation. The Black I'm talking about is a historical category, a political category, a cultural category…Their histories are in the past, inscribed in their skins. But it is not because of their skins that they are Black in their heads…What they said was, "We may be different in actual color skins but vis-à-vis the social system, vis-à-vis the political system of racism, there is more that unites us than what divides us." ("Old and New Identities" 53-55)

This adoption of Black as a political identity thus functioned as a way to create and sustain political communities through an emphasis on shared experience and social location within a racialized system of power.[26] By the 1980s, however, the solidarities that had formed under the sign of Black as a shared experience of British racism had

[26] The adoption and utility of Black as a coalitional identity was not without its contradictions and detractors. Perhaps the most vocal critic of the adoption of Black as a political category is the sociologist Tariq Madood, who argues that the hegemony of Black over other markers of community identity, such as religion and ethnicity, marginalizes the specific experiences of peoples of South Asian origin. He writes, "[T]he term 'black' is not neutral amongst non-white ethnic groups. It has a historical and current meaning such that it is powerfully evocative of people of Sub-Saharan African origins, and all other groups, if evoked at all, are secondary…An emphasis on the discrimination against 'black' people systematically obscures the cultural antipathy to Asians" (66).

begun to unravel, especially as feminist and queer communities and cultural producers began to unsettle the ease with which the term was evoked.

This unsettling of Black British identities and cultural politics was not necessarily an attempt to eradicate the concept itself, but rather was a reimagining and reanimation of it in which internal differences of race, gender, sexuality, and ethnicity were to be examined in their complexity. Black British feminisms were particularly influenced by the work of U.S. Black and women of color feminists who were articulating models of solidarity that did not rely only on the recognition of similarity, but also on the reckoning with important differences.[27] As noted by Black British feminists such as Julia Sudbury, Avtar Brah, and Pratibha Parmar, the most dynamic articulations of Black Britishness were those that refused to consolidate into reified political identities grounded only in the similarity of experience or shared history. Black Britishness was best understood as a critical discourse rooted in a differentiated and expansive definition of political Blackness, one that was subject to constant self-reflection, reevaluation, and revision.[28] As Julia Sudbury writes in her study of Black British feminist activism, "'[B]lackness is not the natural preserve of any set of actors. Neither is it likely to be embraced by all members of the diverse communities of African and Asian descent in Britain. However, this should not be a reason to give up on an inclusive definition of blackness. Rather, it is its very oppositionality, its insistence on discussion and explanation, which makes 'black'

[27] For example, see Pratibha Parmar's interview with June Jordan in "Black Feminism: The Politics of Articulation."

[28] Michelle Wright, although not writing only about the Black British context, has recently made a similar feminist critique of models of African diaspora studies defined through tropes of common history or culture. My suggestion that Black Britishness is best understood as a critical discourse rather than only an identity is indebted to her significant work.

a useful sign" (116).[29] This chapter explores *cinematic* articulations of Black Britishness, as they were engaged in Black British independent film of the 1980s. I read Isaac Julien and Maureen Blackwood's *The Passion of Remembrance* (1986) and Stephen Frears and Hanif Kureishi's *Sammy and Rosie Get Laid* (1987), two films that are dissimilar in terms of their aesthetic styles and narrative structures, but nonetheless key texts of Black British cinema because of the ways in which they articulate a Black British feminist and queer cultural politics that was instrumental in reassessing and revising the politics of solidarity underwriting the concept of Black British identities in the 1970s.

Stuart Hall's essay "New Ethnicities" is foundational to this chapter, especially his discussion of the shifts in Black British cultural politics in the context of emerging cinematic practices. Originally published in 1989, Hall's essay narrates the historical emergence of two phases or modes of Black British cultural politics that he argues were in dialectical tension with each other throughout by the 1980s. The first is the coining of the term Black as a political identity of cross-racial solidarity based on the shared experience of British racism, despite the not insignificant differences of history, tradition, and ethnicity. "'The black experience,'" Hall argues, "as a singular and unifying framework based on the building up of identity across ethnic and cultural difference, became 'hegemonic' over other ethnic/racial identities—though the latter, of course, did not disappear (442).[30] Black communities were positioned at the margins of representation, as the "unspoken and invisible 'other' of predominantly white aesthetic

[29] See also Avtar Brah's *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities* and Heidi Safia Mirza's *Black British Feminism: A Reader*.
[30] A. Sivanandan provides a useful genealogy of the emergence of this kind of Black British politics in "From Resistance to Rebellion: Asian and Afro-Caribbean Struggles in Britain" in *A Different Hunger*.

and cultural discourses." The cultural politics of this singular mode of Black Britishness intervened into the cultural arena by not only fighting for access to representation, but also by producing "positive" images that would counter the negative images and stereotypes of criminality, laziness, and illegitimate family structures—altering what Hall refers to as the "relations of representation." With few existing representations of Black Britishness, it became the burden of Black cultural producers to speak *for* rather than speak *from* their communities.[31]

At the same time, and even more so as the 1980s wore on, Hall observes that another mode of Black British cultural politics was emerging that sought to move from a "struggle over the relations of representation to a politics of representation itself" (444). This emergent cultural discourse was marked by what Hall famously termed, echoing the work of Black feminists, "'the end of innocence,' or the end of the innocent notion of the essential Black subject," in which the singular category of race is unsettled to reveal its complex interminglings, crossings, and intersections with other structures of power. "Once you enter the politics of the end of the essential black subject, you are plunged headlong into the maelstrom of a continuously contingent, unguaranteed, political argument and debate: a critical politics, a politics of criticism" (445). A Black British cultural politics that proceeds from an understanding of the contingency of identities and communities within particular historical conjunctures thus enables a more critical conception of solidarity, coalition, and affiliation that "works with and through difference…[to] make common struggle and resistance possible without suppressing the

[31] See also Kobena Mercer's "Black Art and the Burden of Representation" in *Welcome to the Jungle*.

real heterogeneity of interests and identities." As I will demonstrate below, *The Passion of Remembrance* and *Sammy and Rosie Get Laid* fall within this second mode of Black cultural politics in that they both work to displace the notion of a unified Black British subject through a focus on race, gender and sexuality as co-constitutive structures of power, while also displacing hegemonic modes of representation in their search for new ways of narrating the complexities and contradictions of Black British experiences.

Finally, Hall demonstrates that the emergent Black British cultural politics must be understood as a diaspora politics. If, as I suggested in the previous chapter, the dominant tendency in South Asian studies has been to assert that diasporic subject and community formations are produced primarily through the negotiation of material and affective relations to a lost homeland, this chapter extends that work by asking how diasporic communities are positioned within the societies they come to inhabit once they have left the homeland behind. In the context of Black British filmmaking in the 1980s, Hall writes,

> In the case of the young Black British films and film-makers under discussion, the diaspora experience is certainly profoundly fed and nourished by, for example, the emergence of Third World Cinema; by the African experience; the connection with Afro-Caribbean experience; and the deep inheritance of complex systems of representation and aesthetic traditions from Asian and African culture. But, in spite of these rich cultural "roots," the new cultural politics is operating on new and quite distinct ground—specifically, contestations over what it means to be British. (447)

Importantly, Hall locates the site of diasporic culture and critique not only in the complex relationship to a homeland of the past, but also in the "new and quite distinct" context of a diasporic present. Invoking Paul Gilroy's influential work, Hall goes on to say, "Fifteen years ago we didn't care, or at least I didn't care, whether there was any black in the

Union Jack. Now not only do we care, we *must*" (448, emphasis in original). As articulated in his emphatic *must*, diaspora is in this context fundamentally an intersectional racial analytic, mobilized to problematize and contest the inherent whiteness of British national identity as it is rooted in histories of British colonialism.[32] Importantly, this call for a more capacious definition of Britishness is not an assimilationist project. If assimilation is defined through the temporalized logic of inclusion—where racialized migrants shed their past histories, cultures, languages, customs, and community formations to align themselves with a future-oriented British modernity—Hall's insistence that one must care whether there is any Black in the Union Jack forces us to reckon with the persistence of the past as it impinges on the present and future.

Building on Hall's significant contributions above, I argue that Black Britishness functions in *The Passion of Remembrance* and *Sammy and Rosie Get Laid* in three overlapping ways. First, Black Britishness is a "multi-accentual" political identity that draws on multiple, nonequivalent histories of gendered racialization in postcolonial Britain, London specifically.[33] Second, Black Britishness can be read as a mode of cinematic practice in which the politics of representation, from the fragmenting of linear continuity to the unsettling of realism, take center stage. Finally, and most importantly, I position Black Britishness as a critical memory discourse, in which the legacies and

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[32] For a brilliant discussion of the ways in which dominant conceptions of post-war Britishness were rooted in whiteness, see Paul Gilroy's *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack*, in which he writes, "The politics of 'race' in this country is fired by conceptions of national belonging and homogeneity which not only blur the distinction between 'race' and nation, but rely on that very ambiguity for their effect" (45).

[33] Paul Gilroy's proposes an understanding of Blackness as a "multi-accentual sign" as a way to circumvent essentialist definitions. See "Cruciality and the Frog's Perspective: An Agenda of the Difficulties for the Black Arts Movement in Britain" in *Small Acts*.

residues of British colonialism can be reckoned with in the present. Taken together, I argue that *The Passion of Remembrance* and *Sammy and Rosie Get Laid* are constitutive of a Black queer feminist memory politics that can be productively used to critique both the persistence of imperial racial ideologies as well as the masculinism of anticolonial and antiracist nationalisms.

"Who Will Hear Me Now as I Remember, and Talk of Remembering?": *The Passion of Remembrance*

Isaac Julien and Maureen Blackwood's *The Passion of Remembrance* was released in 1987 from the Sankofa Film and Video Collective. Sankofa was one of a number of Black film and video workshop collectives that were funded by the Greater London Council and Channel 4 in the aftermath of antiracist rebellions that had occurred in Notting Hill and Brixton in the late 1970s and early 1980s. These workshop collectives, which included John Akomfrah's Black Audio Film Collective, Ceddo Film and Video Workshop, and Retake Film and Video Workshop, were integral in the development of Black British independent film. Within these various workshops, young, mostly second generation Black British filmmakers staged an important intervention in the politics of Black cinematic representation. Hamid Naficy observes that the workshops, though distinct from each other, shared some common thematic and political concerns: "Driven by the politics and poetics of decolonization, postcolonial diasporism, and critical theory, the workshops…questioned not only the mainstream media's stereotyping and misrepresentation on the black and subaltern subjects but also

representation itself" (88).[34] In regard to the latter issue, Black film and video collectives often experimented with form as a way to deconstruct and problematize the modes of cinematic representation and address that structured both mainstream commercial narrative cinema, as well as documentary realism's role in the production of colonial knowledge of the racialized, colonized "Other." Sankofa set itself apart from many of the other workshops in its focus on the intersection of race and colonialism with discourses of gender and sexuality. As Isaac Julien himself put it, "Sankofa consists of three Black women and myself, a Black gay man. Although there are workshops that have women and gay members, these issues have been a central political starting point for us."[35]

The Passion of Remembrance is a multilayered text comprised of three separate but interwoven strands. First, there is the esoteric "Speaker's Drama" which features monologues and a conversation between an unnamed Black woman and Black man. These figures speak directly to the camera in talking head style interviews in which they remember and narrate their experiences of British racism and their involvement in antiracist struggles. The Black woman is a key figure in the film, and throughout the Speaker's Drama segments she consistently calls into the question the gendered exclusions and oversights of the Black man's political philosophy, especially in the more confrontational scenes that occur in the film's second half. The second layer of the film is a more straightforward domestic narrative centered on Maggie Baptiste, a young aspiring filmmaker who lives with her brother, Tony, and her parents, Benjy and Gloria, immigrants from Saint Lucia. Maggie's friends Louise, Gary and Michael (who are a

[34] See also Coco Fusco's monograph *Young, British, and Black* for illuminating interviews with members of Sankofa and the Black Audio Film collective.
[35] See Fung, "Eyes on Black Britain."

couple) are also close with the family. Depicting the multigenerational Baptiste family allows the film to explore gender, sexual, and generational differences in relation to British racism and Black cultural politics. The conflicts between the various characters in the Baptiste family, as well as the man and woman of the Speaker's Drama, are reflective of how *The Passion of Remembrance* views Black Britishness not as a reified, coherent or stable identity, but rather as a site of continual contestation and contradiction. The final layer of the film is comprised of archival documentary footage of protests and demonstrations in the 1970s and 1980s. This footage, edited together and presented as Maggie's experimental film work, also functions as a film within the film—the audience watches Maggie's documentary along with the characters. In shifting back and forth between these three strands, violating cinematic codes of linear temporality and narrative causality, I argue that *The Passion of Remembrance* suggests that Black subjectivities and politics are constituted not through a linear, developmental logic, but rather by the dynamic interaction of discursive and representational forms, between history and memory, past and present.

The opening montage of the film depicts groups of Black and South Asian women together participating in protests and demonstrations—standing on picket lines in the rain, holding signs, distributing leaflets and pamphlets, marching in the streets with their fists in the air, laughing and smiling and shouting together. Soft, reflective music plays over these images, which are sometimes interrupted by the figure of Angela Davis speaking at a podium, attesting to the influence of U.S. Black feminisms on Black British feminisms. These very first images in the film centralize the participation and involvement of women of color at the frontlines of antiracist political struggles. This

montage bleeds into the first monologue of the Speaker's Drama, in which the woman speaker recounts her memories of her gendered experiences organizing against the racism of the 1970s:

> Listening to the brothers, to their needs, wants. All the time listening, as they spoke, talked, demanded their right to be men. Then concentrating on how to rebuild them into men, fashioned into an image of their own choosing. Helping them, supporting them by always being there. Making the tea, coffee, curry, patties. Organizing the benefits, licking the stamps. Trying never to refuse. Later on having babies, running the home, whilst taking care of everything. Feeling tired at the beginning of the day…It was always important to be on the scene…Being an active conscious sister. Fashioned in an image designed for, but not by her.

In this opening monologue, the woman speaker narrates the extent to which Black women were simultaneously active agents in organized political protest, but also often sidelined to carry out the necessary reproductive labor that creates the conditions for protest in the first place—caring for the children, cooking the food, running the domestic space, and providing administrative support ("organizing the benefits, licking the stamps"). According to the speaker, women were relegated to the role of supporter, listener, and caregiver, their attention and participation focused on addressing the needs and wants of men, but never their own interests as Black women. "Being a conscious active sister" was an externally defined positionality, "designed for, but not by her." As this monologue demonstrates, the revolutionary subject of 1970s Black British political struggles is gendered male, with the woman never having the opportunity to articulate a revolutionary subjectivity on her own terms. The monologue thus operates on two levels. First, by describing the ways in which Black women's labor has historically been devalued by male leaders of antiracist struggles, the monologue offers a pointed critique of the masculinism of Black organizing, thereby insisting on an understanding of racism

as one vector of power that is differentially experienced with regard to gender. Second, the monologue also opens up a space in which to articulate a Black feminist politics that is not only critical of the history Black nationalism, but also generative of other kinds of future-oriented political subjectivities, identities, and movements rooted in an intersectional analysis of power within struggles for justice.

This sense of critically reflecting on the past in order to formulate new kinds of political identities and movements for the future is the central theme of the narrative sections of the film, which focus on the domestic drama of the Baptise family. The family functions in multiple ways in the film. On the one hand, the family is a site of care, comfort, and support in the face of the racial and class stratifications of British society. Indeed, the film's introduction of the Baptiste family, as they watch a game show on television, is one of incredible warmth. At the same time, the family and the space of the home is also a site of conflict in which the diversity of Black experiences are represented and negotiated, especially in terms of gender, sexual, and generational difference. The film is careful not to present the generational and gender conflicts of the Baptise family in dichotomous terms. Affiliations between the various characters cut across gender and generation at different moments, creating a network of shifting affinities and structures of experience that do not easily resolve themselves in the binary oppositions of parent versus child, man versus woman, brother versus sister. This aspect of the narrative sections of the film thus provides a useful counterpoint to the Speaker's Drama, which

runs the risk of homogenizing the experiences of Black communities in the opposition between the unnamed man and woman speakers.[36]

The gendered differences in political viewpoint between Maggie and her elder brother Tony form one of the central conflicts in the Baptiste family, and also help situate the debate between the man and woman in the Speaker's Drama within a specific context. For example, during a scene in which Maggie and her friends discuss the particularity of Black queer experiences, Tony is quick to accuse them of diluting their minds with the "white informed" issues of gender and sexuality. For Tony, as for the man in the Speaker's Drama, Blackness and Black politics are hindered when the experiences of Black women and Black queers are articulated in their specificity. Conversations about gender and sexuality redirect attention away from the "real" politics of race. As Tony says to Maggie, "You and I should be defining our own perspectives. Things should be informed by us for us." Channeling the woman in the Speaker's Drama, Maggie replies, "'By us for us!' That's the ideal, but the ideal's not what's happening is it? What's happening is you informing us. It's *your* perspectives that you want to inform us about. You're not really hearing anyone else…At the end of the day it's about how you define things because you've got the power." Like the woman in the Speaker's Drama, Maggie's critical posture toward Tony performs the dual function of intervening in the political imaginary of the past by pointing to the gendered distribution of power within antiracist political struggles while also gesturing to other models of affiliation grounded in a multivalent analysis of race, gender, and sexuality.

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[36] Kobena Mercer, in *Welcome to the Jungle*, is quite critical of the Speaker's Drama in *The Passion of Remembrance*, arguing that these portions of the film are "profoundly monologic" rather than dialogic, homogenizing and totalizing rather than differentiated (65).

Thus far, my discussion of *The Passion of Remembrance* has focused on the queer feminist interventions it makes at the level of character and narrative. While these aspects of the film are undoubtedly compelling, they are all the more significant when considered alongside the film's brilliant experiments on the level of form. In an interview with Richard Fung, Isaac Julien elaborates on Sankofa's commitment to experimenting with film form as the means to both critique and generate new modes of cinematic representation: "We came to the conclusion that if we were to start negotiating our identities within the cinema that we'd have to somehow start to negotiate a film language that would actually try not to reproduce dominant ideology but would reproduce our desires and our politics. We also wanted there to be a politics of representation within the work that we produced." As stated above, the three layers of *The Passion of Remembrance*—the Speaker's Drama, the Baptiste family narrative, and Maggie's documentary montages—are not presented in isolation. The film repeatedly shifts between them, violating the rules of continuity, linearity, and sometimes even narrative coherence. Each element of the film interconnects with another, and there are moments where they seem to bleed into each other. For example, during a particularly heightened moment in Maggie and Tony's final argument an abrupt jump cut takes the viewer back to the Speaker's Drama. The conversation continues as if uninterrupted, with the woman taking over where Maggie leaves off. This strategy is mirrored in the formal structure of Maggie's experimental films as well, which are arguably the centerpiece of the film. As Maggie describes them to her friends—and the viewer—"What we're going to be witnessing is archival footage of demonstrations, festivals, things like that. I've edited them all together to form a montage of images of protest and celebration of solidarity."

The montages themselves, such as the one described above that opens the film, present footage from a vast array of movements, including protests for worker's rights, queer liberation, racial justice, and women's rights. As the camera lingers on the faces and bodies of the protesters, what emerges is a moving celebration of the spirit and labor of social justice movements and activists. Yet, in the suturing together of what Tony and the man in the Speaker's Drama see as separate issues of labor, gender, sexuality, and race, Maggie's filmmaking practice insists in seeing continuity and overlap between these issues and the movements they inspire. In her films, Maggie is engaged in the complex work of trying to articulate what Isaac Julien refers to as a film language, a politics of representation that can encompass the specificity of struggles of racial, gender, class, and sexual justice while also attending to the convergences between them. As Maggie's friends watch, discuss, and debate her films, the viewer is also invited into the conversation by having to make sense of the montage of images presented to us. What we are left with at the end of *The Passion of Remembrance*, then, is not only a narrative dramatization of the ways in which Black women and queers have been marginalized in the history of Black struggles, but also a critical conversation about the necessity of building alliances across difference in order to construct alternative political imaginaries and worlds. Maggie's documentary montages, and indeed, *The Passion of Remembrance* itself, can be read as a cinematic imagining of what might yet come into being.

Empire's Queer Hauntings: *Sammy and Rosie Get Laid*

Building on my reading of *The Passion of Remembrance*, I turn now to Stephen Frears' and Hanif Kureishi's *Sammy and Rosie Get Laid*, another cinematic

representation of Black Britishness. Like *The Passion of Remembrance*, *Sammy and Rosie* critically explores the past as it bears upon the present. However, it is different from *Passion* in important ways. *Passion* focused primarily on the internal gender and sexual dynamics of Black British communities in order to displace the notion of a unified Black radical subject, which was mirrored in the film's non-linear, fragmented visual and narrative style. *Sammy and Rosie* is less formally experimental in the sense that it stays within the realm of fictional narrative, although the introduction of the supernatural in the film's final act departs from the conventions of cinematic realism. *Sammy and Rosie Get Laid* is nonetheless very much interested in destabilizing the notion of a unified Black subject, and its method of doing so is to present us with what Ranita Chatterjee calls "an explosion of difference" in its depiction of postcolonial London. *Sammy and Rosie* uses tropes of memory and haunting to trace the continuities between British colonialism and contemporary forms of British racism, and also critique the violence of elite postcolonial nationalisms.

Sammy and Rosie Get Laid was released to both acclaim and controversy in 1987. This second collaboration between filmmaker Stephen Frears and screenwriter Hanif Kureishi, after their acclaimed 1985 film *My Beautiful Laundrette*, continues their engagement with the racial and sexual politics of Thatcher-era England. Unlike *Laundrette*, whose narrative focused primarily on the queer romance between an upwardly mobile British Asian man and a working-class former member of the National Front, *Sammy and Rosie Get Laid* employs a much broader and in some ways more unforgiving canvas. The world of *Sammy and Rosie Get Laid* is populated by an array of characters from different racial, gender, and class positions, offering a kind of cross-

section of postcolonial London that refuses to privilege one character or narrative over another.[37] Sammy, a British Pakistani accountant, and Rosie, a white social worker, are a non-monogamous married couple. Rosie enjoys the sexual freedom afforded by this arrangement, telling Sammy, "Freedom plus commitment. Those were our words. They were to be the pillars of our love and life together." Sammy also pursues other sexual partners, most notably Anna, a white American photographer, but his jealousy and insecurity often get the best of him. Sammy's father, Rafi Rahman, arrives in London from Pakistan. An anticolonial nationalist in his youth, Rafi studied in London before returning to the subcontinent to take a position in the postcolonial Pakistani government. He has returned to London in order to escape persecution in Pakistan for political corruption. In London, he rekindles an affair with Alice, a British woman with whom he had been in love while he was a student. While Rosie initially welcomes Rafi into their home, Sammy's resentment of his father's desertion of him as a child weighs heavily on their relationship. Rafi befriends a young Black man named Danny, who eventually becomes Rosie's lover. Added to the mix are Rani and Vivia, an interracial South Asian and Black lesbian couple who are close friends of Rosie's. Rani and Vivia work for a leftist political newspaper, and uncover information about Rafi's involvement in the torture of political dissidents in Pakistan. Finally, in a turn to the supernatural, there is the unnamed ghostly taxi driver, who is initially seen driving Rafi from the airport. This ghost, a manifestation of one of Rafi's torture victims, appears frequently in the

[37] Gayatri Spivak argues that this shift in focus from the individual within a political context to a more collective representation might constitute a pattern for postcolonial cultural producers. See "In Praise of *Sammy and Rosie Get Laid*."

background action in the second half of the film, before ultimately seeking his revenge on Rafi, leading him to commit suicide.

As the above description demonstrates, it is difficult to articulate a central plot line for the film. Instead, Frears and Kureishi explore the myriad encounters and relationships between the characters in order to engage an almost endless list of thematic concerns, ranging from the racial and class dispossessions engendered by Thatcherism, the legacies of empire in London in the late 20th century, the limits of liberal multiculturalism, police harassment and violence directed at Black British communities, postcolonial state violence and torture, anticolonial and anti-imperial resistance, the dynamic articulation of postcolonial identities, and alternatives to normative heteropatriarchy, especially those embodied and practiced by diasporic queers of color. As Ranita Chatterjee suggests, the "complexity of representation" found in *Sammy and Rosie* stems from its displacement of a white heterosexual masculinity: "The absence of the traditional white heterosexual male as implied center liberates the conceivable play of images on the screen, thus enabling a veritable explosion of difference" (172). Like Chatterjee, I am particularly interested in the political possibilities made available through the secondary characters of Danny, Rani, and Vivia, but also, especially, the ghostly taxi driver. I argue that collectively these characters not only point to modes of radical critique that shape the film's critical posture toward Sammy and Rosie's liberalism and Rafi's heteropatriarchal nationalism, but also that they enable a Black queer politics with which to reckon with the legacies and ghosts of colonial and postcolonial violence in late 20th century London.

From the start, *Sammy and Rosie Get Laid* is invested in drawing continuities between the history of British colonialism and the position of working-class Black communities in London in the 1980s. The film opens with the image of a desolate urban wasteland under a highway overpass. Played over this image, which precedes the opening credits of the film, is the voice of Margaret Thatcher giving her victory address on the night of the 1987 election. "We have a great deal of work to do, so no one must slack," she says to an audibly joyful, laughing audience. "You will have a marvelous party tonight, and you can clear up tomorrow. But on Monday, you know we've got a big job to do in some of those inner cities." This establishing shot of the barren overpass actually references the end of film, after a community of transient peoples has been forcibly removed from the land in order for a property developer to build on it. After this brief opening scene and the main credits, we witness the brutal murder of an unnamed Black woman by the police while they search for her son.[38] In response to this murder, the working-class Black community erupts in a rebellion. Police are called in in riot gear as fires rage outside Sammy and Rosie's apartment window on the day that Rafi arrives from Pakistan. In the pairing of these two opening scenes—one depicting the aftermath of the displacement of the urban poor in service of capitalist development, the other powerfully representing the surveillance and susceptibility of the diasporic Black working class (women) to state-sanctioned death—the film yokes together the intersecting structures of race, class, and gender as the terms of what Danny will later

[38] Both bell hooks (in *Yearning*) and Rahul Gairola note that this scene was inspired the real-life shooting of Dorothy "Cherry" Groce on September 28, 1985. Police raided Groce's Brixton home in search of her son. Groce was shot in the chest by police, leaving her permanently paralyzed from the waist down.

refer to as "domestic colonialism," the condition of working-class immigrant and communities of color in London.[39]

Indeed, the film is replete with signs of the colonial period reappearing in the postcolonial present: the "anticolonial stones" wielded by Rafi is his youth, which find their present day counterpart in the bricks thrown by participants of the rebellion; Alice's taste for Earl Grey tea and Jamaica rum cake, and her dusty childhood photos of herself with her Indian *ayah*; Danny's questions to Rafi—"You guys ended colonialism non-violently. You'd sit down all over the place, right?"—as he considers different resistance strategies. *Sammy and Rosie Get Laid* is thus particularly attentive to the ways in which the lifespan of empire exceeds any notion of linear progress from the colonial to the postcolonial. Instead, as the above examples attest, the film ruminates on the ongoing, residual effects of colonial ideologies in the racial and cultural formations of late-20th century Britain.[40] Danny is a particularly suggestive figure here, as he comes to embody a playful though nonetheless critical posture toward these colonial remnants, one that I suggest can be read as queer. Danny is a ubiquitous but subtle presence in the film, often seen in the background of the action. He is one of the first characters to whom the audience is introduced, and functions as a familiar though somewhat elusive anchor for

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[39] Salman Rushdie, in *Imaginary Homelands*, argues that the experiences of racialized, working-class immigrants in Britain is rooted in the long history of British colonialism: "In short, if we want to understand British racism…it's impossible to even begin to grasp the nature of the beast unless we accept its historical roots. Four hundred years of conquest and looting, four centuries of being told you were superior to the Fuzzy-Wuzzies and the wogs, leave their stain" (130). See "The New Empire Within Britain."

[40] In its focus on the residues of colonialism, *Sammy and Rosie Get Laid* is an important rejoinder to what Salman Rushdie refers to in *Imaginary Homelands* as the "Raj revival"—the elaborate, nostalgic period representations of empire that dominated British cinema and television at the time, such as Richard Attenborough's *Gandhi*, David Lean's adaptation of *A Passage to India* and the television production of Paul Scott's *The Jewel in the Crown*. See "Outside the Whale."

the audience as the film moves between its various storylines. When he meets Rafi for the first time, he introduces himself as Danny, and quickly adds, "But people who like me call me Victoria," ironically and queerly invoking the monarch most associated with Britain's colonial expansion. Danny as Victoria is evoked again a few scenes later when he is introduced to Alice as he dons her lace and feather covered gardening hat, which he finds discarded outside her suburban home. This invocation of (Queen) Victoria in the figure of Danny, a working-class Black British youth, simultaneously acknowledges, on the one hand, the imperial history that would bring Black laboring subjects to the colonial metropole in the post-war period, and on the other the mobilization of working-class Black British communities in critically challenging and reimagining the very notion of British national identity in the decades after the formal end of empire.

If Danny as Victoria is suggestive of a queer challenge to the colonial history of Britain, Rani and Vivia, the interracial Black and South Asian lesbian couple, can be read as the figureheads of the film's queer diasporic engagement with the gendered violences of elite postcolonial nationalism, as it is represented by Rafi. While in their initial scenes it appears as if Rani and Vivia will simply be used to humorously undercut Rafi's discomfort with (queer) women's sexuality, it is soon revealed they are in fact the catalyst for the film's engagement with Rafi's overseeing of torture programs in Pakistan.[41] When he first arrives in Sammy and Rosie's apartment, Rani takes Rosie aside to ask if she is aware of exactly whom Rafi is and what his role was in the

[41] This is not at all to undermine the fact that Rani has a rather scathing, hilarious wit. For instance, she describes heterosexual sex as "You know, that stuff when the woman spends the whole time trying to come, but can't. And the man spends the whole time trying to stop himself coming, but can't." This line is made all the more memorable by the great Meera Syal's performance as Rani.

postcolonial Pakistani government. Rosie admits to not knowing much about Rafi's political career, and Rani promises that she will "dig out some stuff about him." Later, we see Rani and Vivia at the offices of what seems to be a nonprofit organization, described in the screenplay as "rather like Amnesty" (15). An East Asian woman retrieves the multivolume file on Rafi and gives it to Rani and Vivia, who affectionately hold hands with each other at her desk. In this moment of queer intimacy in the Amnesty office and the collective uncovering of Rafi's crimes by three politicized women of color, we can observe the linking of Rani and Vivia's queer sexuality to their pursuit of information about Rafi's political career, a linkage which will come to fruition in their brilliant final confrontation with Rafi towards the end of the film.

After spending the night with Alice, Rafi returns to Sammy and Rosie's apartment only to find Rani and Vivia in bed together. He and Rani exchange insults in Urdu and Punjabi. Crucially, this is the only scene in the movie not performed in English, and it is subtitled as follows:

> RAFI: What are you doing? You perverted, half-sexed, God-accursed lesbians! God save my eyes from the sights I'm seeing!
> RANI: Fuck off, you old bastard! I'll tin-opener off your foreskin! I'll shove live rats up your camel! Who the fuck do you think you are! Pigshit bastard! I'll crush his balls! Let me get at that withered sperm-factory!

As Rahul Gairola astutely argues, the "official" translation offered by the subtitles omits crucial content from Rani's curses, specifically her repeated references to Rafi as a "bloody criminal" and "bloody crook." The inaccurate subtitling of the Punjabi and Urdu insults during this scene has led viewers (and some critics) to read this scene only as a comedic representation of Rani as a hysterical lesbian wielding a piece of wood with the intention of beating Rafi. Gairola complicates this reading when he writes:

> While subtitled phrases like "perverted, half-sexed, God-accursed lesbians" and "I'll shove live rats up your camel" offer creative pejoratives that sound funny, I would argue that they do a disservice to the political urgency of what is actually said in the Urdu exchange. The political significance of what would normally be a rather humorous scene is undermined by the elision of the accusation and repetition by Rani that Rafi is a "criminal." (132)

At this point in the film, Sammy and Rosie are fully aware of the extent of Rafi's crimes—Rani had indeed passed along the file she dug up about him. Rosie is outraged by what she learns but nonetheless proves to be ineffective in confronting Rafi. Her politics are ultimately, as Rani points out, "just surface…liberalism gone mad."[42] Following Gairola then, we can read Rani as one of the most significant figures in the film's critique of Rafi because of her insistence on confronting him with his past.

The conflict between Rafi and Rani and Vivia described above is remarkable as well because it directs the film into its final act, in which Rafi will be forced to come face to face with the literal ghosts of his past. In order to escape Rani, Rafi flees the apartment through an open window and shimmies down a pipe to reach the street. As he reaches the ground, he notices an elderly South Asian man wearing an eye patch and a large bandage on his head staring at him. This man had been his taxi driver earlier in the film, and as Rafi watches him pass the man evaporates into thin air. For the rest of the film, this ghost follows Rafi everywhere he goes, though no one else is able to see him. In introducing the ghost just after the confrontation in which Rani repeatedly calls Rafi a criminal, a link

[42] As hooks notes in her reading in *Yearning*, two scenes in particular illustrate the liberal limits of Sammy and Rosie's politics. On the night of the rebellion, Sammy is reclined on his sofa with headphones blaring music that literally cuts off the sound of the rebellion outside his window. He snorts a line of cocaine, takes a bite of his McDonald's hamburger, and masturbates to a porn magazine in his lap. As hooks notes, he is more concerned with satisfying his desires than participating in the rebellion. Rosie also seems indifferent to the rebellion, as we see her walk seemingly unfazed past burning cars on the street on her way to meet an unnamed lover.

is made between Rani and the ghost, establishing a connection between these two figures who come to facilitate the film's full engagement with the violence upon which Rafi's nationalism rests. As Gayatri Spivak argues, Rani and Vivia form the basis of the film's turning away from realism through the introduction of the supernatural and ghostly: "It's because of [Rani and Vivia's] fact-finding that the film can utilize…non-realistic techniques…[such as] the ghost figure. The film justifies its move away from realism, its stylistic transformation in terms of these two lesbians which I find quite interesting" (83). Building on Spivak's claim here, I want to suggest that the linking of Rani and Vivia to the ghost can be read as a kind of queer affiliation. While they are unable to see the ghostly presence, Rani and Vivia have, in Avery Gordon's phrase, "made common cause" with the ghost (22). Neither intentional nor conscious on their part, this affiliation between Rani and Vivia with the ghost nonetheless enables the film to manipulate the stylistic conventions of realism, allowing the ghost to materialize, to speak, and ultimately to act on Rafi and the violent histories he carries with him.

The final encounter between Rafi and the ghost occurs in Danny's trailer, which is parked on the barren wasteland of the film's opening on the night before the eviction that will eventually displace the community of people who live there. Distraught over his failed love affair with Alice and the increasingly tense environment at Sammy and Rosie's apartment, Rafi is visibly agitated when the ghost appears in the dark caravan. The ghost is naked now and though his body is partially shrouded in shadow his figure reveals to the audience the extent of his injuries: his body is covered with bloody bruises and burns, his left eye is missing from its socket, and he wears a metal headpiece used in electroconvulsive torture. He slowly begins to remove the electrodes stuck onto his body,

and places the electroconvulsive apparatus on Rafi's head. Rafi pleads for forgiveness, and tries to justify his past crimes: "The country needed a sense of direction, of identity. People like you, organizing into unions, discouraged and disrupted all progress." As the embodiment of the elite postcolonial nationalism of the immediate post-independence moment, Rafi's dialogue is an almost perfect instantiation of what Frantz Fanon in *The Wretched of the Earth* called the "pitfalls of national consciousness," in which the authority of the colonizing force is transferred to the elite nationalist bourgeoisie at the expense of poor, working-class, and marginalized peoples. With the transfer of the metal headpiece complete, the ghost begins to recede from view. The headpiece begins to glow with electricity. "All of human life you desecrated, Rafi Rahman!" yells the ghost, as Rafi screams in pain.

While this scene might be read as simply the final confrontation between two individual people—Rafi and the ghost of the tortured man—I want to conclude by suggesting that this scene has important social, rather then only individual import. While the physical manifestation of the ghost in the figure of the cab driver does indeed mark the film's explicit move into non-realist modes of representation, the haunting that the ghost literalizes has already been a "seething presence" in the film in the files of information about Rafi's involvement in overseeing torture.[43] The revelation of the contents of the files occurs earlier, as Rosie reads aloud to Sammy a testimonial transcribed from interviews with one of Rafi's torture victims. The testimony is utterly graphic in its depiction of sexual violation, drawing on a full repertoire of

[43] "Seething presence" is Avery Gordon's phrase used to describe the agency of haunting, even if that haunting has not (yet) materialized in the figure of the ghost (8).

heteropatriarchal anxieties about submission, penetration, and vulnerability.[44] Read alongside the earlier scenes of Rafi's discomfort with Rani and Vivia's sexuality, his investment in a heteronormative politics of reproduction and inheritance, and his accusation that Rosie's resistance to having children makes her a "damned dyke," we can read the sexual as the primary terrain upon which *Sammy and Rosie* stakes its multivalent queer diasporic critique of postcolonial nationalism. In this sense, to read the literalization of the ghost and his final confrontation with Rafi simply as a matter of individual revenge would be to diminish the political stakes of this scene and the film as a whole. Instead, following Avery Gordon, we can read the appearance and the *agency* of the ghost as evidence that he "is not simply a dead or missing person, but a social figure" (8). In the final analysis, *Sammy and Rosie Get Laid* requires that we follow the ghost as he leads us "to that dense site where history and subjectivity make social life," where the past and present collide in order to unsettle.

[44] Because my argument does not depend on a full close reading of the testimony, I have selected not to reproduce the description of the torture here. In doing so, I draw on Saidiya Hartman's discussion of her decision in *Scenes of Subjection* not to reproduce the scene of Aunt Hester's beating in the *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*. My intention is not to suggest that the violence inflicted on the Pakistani torture victim is analogous to or equivalent with that of the slave, as any such rendering would depend on a flattening of the specific historical contexts in which violence is manifest. As one of many details in *Sammy and Rosie Get Laid* that demonstrate the extent of Rafi's heterosexism and homophobia, to reproduce the torture testimony here would be to reduce it only to shock value and pure spectacle.

Chapter Three
Black-South Asian Intimacies and the Legacies of Colonialism

In my reading of *Sammy and Rosie Get Laid*, I argued that the queer Black-South Asian lesbian couple, Rani and Vivia, are integral to the film's political critique. More specifically, I claimed that Rani and Vivia's queer diasporic intimacy enabled the film's multilayered engagement with the residues of British colonial ideologies in 1980s British racism as well as elite postcolonial nationalism, embodied by Rafi. This chapter continues that line of argument by focusing specifically on representations of Black-South Asian interracial intimacies. If, as I have suggested in previous chapters, Black and South Asian subjects have been situated relationally in various colonial and imperial contexts, cultural producers have been at the forefront of imagining what those relationalities might look like, what histories they entangle, and what forms of cross-racial solidarity and affiliation they might enable. An analysis of intimacy as one form through which cross-racial alliance might be articulated forces us to consider not only the racial politics of solidarity, but also the gender and sexual politics these affiliations.

Perhaps the most well-known and well-analyzed literary example of Black-South Asian intimacy is W.E.B. Du Bois' *Dark Princess*. Released in 1928, *Dark Princess* has been rightly heralded by contemporary scholars as a singular example of Du Bois' desire to situate Black freedom struggles in the United States in relation to global anticolonial politics, a move from national to transnational contexts. According to Bill Mullen, the novel's romance between the African American protagonist Matthew Townes and the alluring Indian princess Kautilya "demonstrates the scope and depth of African American participation in internationalist political debates during and after World War I" (219).

Dark Princess "predicts," continues Mullen, "a series of political decisions and maneuvers by black and Asian radicals away from the trajectory of an 'American Century' toward a deliberately miscegenated internationalist politics that anticipated…the shape of anticolonial movements of the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s." As Mullen demonstrates, the novel offers myriad possibilities for understanding the trajectory of Du Bois' thinking on global configurations of white supremacy and the necessity of Afro-Asian solidarities. By invoking Du Bois' text here, I also want to suggest that it remains a flashpoint when thinking about the nature of Black-South Asian sexual intimacies. If, as Alys Eve Weinbaum rightly argues, *Dark Princess* "shifts focus from the most glaring dimensions of the U.S. color line"—that is, between Black and white—"to the color line that exists *within* the color line," it offers a useful jumping off point from which to consider the uneven and relational positionings of differently racialized groups ("Interracial Romance" 108). Such a framing necessitates that we consider not only the moments of identification and similarity that enable cross-racial alliances, but also, crucially, what Weinbaum refers to as "that which prevents one part of the colonized world from comprehending its necessary connection to all others." To consider "the color line within the color line" thus requires a nuanced understanding of the racial, gender, and sexual dynamics of power as multidirectional and uneven as they work to position non-white communities of color in relation to each other.

Dark Princess is the story of Matthew Townes, an African American medical student who flees to Europe out of frustration at the severe racism he experiences at the University of Manhattan. In Berlin, he meets the mysterious Princess Kautilya of Bwodpur, India. The Princess is a member of an international anti-imperial organization,

the Great Council of the Darker Peoples, which she describes as a "great committee…of those who suffer under the arrogance and tyranny of the white world" (16). The Princess invites Matthew to a dinner where he meets members of the organization, which includes Chinese, Japanese, Indian, Arab, and Egyptian representatives, "all the darker world, except the darkest" (19). As Matthew comes to find out, the council is unconvinced that Black Americans are qualified for membership in the group, and it is here that Du Bois explores the nature of the "color line within a color line, a prejudice within prejudice" (22). Convinced that meeting Matthew is a sign that the group must expand its representation, Princess Kautilya recruits him to report on the nature of Black radicalism in the US. In the grief and anger-stricken wake of the lynching of a close friend, Matthew joins a plot to blow up a train of Klansmen. He is saved from prison by Sara Andrews, the assistant to a Chicago politician. As Matthew becomes more involved in the corrupt world of Black electoral politics in Chicago and concurrently with Sara, Princess Kautilya reappears to reclaim him. Matthew and the Princess embark on a long-deferred romance, marry, and have a child by the novel's end. The birth of Madhu, their mixed-race son, is celebrated in an elaborate pageant, and Madhu is proclaimed as the "Messenger and Messiah to all the Darker World" (311).

In one of the more celebratory responses to the novel, Paul Gilroy reads the birth of Madhu "as a beginning rather than an ending," as an "image of hybridity and intermixture that is especially valuable because it gives no ground to the suggestion that cultural fusion involves betrayal, loss, corruption, or dilution" (*Black Atlantic* 144). In other words, the coming together of Black and South Asian struggles as they are embodied in the figure of the Messiah-child Madhu instantiates for Gilroy a model of

hybridity that does not privilege one over another, but rather forges a uniquely coherent political unity that draws equally from both cultural positions. Gilroy goes on to suggest that the Black-South Asian affiliations presented in *Dark Princess* "anticipate and affirm a global political relationship that would flourish in Martin Luther King's appropriation of Gandhi's concepts and methods in the elaboration of his mass, non-violent populism." Other critics, such as Yogita Goyal, have been more critical of the novel's politics. Goyal argues that scholars have been too quick to celebrate the text's affirmation of anticolonial internationalism and suggests that an impossible and inordinate burden has been placed on *Dark Princess* to reconcile its political ambitions with Du Bois' adherence to the genre conventions of the Orientalist romance. Scholars in feminist and queer studies have also been critical of *Dark Princess*' vision of cross-racial solidarity by calling attention to the gender and sexual normativities that underlie its emergence. Alys Eve Weinbaum, in a brilliant reading, argues that the text's narrative of heteronormative romance, sex, marriage, and reproduction undercuts its radical vision. "[I]n *Dark Princess*," writes Weinbaum, "the events that catalyze and resolve the drama pivot around interracial desire and its teleological resolution through interracial reproductive sexuality," ultimately "posit[ing] heterosexuality and reproductivity as twinned motors of black internationalist, anti-imperialist politics" ("Interracial Romance" 109, 116).[45]

I begin with these varied readings of *Dark Princess*, and highlight Weinbaum's contribution in particular, in order to underscore the necessity of considering the intersections of the racial with the sexual when examining the terrain upon which cross-

[45] See also Roderick Ferguson's reading in "'W.E.B. Du Bois': Biography of a Discourse," in which he, like Weinbaum, critiques the inherent heteronormativity of Du Bois' novel.

racial affiliations are built. Using the critical debates on *Dark Princess* as launching off point, this chapter looks at two more recent representations of Black-South Asian intimacies from the cultural archive of the South Asian diaspora: M.G. Vassanji's 2003 novel *The In-Between World of Vikram Lall* and Mira Nair's 1991 film *Mississippi Masala*. While Du Bois' text seems wholly invested in the radical potential of Black-South Asian heterosexual intimacy as a viable means of anticolonial and antiracist politics, I argue that *The In-Between World of Vikram Lall* and *Mississippi Masala* betray a profound ambivalence about the political utility of these relations.

The Failure of Romance: M.G. Vassanji's *The In-Between World of Vikram Lall*

Published in 2003, M.G. Vassanji's *The In-Between World of Vikram Lall* opens in Canada, with the narrator, Vikram, coming clean to the reader about "having been numbered one of Africa's most corrupt men, a cheat of monstrous and reptilian cunning" (3). Vikram is in exile in Canada, living in a small house somewhere outside of Toronto, because of his involvement in laundering money for government officials in postcolonial Kenya. Now middle-aged and with little to occupy his time, Vikram writes his life not in the hopes of finding redemption, or so he claims, but rather because he "simply crave[s] to tell [his] story." Over the course of the complex narrative, the novel moves across various decades of Kenya's tumultuous history, from the final days of empire and the Mau Mau rebellion, to the years of optimism just after independence in 1963, and later into political corruption in the 1970s and 1980s. In covering such a lengthy period of time, marked by numerous social and political changes, the novel offers a rich picture of the unstable positioning of the South Asians vis-à-vis both European and African

communities. At the heart of the novel is a tragic love story between Deepa, Vikram's younger sister, and Njoroge, his best friend.

The "in-betweenness" of the title proves to be a compelling description of various social relationships explored in the text. For instance, in-betweenness names Vikram's role as a money launderer; he quite literally acts as a middleman between corrupt members of the postcolonial Kenyan government and private business interests. In-betweenness can also describe Vikram's displacement as an exile from Kenya now living in Canada. It might also describe the period of political and social transition in Kenya brought on by the end of formal colonialism and the establishment of the newly independent nation. Its richest connotations, however, lie in its capacity to narrate the relational positionings of European, South Asian and African communities in East Africa. In this sense, in-betweenness names the racial and economic position of South Asians below Europeans settlers, but above Black Africans in British colonial society. Within this framework, the very concept of Black-South Asian cross-racial solidarity and alliance becomes complicated because of the different locations each of these groups occupies in the racialized economic hierarchy. To prematurely celebrate moments of cross-racial alliance runs the risk of ignoring structural inequities between Black and South Asian subjects in colonial and postcolonial Kenya. On the other hand, to see the hierarchies of race and class as intractable would deny the possibility and necessity of cross-racial alliance in the struggles against colonialism. Sana Aiyer suggests that a more useful approach is to "consider the simultaneous coexistence of solidarity and friction" in a space like East Africa, to inhabit the contradictions produced by both (13). Following Aiyer, we might finally read "in-betweenness" as a description of this simultaneity of

solidarity and friction, alliance and antagonism. As I will argue below, the novel uses the love affair between Deepa and Njoroge as a barometer with which to gauge the shifting politics of race, class, and gender in three specific moments of Kenyan history: the twilight of empire, the immediate aftermath of independence, and finally, the postcolonial period.

While the presence of South Asians in East Africa predates the British importation of Indian labor, colonial-era indentured labor migrations set the stage for later movements of South Asians across the Indian Ocean. The majority of these laborers were from Punjab, and although many returned to the subcontinent after completing their indenture contracts, some remained in Africa to work as merchants and traders. This is the case for Vikram's grandfather who arrives in East Africa in the late 19th century to lay the railroad from Mombasa to Kampala, and then stays on after the expiration of his indenture contract to open a shop in Nakuru. As Vikram tells us, "Family legend has it that one of the rails on the railway line just outside the Nakuru station has engraved upon it my paternal grandfather's name, Anand Lal Peshawari, in Punjabi script—and many another rail of the line has inscribed upon it the name and birthplace of an Indian labourer. I don't know if such rails ever existed, with Punjabi signatures upon them, but myth is more powerful than factual evidence, and in its way far truer" (16). The mythical inscriptions of Punjabi names on the railways speaks to how the labor of the indentured worker is figured as the means by which this first generation of colonial migrants comes to assert their belonging in East Africa.

Subsequent South Asian migrants came to East Africa to work in mid-level civil service jobs. As Avtar Brah argues, the British worked hard to maintain stark divisions in

the economic opportunities available to Europeans, South Asians, and Africans: "The primary thrust of the colonial policy was to restrict the activities of the Africans to the agricultural economy and those of the Indians to petty trade and commerce, at the same time maintaining both groups subordinate to the white settlers with large plantations or dairy farms and to the metropolitan bourgeoisie" ("The 'Asian' in Britain" 44). With their insertion into the labor force, South Asians were positioned in the middle of what Brah calls the "colonial sandwich…the position below the white colonist but above black Africans." In the novel, this in-between position is first elaborated upon in scenes from Vikram's childhood. In the early 1950s, Vikram's parents run the family's small provisions store in Nakuru (initially started by Anand Lall), which sells goods primarily for the European settlers "and the rich Indians who emulated them" (8). The Lall family's shop is located next door to a whites-only bakery, Arnauti's, and in the same small shopping center as an Indian sweet shop and a greengrocer. Like the sweet shop in Mootoo's "Out On Main Street" discussed in chapter one, the shopping center in Nakuru functions as a contact zone in which social hierarchies of race, class, and gender are both shored up and challenged.

As small children, Vikram, Deepa and Njoroge have already learned the rules of racial segregation as they apply to the shopping center. For example, Vikram describes how he and Deepa, but not Njoroge, are allowed a corner table outside Arnauti's. While their parents run the store, Vikram, Deepa and Njoroge play in the parking lot. One afternoon, a Mrs. Bruce and her two children, Bill and Annie, arrive to shop at the Lall's store. Bill and Vikram strike up a fast friendship, and soon all five children—Vikram, Deepa, Njoroge, William, and Annie—begin meeting regularly to play games together.

The parking lot in front of the shopping center thus becomes a space for the transgression of racial and economic hierarchies. As Vikram tells us about Bill and Annie: "They had rather refined accents…their clothes were smart; their mannerisms so relaxed. But these barriers of class and prestige were not so inviolable or cruel at our level, and we did become friends" (10). This is not to say that the novel presents us with an idyllic view of childhood outside of colonial relations of power. Indeed, the games the children play all come directly from the repertoire of empire. In one scene, the children impersonate World War II fighter pilots "shooting down Germans or Japs or Eyeties." In another, Bill plays a "Special Branch inspector…administering a loyalty oath to the 'uncovered' and 'repenting' Mau Mau terrorist Njoroge, assisted by his faithful sergeant Vic" (12). These scenes of childhood play in the shopping center's parking lot demonstrate the ways in which colonial power relations structure the everyday lives of colonial subjects, positioning them in rigid racial and economic hierarchies.[46] At the same time these forms of contact open up provisional spaces in which the boundaries of race, class, and gender might be transgressed by the affective bonds of friendship, or as in the case of Deepa and Njoroge, affection and love. As we will see, however, these transgressions are not without consequence.

Although Deepa and Njoroge's love story does not come to fruition until much later in the novel, the seeds of their affection are planted in their childhood friendship,

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[46] By "colonial subjects" I mean subjects of both the colonizing and colonized race. As Rosemary George argues in *The Politics of Home*, "Considering both locations…*simultaneously* guarantees that a recognition of the collaboration between the two groups remains central to the analysis…This simultaneity accounts for subjects who share a history of colonialism, without making the claim that all colonial subjects are identical"(4). In the context of British East Africa, this usage emphasizes the three-tiered racial hierarchy of European, South Asian, and African.

which is marked by care, compassion, and mutual understanding. For instance, after the killing of a local European family by Mau Mau rebels, the police raid the servant quarters of Vikram's Indian neighborhood and arrest Njoroge's grandfather, who works as a gardener for the Indian families, as well other members of the Kikuyu ethnic group.[47] As the police leave after making their arrests, Njoroge emerges from the Lall house and it is revealed that Deepa hid him under her bed to protect him during the raid. The novel thus portrays Deepa as having an innate affinity for Njoroge, protecting him even if she does not fully understand what she is protecting him from. Stephanie Jones writes that the text "portrays their love as definitively natural: as beginning in earth and play, the sunshine and secrets of childhood, and as right, inevitable, and irrefutable" (183). Even Vikram recognizes the special bond that Njoroge and Deepa share as children: "I believed they had more fun together than he had with me. That was why I thought he was in love with my sister. Every time I said that, Mother would have a fit, but she never objected to our playing with our friend" (9). It is Vikram's mother, in fact, who urges her children to include Njoroge, who is an orphan, in many of their family activities. Although the boundaries of race and class continue to separate them, Mrs. Lall welcomes Njoroge as an adopted member of the family. She even encourages Deepa to tie a *rakhi* on Njoroge's

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[47] The Mau Mau rebellion has been the subject of much debate. The dominant narrative is that it was a large-scale race war fought against the benevolent white colonizers. As David Anderson argues, however, "only thirty-two European settlers died in the rebellion, and there were fewer than two hundred casualties among the British regiments and police who served in Kenya during those years…Rebel losses were far greater than those suffered by the British security forces" (4). Caroline Elkins estimates that 1.5 million people, "nearly the entire Kikuyu population" was imprisoned in large-scale detention camps by the British (xiv). These numbers are only estimates, however, because the British intentionally destroyed many of the records of imprisonment in "massive bonfires" before leaving Kenya in 1963 (xii).

wrist for the holiday celebrating the bonds of brothers and sisters: "Little Deepa went about it with great enthusiasm. Thus, though unwittingly, she made Njoroge her brother, a fact that Mother would use as an argument in later years with much force" (114). While the text presents Mrs. Lall as having genuine affection for Njoroge, this passage suggests that she strategically wants to shape his relationship with Deepa in order to neutralize the possibility that they may actually fall in love as they grow older. As the narrator foreshadows, Mrs. Lall will exploit the ambiguity of the familial bond between Deepa and Njoroge as siblings, instantiated here by the tying of a *rakhi* on the wrist of a brother by his sister, as the reasoning for why they cannot fall in love. Her fears are allayed when Njoroge is sent to a boarding school in 1953; it is not until 1965 that Deepa and Njoroge meet again.

In the early sections of the novel, the ill-fated love story of Deepa and Njoroge is foreshadowed by another Black-South Asian coupling between Juma Molobux and Sakina Dadi. Juma Molobux is the best friend of Vikram's grandfather, Anand Lall. Like Anand Lall, Juma was an indentured worker who opened a shop after the end of his indenture contract. In his role as a shopkeeper, he comes into frequent contact with the Maasai community in the area, and ends up marrying a Maasai woman, Sakina Dadi. The revelation that Sakina Dadi is not a Punjabi woman but actually of Maasai heritage comes as a surprise to Vikram: "Sakina Dadi, as I had known her, like any Punjabi woman wore a shalwar-kameez and dupatta, spoke Punjabi fluently and perfectly…and cooked formidable kheer, karhi, and dahi-wada" (36). As we are told later in the novel in order to marry Juma, Sakina Dadi had to completely forego her Maasai heritage by converting to Islam and immersing herself in Punjabi culture. This representation of Juma and Sakina's

marriage can be read in relation to Paul Gilroy's discussion of *Dark Princess* above. If in Du Bois' text Gilroy sees the possibility for a kind of egalitarian hybridity in the cross-racial union of Matthew and Kautilya, in which neither element overrules the other, we see the opposite in Juma and Sakina's relationship in *Vikram Lall*. Moreover, Juma and Sakina's two sons, rather than heralding the promise of cross-racial alliance like Du Bois' Madhu, must negotiate the contradictions produced by their biracial identities in the racially stratified British colony. One rejects the imperative of his Punjabi identity and chooses to return to the Maasai community. The other, who faces intense racist harassment by the police during the Mau Mau emergency, ultimately chooses to reject his Maasai identity altogether. As Nalini Iyer observes, "Even as the child narrator, [Vikram], views the multiracial world of Nakuru as an Edenic place with racial harmony, the undercurrents of violence and the compelled cultural and religious conversions of Sakina tell a different story" (207-8).

The second portion of the novel is set just after Kenyan independence in Nairobi. It is in the heady days of the founding of the new nation that Njoroge reenters the lives of Vikram and Deepa. At their reunion at Café Rendezvous, Deepa is overjoyed to see Njoroge again, but her enthusiasm causes a minor disturbance in the cafe: "Everyone at the chic Rendezvous had looked up at this wild, unorthodox Asian girl, at the joyous embrace [of Njoroge] and its aftermath. Independence was here, yes…and we were all citizens of a new multiracial, democratic nation, but still, this was taking integration too fast, too far even for Nairobi" (144). The promise and excitement wrought by independence are meant to signal the breakdown of the older racial and social hierarchies. This passage suggests, however, that the effects of that old order remain; Independence

has not constituted a break with the past, but rather inherited some of the old prejudices under the guise of democratic equality. Deepa and Njoroge begin to meet in secret, reacquainting themselves after a twelve-year absence, and eventually confess their love for each other. As much as Deepa would like to believe in the multicultural promise of a "new Africa," the growing affection between she and Njoroge comes to be a liability for the racist South Asian community (177). While Deepa believes that her family will accept the union, Mrs. Lall intervenes by appealing, as the narrator foreshadowed earlier, to the bonds of kinship. As she tells Njoroge, "You are a brother to my son and daughter, you are their best fiend. But a husband for Deepa—no, Njoroge" (214). Out of respect for the woman who has been like a surrogate mother to him, Njoroge acquiesces to Mrs. Lall's wishes and breaks off his relationship with Deepa. Bound by the obligations of family Deepa marries Dilip, a diasporic South Asian businessman, and moves to London.

Finally, the third section of the novel is set in the postcolonial period of the 1970s and 1980s. By this time the promise of a new democratic society has fallen away to political corruption and decline. Remarking on this section of the novel, Peter Simatei argues, "In the new dispensation, Indians…find new roles as, again, middle men, but this time of the corrupt African elite and foreign businessmen" (64). As Vikram becomes more involved in money laundering schemes for postcolonial government officials, Njoroge has aligned himself with an opposition party. Their political trajectories begin to diverge, though their friendship remains strong. Deepa has returned to Nairobi, and works in a pharmacy owned by her in-laws while her husband Dilip makes frequent business trips to Europe. Deepa and Njoroge being seeing each other again, although it remains ambiguous whether they embark on a full-fledged affair. Nonetheless, their

reunion causes friction between Deepa and her mother-in-law, and threatens to become a major scandal amongst the South Asian community. During one of their clandestine meetings in Deepa's pharmacy, two gunmen, representatives of Njoroge's political enemies, break in and shoot Njoroge dead: "Deepa screamed, loud and recklessly, missing an angry bullet from the escaping thugs, and people rushed inside. She was photographed, her mouth open in a long wail of grief, kneeling on the floor of her shop, Njoroge's head on her lap, his white sweater dark with blood, her raised hand dripping with it. In that scene he was finally hers" (327). The image of Deepa wailing in grief over the loss of her beloved is circulated in the newspaper, scandalizing the South Asian community, and haunting Deepa for the rest of her life. It is also suggested that her husband Dilip might have had some connection to Njoroge's murder. In the bitter irony of above passage's last statement—"in that scene he was finally hers"—Vassanji leaves us with a rather bleak resolution to the promise that Deepa and Njoroge's relationship might have initially represented in the post-independence period. Their relationship does not resolve any of the political tensions of the historical moment; rather, they are casualties of it.

On the Love Between Men: Mira Nair's *Mississippi Masala*

On its surface, it seems as if *Mississippi Masala* will provide an antidote to the bleakness of *The In-Between World of Vikram Lall*. As I demonstrate, however, Nair's film is just as ambivalent about the capacity of a heterosexual Black-South Asian coupling to unsettle longstanding histories of imperialism and racism. *Mississippi Masala* opens in the early hours of November 7, 1972, the day by which all South Asian

residents, regardless of citizenship status, had to leave Uganda by order of Idi Amin.[48] Okelo Omorro drives his friend, Jay Loha, back home from the police station. Jay, a well-respected attorney whom the film tells us has represented Black Africans in cases against Indians, had been arrested for doing an interview with the BBC in which he spoke out against Amin's regime. Okelo questions Jay's refusal to leave Uganda despite the edict by Amin. Jay asserts that Uganda is his home, to which Okelo replies, "Not anymore, Jay. Africa is for Africans. *Black* Africans." This statement, which Jay reads as a betrayal of their friendship, will haunt him for the next two decades. Jay, his wife Kinnu, and their young daughter Mina leave Uganda on that same day, with Jay refusing to acknowledge Okelo's presence to see the family off. This prologue precedes the opening credits of the film.

While the opening credits play, we see the path of the Loha's flight, which takes them from Uganda to England and eventually Greenwood, Mississippi, where the film resumes in 1990.[49] The family now lives in the Monte Cristo motel run by relatives, more

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[48] In *From Citizen to Refugee*, Mahmood Mamdani notes the residual colonial racial and economic structures that were the conditions of possibility for Amin's expulsion of South Asians from Uganda. Mamdani writes: "There was rigid racial compartmentalisation in the newly created colonial political economy. Laws hindered Africans from entering trade and Asians from owning land. In the economy that emerged, Africans were primarily peasants and workers; Asians primarily shopkeepers, artisans, and petty bureaucrats; and Europeans were bankers, wholesalers and the administrative and political elite. Race coincided with class and became politicised. Thus, in November 1971, Amin produced a list of 'Asian business malpractices,' not just 'business malpractices'" (15). This racialized economic motive for the expulsion is depicted in *Mississippi Masala* as well, when Amin states on television, "Africans are poor. The Asians are rich. The Asians are sabotaging the economy."

[49] Interestingly, the 10-year sojourn in Britain in barely remarked upon in the film. The racial, class, and gender politics of Britain in the late 1970s and early '80s, discussed in the previous chapter, yielded interesting forms of Black-South Asian relation. Without dwelling too much on what the film leaves out, some discussion of the Loha's time in

recent migrants from South Asia. Kinnu runs a small liquor store in a predominantly Black neighborhood, and Mina, now twenty-four years old, works as a receptionist and housekeeper at the Monte Cristo. In the eighteen years since the family was exiled, Jay has not lost his drive to seek justice for the expulsion, and spends his days writing letters to the government of Uganda demanding restitution of his lost property. After rear-ending his car, Mina meets Demetrius, a local Black resident of Greenwood who owns a small carpet cleaning company, and who has contracts with many of the Indian motel owners in the area. Over the course of several weeks, Mina and Demetrius fall in love. Not willing to tell her parents about the love affair, she sneaks away to spend the weekend with Demetrius in Biloxi. Mina's cousin Anil catches the couple on their weekend getaway and initiates a fight with Demetrius, which leads to Mina and Demetrius being arrested by police. The scandal of this situation effectively ruins Demetrius' business: the Indian community breaks all business contracts with him, the Black community ostracizes him, and the white-owned bank cancels his small business loan and repossesses his van. Upset that Jay and Kinnu are unsupportive of her relationship with Demetrius, Mina runs away again, reconciles with Demetrius, and the couple resolves to leave Greenwood in order to start a new life together away from the constraints of family and community. Jay returns to Uganda in order to attend a court hearing about his lost property. He visits the school where Okelo worked in hopes of reconciling with his long lost friend, but learns that he is too late—Okelo has died. As the

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Britain, especially as the adolescent Mina would have experienced it, would have offered a nice bridge between the film's engagement with Black-South Asian relations in Uganda and the U.S. South.

end credits roll, the audience is presented with images of Mina and Demetrius, dressed in Indian and African clothing, kissing and dancing in an open field of cotton.

At the time of its release, and perhaps even more so today, *Mississippi Masala* was unique in that it was a film directed by an immigrant woman of color that centered almost exclusively on relationships between Black and South Asian communities. Although Nair had received an Oscar nomination for her previous film, *Salaam Bombay*, *Mississippi Masala* brought her significant attention from Hollywood. The film also benefitted from the presence of Denzel Washington in the role of Demetrius. Over the last several decades the film has polarized critics working in ethnic studies, South Asian (diaspora) studies, and feminist studies with its representation of interracial romance, the expulsion of South Asians from Uganda, and the admittedly exoticized representation of Mina. In perhaps the most virulent critique of the film, bell hooks and Anuradha Dingwaney characterize it as "another shallow comment on interracial, inter-ethnic, and transnational 'lust.'" Claiming that it is "shallow, dishonest, and ultimately mocking," hooks and Dingwaney write that the film's resolution, "that romantic love represents that interaction which most powerfully enables individuals to move beyond systems of domination (like nationalism, imperialism, racism, sexism) to bond despite differences (race, class, religion)—is a classic American message." Similarly, Jigna Desai quite convincingly argues that the narrative trajectory of *Mississippi Masala* exemplifies American exceptionalist ideologies of individualism, multiculturalism, and westward expansion on the frontier.[50] For these and other critics, *Mississippi Masala* uses the

[50] Desai also reads the film alongside Du Bois' *Dark Princess*. See her *Beyond Bollywood*. For another critique of the film see R. Radhakrishnan's "Ethnicity in the Age

heterosexual interracial love story between Mina and Demetrius as the means to both resolve and transcend the traumas of racism and displacement wrought by histories of colonialism and slavery. In apparently celebrating the central couple's decision to leave their communities in search of a better elsewhere, the film adheres to a dangerous American individualism that undercuts the novelty of seeing brown and Black love on screen. In a more sympathetic reading, Purnima Bose and Linta Varghese argue that some South Asian feminist critics have unfairly reproduced discourses of authenticity and essentialized South Asian womanhood in their critiques of the representation of Mina as exoticized, thereby "occluding a diversity of class and regional experiences in the South Asian diaspora" (139).

Without discounting the significant critiques made of the film, many of which are quite persuasive, I want to suggest that *Mississippi Masala* is a much richer text that many of its critics claim. While the internal narrative logic of the interracial love story does indeed resolve itself in a celebration of (American) individualism that requires a detachment from the bonds of family and community, I argue that the film as a whole seems much more ambivalent about the capacity of the heterosexual love story to mediate the complicated histories in which it is situated. Although the film does seem to position the central love story as a resolution to violent histories of racism, displacement and colonialism, I suggest that it is possible to read the film against the narrative of heterosexual romantic progress. Put another way, reading the film against the grain of the heterosexual love story at its center reveals and animates the many contradictions,

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of Diaspora," in which he argues that *Mississippi Masala* "revel[s] uncritically in the commodification of hybridity" at the expense of a serious engagement with the histories of racism, imperialism, and expulsion that it mobilizes.

interruptions, and hauntings that underlie the film's narrative. Reading for *Mississippi Masala*'s contradictions might yield other critical and political possibilities that remain unavailable in the main love story. By attending to the film's representations of memory and the centrality of the relationship between Jay and Okelo, I argue that the film's privileging of heterosexual interracial intimacy as the resolution to histories of racial and imperial dispossession becomes much more tenuous.

One of the key cinematic means by which the film complicates its investment in the heterosexual romance is through the extensive use of flashback. The linear trajectory of the love story in Mississippi is repeatedly interrupted by scenes of Mina's childhood in Uganda and Jay's memories of his relationship with Okelo, both as children and in the weeks leading up to the expulsion.[51] For example, in the hotel room in Biloxi just after they have sex for the first time, Demetrius sings happy birthday to Mina, which triggers a flashback to a birthday party from her childhood. Just as family and friends, including Okelo, are gathered together to sing happy birthday, Idi Amin appears on the television screen in the background and declares his order for Asian expulsion. Needless to say, Mina's birthday party is disrupted by the arguments of the adults following Amin's announcement. Within the same flashback, the scene cuts to Mina playing in the backyard of the Loha home where she sees the decaying body of a African man, his face bloody and covered in flies, presumably a victim of Amin's violent regime. The film then cuts back to the present, in the hotel room in Biloxi, where the adult Mina awakens in a fright from a nightmare. Demetrius wakes up as well, and comforts Mina as she falls

[51] See Vanita Reddy's "Afro-Asian Intimacies and the Politics and Aesthetics of Cross-Racial Struggle in Mira Nair's *Mississippi Masala*" for another discussion of the use of flashback in the film.

back asleep. While the resolution of this scene might be read as an example of how their romance acts as a remedy for Mina's haunted past, the visceral intensity of the flashback scenes, especially the image of the Black man's decaying body, far outweigh the moment of romantic tenderness when Demetrius comforts Mina. As Susan Friedman notes, Mina does not tell Demetrius about her life in Uganda, either in this scene or in a previous one in which his family asks her questions about Africa.[52] When read for these moments of silence, there is no working out or resolving of past histories through heterosexual romance. Indeed, in a later scene Mina accuses Demetrius of never asking about her life, suggesting that their relationship is not founded on a mutual understanding of each other. In other words, the relationship seems to have its limits. Attending to these moments of tension, it becomes difficult to position the central love story as the answer to Mina's haunted past. Instead, I argue that the film, despite its investment in the heterosexual coupling, calls attention to that which cannot be resolved through recourse to love, desire, or intimacy.

Flashbacks are also used extensively in the characterization of Jay. When we are reintroduced to the family in Mississippi, the film establishes Jay as the quintessential diasporic figure, longing for his lost homeland Uganda. In one scene, Jay sits at his bedroom window at the Monte Christo motel composing a letter to the government of Uganda. Jay's voiceover reveals to the viewer the contents of the letter: "Honorable sirs: This is in reference to my lawsuit, number 2089, filed in the high court at Kampala, dated 30 December 1985 for restoration of my property. I was born in Uganda and Uganda has

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[52] See Friedman, "Beyond White and Other: Relationality and Narratives of Race in Feminist Discourse."

been my home. A country to which I had the utmost loyalty and love, until I was forcibly and illegally expelled by General Idi Amin." Jay gazes out the window of the Monte Christo motel, which overlooks a barren, gravel parking lot. As the voiceover continues, the image of the parking lot is replaced by a beautifully lush Ugandan landscape, recognizable to us as the view from the terrace of Jay and Kinnu's Kampala home. This nostalgic image of the landscape is noticeably absent of any people. At this point in the film, Jay's diasporic nostalgia for Uganda is rooted almost exclusively in a politics of property, which speaks to the historical class privilege of South Asian Ugandans in relation to Black Africans. This scene of Jay longing for his lost property is linked to a flashback later in the film on the night of before Jay and his family flee Kampala. Jay sits with a group of drunk South Asian men in a bar. One of the men raises his glass, "Uganda has been so good to us, until this madman came." The "madmen" refers to Amin. Jay replies, "We created the madman. We buggers in Uganda. Most people are born with five senses. We [Indians] are left with only one: the sense of property." In this scene Jay himself recognizes that the economic success of the largely middle-class South Asian community in Uganda in the mid-20th century (as opposed to earlier generations of indentured labor migrants) has enabled resentment by Africans, who are largely positioned below South Asians in the class hierarchy. As Vanita Reddy notes, "The largely commercial interests of this class of migrants buttressed British imperial interests in a way that economically subordinated local African populations. This racialized market structure later became Amin's justification for Asian expulsion" (244).[53]

[53] See also Savita Nair's "Shops and Stations" for a rich historical account of the racialized class structure of British East Africa.

This scene of Jay's nostalgic longing for the Ugandan landscape as property is contrasted by Kinnu's memories of Okelo's relationship to the family. While visiting Kinnu in her liquor store a few scenes later, Jay notices an old photograph of Okelo with a young Mina pinned to the wall behind the cash register. When he questions Kinnu about where this photo has come from, she replies that it has always been there. It is the same photo that we see her place in her purse just before leaving their home in Kampala. Throughout the film, Kinnu seems unmoved by Jay's emphatic outrage over the loss of their property, but the (re)appearance of the photo in her liquor store speaks to Kinnu's own palpable sense of loss—not the loss of property, but the loss of the affective bonds of love and friendship with Okelo. This scene demonstrates the extent to which Jay's obsession with his lawsuit against the Ugandan government has blinded him to Kinnu's own memories of Okelo and their life in Uganda. Seeing the photo behind the cash register triggers a memory from Jay's childhood. We see two young boys playing in a river together, and an African woman (presumably Okelo's mother) chides them to behave. Jay's landscape from the previous scene is resignified here; it is no longer simply property, but rather the space in which his affective relationship with Okelo was fostered as children. This scene is crucial because it provides historical weight to Jay and Okelo's friendship—which they call brotherhood—forcing the viewer to reconsider the import of a relationship that until now has been largely contained within the prologue of the film. As Reddy observes, however, Kinnu's contention that the photo has always been there suggests that Okelo is a "figure who continues to haunt the family's diasporic present in Mississippi" (251). This scene is thus a reminder of Okelo's absent presence throughout the narrative that in many readings is overshadowed by the central romance between

Mina and Demetrius. Ascertaining the import of Okelo as an absent presence, and indeed the significance of Jay and Okelo's relationship to the film as a whole, requires that critical inquiry shift from the romance between Mina and Demetrius to the friendship/brotherhood between Jay and Okelo.

As I discussed above, the conversation between Jay and Okelo in the prologue of the film, in which Okelo states, "Africa is for Africans. Black Africans," is figured as a betrayal that acts as the impetus for Jay to leave Uganda. Jay himself says as much in a conversation with Mina later in the film. "After thirty-four years, my brother Okelo told me that Africa is for Africans, Black Africans. After thirty-four years, that's what it all came down to. The color of my skin. That's why we left. Not because of Idi Amin or anything like that." He goes to say that his objections to her relationship with Demetrius are rooted in the trauma of Okelo's betrayal, in the hard-won realization that "people stick to their own kind." Mina replies, "Okelo risked his life to save yours. I don't know what more proof you could have of his love." This scene leads to another extended flashback to Uganda in which we see Okelo bribe the police with a bag full of cash in order to secure Jay's release from jail, an act that surely placed his own life in danger. Jay insistence that Okelo's nativism was the reason for the family's leaving Uganda obscures Okelo's act of political defiance, which Mina reads as love. By invoking "love" here in response to Jay's narrative of Okelo's betrayal, Mina not only forces her father to reflect on the import and bravery of Okelo's actions, but also encourages a reading of the film that centralizes the relationship between Jay and Okelo as one of love between men. A queer reading of this relationship is useful here, not to suggest that Jay and Okelo themselves are queer subjects, but rather that a queer lens might allow us to centralize the

intimate relationship between these two men; to read queerly here is to read against the grain of the heterosexual romance in order to imagine other forms of Black-South Asian intimacy that allow for contradiction rather than reconciliation or resolution. Indeed, the earlier scene of Okelo telling Jay that "Africa is for Black Africans" is recast in this light such that Okelo's insistence that Jay leave with his family might be read as a resigned acknowledgement of the severity of the danger posed by the Amin regime, rather than an endorsement of it. From this perspective, Okelo's ventriloquizing of Amin's nativist ideology is not a betrayal, but a moment in which one man sacrifices the intimacy he shares within another in order to ensure his survival.[54]

Toward the film's end, Mina and Demetrius have agreed to leave Greenwood together in order to start their own carpet cleaning business elsewhere. This decision to leave their families and communities in order to be together has been a site of particularly vehement scholarly critique. For instance, R. Radhakrishnan characterizes their decision to leave and the film's tacit celebration of the heterosexual couple form as nothing more than a cinematic articulation of adolescent angst: "The two young adults just walk out of their 'prehistories' into the innocence of physical, heterosexual love. The past *sucks*, parents *suck*, Mississippi *sucks*, as do India and Uganda, and the only thing that matters is the bonding between two bodies that step off the pages of history" (124, emphasis in original). In the final moments of the film, images of Mina and Demetrius kissing and dancing in a field of cotton, dressed respectively in ethnic Indian and African clothing, interrupt the closing credits. As I argued above, the almost exclusive focus on Mina and Demetrius' romance in some of the scholarship on the film obscures the moments of

[54] See also Kum-Kum Bhavnani's "Organic Hybridity or Commodification of Hybridity."

contradiction that might be read to usefully unsettle the film's apparently optimistic ending. Susan Friedman reads these final shots as utopian in the sense that Mina and Demetrius seem outside of time—within the closing credits, outside the diegesis of the film's narrative—in a timeless space beyond racial division. "Like all utopic moments," writes Friedman, "it leaves us with a lingering question about how long it can last in the 'real' world of racial separateness, stratification, miscommunication, and silence. The very power of the film's depiction of conflict based in cultural and historical difference calls into question the happy ending of the lovers' future" (31). Similarly, Urmila Seshagiri observes that "Despite an apparently optimistic ending, Nair's film could not deliver its characters out of imperialism's unhappy legacy" (179). Indeed, the setting of the final shots is crucial. While Mina and Demetrius seem lost in each other's love, the fact that their celebration occurs in a cotton field actively conjures forth history rather than subsuming it to heterosexual love. The setting speaks to the long histories of cotton as a central commodity of colonialism and slavery, both in South Asia in the 18th century and the U.S. south in the 19th-century.[55] As Seshagiri writes, "The cotton fields, long-standing symbols of the South's violent slave-based economy, suggest that Mina and Demetrius are trapped in the same exploitative geography that dispossessed their parents and grandparents" (193). Considering such moments of contradiction, in this case between the celebration of heterosexual cross-racial love and the histories of colonialism

[55] Lisa Lowe writes: "Until 1800, the Indian subcontinent was *the* most important cotton manufacturing region in the world, making textiles for export to other parts of Asia, Europe, and Africa, and throughout the eighteenth century, the British and Dutch East India Companies imported a wide variety of cotton textiles from India for English and European markets" (*Intimacies* 89). See also Bose and Varghese.

and enslavement coded in the sign of cotton, destabilizes the ease with which some critics have read the final union of Mina and Demetrius.

A central focus on these final moments also obscures what happens at the end of the narrative proper. The final scene of the film (before the end credits roll) is decidedly not centered on Mina and Demetrius, but rather on Jay's return to Uganda, a coda that yields loss instead of celebration. Jay travels to Uganda to appear at the court hearing for the restitution of his property. Upon his arrival in Kampala, Jay is met with scenes of poverty and destitution. "Everything is in ruins," his cab driver tells him, but it's still heaven." The romantic image of the lush Ugandan landscape is replaced with the reality of urban economic devastation. Before he goes to court, Jay visits a school where Okelo worked as a teacher, hoping to reconcile with his friend. His hopes are dashed, however, when he learns from another teacher that Okelo died in 1972 itself. "How did he die?" Jay asks. The teacher shakes his head in resignation. "Disappeared one day. They found his body." While the details of Okelo's death remain ambiguous, the implication is that he was disappeared and murdered by the Amin regime, presumably for bribing the police to ensure Jay's release from jail. Jay turns away, distraught. "I wrote him so many letters," he says. As Gaurav Desai argues, this revelation that Jay had in fact attempted to reconnect with Okelo over the past decades changes the viewer's perception of him: "Because the film so carefully presents an angry and disappointed Jay at the moment of the original expulsion from Kampala—with Jay refusing even to say a proper good-bye to Okelo—this revelation at the end of the film comes as a complete surprise" (211). After hearing this devastating news, Jay visits the Loha family home, which is now overrun by debris, animals, and weeds. In these final moments of the narrative, Jay's

nostalgic, diasporic longing for Uganda is not met with the restoration of the wholeness he lost in the expulsion, nor in his desire to reclaim his home—his property, his national identification, and his relationship with Okelo are all irretrievable by the film's end. "Home is where the heart is," he writes in a letter to Kinnu, "and my heart is with you." If the final shots of the film, of Mina and Demetrius dancing in the field of cotton, are meant to signal the power of their heterosexual union to resolve and transcend the historical conflicts of the past, this sense of resolution is tempered by the profound loss that structures Okelo and Jay's relationship. What we are left with at the end of the film is not the unencumbered triumph of love overcoming the intolerable histories of colonialism, enslavement, and dispossession. Rather, privileging the relationship between Jay and Okelo through a queer lens foregrounds the pain, heartbreak, and alienation wrought by those histories. *Mississippi Masala* might indeed advocate an individualist detachment of oneself from family and community in Mina and Demetrius' narrative, but in the figure of the grieving Jay the film can also be read to remind us that as much as we would like to or try to leave painful collective histories behind, they have a way of catching up to us.

Chapter Four
Transnational U.S. Exceptionalisms: Neoliberal Bollywood

In June 1999, BBC Online conducted a worldwide poll of its users, asking them to select the "greatest star of stage or screen of the last thousand years."[56] Amitabh Bachchan, the great icon of Hindi commercial cinema, beat out the likes of Lawrence Olivier, Charlie Chaplin, and Marilyn Monroe to emerge as the winner. Three years later, Ashutosh Gowariker's colonial-era sports drama *Lagaan* (Land Tax) was nominated for the 2002 Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film. That same year in London's West End, Andrew Lloyd Webber produced *Bombay Dreams*, a lavish Bollywood-inspired musical by Indian film composer A.R. Rahman; the production opened on Broadway in 2004. Sanjay Leela Bhansali's melodramatic spectacle *Devdas* was screened at the 2002 Cannes Film Festival. South Asian-origin filmmakers Mira Nair and Gurinder Chadha playfully incorporated elements of Bollywood style in *Monsoon Wedding* (2002) and *Bend it Like Beckham* (2002), as did Western filmmakers Baz Luhrmann, director of *Moulin Rouge* (2001) and, of course, Danny Boyle, director of *Slumdog Millionaire* (2008).[57] Taken together, these developments seemed to signal that Bollywood are "arrived" in the West. No longer seen as derivative, the turn of the

[56] "Bollywood Star Tops the Poll," BBC Online.
[57] The use of the term "Bollywood" to reference Indian filmmaking has been controversial for suggesting that Hindi cinema is derivative of Hollywood film style. Films are made in India in at least eighteen different languages, and regional film industries produce a variety of cinematic content. "Bollywood" is often invoked as a stand-in for Indian filmmaking writ large, effectively homogenizing a very diverse set of film cultures, practices, and styles under the sign of the Hindi-language, melodramatic song-and dance spectacles produced in Mumbai that dominated the 1990s and 2000s. I discuss Ashish Rajadhyaksha's concept of the "Bollywoodization" of Indian cinema below. For more on the controversies of nomenclature see Prasad, "This Thing Called Bollywood."

millennium saw Bollywood emerge in the Western gaze as a legitimate and distinctive world cinema.

This newfound visibility of Bollywood cinema as a viable and legitimate consumer commodity for diasporic South Asians and also for non-South Asian audiences in the U.S. and Europe was accompanied, however, by the heightened surveillance, disciplining, and policing of South Asian-, Muslim-, and Arab-Americans and immigrants in the months and years following 9/11.[58] Gayatri Gopinath has argued that the simultaneous visibility and celebration of Bollywood spectacle on the one hand and increased state violence on South Asian and Muslim communities on the other should not be read as mere coincidence, but as two strands in a much larger and more insidious project of racial management.[59] For Gopinath, the circulation, consumption, and indeed, fetishization of Bollywood cinema in the violent and paranoid post-9/11 context indexes the ways in which the gendered racialization of South Asian/Americans operates unevenly through a dialectic of incorporation and exclusion, through differentiated access to the institutions of US national identity, citizenship, and national culture.[60] According to Jodi Melamed, this "new flexibility in racial procedures" is a key feature of what she

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[58] For reports of *documented* cases of anti-Muslim racism and violence see the following: Human Rights Watch, "'We are not the Enemy': Hate Crimes Against Arabs, Muslims, and Those Perceived to be Arab or Muslim after September 11"; "American Backlash: Terrorists Bring War Home in More Ways than One," (South Asian American Leaders of Tomorrow 2001); "Legislating Fear: Islamophobia and its Impact in the United States," (Council on American-Islamic Relations 2013).

[59] Gopinath writes, "The Bollywood boom…incorporates South Asians into the U.S. national imaginary as pure spectacle to be safely consumed while keeping intact their essential alienness and difference; such an incorporation holds safely at bay those marginalized noncitizens who function under the sign of terrorist and 'enemy within'" ("Bollywood Spectacles" 162).

[60] For a discussion of paranoia in the context of the War on Terror, see McClintock's "Paranoid Empire."

calls "neoliberal multiculturalism," a discourse that rationalizes the production of racial privilege and racial stigma across racial categories (151).[61] In the context of the US War on Terror, South Asian/American racializations operate through the differentiation between seemingly docile model minority subjects whose gender and sexual normativity enables their (limited) inclusion into multicultural U.S. national identity and perverse terrorist monsters that must be excised from the nation.[62] Building on the work of Gopinath and Melamed, I offer critical analyses of two recent Bollywood films that engage the gendered racializations of South Asian/Americans in the United States leading up to and in the immediate aftermath of the 9/11 attacks: Karan Johar's *My Name is Khan* (2010) and Kabir Khan's *New York* (2009). In reading these films, I contribute to recent ethnographic, historical, and legal accounts of South Asian, Arab and Muslim post-9/11 U.S. racializations by expanding the field of inquiry to include a critical consideration of Bollywood cinema.[63]

As numerous scholars have argued, Bollywood cinema is an important site in the negotiation of diasporic desire and the production of South Asian diasporic

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[61] Melamed observes, "As new categories for distinguishing more-worthy from less-worthy persons come to overlay conventional racial categories, traditionally recognized racial identities, e.g., black, Asian, white, or Arab/Muslim, now occupy both sides of the more worthy/less worthy divide" (151-2).

[62] See two articles by Jasbir Puar and Amit Rai, "The Remaking of a Model Minority: Perverse Projectiles Under the Specter of (Counter)Terrorism," and "Monster, Terrorist, Fag: The War on Terrorism and Production of Docile Patriots," as well as Jigna Desai, "Bollywood Abroad: South Asian Diasporic Cosmopolitanism and Indian Cinema."

[63] See, for example, Sunaina Maira's *Missing*, Moustafa Bayoumi's *How Does it Feel to be a Problem*, Junaid Rana's *Terrifying Muslims*, Leti Volpp's "The Citizen and the Terrorist," and Muneer Ahmad's "Homeland Insecurities."

subjectivities.[64] In what follows, I place *My Name is Khan* and *New York* within a longer history of representations of the Indian diaspora in Hindi popular film. If the conventional diasporic narrative of Hindi films has centered on the question of the authentic Indianness of (Hindu) diasporic subjects, the post-9/11 films I examine here are preoccupied with demonstrating the authentic Americanness of diasporic (Muslim) Indians. *My Name is Khan* and *New York* are but two examples of a number of recent Bollywood films that center on South Asians living in the post-9/11 U.S., including Nikhil Advani's *Kal Ho Na Ho* (2003), Renzil D'Silva's *Kurbaan* (2009), and Naseeruddin Shah's *Yun Hota to Kya Hota* (2006).[65] Taken together, these films represent an important archive of the ways in which discourses of U.S. national identity, cultural citizenship and belonging, multicultural assimilation, and gendered racialization circulate outside of the confines of the U.S. nation-state and encounter discourses of diaspora and nationalism in South Asia. In this sense, I read *New York* and *My Name Is Khan* as texts that exemplify what postcolonial feminist scholar Inderpal Grewal calls "transnational America." "As a superpower," Grewal writes, "America produced subjects outside its territorial boundaries through its ability to disseminate neoliberal technologies through multiple channels…The relevance of America was not solely in the subjects it produced within the United States but in its ability to create networks of knowledge and power, cosmopolitan

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[64] See Chakravarty, *National Identity in Indian Popular Cinema*; Mishra, *Bollywood Cinema: Temple of Desires*; Gayatri Gopinath, *Impossible Desires*; and Ziauddin Sardar, "Dilip Kumar Made Me Do It."

[65] Aside from these mainstream Bollywood examples, there are a number of independent and South Asian diasporic films that take up these issues as well. See, for example, Joseph Castelo's *The War Within* (2005), Sarah Gavron's *Brick Lane* (2007), Shoaib Mansoor's Pakistani, Urdu-language film, *Khuda Ke Liye* (2007) and Mira Nair's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2012), based on Mohsin Hamid's acclaimed 2007 novel of the same name.

and 'global,' that traversed and rearticulated national boundaries" (3). Critical inquiry into the narrative and representational strategies employed by these films, I argue, reveals how U.S. discourses of multicultural assimilation and U.S. exceptionalism exceed the territorial boundaries of the United States and circulate through more diffuse circuits of neoliberal capitalism. At the same time, I am interested in how the racial logics of U.S.-led neoliberal capitalism, particularly the figure of the perverse Muslim terrorist, interface with Hindu nationalism in India. I thus situate my readings of *My Name is Khan* and *New York* within the "transnational connectivities" enabled by neoliberalism in both the U.S. and India to consider the ways in which the figure of the perverse Muslim terrorist is the very sign around which U.S. nationalism and Hindu nationalism may be seen to converge.[66]

My Name is Khan and *New York* seek to represent and document the injustices wrought on South Asian immigrants and South Asian Americans through the proliferation of post-9/11 anti-Muslim racism. Both films depict scenes of the harassment, surveillance, profiling, violence, torture and death meted out to South Asians in the context of the War on Terror. Both films, to varying degrees, implicate the U.S. state as arbiters of racial violence. Both films also situate anti-Muslim racism within the long history of U.S. anti-Black racism by invoking visual and sonic iconographies of the Civil Rights Movement. The deployment of U.S. Civil Rights imagery in *My Name is Khan* and *New York* speaks to the ways in which what might conventionally be thought of as a localized, national movement for rights within the U.S. nation-state animates transnational, coalitional imaginaries. The chapter ends by interrogating the terms of

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[66] See Grewal, *Transnational America*, especially 14-26.

these coalitional imaginaries, to reveal their possibilities and limitations in the ongoing struggle for racial justice. The films differ in the extent to which they might be read as subscribing to and legitimating ideologies of multicultural assimilation and post-Civil Rights U.S. exceptionalism.[67] Despite its concern with representing the plight of South Asian Muslim immigrants in a post-9/11 U.S. context, I argue that *My Name is Khan* ultimately affirms a politics of normative racial and sexual reconciliation through a linear, developmental narrative of multicultural inclusion into U.S. national identity, thereby reinforcing the familiar narrative of racial progress that is a touchstone of post-Civil Rights U.S. exceptionalism. In contrast, *New York* betrays a profound ambivalence about the costs of such inclusion. In its disruption of the normative temporality of racial progress, the film ultimately suggests that racial reconciliation is always haunted by ghosts of its own undoing.

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[67] My critical engagement with discourses of U.S. multiculturalism in informed by the work of Lisa Lowe and Angela Davis, both of whom demonstrate that the multicultural recourse to representation as redress obfuscates the persistence of differentiated material inequity. Lowe writes in *Immigrant Acts*, "To the degree that multiculturalism claims to register the increasing diversity of populations, it precisely obscures the ways in which that aesthetic representation is not an analogue for the material positions, means, or resources of those populations" (86). Angela Davis writes, "'Difference' and 'diversity' are descriptive: people are different, cultures are diverse. In this context, we must be aware of the fact that multiculturalism can easily become a way to guarantee that these differences and diversities are retained superficially while becoming homogenized and harmonized politically, especially along axes of class, gender, and sexuality…[M]ulticulturalism can become a polite and euphemistic way of affirming persisting, unequal power relations by representing them as equal differences" ("Gender, Class, and Multiculturalism," 44). The discourse of U.S. exceptionalism is not singular or unified but is rearticulated in different forms at different historical moments, all with the purpose of shoring up U.S. nationalism and imperial expansion. The dominant historical narrative of the successes of the U.S. Civil Rights Movement has placed the concepts of racial progress, redemption and what Neda Atanasoski calls "moral multiculturalism" at the center of contemporary articulations of U.S. exceptionalism that justify U.S. military intervention and neoliberal market expansion (4). See also Nikhil Pal Singh's *Black is a Country* and Jodi Melamed's *Represent and Destroy*.

Bollywood in the Diaspora, the Diaspora in Bollywood

Representations of diasporic Indians, or more precisely of Non-Resident Indians (NRIs), have undergone significant shifts since the 1990s.[68] These changes in representational strategies resonated with the liberalization of the Indian economy, which expanded the urban, consumer middle classes and also saw the Indian state attempt to court wealthy NRIs as long-distance nationals who can invest in the Indian economy through remittances. Prior to these economic shifts, NRIs made only sporadic appearances in Indian films and were often figured as the embodiments of lost Indian authenticity brought on by the dangers of decadent consumption and sexuality in the West. Perhaps not surprisingly, these representations were quite heavily gendered, with the "westernized" Indian woman signifying a particularly insidious danger to Indian national identity. Throughout much of 1970s and 1980s, this image of the deviant, westernized NRI (especially NRI women) dominated depictions of diasporic communities in Indian cinema, as seen in films like Manoj Kumar's 1970 *Purab aur Paschim* (East and West), Shakti Samanta's *An Evening in* Paris (1967) and Dev Anand's *Hare Rama Hare Krishna* (1971).[69]

In *Purab aur Paschim*, for example, East and West are positioned in antithetical relation to each other—the East (India, specifically) is the site of tradition, family values, and culture, while the West is rendered as the site of cultural loss, sexual deviancy and

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[68] See chapter one of this dissertation for a discussion of the class and gender politics of the NRI.

[69] Even films that were not explicitly concerned with NRI communities reproduced the image of "Westernized" woman as a threat to national identity in the dichotomy of the chaste heroine and the deviant vamp. See Asha Kasbekar's "Hidden Pleasures: Negotiating the Myth of the Female Ideal in Popular Hindi Cinema."

debasement, but also of education. Bharat (Manoj Kumar) is the prime signifier of the Indian nation both in name and character (Bharat is the Sanskrit word for India). He is well mannered, studious, devoutly Hindu, and as the son of a freedom fighter killed in the anticolonial struggle against the British, deeply patriotic. Many of the film's songs show Bharat singing the praises of the homeland to rapturous crowds. When he travels to England to pursue higher education he meets Preeti Sharma (Saira Banu). In stark contrast to Bharat, Preeti is the quintessential "westernized" Indian woman—she smokes cigarettes, drinks alcohol, wears short skirts, has no understanding of Indian history or Hindu religious traditions, and sports long blond hair, the sign of an almost complete investment in whiteness and a rejection of proper Indian (Hindu) femininity. Bharat and Preeti fall in love and return to India, where she effectively reclaims her lost roots through domestication. In the final scene of the film Preeti leads the cast in a rousing devotional song at a Hindu temple. Dressed in a red wedding sari and having renounced cigarettes and alcohol, Preeti has been fully reformed into respectable Indian womanhood through marriage to Bharat, metaphorically signaling her union with the nation.

The gendered division of East and West in *Purab aur Paschim* resonates with Partha Chatterjee's well-known formulation of "the nationalist resolution of the women's question" in the split between the spiritual and material realms:

> The material is the domain of the 'outside,' of the economy and of statecraft, of science and technology, a domain where the West had proven superiority and the east had succumbed. In this domain…Western superiority had to be acknowledged and its accomplishments carefully studied and replicated. The spiritual, on the other hand, is the 'inner' domain bearing the 'essential' marks of cultural identity. The greater one's success in imitating Western skills in the material domain…the greater the need to preserve the distinctness of one's spiritual culture." (6)

The spiritual domain includes language, art and aesthetics, print culture, family, and the role of women—the "essential" markers of cultural identity. What emerges out of this separation is a reevaluation of colonial power dynamics in which anticolonial nationalism claims complete sovereignty over the spiritual realm and its manifestations in the form of national culture. Accordingly, the colonial power is refused entry into the spiritual realm. Within the anti-colonial nationalist context, this separation was especially crucial in the process of selectively adhering to the promise of Western modernity while simultaneously protecting and maintaining the superiority of indigenous cultural traditions—"to fashion a 'modern' national culture that is nevertheless not Western."[70]

By the 1990s, the cultural imaginary of the NRI underwent a significant shift as part of the constellation of economic reforms undertaken by the Indian state to "liberalize" the India economy through privatization, deregulation, and foreign investment.[71] These kinds of neoliberal economic reforms had a profound impact on the film and culture industries in India, and contributed to what Ashish Rajadhyaksha has called the "Bollywoodization" of Indian cinema. In what has become a field-defining

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[70] It should be noted that Chatterjee's framing of the nationalist resolution to "the woman question" functions in rather essentializing terms. "Woman" and "peasant" function in Chatterjee's text as transparent, coherent categories. Postcolonial and women of color feminist critiques have been immensely influential in offering more variegated and nuanced critiques of the ways in which class, caste, race, gender, religion (and other forms of social and political differentiation) function to produce legitimate or illegitimate national subjects and concerns. See, for example, Chandra Mohanty's *Feminism Without Borders* and Anne McClintock's *Imperial Leather*.

[71] For a lucid overview of economic liberalization policies, see Mankekar's "Brides Who Travel." Rupal Oza, in *The Making of Neoliberal India*, addresses the debates surrounding the production of what she calls "the new liberal Indian woman in the new liberalizing India" (24). According to Oza in an argument reminiscent of Chatterjee's discussion of gender and anticolonial nationalism above, "The ['new'] Indian woman was carefully crafted within public cultural discourses to be modern, representing globalizing India, yet 'Indian' by being anchored to its 'core' values" (22).

essay, Rajadhyaksha argues that Bollywood is not reducible to only the Hindi film industry, but rather that the film industry is but one part of a much larger culture industry that emerged in the wake of neoliberal reform.[72] In identifying the film industry as one component of the larger Bollywood culture industry, Rajadhyaksha argues that "Bollywood" itself is the product of global capitalism. The increase in foreign investment in the production and distribution of Bollywood films, particularly by major U.S. based film distribution companies, the consumptive potential of a nostalgic South Asian diasporic audience, and a rapidly expanding urban middle-class has ensured a dynamic relationship between Bollywood as a particular mode of cinematic representation and the reconstitution of South Asian identities as both national and global, traditional yet cosmopolitan.

Building on Rajadhyaksha's arguments in her recent book *Producing Bollywood: Inside the Contemporary Hindi Film Industry*, Tejaswini Ganti argues that the transformation of the Hindi film industry into and as part of the Bollywood culture industry would not have been possible without the rise of neoliberalism in India. In her analysis of what she calls the "ongoing process of the 'gentrification' of Hindi cinema," Ganti identifies three major features that distinguish the post-liberalization film and culture industries (4). First, the corporatization and integration of film production, distribution, and exhibition has dramatically changed filmmaking in India, especially

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[72] Rajadhyaksha writes, "[Bollywood] might best be seen as a more diffuse cultural conglomeration involving a range of distribution and consumption activities from websites to music cassettes, from cable to radio. If so, the film industry itself…can by definition constitute only a part, and perhaps even an alarmingly small part, of the overall culture industry that is currently being created and marketed (27).

since the Indian state officially granted "industry status" to the film industry in 2000, thereby easing restrictions on corporate investment to subsidize production, distribution, and exhibition. This has also coincided with the rise of the multiplex cinema in urban centers, which has fragmented the audience and created niche markets that were not as prominent in India before. Second, the rise of respectability politics in which Hindi cinema has transformed from a supposedly local, low-cultural form to a dynamic, global cinema of international repute has created a discourse around cinema rationalized through the ideals of taste, professionalism, and modernization. And third, Ganti notes the almost complete erasure of representations of working-class, poor, and rural communities in favor of the mega-rich (4). Films such as Yash Chopra's *Dil to Pagal Hai* (The Heart is Crazy), Subash Ghai's *Taal* (Rhythm), and Karan Johar's *Khabi Khushi Khabi Gham* (Sometimes Happy, Sometimes Sad) speak to the ways in which wealth, consumerism, and cosmopolitanism have become primary features of the protagonists in mainstream Bollywood cinema (especially NRI families), presented through elaborate sets of palatial homes and the conspicuous presence of name-brand commodities, especially high-end fashion labels and sports cars.

In this changing configuration of state economic policy and media representation the NRI has become resignified. As Jigna Desai argues, the "NRI was no longer posed as the bastard westernized child," as was the case in a film like *Purab aur Paschim* discussed above, "but rather as the prodigal son who lovingly adores and maintains his motherland" ("Bollywood, USA" 348). The film that contributed most decisively to this shift is undoubtedly Aditya Chopra's 1995 blockbuster *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* (The Brave-hearted Lover Will Steal the Bride). Since its release, *Dilwale Dulhania Le*

Jayenge (*DDLJ*) has become perhaps the most beloved Bollywood film of the last few decades, and still holds the record as the longest-running film in Hindi cinema's history—roughly two decades at the Maratha Mandir Cinema in Mumbai. The film made the romantic pairing of Shahrukh Khan and Kajol one of the most iconic in Hindi cinema (which is repeated again in *My Name is Khan*). At the time of its release *DDLJ* was part of the resurgence of the genre of the family drama, which had receded in recent years as action movies had come to dominate the cinematic landscape.[73] Just one year prior, Sooraj Barjatya's *Hum Aapke Hain Koun* (Who am I to You?) had unexpectedly broken box office records with its narrative of an extended joint family brought together through the marriage. The centrality of various Hindu rituals associated with marriage and domesticity (the engagement ceremony, bridal shower, wedding, baby shower, etc.) in the narrative contributed to its idealized depiction of the Hindu family, and in the context of the rising tide of Hindu nationalism, made the film popular both in India and the diaspora.[74]

Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge also centered its narrative largely on the preparations of an elaborate wedding, though it brought in the diasporic/NRI element more explicitly. Raj (Shahrukh Khan) and Simran (Kajol) are second generation diasporic Indians born and raised in London who meet and fall in love while traveling with friends across Europe. When Simran's father, Baldev Singh, finds out about her romance with Raj he abruptly moves the family back to his village in Punjab where he plans to get

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[73] See Sangita Gopal's discussion of the family drama in *Conjugations*.
[74] See Patricia Uberoi's "Imaging the Family: An Ethnography of Viewing *Hum Aapke Hain Koun*." For a queer diasporic reading of women's homosocial space in the film see Gopinath's *Impossible Desires*.

Simran married to a young man of his choosing. Raj follows the family the India, where he attempts to win over Baldev Singh. Simran's mother encourages the couple to elope, but Raj adamantly refuses. He says throughout the film that he will marry Simran only with the blessing of Baldev Singh, ultimately to uphold the "proper" relations of the patriarchal Hindu family. If, as I have argued above, *Purab aur Paschim* figured the diaspora as a threat to conventional Hindu nationalist patriarchy in the figure of the westernized Indian woman, *DDLJ* (and subsequent diaspora films from the 1990s onward) emphasized the Indianness of diasporic characters by showing their commitment to patriarchal Hindu values, despite having been born and raised in the west. For example, in a scene much remarked upon by feminist film scholars, Simran wakes up in a hotel room after getting drunk on cognac and cannot remember the events of the night before (crucially, the figure of the drunk diasporic woman is played for comedy in *DDLJ*, unlike in *Purab aur Paschim*). Raj, in an elaborate practical joke, tricks her into thinking that they had sex. When Simran gets upset Raj assures her that he is only joking and that he understands how important respectability is to Indian women. Despite being represented earlier in the film as a player, Raj demonstrates his authentic Indianness by emphasizing his commitment to patriarchal discourses on women's respectability. "It is crucial to note," observes Purnima Mankekar, "that in *DDLJ* Indian tradition is *not* represented as static or unchanging [as in *Purab aur Paschim*], but, instead, is depicted as flexible and portable…as responsive to the demands of flows of migration and late capitalism" (742).[75]

[75] See also Jenny Sharpe's "Gender, Nation, and Globalization in *Monsoon Wedding* and *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge*."

At first glance, *My Name is Khan* and *New York* would seem to mark another shift in representations of the diaspora in Bollywood cinema. Unlike *Purab aur Paschim* and *DDLJ*, whose narratives focus on the attempts of NRIs to maintain authentic Indianness through adherence to normative patriarchal gender relations, the narrative drive of *My Name is Khan* and *New York* insists on the authentic *Americanness* of their protagonists in response to anti-Muslim racism and the racialization of terror. Indian national identity seems to have been superseded by U.S. national identity, with symbols of U.S. nationalism replacing Indian nationalist proclamations of *Vande Mataram*, *Mera Bhaarat Mahaan*, and *Saare Jahan Se Achaa*. I want to suggest that this substitution of U.S. for Indian nationalism is contingent on the substitution of a *Hindu* diasporic subject with a *Muslim* one. Unlike the Hindu protagonists of *Purab aur Paschim* and *DDLJ*, whose diasporic desires were rooted in their ideological, affective, and material investments in Hindu nationalist patriarchy, the Muslim characters that populate *My Name is Khan* and *New York* are always already in excess of the dominant Hindu-ness of Indian national identity. In his study of religious nationalisms in South Asia, Peter van der Veer argues, "In the construction of the Muslim 'other' by Hindu nationalist movements, Muslims are always referred to as a dangerous 'foreign element'" (10).[76] The discourse of the Muslim Other in the Indian context was bolstered by the construction of the "Muslim terrorist" in

[76] Peter van der Veer's *Religious Nationalism* offers a useful historical narrative of the rise of contemporary Hindu nationalism and the constitutive role of British colonial governance and Orientalist knowledges in the consolidation of "Hindu" and "Muslim" as coherent categories in South Asia. The exclusion of Muslims from Indian national identity has been reproduced in Hindi popular cinema since its inception. Film scholars Kalyani Chadha and Anandam Kavoori locate Indian cinematic representations of the Muslim "Other" in the discursive triad of "exoticization-marginalization-demonization," despite the influence and contributions of Muslim filmmakers, actors, and artists to the history of Indian cinema.

the U.S.-led War on Terror. As Inderpal Grewal notes, "In India…the Muslim as terrorist has become a discursive regime produced by right-wing Hindu groups and the Indian state. There the figure of the "Islamic terrorist" is an already familiar representation within dominant media, so that 9/11 provided an opportunity for its further demonization" (207). We might read *My Name is Khan* and *New York* then to observe the simultaneous exclusion of Muslim subjects from both U.S. and Indian national formations.[77] However, as I demonstrate in my close readings of the films below, the location of Muslim diasporic subjects vis-à-vis the nation (both Indian and U.S.) is mediated by discourses of gender and sexuality. Much like the figure of the NRI woman in *Purab aur Paschim* and *DDLJ*, the Muslim is rendered assimilable with U.S. national formations only to the extent that they align with normative gender and sexuality. Those nonnormative, queered Muslims excluded from the nation, however, may gesture toward alternative forms of collectivity that disrupt the consolidation of multicultural U.S. national identity itself.[78]

Racial Reconciliation in *My Name is Khan*

My Name Is Khan was released amidst much fanfare in February 2010. The film reunited superstars Shahrukh Khan and Kajol as romantic leads—a pairing that ranks among the most celebrated in Bollywood since their star turns in *DDLJ*. The director

[77] Jigna Desai and Rani Neutill argue that recent Bollywood films reorient the origins of "global terror" to the subcontinent, thereby placing the 9/11 attacks in the U.S. within a longer genealogy of Muslim terror that begins with Partition. See "Wound, Injury, and Restoration."

[78] See Paola Baccheta's "When the (Hindu) Nation Exiles its Queers," Fatima El-Tayeb's *European Others*, and Jasbir Puar's *Terrorist Assemblages* for discussions of the Muslim as the queered Other of the nation.

Karan Johar is one of the most commercially successful filmmakers working today as well as one of the most high-profile celebrities in India. Johar's films have been especially popular with diasporic audiences in the U.S. and U.K. for their spectacular performance of South Asian cosmopolitanism and heteronormative Hindu nationalism. *My Name Is Khan* gained further notoriety in August 2009 when Shahrukh Khan was detained at Newark Liberty International Airport while on a promotional tour for the film. The irony—that an Indian Muslim celebrity had been racially profiled in the U.S. while promoting a film about the racial profiling of Muslims in the U.S.—was widely commented upon in the news media in the U.S., U.K. and India.

The film follows Rizwan Khan, an Indian Muslim immigrant who, soon after his arrival in the US, is diagnosed with Asperger's Syndrome. Rizwan marries Mandira, a Hindu single mother whose son Sameer quickly forms a loving bond with Rizwan. As upwardly mobile, middle-class model minorities, Rizwan and Mandira lead an idyllic suburban life until the 9/11 attacks disrupt their sense of security. Sameer is murdered in an anti-Muslim hate crime and a devastated Mandira blames Rizwan's religion for Sameer's death. In her anger, she kicks Rizwan out of the house, telling him to return only once he has told everyone in America, including President George W. Bush, that he is not a terrorist. Taking Mandira's injunction literally, Rizwan travels across the U.S. following Bush's domestic travel itinerary, but repeatedly fails in his quest to meet the President. One extended stop places him in "Wilhemina, Georgia," a poor all-Black town where he meets and befriends a Black single mother and her son. Rizwan is eventually racially profiled, arrested, detained without due process, and held in solitary confinement as a terror suspect. Media reports of his case circulate widely, leading to his eventual

release. Upon leaving state custody, Rizwan travels back to Wilhemina to aid in disaster relief in the aftermath of "Hurricane Molly"—a thinly veiled Katrina reference. His work in Wilhemina brings him more national media attention and the film ends with a reconciled Rizwan and Mandira meeting and being celebrated by then President-Elect Barack Obama, to whom Rizwan finally delivers his message: "My name is Khan, and I am not a terrorist."

As this synopsis demonstrates, *My Name is Khan* traces a narrative of racial reconciliation wherein racialized subjects violently excluded from the nation ultimately find redress through inclusion into that very national form, often by differentiating themselves from others who are rendered as more deserving of exclusion.[79] In the context of post-9/11 racializations of Muslim-, South Asian, and Arab-Americans, this process manifests in the differentiated production of "good" and "bad" Muslim or Muslim look-alike subjects: the model minority incorporated by multiculturalism on the one hand and the "terrorist monster" who must be excluded on the other.[80] In *My Name is Khan* this process operates through regulatory discourses of race, gender, and sexuality. For example, a key scene in the film shows Rizwan anonymously informing the FBI about a suspected terrorist he witnesses in a mosque. In so doing, Rizwan aligns himself with the U.S. state security apparatus in its fight against "Islamist" terrorism, thereby demonstrating that he is one of the good guys. Beyond this individual act of patriotism that absolves him of guilt within the narrative, however, I also want to suggest that Rizwan's disability functions as another means by which the film demonstrates his

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[79] For an elaboration of the problematics of this model of inclusion and differentiation, see Alexander Weheliye's *Habeus Viscus*, especially chapter five.
[80] See Mahmood Mamdani's *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim*.

inherent "goodness" to the audience. His diagnosis with Asperger's Syndrome after his migration to the U.S. can be read as what disability studies scholars David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder call "narrative prosthesis," a metaphorical device that works to exceptionalize the character marked by disability. His Asperger's Syndrome immediately places him, in the eyes of the audience, in a position of innocence, as a sympathetic victim of post-9/11 anti-Muslim racism in contrast to the truly violent Muslim terrorist whose monstrosity makes him unmournable. Indeed, we might say that Asperger's Syndrome disables Rizwan from being a terrorist.[81]

Differentiating between good and bad Muslims also relies on normative conceptions of gender and sexuality. Mandira's rejection of Rizwan after Sameer's murder and her hyperbolic injunction that he return only after proving to the President that he is not a terrorist fuses the reconciliation of the heterosexual couple with Rizwan's redemption in the eyes of the nation. Their tearful reunion toward the end of the film is literally interrupted by the sudden appearance of a Muslim terrorist, a follower of the man whom Rizwan reported to the FBI earlier in the film, who stabs Rizwan in the stomach in the name of Allah. In staging this eruption of violence, the Muslim terrorist is placed between Rizwan and Mandira as a perverse impediment to their union, indeed as the very embodiment of what Jasbir Puar and Amit Rai call the "monster-terrorist-fag" who stands in opposition to the consolidation and affirmation of sexual normativity.[82]

Rizwan's redemptive entry into U.S. national identity, however, relies not only on his differentiating himself from the figure of the Muslim terrorist, but also, crucially, on

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[81] My thanks to Rashna Singh for helping me to articulate this claim.
[82] See also Puar's *Terrorist Assemblages*.

his positioning himself relationally to Black Americans. I argue that the film consolidates South Asian *American* Muslim masculinity through an instrumental usage of U.S. Black identities and political struggles to affirm the narrative of racial progress that lies at the heart of contemporary discourses of U.S. exceptionalism. In the fictional Wilhemina, Georgia, Rizwan meets and befriends "Mama Jenny" and her son "Crazy-Haired Joel," two characters whose representation draws extensively on the repertoires of blackface minstrelsy. Jenny's older son has been killed in the Iraq War, and she and Rizwan share a moment of deep recognition and identification through the disclosure of grief for their dead children. At a local memorial service for U.S. soldiers killed in Iraq, Joel leads a group of Black mourners in an uplifting rendition of "We Shall Overcome," and Rizwan joins in by singing Girija Kumar Mathur's Hindi translation of the song, "Hum Honge Kaamyaab." This brief episode in Wilhemina is meant to demonstrate an affinity between South Asian immigrants and Black Americans through a shared mourning of racialized loss, drawing on a long history of Afro-Asian coalition and solidarity politics.[83] In addition, this initial moment of identification between Rizwan and Jenny through the Civil Rights anthem is meant to prefigure the film's climactic set piece, in which Rizwan returns to Wilhemina to "save" Jenny and Joel in the aftermath of "Hurricane Molly."[84] Upon returning to Wilhemina after being released from state detention, Rizwan is besieged by the sight of dozens of Black corpses scattered throughout the town, evoking the devastation of Hurricane Katrina on New Orleans. The film acknowledges the Bush administration's severely delayed response to the disaster, but refrains from offering any

[83] For example, see Vijay Prashad's *Everybody was Kung Fu Fighting*.
[84] See Shana Redmond's brilliant *Anthem: Social Movements and the Sound of Solidarity in the African Diaspora*.

kind of sustained critique of the state. Instead, the devastation wrought by Hurricane Molly, and the fetishized representation of Black suffering function to substantiate Rizwan's status as an ideal and exceptional U.S. citizen-subject.[85]

In other words, rather than indict the state for its neglect of Wilhemina/New Orleans, *My Name Is Khan* uses the destruction of Black communities and the death of Black bodies to narrate Rizwan's ascendance into the fold of U.S. national identity. For example, in a montage of news media reports on Rizwan, one reporter says, "Just recently this man was arrested and tortured for being an enemy combatant of this country. I wonder what the government officials would call this Muslim enemy combatant today as he selflessly tries to save the remaining lives in Wilhemina." Another reporter states, "Just a few days ago this man was called a terrorist and tortured mercilessly. Today we wait for the response of government officials as he tirelessly strives to save innocent lives." Tellingly, these news reports call on the Bush administration not to provide much-needed aid to the Black communities devastated by the hurricane but rather to recuperate and legitimate Rizwan's national allegiance. In the absence of a critique of the state, Rizwan's work in Wilhemina cannot be read simply an act of racial solidarity against the state's dispossession of poor communities of color, but must be read as the means by which to secure his assimilation into the US national body through a symbolic performance of whiteness. As Susan Koshy has noted, the construction of whiteness operates in dialectical relation to Blackness and Asian Americanness, such that Asian

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[85] *My Name is Khan* thus makes explicit Toni Morrison's contention that the assimilation, however partial, of immigrant communities often happens "on the backs of blacks." "It doesn't matter anymore," writes Morrison, "what shade the newcomer's skin is. A hostile posture toward resident blacks must be struck at the Americanizing door before it will open…Star spangled. Race strangled (57).

Americans can accrue some particular privileges through a symbolic alignment with whiteness. Writing about Chinese Mississippians in the era of Jim Crow, Koshy argues that a "strategic mimicry of white cultural norms opened up access to symbolic whiteness" which "illustrates the power of whiteness to induce identification from nonwhites and the position of blacks as the definitional 'other' against whom ideologies of whiteness are produced and sustained" (174). As such, we might read Rizwan's "selfless" concern with Jenny and Joel, and his attempts to "save" the Wilhemina community as the performance of a benevolent whiteness that can only imagine Black subjects as helpless victims, and that elevates Rizwan—and by extension, Muslim masculinities writ large—into the position not only of model minorities but as ideal U.S. national subjects.

Indeed, the film's final scene depicts Rizwan, now reunited with Mandira, being fully accepted into the multicultural fold of U.S. national identity by President-Elect Obama. The film ends with a multilayered, triumphant reconciliation of both family and nation. We see Rizwan and Mandira being led onto a stage to meet Obama in front of a cheering multiethnic crowd of supporters, while a rousing rendition of "Hum Honge Kaamyaab or "We Shall Overcome," plays on the soundtrack. In her final voice-over monologue, which is accompanied by the image of the family walking hand in hand back into their home, Mandira promises Sam—their son, but perhaps also Uncle Sam—that she will never again let Rizwan go. This reconsolidation of the heterosexual family accompanies the integration of normative Muslim identities into U.S. national identity, signaled by Obama's outstretched hand as a gesture of welcome. For the film, Obama's victory signifies the success of U.S. liberal multiculturalism and the completion of the

struggle for Black civil rights—the U.S. emerges here as an exceptional nation that has grappled with and *overcome* its histories of racial slavery, exclusion, dispossession, and exploitation to arrive at a moment of post-racial celebration. In staging this final meeting, the film places Rizwan and Obama in analogous positions—as racialized subjects who have successfully fought and triumphed over racism through their own persistent self-determination and individual will. Only in a singular nation like the U.S., according to this logic, could figures like Obama and Rizwan emerge as victors.

Contesting Assimilation in *New York*

This celebration of the promise of South Asian Muslim assimilation in *My Name is Khan* stands in contrast to the much darker narrative of post-9/11 racialization in Kabir Khan's 2009 thriller, *New York*. If, as I have argued, *My Name is Khan* ends with the triumph of multicultural assimilation as a key feature of U.S. exceptionalism, *New York* betrays a profound ambivalence with the discourse of U.S. exceptionalism and the possibility—perhaps even the desirability—of assimilation. The main narrative of the film centers on Roshan, an Indian Muslim FBI agent who recruits a young Muslim immigrant, Omar Aijaz, as an informant in an undercover operation to capture Samir Shaikh, a suspected leader of a terror cell in New York City. Omar and Samir were best friends in college, but have been estranged by Samir's marriage to Maya, with whom Omar was also in love while they were at college. As a Muslim FBI agent, Roshan functions as a stand in for the narrative of U.S. multicultural assimilation and an emblem of the neoliberal calculus that distinguishes "good" Muslims from "bad" that I discussed in my reading of *My Name is Khan*. The film's introduction of Samir occurs via

flashback to 1999, when he is a student at the fictional New York State University. Samir—or rather Sam, as he is introduced to us—is a participant in the college's "Annual Challenge," a race across campus to the flagpole perched atop the library. Amidst the cheers of the large crowd of diverse students gathered to watch the race, Sam triumphantly raises the American flag to declare his victory. Sam is figured as the epitome of the all-American college jock—masculine, cocky, football-playing, clad in brightly colored Abercrombie and Fitch polo shirts and khaki cargo shorts. Maya describes him as "just so American in his ways," despite being the son of a college professor who is "an expert in Indian culture." Having lived in the U.S. since he was four year old, Sam appears to have assimilated into American post-racial life as it is represented in the multicultural utopia of New York State University. Soon after 9/11, however, Sam is arrested and imprisoned for 9 months in a detention center, where he is regularly and routinely tortured by U.S. officials. After his release for "lack of evidence," Samir seeks out a terror network he learned about while detained, and thus the film suggests that it is his experience of detention and torture that turns him—a formerly upstanding, Indian American Muslim immigrant—into a terrorist. In this sense, Samir is representative of the racial contradictions inherent in the assimilation narrative, of the undeniable fact of race that positions him as a threat to the U.S. despite his seeming Americanness.

In the film's climax, Samir attempts to bomb the FBI headquarters in New York, but he is stopped by Maya who convinces him, for the sake of his family, to leave behind his life of terror. Before Samir and Maya can reunite they are both shot dead by a rain of FBI bullets. The film ends six months later with Omar adopting Samir and Maya's young

son, Danyal, who in the final scene is shown playing little league baseball while Omar watches from the stands. Roshan, who has since been promoted at the FBI because of his work in the case against Samir, appears at the baseball game just as Danyal scores the winning run. "What did we get out of this undercover operation of yours?" asks Omar, "Two of my friends ended up dead, and you got a medal. What else?" Referring to Danyal, whose teammates are now carrying him on their shoulders, Roshan says, "A Muslim boy whose father was a terrorist is playing on an American team, and they're hailing him [Danyal] a hero. That's what we got. That's what we achieved." Omar does not respond, and his facial expressions suggest that he remains unconvinced. On this note of uncertainty, of deep ambivalence about the terms of Danyal's assimilation, the film ends. In contrast to *My Name is Khan*, which ends with the affirmation of the U.S. state's commitment to racial diversity and freedom in the triumphant meeting of Rizwan and Obama, *New York* seems less convinced that the state should be let off the hook. Indeed, as Omar reminds us, the very state and national culture that supposedly incorporates Danyal does so only by murdering his parents.

In her queer reading of *New York*, Deepti Misri reads the love triangle between Omar, Samir and Maya through the lens of the Bollywood buddy movie, a genre whose playful coding of homoerotic desire lends it nicely to queer analysis. Finding similar homoerotic codes in the final meeting between Omar and Roshan, Misri suggests that this final queer "coupling" reveals the contradictions and exclusions of heteronormative citizenship for Muslim-American and Muslim immigrant subjects. Without discounting Misri's very convincing reading, I want to suggest another instance of queer possibility in

New York, though one that relies less on the identification of queer desire than on one's location in relation to normative power.

Haunting the margins of *New York* is Zilgai, a working class, non-English speaking, Bangladeshi Muslim immigrant who suffers severe trauma after being detained and tortured by U.S. authorities in the same detention center as Samir. Zilgai is a relatively minor character in *New York*, appearing only in a few short scenes. He is often positioned in the background of the main action, alone and without community. In the scene of Samir's release from prison, for example, we see Maya, her back to the camera, walking from the left foreground of the frame toward Samir who occupies the image's center. Zilgai follows Samir out of the prison, finds no one waiting to welcome him, and walks alone out the frame to the right, while the camera zooms in to focus on Maya and Samir. In this particular scene, as in the film as a whole, Zilgai remains completely outside of heteronormative citizenship and belonging and thus might be read as the film's most "queer" subject. To quote Gayatri Gopinath in a different context, "Queerness here is not so much a brave or heroic refusal of the normative, as it appears in some narratives of queer subjectivity, as much as it names the impossibility of normativity for racialized subjects who are marked by histories of violent dispossession; for such subjects, a recourse to the comforting fictions of belonging is always out of reach" ("Archive" 167).[86]

With the help of Maya, who (rather conveniently for the narrative) works as a human rights attorney, Zilgai is seeking redress from the U.S. state for the crimes it

[86] For further discussions of queerness defined as that which is outside normative power, as opposed to simply a sexual identity category, see Cathy Cohen's "Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens" and Roderick Ferguson's *Aberrations in Black*.

committed upon his person, but his calls for justice are repeatedly ignored and thwarted. In a key scene, the police stop Zilgai for driving while brown. He pulls over to the side of the road in front of a large mural depicting key icons and images of the U.S. Civil Rights Movement and the labor movement. As the cop gets out of his squad car, there is a fleeting moment in which the painted figure of Dr. King in the mural appears to be yelling at the white policeman in the foreground. Situating the material conditions of post-9/11 racialization and surveillance in front of and, I argue, as part of this mural challenges the narratives of racial progress and multicultural assimilation that are so central to articulations of U.S. exceptionalism. This fleeting moment, in which the boundary between the painted image of Dr. King and the presence of the white policeman seems to dissolve, disrupts the linear temporality that would fix Dr. King and the struggles for social justice around which he organized squarely in the past. Indeed, the normative temporality of racial progress collapses, momentarily gesturing toward what Grace Hong and Roderick Ferguson, invoking the work of women of color feminism and queer of color critique, call "strange affinities": modes of knowledge production and coalitional politics that "produce alternative meanings, alternative understandings about the nature of power" (15). Unlike *My Name is Khan*, which by its conclusion has arrived at a widely sought-after "post-racial" world, with the figures of President Obama and Rizwan Khan embodying the inevitable fruition of struggles for racial equality through representation, this brief but suggestive moment in *New York* leaves us with a different set of questions about the relationships between differently racialized communities and about the present and its relationship to the past. How are we to understand the persistence of racial violence, in its myriad, uneven, and intersecting manifestations?

What kinds of "unpredictable or unlikely coalitions," to invoke Angela Davis, have we yet to imagine?[87]

[87] See Davis, "Reflections on Race, Class, and Gender in the U.S.A."

Epilogue

> The very process of constructing a narrative for oneself—of telling a story—imposes a certain linearity and coherence that is never entirely there. That is the lesson, perhaps, especially for us immigrants and migrants: that home, community, and identity all fit somewhere between the histories and experiences we inherit and the political choices we make through alliances, solidarities, and friendships.
>
> --Chandra Talpade Mohanty, *Feminism Without Borders*

I.

Four years ago, I began work on an informal oral family history, conducting interviews with my mother and grandmother about their experiences living in British colonial Kenya in the 1940s and 50s, their move to London in the 1960s, and my mother's eventual migration to the United States in 1964. My mother and her four brothers are the third generation of our Punjabi family born and raised in British East Africa. Learning about my family's personal experiences living in empire—about the rigid racial, class, and gender hierarchies of late-colonial Kenya; the simultaneous familiarity and strangeness of London for middle-class, postimperial migrants; my mother's memories of her initial years in the U.S.; of hearing the news that Dr. King had been assassinated—these stories, as they have been narrated to me, have animated my interest in tracing the relationships between Black and South Asian diasporic formations in this dissertation. These stories from my mother and grandmother offer a unique point of entry into the cultural imaginaries and residues of empire, and they speak to the denseness of memory as an alternative archive from which to draw both inspiration and the will to continue working.

I see this unofficial oral family history as a kind of parallel project to this dissertation on Black and South Asian diasporic cultural production. The relationship between the two projects is informed by an understanding of personal and familial

experience that is, following Chandra Talpade Mohanty, "deeply historical and collective" (191). While the oral history attempts to document the particular experiences and memories of my family for circulation amongst my relatives, the dissertation does the more expansive work of situating stories like my mother and grandmother's—and importantly, many stories *unlike* theirs—within broader, interlinked histories of empire, racialization, migration, and displacement. It attempts to excavate the material and affective convergences and divergences between differently colonized, racialized, and gendered communities and to imagine and theorize more complex ways of understanding our collective present.

II.

It is December 2013. I am in London, along with my parents, visiting my grandmother and our extended family. We are in the upstairs bedroom of my grandmother's house in Wembley. My computer sits on a table in front of my grandmother, recording our conversation. My mother and I sit on the bed. I ask them both more questions about Nairobi, about the circumstances that led to my grandfather moving from Punjab to Kenya, where he would eventually marry my grandmother. He was 21, she was 16. I ask about my grandmother's time working as a teacher at an Indian girls' school in Nairobi. Educational institutions were intensely segregated, with separate schools for British, Indian, and African children. My grandmother taught Punjabi and Gujarati language to girls in the 4th standard, and music to older high school girls. She loved teaching, as do I, and I like to think that I inherited this from her.

I ask questions about how Indian independence in 1947 affected the South Asians living in Kenya, and whether the energy and excitement of the Indian independence struggle influenced South Asians in Kenya to support African anticolonial struggles. This is when the conversation turns to Dharam Kumar (D.K.) Sharda, my mother's maternal uncle. I knew that my grandmother had an older brother whom she was close to, and that he had eventually left Kenya for India, the homeland of their parents. I can't remember ever having heard why he left Kenya, just that he left for Bombay and worked as an editor for the *Times of India*. I recall hearing stories that he was a close friend of the popular actor and filmmaker Dev Anand, and that once when my mother visited his office in Bombay she rode the elevator with Lata Mangeshkar, the legendary playback singer for the movies. The conversation has taken a different turn, however, one I did not anticipate. D.K. Sharda was a journalist in Nairobi. My grandmother tells me that he wrote for the *Colonial Times*, and then later founded another paper, the *Daily Chronicle*, with some of his colleagues. He was apparently quite sympathetic to the struggles of African Kenyans, wrote articles in support of Kenyan independence movements, and staunchly advocated for Black-Asian anticolonial alliances. He didn't choose to leave Kenya; the British deported him because of his political activism.

To say that I was dumbstruck is an understatement. I just listened that night as my grandmother spoke. Eventually, that night and many times since then, I asked more questions. What exactly did he write about? Who were the people with whom he worked? Was he affiliated with any political organizations? Did he ever talk about his work with the family, and if so, how did they respond to it? My grandmother has been gracious in answering all my questions as best as she can.

In the process of writing this dissertation I came across a recent book by Sana Aiyar, a historian at MIT, called *Indians in Kenya: The Politics of Diaspora*. It's a thick book, dense with historical material based on extensive archival work. One afternoon I sat at my desk with a cup of tea with the book in front of me, reading some sections and skimming others. I read the section on the East African Indian National Congress, which by the 1920s became one of the central organizations for Indian politics in the colony. Throughout the 1940s, the Congress was in regular talks with the Kenya African Union (KAU). The two organizations held joint meetings in which they discussed the necessity of Afro-Asian collaboration, especially as subsequent generations of South Asians began to claim Kenya, rather than India, as their homeland. In her discussion of the growing collaboration between the Congress and the KAU, Aiyer mentions the pivotal role that the radical Indian press played in organizing "Indians whose politics were distinctly anticolonial" (142). She names five journalists in particular from the *Colonial Times* and later the *Daily Chronicle*: Girdhari Lal Vidyarthi, Pranlal Sheth, Haroun Ahmed, Nathoo Amlani, and D.K. Sharda. Aiyer writes:

> [T]he *Colonial Times* and the *Daily Chronicle* became vehicles for such Indians to criticize government policy, support the KAU, and shape Indian political discourse in the colony….Throughout the 1940s these journalists, who were simultaneously members of the Congress, criticized colonial policy, took up specific African grievances, and supported politically active Africans outside the Legislative Council by publishing papers for African political organizations, often courting arrest.

Aiyer goes on to describe the many attempts made by the British to crackdown on these journalists, but as a group they remained steadfast in their political commitments and fought back against measures adopted to silence their editorial pens, including charges of sedition brought against Ahmed, Vidyarthi, and Sharda. There are a handful of more

references in Aiyer's book to Sharda's involvement with several informal anticolonial organizations, particularly after the imprisonment of Jomo Kenyatta and the banning of the KAU by the colonial government in 1953. He also oversaw the printing of political pamphlets in multiple vernacular languages.

Reading D.K. Sharda's name in Aiyer's text, and learning more about his political involvement in Kenya, especially his commitment to forging cross-racial alliances, was overwhelming. I experienced intense feelings of identification, pride, and the desire to seek out some of this writings in the future. The pleasure of recognition from seeing Sharda mentioned in an academic text is also tempered, however, by the realization that whatever I may come to learn about the work he carried out with his colleagues, it will always be partial and limited. The narrative will necessarily be incomplete no matter how many books I find that reference him, no matter how many questions I ask my grandmother. I may even come to find—or rather, I'm sure that I will find—that our political investments in cross-racial alliance, as represented in his journalistic output and in my research, diverge by virtue of the fact that we each work(ed) in different historical and political conjunctures. Nonetheless, I cannot help but feel some kind of connection to this ghost of my past, an ancestor with whom I might have—and might yet—struggle alongside.

III.

My mother is ten years old in the photo, a family portrait taken in a professional photography studio in Nairobi in 1953. Dressed in a Punjabi suit with two pigtails, my mother stands beside her four younger brothers, who wear suit jackets with matching

shorts, carnations pinned to their lapels. My grandmother is seated on the left, in an elegant white sari. My grandfather stands tall behind them—looming, as he sometimes did in real life—his elbow resting on a tall table. The studio is ornate, with curtains and archways and vases of flowers and sunlight coming through a window on the left side. I remember seeing this picture often when I was young. It was kept in a thick photo album, protected beneath a thin sheet of plastic. It seemed completely foreign to me then. I couldn't believe that the little girl was my mother, and I had a hard time identifying the four boys as my uncles. The photo is still foreign to me—it was taken in a world I will never know, during a set of historical circumstances that I will never fully understand, despite my best efforts. Yet, I also feel a strong intimacy with the image. I *know* these people, or at least I know who they became. I can see my mother in the face of the little girl; I can recognize my grandmother's body language in the way she sits in the chair; I can sense the mischief lurking behind Uncle Pami and Uncle Neelam's stoic facial expressions.

That this photo is simultaneously foreign but intimate, familiar yet strange is indicative, I think, of the ways I imagine what the lives of these people—my family—must have been like in Kenya in the 1940s and 50s and London in the decades after. The orderliness of the way the figures are arranged—here a marker of middle-class respectability and domesticity—is completely at odds with the boisterous Punjabiness of the family I know—the jokes that are retold over and over, the dancing and singing that are inevitable at any family gathering. So much is obscured in this photo. The violence of some the stories my mother and grandmother have told me—the bloody attack on the children next door by Mau Mau rebels; my grandfather's rage when the children

misbehaved; the everyday, mundane forms of racism that became more frequent as the South Asian community in London grew; other examples that I choose not to disclose here. So much remains outside the purview of the photograph. Like the references to D.K. Sharda in Aiyer's book, the photo conceals as much as it reveals.

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