The Diasporic Itinerary:

Literary and Cinematic Geographies of South Asian Diaspora

BY

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THESIS

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For my grandparents

Kamal Kishore Kapur and Krishna Kapur

who first taught me

the beauty of words and the joy of learning

and

For Vipul

who makes this beauty and joy possible every day
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SUMMARY

This dissertation argues that the opposition between Britain and the United States molds South Asian cultural expression and is central to its interpretation. Examining the work of a diverse group of South Asian diasporic filmmakers and authors, including Gurinder Chadha, Mira Nair, Ian Iqbal Rashid, Hanif Kureishi, V.S. Naipaul, Salman Rushdie, Jhumpa Lahiri, and Kiran Desai, I show how they portray Britain and the U.S. quite differently: America as a site of refuge and emancipation and by contrast, Britain as a place burdened with racism and colonialism. The spatial imagination and the directional logic of cultural narratives engendered by this contrast constitute what I call the “diasporic itinerary,” which inscribes a yearning for America as the ultimate destination and functions as a technology of Americanization in South Asian literature and film. The comparative framework of the “diasporic itinerary” goes beyond a simple juxtaposition of differences between South Asians in Britain and the U.S. and traces instead the specific intersections of the two racial systems, especially how American multiculturalism functions as a resolution to the history of British colonialism in diaspora narratives. While scholars of globalization suggest that the conceptual opposition between Britain and America has fallen apart since the late 1980s due to the decline of American hegemony, I argue that the opposition has manifested much more consistently and sharply in South Asian diasporic cultural texts since the 1989 fatwa against author Salman Rushdie.

Instead of thinking of South Asian diaspora as a space of unfettered mobility or as a set of random cultural flows, this project attends rigorously to the differences among specific national histories and racial geographies. Denaturalizing the dominant spatial concepts of diaspora theory such as placelessness or transcendence of national borders, The Diasporic Itinerary dispels the
binaries between homeland and hostland, displacement and place, and reveals that empires are unevenly mapped on to the nation. The opposition between Britain and the U.S. reconfigures the diaspora by challenging the idea of an amorphous unity based on race and foregrounding other modes of subordination of class, nationality, religion, and gender as integral to South Asian cultural production. The anxieties precipitated by these hierarchies are often represented as divisions between South Asian men, divisions that are then assuaged by the objectification of South Asian women’s bodies as the space of home.
1. INTRODUCTION

In his memoir *Congressman from India* (1960), the first South Asian elected to the United States House of Representatives, Dalip Singh Saund, recounts his travels to London and his visit there to the graves of Lord Nelson and Duke Wellington, chief architects of the British empire. The grandeur of the monuments to commemorate these men’s imperial ambitions inspires intense feelings in Saund. He writes, “While I could respect these men for themselves, their achievements in building the Empire did not have much appeal for me. I was not interested in empire builders. Abraham Lincoln’s statue, however, evoked in me quite a different response” (34). Saund, an immigrant from India, had first-hand experience of British colonialism. But as an American citizen, who became a congressman in spite of being a racial minority, he believed in America’s democratic ideals. The stark contrast he draws between Britain and the U.S. relies on a temporal disjunction that enables him to call on an earlier history of slave emancipation but that allows him to elide racism and racial segregation in America at the time of his writing. Surprising as this opposition may seem, both in light of America’s imperial ambitions and the fact that Britain had abolished slavery much before the U.S. did, it functions for Saund as a way of Americanizing himself, and I argue in *The Diasporic Itinerary*, functions in South Asian literature more generally as a technology of Americanization.

Such is the resiliency of the opposition between Britain and the U.S. that even when South Asian authors establish a similarity between the racism experienced by diasporic subjects in these two nations, it gets registered as a point of contrast. An example of this can be seen in Sam Selvon’s *The Lonely Londoners* (1956). Writing within the same post-World War II time frame as Dalip Singh Saund, Selvon chronicles the lives of South Asian Trinidadians in the
postcolonial metropolis, and draws a contrast between Britain and the U.S. quite differently compared to the passage from Saund, but to similar effect:

The thing is, in America, they don’t like you, and they tell you so straight, so that you know how you stand. Over here is the old English diplomacy. In America you see a sign telling you to keep off, but over here you don’t see any, but when you go in the hotel or the restaurant, they will politely tell you to haul—or else give you the cold treatment (40).

Selvon’s passage presents a distorted image of the point made by Saund. Whereas Saund’s admiration for America is non-ironic (the literary form of the diasporic memoir repeatedly shows itself as having less capacity for irony compared to diasporic fiction), Selvon’s articulation seems capacious enough to register a double vision: a scathing critique of American racism and the contradictory belief that American racism is distinctive and “better” as compared to the British version.¹ The “double vision,” in the words of Paul Giles, of “simultaneously constructing and deconstructing an image of America as the promised land” (10), the primary characteristic of modernist American literature, also pervades minority diasporic literature as seen not only in Selvon’s passage but also in other significant works of Asian American literature such as Carlos Bulosan’s America is in the Heart (1943). The narrative strategy followed by these literary texts cushions a critique of American imperialism and racial system in the familiar rhetoric of nationalist exceptionalism. For instance, Bulosan inevitably exposes the contradictions of Asian American citizenship when he resolves the narration of his racial exclusion and struggle to make a living by staking a claim to the nation’s promise, declaring that America—deterritorialized, not “merely a land or an institution” or a place “bound by geographical latitudes”—is in the heart even if its promise cannot be realized in material and territorial terms (189).
While American literature and literary criticism, at least through the 1970s, have been acutely aware that the oppositional stance toward Europe, especially Britain, has engendered and propelled the rhetoric of American exceptionalism, diaspora literature, on the other hand, has narrated the fiction of American exceptionalism, even if somewhat contradictorily, primarily through the homeland/hostland binary. My contention in this dissertation, however, is that the opposition between Britain and America molds South Asian diasporic cultural expression and is central to its interpretation. South Asian literature and film portray Britain and the U.S. quite differently: America as a site of refuge and emancipation for South Asians and by contrast, Britain as a place burdened with racism and colonialism. In other words, it is the opposition between Britain and the U.S. that inscribes a yearning for America as the ultimate destination of the South Asian diasporic journey. The spatial specificity and the directional logic of cultural narratives, which drive South Asian imaginings and longings toward America, producing and reinforcing a positioning of Britain and the U.S. not as equivalent nations in the diaspora or as indistinguishable points in the monolithic “West” but as distinctly hierarchical, constitute what I am calling a diasporic itinerary. To be clear, this hierarchy between Britain and the U.S. is not necessarily as much about America’s dominance but more about the absence and limits of critique of American neoimperialism and exceptionalism in diasporic literature. That is, what are the thematic and narrative considerations that enable a critique of British colonialism but make impossible, or render rather difficult, a similar critique of American imperialism and its neo-incarnations?

My thinking on the spatial and directional logics of the diasporic itinerary emerged from the work of two theorists who have pointed to the continued relevance of the nation-state through colonial and postcolonial periods. Benedict Anderson notes that the salience of the nation during
the historical period of the emergence of empires dictated the possible circuits of mobility for the
colonized and colonizer. In the context of the nineteenth-century Spanish empire, he writes, “[i]f
peninsular officials could travel the road from Zaragoza to Cartagena, Madrid, Lima, and again
Madrid, the ‘Mexican’ or ‘Chilean’ creole typically served only in the territories of colonial
Mexico or Chile: *his lateral movement was as cramped as his vertical ascent*” (57; emphasis
mine). Anderson’s idea of the “cramped pilgrimage” illustrates the coincidence of the racial,
gender, and nationalist ideologies that circumscribed colonized subjects such that they were
allowed to travel to the colonial metropolis to be trained in civil service, but had to return to the
colony in order to serve. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak extends the colonial idea of directional
mobility to the postcolonial era of diasporas. In a collection of interviews titled *The Postcolonial
Critic*, she relates the following account of her travels between Britain, Canada, and the U.S.:

> It’s that Canada is more likely to be, for the Indian person from Britain or India, a
place where he or she might want to become an illegal alien. Whereas the Indian
person who resides in the United States is not going to want to become an illegal alien
in Canada. The same passport—namely, the Indian passport—requires a visa to enter
Canada if that person is coming from Britain, whereas it doesn’t if that person is
coming from the United States. It’s the same person, the same passport, but the visa
regulations are different (79-80).

Even though the visa regulations have significantly changed since the time of Spivak’s
interview, and not for reasons of immigration fairness, it does not change her underlying claim
that only specific itineraries are possible for racialized subjects while others are denied. Far from
signifying unfettered mobility, the diaspora reconfigured through the diasporic itinerary outlines
the “cramped” horizontal journeys, the combined result of specific intersections of racial systems
of Britain and the U.S., gender implications, and the uneven relations between spatial imaginaries and geographical materiality of places.

While I have used the literature of the 1950s here to establish the definitions and parameters of the diasporic itinerary, the bulk of the analysis in the dissertation focuses on South Asian literary and cinematic texts from the end of 1980s to the first decade of the twenty-first century, a time period in which, I suggest, the contrast between Britain and the U.S. has manifested much more consistently and sharply. Representations of the opposition between Britain and the U.S. in South Asian diasporic post-war literature seem rather predictable as they overlap with a similar contrast at the core of mainstream American exceptionalism of the time period. But in the 1980s when, according to scholars of globalization, the conceptual opposition between Britain and the U.S. began to fall apart in the political-economic sphere as well as in literary representations, I argue that we see an intensification, rather than a dismantling, of this opposition in South Asian diasporic cultural texts. That is, the contrast persists as a structuring principle of South Asian diaspora narratives even when it appears rather anomalous in light of the strengthening of the “special relationship” between Britain and the U.S., first under the guise of transatlantic consolidation of conservatism under Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher and then in the “global war on terror.” Analyzing the transforming relationship between America and a globalizing world, scholars such as Linda Basch and Paul Giles have marked the 1980s as the time of decline of American hegemony more generally and the irrelevance of nationalist exceptionalism more specifically. But the narrative of U.S. exceptionalism, generated through a contrast with British colonialism, is alive and resilient in the works of South Asian diasporic writers and filmmakers, especially from the 1980s onwards.
The event that had the most influence in cementing this idea of America as the ultimate destination of the South Asian diasporic journey was the 1989 fatwa against the author Salman Rushdie. The Iranian ayatollah issued the fatwa against Rushdie on February 14, 1989, because his novel *The Satanic Verses* imagined a narrative of Islam that questioned the rigidity of religious beliefs by juxtaposing them against the hybridity and multiplicity of immigrant narratives in multicultural Britain. Rushdie fled Britain and sought refuge in his friends’ basements in the U.S. While this encounter did not involve the state as an actor as such and Rushdie did not seek political asylum, the actions of individuals enabled the U.S. to support and encourage narratives that reinforced ideas of the U.S. as an exceptional place for South Asians. I discuss Rushdie’s post-fatwa writing in Chapter 5 to demonstrate that while for an earlier generation of South Asians and South Asian writers like V.S. Naipaul, Britain was the place of opportunity, the authors from the succeeding generations have often turned toward the U.S. Rushdie, for instance, sought refuge in America, defining himself against not only the history of British colonialism but also against the book-burning British South Asians, who were also mostly working-class. As I point out in the chapter, it is interesting that Naipaul received scathing criticism for his fascination with Britain whereas writers like Rushdie and Jhumpa Lahiri who have claimed unequivocal belonging in America in spite of the injustices of U.S. imperialism have not drawn similar wrath from critics, thereby revealing the extent to which South Asian diasporic itinerary from Britain to the U.S. has been naturalized.

The Rushdie affair nevertheless established South Asian literature at the epicenter of the radical shifts in global geopolitics especially as these pertained to the relation between Britain and the U.S. The fatwa unraveled the already fragile solidarities that constituted the “Black British” political identity, splintering off British Asians from African-Caribbeans, leading to a
racial system that, I suggest in Chapter 2, more closely resembles the black-white binary of the racial stratification in the U.S. that situates South Asians at the margins. The fatwa established religion and class as new lines of contention and division in the diaspora in addition to racial difference. Whereas there was a rapid increase in South Asian immigration to the U.S. after 1965, the incoming professional class had remained culturally invisible and politically marginalized, incorporated in the economic sphere but excluded from all others. But the fatwa and the Bradford book burnings inaugurated a very different image of diasporic South Asians in the American racial imaginary and the global public sphere – that of riotous fundamentalist mobs. This image assumed its full representative force after the events of 9/11, events that, Rushdie has argued, his fatwa was an early harbinger of. The narrative of America as a space of refuge and emancipation for South Asians that had taken hold after the fatwa, however, could not be dislodged after 9/11 notwithstanding the increasing racial violence, surveillance, and discriminatory actions against South Asians, even as this narrative became increasingly fraught with contradictions. For instance, Mohsin Hamid’s 2007 novel The Reluctant Fundamentalist is, in the words of the author, “a swan song to America” in spite of its fervent critique of U.S. neoliberal imperialism. The story of the diasporic itinerary straddles the transition in global geopolitics from fatwa to jihad, and the trajectory of South Asians in the American imaginary from the invisible “model minority” to hypervisible “potential terrorists.”

The class backgrounds of immigrants to Britain and America not only play a role in the shifting articulations of “model minority” and “potential terrorists” within national frameworks but also define the ways in which histories of empire are rendered il/legible. Britain drew mostly working-class immigrants from South Asia and its other colonies to compensate for the labor shortages after World War II. South Asians in Britain belonged, at least through the end of
1980s, to that “peculiarly British” racial formation called “Black British” (Alexander 557). As I elaborate in Chapter 2, the “black British” racialization and its solidarities were facilitated by a spatial disjunction that defined the British empire: a territorial separation between the nation and its colonies that ensured that the “race problem” arrived at British shores only in the postcolonial era and which meant that there was no pre-existent black-white binary that would have relegated South Asians in a different category. In contrast to the working-class immigration to Britain, the 1965 National Origins Act that abolished nation-based quotas for immigration to the U.S. encouraged immigration by technically-qualified professionals, mostly from the Indian middle-class that was by this time profoundly disillusioned by the lost promise of postcolonial modernity. These South Asians, ambiguously and contentiously categorized as Asian Americans, were racialized as the “model minority.” The “model minority” paradigm, while it drew on America’s racist and imperial histories, necessarily legitimized a narrative of multicultural inclusion that disavowed these histories. According to Paul Giles, the exceptionalist strain in American discourse and literature can be attributed to a de-historicization that is the specific result of the deterritorializing impulse in national cultural narratives. The geographical paradigms of placelessness and the ever-expanding frontier occlude the history of America’s imperial encounters, including the ones in Asia. Considering the spatial concepts and metaphors at the core of narratives of the diasporic itinerary dispels the binary between displacement and place posited in diaspora theory and also reveals that empires are, after all, unevenly mapped on to the nation. That is, the difficulty of critiquing American empire in South Asian diasporic narratives can seem surprising given that “race” is perceived as constitutive of the American national fabric in a way that is not seen in Britain, where the national narrative emphasizes that
its racism occurred elsewhere, in the colonies. Therefore, the opposition between Britain and the U.S. that The Diasporic Itinerary interrogates is neither intuitive nor straightforward.

My critical method involves analyzing the spatial oppositions and temporal elisions through a comparative discussion of Britain and the U.S. so as to illuminate how the narrative of American exceptionalism is sustained in South Asian literature and film. The spatial separation between nation-based disciplines of “American Studies” and “British Studies,” and a temporal separation between racist pasts and nationalist presents indeed serve to obscure the transnational foundations of American exceptionalism. The cultural analysis of diaspora, then, becomes the disciplinary space in which we can foreground the relation between metaphors and representations of physical space in order to understand the ideologies and power relations that, spatial theorists from Doreen Massey to Henri Lefebvre have emphasized, constitute such metaphorization. The dominant metaphors that have governed diaspora analysis such as roots, routes, rhizome, and homelessness are not “natural” paradigms of spatial representation; as Lefebvre reminds us, “they become figures of speech” (139; emphasis mine). The narrative devices that inform this process of becoming and constructing, then, are the central concerns of my project.

The Diasporic Itinerary goes beyond a simple juxtaposition of the differences between South Asians in Britain and America. Exploring how the “black British” and “model minority” racial formations are increasingly defined in relation to each other, my argument intends not only to reveal the malleability of race across space and time but also, more importantly, to demonstrate the transnational explanatory power of race. Instead of thinking of South Asian diaspora as a set of random cultural flows—a confluence of multiple border crossings—the concept of “diasporic itinerary” emphasizes the importance of analyzing cultural production in a
comparative, transnational framework that attends rigorously to the differences among specific national histories and racial geographies. The comparative framework of the diasporic itinerary aims to steer away from the “add places and stir” model of diaspora to one that accounts for not only the significance of symbolically charged sites along the spatial scale—home, neighborhood, region, nation—but also the directional spatial aesthetic in representations of the diasporic journey from Britain to America. My argument, therefore, rejects the impulse to categorize authors and filmmakers whose texts encompass multiple diasporic places (and their numbers are ever increasing) such as Salman Rushdie, Mohsin Hamid, Gurinder Chadha and Mira Nair, as inhabiting a state of rootlessness, homelessness or exile and reckons instead with specific directions of their spatial imaginations. It must be emphasized that the proposition of a comparison between Britain and the U.S. does not preclude other productive comparisons and other diasporic itineraries. For instance, analysis of South Asian diasporic music might prompt an examination of the itinerary between the Caribbean and Britain or the itinerary between Africa and the U.S. could raise questions of Afro-Asian relations in the diaspora. But I imagine such other itineraries intersecting with the one between Britain and the U.S. that I have proposed here.

To note the spatial specificity and the directional nature of cultural narratives is to go against the grain of concepts such as hybridity, third-space, or in-betweenness as dominant modes of interpreting cultural production and creative expression in the diaspora. The abstraction of hybridity and third-space is interlinked with theorizations of diaspora as a placeless entity or one that transcends national borders. The challenges such theorizations have posed to essentialism and cultural nationalism have not prevented their appropriation by discourses of essentialist identity formation. These theorizations suggest an amorphous diasporic
unity based on race as the primary marker of difference, erasing all other modes of subordination of class, nationality, gender, and religion internal to the diaspora. By bringing within the same framework material geographies as well as the imaginaries that constitute the trajectories between them, this dissertation grapples with Arif Dirlik’s contention that “[t]o raise the question of places is to raise the issue of difference on a whole range of fronts, including those of class, gender, and ethnicity” (119). Indeed, this analysis territorializes diaspora in order to historicize the relationship between the nation-states of Britain and the U.S. that is central to the formation of South Asian diaspora and its literary production.

However, the concept of “diasporic itinerary” is an effort not to localize the diaspora but to recuperate what Brent Hayes Edwards refers to as the “anti-abstractionist uses of diaspora” (12). According to Edwards, to use the term “diaspora” implies “neither that it offers the comfort of abstraction, an easy recourse to origins, nor that it provides a foolproof anti-essentialism: instead it forces us to articulate discourses of cultural and political linkage only through and across difference…” (13). The diasporic itinerary becomes a methodology to understand Edwards’s conception of diaspora as décalage or “twoness of the joint”: diaspora as “both point of separation and point of linkage” (14-15). That is, employing the framework of the diasporic itinerary, we can see that what is interpreted in literary analysis as a racially cohesive diaspora is a historical formation cast through opposition, difference, and contrast between Britain and the U.S. My claim about the opposition between Britain and the U.S. as a structuring principle for understanding South Asian diaspora and its cultural production should not be understood as a reconceptualization of Gilroy’s Black Atlantic with a different color. Whereas Gilroy interprets the Black Atlantic as a single cohesive unit, the Brown Atlantic itinerary traced here suggests a
bi-polar system with discourses of nationalist exceptionalism traveling in one direction and those of colonial history in the other.

A reinscription of global geopolitics, defined by the framework of opposition between Britain and the U.S. reveals the internal divisions within the South Asian diaspora, notably those of gender and sexuality. In the period from the late twentieth into the early twenty-first century, the ostensible crisis and burden of racialized immigration that was shouldered by South Asian women in the form of mainstream conversations about women’s oppression and arranged marriages has shifted to South Asian men. The opposition between Britain and the U.S. is manifested as the anxieties precipitated by hierarchies of class, religion, and nationality, represented as divisions between South Asian men, which are then assuaged by the objectification of South Asian women’s bodies as the space of home. For example, as a wealthy, Indian Hindu man, Kohli in *Bride and Prejudice*, is shown to be racialized as model minority and incorporated in circuits of American capitalism whereas figures such as the Sikh Mr. Bhamra in *Bend It Like Beckham* and the working-class Muslim narrator of *Greetings from Bury Park* foreground their exclusion from American model minority parameters and their positioning in the margins of British multiculturalism. The exclusion of Muslims and Sikhs from the American body politic, however, does not prevent these texts from expressing a continued desire and longing for America, whether in the form of Mr. Bhamra’s understanding of the U.S. as a liberatory space for his daughter or in the form of South Asian Muslims’ fandom of American pop culture icons in *The Black Album*, *Greetings*, and *Touch of Pink*.

Contrary to earlier gender paradigms that conceptualized diaspora as structured by masculinist mobility, *The Diasporic Itinerary* points to an emerging representation of South Asian women as cosmopolitan travelers and “cultural ambassadors” who belong effortlessly in
multiple diasporic places because they have intimate knowledge of all cultures and not just of
“native” ones. Lalita in *Bride and Prejudice* translates India’s customs for Darcy, the American
capitalist; Vina in *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* wears a “single black glove of black American
geradicals., (she) had painted the Om symbol in scarlet on her right cheek and wore an English
dress from a boutique called The Witch Flies High…” (Rushdie 223-224); and the three
apartment women in *The Inheritance of Loss* are shown to be “uniquely positioned to lecture
everyone on a variety of topics: …Vermonters on the fall foliage, Indians on America,
Americans on India, Indians on India, Americans on America” (Desai 56). These representations
of women indicate that narratives of liberation in the diaspora do not necessarily engender
critiques of nationalistic or imperialistic formations, thereby reinforcing the idea that feminism
remains a critical terrain of ideological struggle but also making us question what it means to do
feminist analysis in the diaspora. The euphoria about diaspora that we saw at the beginning of
the twenty-first century in feminist and queer theory scholarship—Gayatri Gopinath’s *Impossible
Desires* is a prominent example that articulated diaspora as a promising space for queer
communities because of its anti-nationalist impulses—is now tempered with a postcolonial
melancholia, the result of a renewed attention to the imperializing impulses of U.S.-centered
academic discourse. For instance, in an editorial of a special issue of the *Feminist Review* on
gendering diaspora, Tina Campt and Deborah Thomas suggest that exuberant conceptualizations
of diasporic, queer, and other marginalized communities—such as Muslims—as theoretically
proximate on account of their ex-centricity to the nation is the result of the “dominance of U.S.-
based cultural and intellectual discourses on diasporic relations…that stress community
solidarity at the expense of analytic attention to key differences within and among populations”
(3). The editors encourage analyses of gender and sexuality that “expose the limits of diaspora”
by resisting the colonizing tendencies of American Studies, which have been only too easily replicated in diaspora studies (3). Diaspora Studies, therefore, emerges as a valuable site for bringing the fields of American Studies and Postcolonial Studies into a productive dialogue. The theoretical framework of diasporic itinerary goes beyond the idea of challenging the post- in postcoloniality and reveals the ways in which American multiculturalism in South Asian diasporic literature and culture functions as a resolution to the history of British colonialism, a relationship that is not captured by scholarship that focuses on studying America as a postcolonial society.

While the theoretical framework of empire and postcolonialism is more easily available for our understandings of Britain, America remains resistant to being read through the analytical lens of empire even though its racial relations are based on its imperial tendencies. As I suggest in Chapter 2, the legibility of the British national narrative in the framework of empire enabled a distinct “black British” racial category, which functioned more as a political coalition organized around the common experience of colonialism in the Caribbean, Africa, and South Asia. In contrast, the black/white binary constitutive of the American national fabric excludes and marginalizes South Asians, and also obscures American imperial history. Post/colonial Afro-Asian relations, therefore, are central to the textures of multiculturalism and diaspora in Britain and the U.S. But at the beginning of the 1990s, interracial relations were in a state of flux due to the disintegration of the “black British” category and the increasing tension between racialization of Asian Americans as model minority and the racial rhetoric that categorized them as “forever foreigners.”

In Chapter 2, I compare British and American multiculturalisms in two films by South Asian women directors, Gurinder Chadha’s *Bhaji on the Beach* (1993) and Mira Nair’s
Mississippi Masala (1991), that capture the changing articulations of Afro-Asian relations in the 1990s through the trope of romance. Paying homage to the Bollywood aesthetic, these films frame Afro-Asian romances in geographies of South Asian diasporic working-class consumption and labor. I suggest that the portrayal of the carnivalesque Blackpool beach is integral to the grim resolution of Afro-Asian romance in Chadha’s film, whereas the “American motel” in Mississippi Masala lends itself to a celebratory reading of interracial romance. These distinct resolutions are literally and figuratively inscribed on South Asian women’s bodies, and are predicated on the erasure of black women’s bodies. In Bhaji, Hashida’s body pregnant with a “black” child and her romantic relationship with the Afro-Caribbean immigrant Oliver represent the limit of British multiculturalism and of the Indian community’s ostensibly progressive feminist politics which, I suggest, is enacted within the framework of an American rhetoric of liberty. Whereas the Indian-owned motel is the site of conflict between South Asian model minority aspirations and African American exclusion from the capitalist economy, Mina’s hypersexualized body and her mother Kinnu’s body, reified as “home,” function as sites of resolution to the violence of British colonialism and racial exclusions of U.S. multiculturalism.

By mid-1990s, the forces of globalization and economic liberalization led to a shift in the politics of representation in Bollywood and diasporic cinemas such that working-class narratives received scant attention while portrayals of opulence ensured box-office success. This shift was also accompanied by a move away from Afro-Asian romances to an exploration of South Asian-white romantic relations. It is in this context that we see Gurinder Chadha’s films shift to depictions of wealthier segments of the diaspora. In Chapter 3, I consider the diasporic itinerary in Chadha’s later films Bend It Like Beckham (2002) and Bride and Prejudice (2004) to suggest that the model-minority racialization of South Asians in America is based on a diasporic
romanticization of their status as erstwhile British subjects. That is, the model minority racialization in these films is constructed not only within U.S. racial paradigms but also within a diasporic framework through a contrast with British colonialism and racism. This dynamic is manifested spatially in the diegesis of these films. For instance, the wealthy Indian Hindu accountant Mr. Kohli’s residence in the Valley becomes a symbol of his reluctant incorporation as “model minority” within the multicultural milieu of *Bride and Prejudice*. I contrast Kohli’s racial status with that of the turbaned Sikh Mr. Bhamra in *Bend It Like Beckham* who is intertextually excluded from a model minority racialization. While these films represent South Asian men as lacking cultural capital whether or not they are included as “model minorities,” the women, irrespective of their religion and class, are cast as assured cultural ambassadors who can belong effortlessly in multiple diasporic places. As cultural translators between different sites in the diaspora, South Asian women are portrayed as particularly amenable to the technologies of Americanization, such as the use of cosmopolitan knowledge of various places in the diaspora for expansionist and imperialist ends.

Whereas Chapter 3 points out that the perception of South Asians as “potential terrorists” lurks behind the façade of model minority reconfigurations, Chapter 4 focuses on how South Asians have responded creatively to mainstream discussions linking Muslim masculinity and Islamic fundamentalism by adopting the form of fan fiction or memoir and fan films. The fan narratives I analyze in this chapter—Hanif Kureishi’s Prince fan novel *The Black Album* (1995), which addresses the aftermath of the fatwa against Salman Rushdie, and Sarfraz Manzoor’s Springsteen fan memoir *Greetings from Bury Park* (2007), written in response to 9/11 and the 7/7 London bombings—chronicle the formation of South Asian masculinity by rejecting the dominant race- and Islam-based conceptions of diaspora. Instead, they chart an alternative
diasporic itinerary in which American popular culture fandom becomes a way for South Asian masculinities to seek incorporation in a multicultural Britain. The protagonists’ reverence for American pop icons raises possibilities of political consciousness but also reinstates hierarchies of religion, nationality, class, and gender, hierarchies that diffuse anxieties regarding fundamentalism and reinforce the texts’ bildungsroman form. I compare Kureishi’s and Manzoor’s texts to Ian Iqbal Rashid’s Cary Grant fan film *Touch of Pink* (2005), which adopts an irreverent stance toward the Hollywood icon and critiques the Orientalism of American pop culture, and is therefore unable to sustain a developmental narrative, thereby revealing the diaspora as a precarious state for a South Asian Muslim gay man. This analysis also interrogates the limits of cultural politics by showing how popular culture can be used in literature to contain political conflicts. After all, using fandom to diffuse anxieties about Islam renders fundamentalism a problem of cultural integration, nothing that fandom cannot resolve.

The choice of the American popular music icons in *The Black Album* and *Greetings from Bury Park* reflects both the spatial aesthetic of these texts and the literary forms by which these music stars are incorporated into the narrative. Prince, for instance, is included in Kureishi’s novel mostly intertextually and is used to manage the religious and racial strife that pervade the South Asian urban diasporic streetscape, whereas the lyrics of Bruce Springsteen are indispensable to Manzoor’s portrayal of the contrasts between Britain and the U.S. and to the connections between deindustrialized landscapes of the working-classes in Luton and the American rural heartland. The rural/urban divide of the South Asian diasporic itinerary is further explored in Chapter 5 in the work of V.S. Naipaul and Salman Rushdie. Challenging these authors’ identification with the diasporic state of homelessness and exile, this chapter reckons with the spatial imaginations of their work.
Reading Naipaul and Rushdie in the same framework of the diasporic itinerary is significant for my suggestion that 1989 marked a turning point in the cultural imagination of the opposition between Britain and the U.S. I explore the relationship between British colonialism and American neoimperialism that Naipaul posits by weaving the Trinidadian landscape of his beginnings with the landscape of the rural American South in *A Turn in the South* (1989) and with the British countryside in *The Enigma of Arrival* (1987). Employing a form that combines travel writing with autobiography, *A Turn in the South* offers a postcolonial critique of the American South, connecting it to the legacies of post-plantation Caribbean and post-slavery United States. Even though there are instances when he offers a simplistic reading of America as a space of possibility for African Americans, as a South Asian diasporic writer, he finds himself an outsider in the black/white binary of the South in spite of the proximity that, he argues, exists between the postcolonial Caribbean and the post-slavery South. As a writer of the pre-fatwa generation, I argue, Naipaul finds his territorial home in the British countryside, where the landscape’s ruins evoke grandeur and allow Naipaul to imagine a kinship and intimacy with the white colonizer. Therefore Naipaul’s imagination of kinship with the colonizer in the postcolonial pastoral of *The Enigma of Arrival* is not about staking a claim on the beauty of the land as a racialized postcolonial subject but about dismantling the very idea of “natural beauty” by revealing the colonial injustice that produced this grandeur of the countryside in the first place. This chapter contrasts Naipaul’s portrayals of the rural with Rushdie’s urban spatial aesthetic in his post-fatwa novel *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* (1999) which distills within its narrative scope the Bombay-London-New York itinerary. The novel celebrates New York as an exceptional place for South Asians by taking an ahistorical view of race and racism in America, which emerges from the novel’s positing of tense divisions between the city and the imperatives
of the nation. Since both Naipaul and Rushdie are predominantly studied as postcolonial Anglophone authors, this chapter’s delineation of the diasporic itinerary in their work compels us to examine the stakes of their work for American Studies.

Chapter 6 presents a limit case for my argument in this dissertation by comparing representations of home and homelessness in the work of two prominent South Asian women authors, Jhumpa Lahiri and Kiran Desai. Expanding on the contradiction between the deterritorializing impulse of the diaspora and the territorializing impulse of home that I explored in Chapter 5, this chapter interrogates the extent to which the geographical site of the suburban home underpins both the naturalization of the South Asian diasporic itinerary as well as the dominance of the metaphor of homelessness to describe the diasporic condition. I analyze the cultural work performed by the contrast between Britain and the United States in Jhumpa Lahiri’s short story “The Third and Final Continent” from her Pulitzer Prize-winning collection Interpreter of Maladies (1999) in producing a narrative of racial incorporation, gender mobility and the invisibility of class differences. Both the “The Third and Final Continent” and Lahiri’s novel The Namesake (2003) portray the United States as the ultimate destination for South Asians by refracting the diasporic journey through the geography of the suburban home. In contrast, Desai, by literalizing the metaphor of homelessness in her novel The Inheritance of Loss (2006), portrays a continuity between British colonialism and American neoimperialism, making visible the racial and capitalist violence that structures the diaspora. Specifically, I analyze the protagonist Biju’s homelessness and spatial confinement in subterranean New York which, I suggest, reveal that American multiculturalism is built upon the histories of colonial racial difference.
In the Afterword to this dissertation, I present a reading of Kamila Shamsie’s novel *Burnt Shadows* (2009) and Mohsin Hamid’s novel *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007) to outline the stakes of this project: the critical value of South Asian spatial diasporic itinerary as an analytical tool to interpret narratives that span multiple spaces and not just the homeland-hostland binary. Grappling with post-9/11 global geopolitics, these texts critique American neoisperialism and neoliberalism, but they continue to portray America as a place of refuge, and therefore do not significantly alter the underlying dynamic of American exceptionalism as outlined by the concept of “diasporic itinerary.” The spatial imagination of Shamsie’s novel, I suggest, casts the events of 9/11 as a culmination of America’s imperial actions in global geopolitics starting from World War II and the bombing of Nagasaki through the Cold War. But *Burnt Shadows* mostly eschews the dynamics of South Asians as “model minority” and “potential terrorists” within the U.S. national sphere, a relation that is more productively explored in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. I read Hamid’s novel using Edouard Glissant’s theory of diversion to understand the novel’s delineation of the relation between “model minority” racial category and the U.S. state’s label of “terrorist.” Glissant’s theory of “diversion” states that when power relations are invisible in a particular context, a detour to another site becomes necessary to challenge the forces of domination. Because American racial and imperial domination remain invisible to Hamid’s protagonist Changez within U.S. borders on account of his racialization as model minority, the novel undertakes a transnational itinerary through Manila and Valparaiso to Lahore to make forces of American empire visible. I suggest that it is this political consciousness of American empire and critique of the spatial logic of global neoimperialism that the U.S. state seeks to contain by labeling Changez a “terrorist.” Therefore, South Asian diasporic novels such
as Hamid’s and Shamsie’s use seemingly new post-9/11 geopolitics as an entry point to chart connections between geographies created by British and American empires.
Notes

1 The “double vision” of Selvon’s passage is evident in numerous other texts discussed in this dissertation. For instance, we can see a further clarification of the point Selvon is trying to make in the following sentence from Sarfraz Manzoor’s memoir *Greetings from Bury Park*: “It wasn’t that I was unaware the United States had its own race problems but even those seemed glamorous” (130).

2 The concept of “cramped privilege” is theoretically proximate to Houston Baker’s concept of “tight places” that marks black men’s geographical, ideological and social circumscription. This proximity establishes a productive dialogue between American race studies on the one hand, and postcolonial and diaspora studies on the other by locating the spatial paradigm as central to discourses of racialized mobility and displacement, which are seen as removed from or even antithetical to considerations of place.

3 Other texts that have defined globalization as the demise of the nation-state and decreasing relevance of the national borders include Arjun Appadurai’s *Modernity at Large*, Michael Hardt’s and Antonio Negri’s *Empire* and Masao Miyoshi’s essay “A Borderless World?”

4 For an exhaustive account of the conditions surrounding the immigration of South Asians to the U.S. after 1965 and its economic, cultural, and political implications for the Asian immigrant community, American state and other minorities, see Vijay Prashad’s *The Karma of Brown Folk*.

5 See especially Henri Lefebvre’s *The Production of Space* and Doreen Massey’s *Space, Place, and Gender*.

6 Examples of texts that simply juxtapose the differences between South Asians in Britain and America include Sandhya Shukla’s *India Abroad* and anthologies such as *The South Asian Religious Diaspora in Britain, Canada, and the United States*, edited by Raymond Brady Williams et al.

7 While analyses emphasizing these concepts are particularly widespread in literary and cultural criticism in Postcolonial Studies and Diaspora Studies, some notable scholars whose work exemplifies the hybridity, third-space approach include Homi Bhabha, John Hutnyk (especially his co-authored book *Diaspora and Hybridity*), and Pnina Werbner. For important critiques and redefinitions of the concept of hybridity, see Robert Young’s *Colonial Desire* and Arif Dirlik’s essay “Bringing History Back In.”
2. “THIS IS AMERICA, MA. NO ONE CARES”: AFRO-ASIAN RELATIONSHIPS IN

MISSISSIPPI MASALA AND BHAJI ON THE BEACH

There is always a look of genuine surprise on my students’ faces when I tell them that in the 1980s, South Asians were racialized as “black” in Britain, while in the U.S. they have been considered Asian Americans, a category to which their relationship has been contentious even as they have availed of the accompanying ideological baggage of the “model minority” paradigm.¹ The contrast between South Asians’ racial status in Britain and the United States not only challenges an essentialist conception of race by pointing to the malleability of race across space and time but also prompts us to think about the role this difference plays in the South Asians’ consideration of the U.S. as the ultimate destination of their diasporic journey. The inclusion of South Asians in the black British racial category through the 1970s and ’80s indicates that interethnic Afro-Asian relations remain central to the diasporic imagination that situates Britain in opposition to the United States. Comparative perspectives on interethnic encounters between blacks and South Asians in Britain and America can help us map the historical relation between slavery and colonialism and its various transformations in the postslavery, postcolonial period, which significantly influence the present day texture of multiculturalism in each nation.

In this chapter, I analyze representations of Afro-Asian romance in the diaspora through the contrast between British and American multiculturalisms in two films by South Asian women. Gurinder Chadha’s Bhaji on the Beach (1993) and Mira Nair’s Mississippi Masala (1991) both employ working-class narratives to frame Afro-Asian romances in geographical spaces that are charged with cultural symbolism within national imaginaries and implicated as transient places within diasporic discourses of mobility. The portrayal of the carnivalesque multicultural Blackpool beach is integral to the grim resolution of interethnic encounters in Chadha’s film,
whereas the “American motel” in *Mississippi Masala* lends itself to a celebratory reading of Afro-Asian romance. I also suggest that these distinct resolutions are literally and figuratively inscribed on South Asian women’s bodies while black women’s bodies are erased from the screen. In *Bhaji*, Hashida’s body pregnant with a “black” child and her romantic relationship with African-Caribbean immigrant Oliver represents the limit of British multiculturalism and of the South Asian community’s ostensibly progressive feminist politics which, I suggest, is enacted within the framework of American rhetoric of liberty. The Blackpool beach, a site of working class tourism and consumption that allows South Asian immigrants to claim inclusion in an iconic British landscape, is also a site where South Asian feminism is consolidated by excluding suggestions of miscegenation and interracial romance.

Like the tourist site of the beach, the motel is often considered as a place of transience in diasporic discourses that privilege mobility. Instead of defining the motel through ideas of diasporic mobility and identity, *Mississippi Masala* examines the Indian-owned motel in the American South as a geographical space where the South Asian diasporic imaginary intersects with the interethnic conflicts and racial exclusions of U.S. multiculturalism. Far from sites of urban racial strife, motels’ location in rural and suburban spaces might seem conducive to formation of “natural” community for South Asian immigrants, but diasporic Indians’ ownership of and labor in motels in the American South is not random or accidental. Nair situates the Indian-owned motels in the South in the longer history of South Asians’ positioning as traders and merchants in many racially-stratified societies, but this inclusion of South Asians in the American capitalist economy is predicated on the relative exclusion of African American characters like Demetrius. The spatial imaginary of the motel connotes both racialized working class lives as well as illicit sexual encounters, and whereas interethnic racial conflicts emerge in
the arena of economy and labor in *Mississippi Masala*, the film resolves them in the realm of the sexual. Specifically, Mina’s hyper-sexualized body and her mother Kinnu’s body reified as “home” function as sites of resolution of the violence of British colonialism in Africa and the racist and class conflicts between African Americans and Asian Americans.

The opposition between Britain and the U.S. in the context of Afro-Asian relations portrayed in these films is intriguing considering that both nations employed Asian labor, including indentured or other workers from the subcontinent, to sustain the plantation economies after the abolition of slavery and the loss of black slave labor. That is, in both British and American contexts, the migration of South Asian labor was used to manage the perceived economic and racial crises that emerged in the wake of abolition of slavery, even though Britain abolished slavery in 1833, decades before the U.S. did. The similarity in the mandated role of South Asian labor does not obscure the difference in the spatial logic through which South Asians were incorporated in Britain and America, which gave rise to the different tenors of multiculturalism and Afro-Asian relations in the two nations. While British empire transported South Asian labor to its various colonies in Africa and the Caribbean, which were seen as territorially separate from the British nation, America harnessed Asian labor within the domestic context, a process that drew on imperial racial ideologies even as it obscured them.

The framework of empire is, thus, prominently available in our understandings of Britain but race is considered to be a problem only in the distant colonies and not within the nation. In contrast, the black/white racial binary is considered as constitutive of the very fabric of America while the nation’s neoimperial tendencies, of which its racial and immigration patterns are a part, remain resistant to being read through the lens of “empire.” Comparing British and U.S. multiculturalisms, Christian Joppke writes: “In the United States, multiculturalism is only
indirectly related to the recent immigration waves of non-European origins. Instead, the direct origin of multiculturalism is America’s unresolved race problem” (454). According to Joppke, U.S. multiculturalism co-opts the black/white binary as a given part of the nation’s structure—consolidated as it is against Asian immigration since at least the nineteenth century, and therefore much more strongly related to immigration than Joppke accounts for—and does not pose much of a challenge to the “concept of nationhood” (455). This logic and structure of U.S. multiculturalism means that South Asians’ struggle for inclusion depends on disrupting the black/white binary and its academic equivalent of establishing the centrality of Asian immigration to the construction of the binary.

British multiculturalism, on the other hand, Joppke finds, “is more directly related to immigration, and it also appears as a more direct challenge to established notions of nationhood” (455). Therefore, even though the British empire had always been organized according to a racist logic, Britain saw itself as arriving belatedly at the race problem within the national borders as compared to America. This comparison was integral to the racial imagination of the British politician most known for his anti-immigrant vitriol, Enoch Powell. In his “rivers of blood” speech, a canonical text of the British race relations narrative, Powell says: “That tragic and intractable phenomenon [of immigration] which we watch with horror on the other side of the Atlantic but which there is interwoven with the history and existence of the States itself, is coming upon us by our own volition and our own neglect.” In this statement, we can see the important role of the transnational opposition between Britain and the U.S. even in a text whose central investment was to establish the primacy of white racial purity within the bounds of the nation. The absence of a pre-existing black/white binary, the common framework of British empire for African, African-Caribbean and South Asian immigration not only from the
subcontinent but also from Africa and the Caribbean, and the contemporaneity of these three groups’ immigration after World War II, provided the backdrop for the emergence of the peculiarly British racial formation of “black” that encompassed all these groups. The category of “black” represented political solidarity across different minority groups and produced a multiculturalism which, at least in theory, emphasized antiracism, as seen in the Greater London Council’s campaign chronicled in There Ain’t No Black in the Union Jack, whereas American multiculturalism mostly employs the vocabulary of “diversity” and becomes a numbers game in the institutional inclusion of minorities.

But by late 1980s, the political coalition represented by the term “black British” had begun to fray. For the purposes of my argument in this dissertation, it is significant to mark two aspects of the dissolution of “black British.” First, the fatwa against Salman Rushdie in 1989, which I demarcate in the Introduction as an important turning point in the emergence of the opposition between Britain and the U.S. in South Asian diasporic literature, also exacerbated the demise of the category “black British.” Introducing religion into the British public sphere as a distinct mode of identity, the Rushdie affair unraveled racial solidarities between African-Caribbean and Asian communities and accentuated class divides within the South Asian community. The recasting of South Asian citizenship in Britain in terms of culture and belonging (instead of political citizenship and structural attributes for African Caribbeans) exemplifies what Stuart Hall has called “ethnicizing of race,” which, according to Claire Alexander, offered “culture” as an explanation for class inequalities within South Asian community and created a gradient of “cultural outsiders” with Muslims situated at its outer edge (Alexander 564; Hall 224-225).

Second, the opposition between Britain and the U.S. that I examine in this project becomes even more interesting when we consider that the fracture of the category “black British,” while
engendering a “color vs. culture” debate specific to Britain, ultimately resulted in a racial system significantly closer to the American black/white binary with the South Asians designated as “forever foreigners” and inassimilable. Scholars like Tariq Modood vehemently opposed adopting the encompassing term “black” on the grounds that it implied an overwhelming focus on “color” as the basis of uniting and mobilising which did not capture the complete experience of racism against Asians that can be attributed to not only color but also cultural practices (66-67). But ironically, Alexander notes, the fraying of the category “black British”—the very category that Modood felt marginalized the British Asian experience—led to even greater invisibility and marginalization of South Asians (562-564). While the African Caribbean community in Britain was perceived in public and academic discourses as part of both the national politics and the “trans-Atlantic connection, which conflates African-Caribbean experience in Britain to African American experience,” the South Asian community came to be defined largely in terms of cultural outsiders in Britain, whereas their “cultural values” of family, education, and hard work read like a list that defines Asian Americans as model minority (Alexander 559, 563). The grim resolution of Afro-Asian romance in Bhaji on the Beach, to which I now turn, reflects precisely the changing articulations of the term “black” in the early 1990s as well as the new interracial fissures, transnational imaginings of America, and divisions within South Asian community that sprouted from the grave of “black British.”

2.1 Feminism and Empire at the Blackpool Beach

The central narrative premise of Chadha’s Bhaji on the Beach is a day excursion taken by a group of South Asian women to Blackpool to see the beach and the illuminations. The trip is organized by the coordinator of Saheli Asian Women’s Center, Simi, who is a community
organizer. The film consists of intertwined narratives of Pushpa, the grocery store owner and self-appointed moral custodian of the community; Bina, the retail sales-clerk; Asha, who runs a convenience store and suffers hallucinations, dizziness, and headaches; Hashida, the “good daughter” who was slated to go to medical school but is now pregnant by her black boyfriend Oliver; Ginder, victim of domestic abuse by her husband Ranjit and his family; Ladhu and Madhu, two teenage girls looking for attention from white guys; and Rekha, a wealthy socialite from India. The film defines its explicit feminist motifs, rendered through an emphasis on place, at the very outset. It begins with Asha’s hallucinatory sequence, in which she visualizes herself as a miniature-sized body lost amidst giant-sized objects of consumption that populate her corner-store—Cadbury’s chocolate bars to video cassettes of Bollywood movies. Moving through these objects that evoke memories of her homeland but also the racism and patriarchy that demand her labor in the confines of the store, she hears repeated echoes of the words “Duty! Honor! Sacrifice!” and an oversized idol of a Hindu god instructs her: “Know your place!”

The film’s feminist aesthetic imagines the Blackpool picnic as an escape from the exploitative and patriarchal confines of the diasporic homes and family-stores, spaces of the racialized community, into the British public sphere. This framework is set up by Simi’s words at the beginning of the picnic: “It is not often that we women get away from the patriarchal demands made on us in our daily lives struggling between the double yoke of racism and sexism that we bear…Have a female fun time.” Simi’s words seem straight out a feminism textbook, and while they provide an apt theorization of South Asian women’s lives, the women on the picnic are not academics and hence simply shrug their shoulders in incomprehension and puzzlement at these words. The rest of the film too seems to shrug its shoulders at the limits of this theorization, because far from an escape, the forces of racism and sexism not only dictate
and order South Asian women’s private sphere but also suffuse the British public sphere. Simi and Hashida are propositioned to at the rest area enroute to Blackpool and spat on and hurled with racial and sexual slurs when they refuse and resist.

Chadha uses the Blackpool beach and streetscape effectively to frame not only the racism and sexism the South Asian women experience from the dominant white as well as the South Asian community but also the women’s contestation against racial and sexual violence and their claim to English national identity. Commenting on the multivalent resonances of the carnivalesque Blackpool beach as the diegetic space in Bhaji on the Beach, Anne Ciecko finds that the “the destination of Blackpool is significant because it is both a tourist spot and a place where many working-class English take their holidays” (76). Chadha mines this connotation to emphasize the film as a South Asian diasporic working-class narrative and explore the tensions of race and empire in a place that evokes working-class consumption in an iconic British landscape. Ciecko finds that the carnivalesque aesthetic of Chadha’s Blackpool beach goes beyond the white working-class associations to signal subversion by racial communities. She writes that the carnivalesque in British cinema is associated with diasporic Afro-Caribbean culture and is the “link between street festivals, political activism, and race riots/uprisings in the national imaginary” (76). The spectacle of working class consumption in Bhaji on the Beach is saturated with Orientalist themes. The South Asian women, some of them in sarees or salwar-kameez, are eroticized and exoticized. For example, Paulie, who works at the beach’s burger joint in cowboy regalia, declares to Madhu that she is different because the color of her skin is “like the top of a sesame seed bun,” and Simi gets propositioned with the words “Fancy a curry tonight?” Chadha captures Blackpool’s fascination with the women and the stares they receive. But the women also, in turn, consume and participate in other pastimes and games that reflect the
specter of “empire at home,” such as the sheikh with the camel race games called the “Arabian Derby” or the python-clad Indian prince. As Jigna Desai points out, the film’s carnivalesque spirit “functioned to consolidate British identities for the white working class through tourism based on experiencing the exotic ‘other,’” and therefore participation in this Oriental gaze becomes an important way by which the South Asian women claim a British working-class national identity (152). The film represents the South Asian women’s claim to Blackpool’s iconic landscape by not only depicting their participation in white working-class tourism and its Oriental gaze, but also using a Punjabi soundtrack to accompany the visual of their racialized bodies. The lush images of the British countryside are filtered through the Punjabi words set to the tune of “Summer Holiday,” a song by the British pop icon Cliff Richard.

Blackpool, the space of tourist pleasure and consumption, also carries an ominous atmosphere of conflict, hatred, and violence, responses to women’s transgressive presence in spaces from which they are usually excluded. Even though the South Asian women collectively experience racism and patriarchal violence, they are not bound by essentialist “sisterhood.” Chadha represents the same space of Blackpool in varying aesthetic registers to reflect the conflicts that divide the group of South Asian women. Chadha renders Asha’s failed rescue by Ambrose, who represents British Orientalism, in the Bollywood aesthetic of romantic fantasy and the spatial aesthetic of the idyllic British countryside. Employing the urban spatial aesthetic of dark, seedy places, the film constructs the disruption of Asha’s romantic fantasy in binary opposition to Ginder’s rescue from patriarchal violence by “sons of liberty,” who symbolize the liberatory rhetoric of America. The conflict between these two women’s narratives is exacerbated by Asha’s inclination to blame Ginder for her failed marriage. Although I suggest that Bhaji on the Beach is about South Asian women claiming British national identity, my
reading is not interested in the trope of generational differences which produces highly limited analyses of the film’s conflicts by emphasizing the developmental idea of assimilation. The film’s resolution, I would argue, is less about producing the ideal British multicultural subject than it is about consolidating a South Asian feminist narrative. The conflict between Asha and Ginder is resolved by recognition of patriarchal violence within the South Asian community and by excluding Hashida, pregnant with a black man’s child. The three interlocking conflicts that define the limits of South Asian feminism and British multiculturalism are rendered literally and figuratively on these women’s bodies: Asha’s body tormented by the dizziness of her hallucinatory headaches, Ginder’s bruised body and Hashida’s body pregnant with a black man’s child.

The dominant aesthetic choice that Bhaji on the Beach employs to represent Hashida is that of close shots in confined spaces—such as the café, the bar, the abortion clinic, and the museum—which has the effect of heightening her anguish and magnifying her conflict with her African Caribbean boyfriend Oliver as well as with the other women on the trip. Hashida’s tensions with Oliver capture the demise of the political coalition represented by “black British.” For instance, Oliver has the following exchange with his African Caribbean friend Joe:

OLIVER. Actually what you said was ‘Thank God [Hashida’s] not white.” So what happened to the mouthpiece of black solidarity?

JOE. Black don’t mean not-white anymore

OLIVER. So what does it mean then?

JOE. Forget the meaning and respect the differences. But that’s what’s missing between us and them: respect. [Then, pointing to British Chinese men in the background] Chan over
there, him write him name on all him eggs like I thieved them or something…see when you try fusion, you get confusion.

This exchange reflects the mutual suspicion accompanying the fraying of the category “black British,” and the resurgence of talks of ethnic “difference” rather than racial solidarity. The contradictory racial stereotypes that define blacks in the South Asian diasporic imaginary are seen in another still in which the camera lingers over Hashida’s brown body in Oliver’s black arms under a poster that reads “Fear of a Black Planet,” while Oliver shares with Hashida that he has been the “invisible man” in their romance. The “color vs. culture” debate that dominates Oliver’s conversation with Joe also tints Pushpa’s response to the news of Hashida’s pregnancy by a black man: “Thirty years I have lived in this country; never have I known anything like this…Black? … It’s not color, it is culture…What about the child?”

The film never allows us to read Pushpa’s vitriolic reactions to Hashida’s pregnancy, which connote a policing of racialized women’s sexuality to maintain “racial purity,” outside the context of white British racism. For instance, her response to Hashida discussed above echoes directly her response to a group of white men passing by in a van baring their bottoms to the South Asian women in a racist gesture, when she exclaims: “Hai Ram! Thirty years I have lived in this country. Never have I seen anything like this.” In another scene, Pushpa and Bina are sitting in the same café as Hashida hurling insults at her for her sexual relations with a black man while the white women who owns the café spews racial insults at the two older ladies who have pulled out Indian snacks from their bags to eat with the tea. The scene is set up as a long shot of the café with Hashida in the center, Pushpa and Bina on one side in the shot and the white woman owner of the café at the back in a position of authority overseeing everybody but also somewhat receded in the background. The following exchange ensues:
OWNER. Excuse me, if it’s a take away you want, the Khyber Pass is around the corner. It’s strictly English food in here. Understand? [to another customer referring to Pushpa and Bina]… Bloody heathens. No manners.

BINA. [To Pushpa referring to Hashida] No shame.

OWNER. They want to get back to where they came from.

PUSHPA. We should never have come to this country.

OWNER. They breed like rabbits.

PUSHPA. If the baby dies, it will be a blessing for everyone. …

HASHIDA. [who has walked up to Pushpa’s and Bina’s table] Anything else?

PUSHPA. [Looks at Hashida up and down] You whore!

The camera which focuses alternately between the café owner on the one hand and Bina and Pushpa on the other hand demonstrates the inextricability of the two South Asian women’s policing of Hashida’s sexuality from the broader racism in Britain, which also hinges on racialized women’s sexuality as indicated by the owner’s comments about “breeding like rabbits.”

In contrast to the racial and sexual conflicts that define Hashida’s body and her confinement in Blackpool’s closed spaces rather than in the freedom and pageantry of the streets, the film represents Asha’s narrative as a melodramatic romance. Rendered in the idiom of a romantic fantasy, the Blackpool of Asha’s narrative is part of the idyllic British countryside in which she meets Ambrose Waddington. The romance between Asha and Ambrose is set in the wilderness of Blackpool, away from the bustling tourist traffic, amidst creeks and bridges and willows, an aesthetic quite different from the other narratives that populate the film. Ambrose Waddington is an embodiment of multiple strains of British multiculturalism and his benevolent
fixation on the figure of the exotic South Asian woman betrays his acute anxiety about the presence of these very racialized subjects in his “home.” Ambrose introduces himself to Asha as an “actor, historian, and ancient Blackpuddlian” bringing to bear discourses of history and culture on his performance of Orientalist multiculturalism. As Ambrose serenades Asha, whom he exoticizes and eroticizes by considering her “too feminine, he also serenades the nation and empire of Great Britain, which he also genders as female in his words “this fallen woman I call home.”

The idyllic vision of Blackpool that Asha embodies, and which signifies British nation and empire, is interrupted by Asha’s hallucinations and the space of her imagination. The film renders her fantasies in the melodramatic Bollywood aesthetic, a mixture of hyperbole and romance. Her three initial hallucinations focus on issues of patriarchy in the South Asian diasporic home, a space of oppression that demands “Duty! Honor! Sacrifice!” from women. In these hallucinations, she visualizes women like Ginder and Hashida as Bollywood vamps, who are unable to meet these gendered expectations. But the melodrama of the hallucinations meets reality in the final romantic fantasy sequence in which she imagines herself as a glamorous heroine, and Ambrose, in Indian attire, is following her, smitten with desire. Then she imagines a rain scene, which often typifies desire and sexuality in Bollywood films, in which the rain drips off the brown face make-up that Ambrose is wearing, thereby revealing his white skin underneath. While the rain scene in Bollywood films serves to naturalize desire (for instance the use of rain in Mira Nair’s other film Monsoon Wedding), the scene of Asha’s hallucination serves to denaturalize British multiculturalism’s desire for the racialized diasporic subject by revealing the racist Orientalism that lies underneath. Asha’s fantasy also denaturalizes her position in the racial multicultural order by connecting it to Ambrose’s racism. “And I wasn’t
born selling bloody newspapers!” she exclaims after the disruption of her romantic fantasy of Ambrose.

The film marks the domestic violence victim Ginder’s presence on the Blackpool beach as transgression, as it defies the attempts by her husband Ranjit and his two brothers Manjit and Balbir, who have followed her on the excursion, to define the beach as a space of patriarchal surveillance and coercion. When the South Asian men, perched high up on a viewing tower, gaze at the women enjoying the seaside resort as a site of leisure, pleasure, and consumption without the presence of their husbands, they are filled with violent rage, as seen in Balbir’s response: “We have seen you. Having a great fucking time without your husbands.” Ginder’s guilt and fear, especially when her son Amrik goes missing, lend an ominous atmosphere to the film’s representation of Blackpool. Her frantic search for her missing son takes us through the hidden corners of Blackpool not usually seen by tourists. She is identified with the dark, nether regions of the tourist town that appear more like the seamier side of urban life than anything resembling the idyllic, pristine countryside of Asha’s imagination.

The failed rescue of Asha by Ambrose is constructed in binary opposition to Ginder’s rescue by “sons of liberty” in Blackpool’s Manhattan cocktail bar, which recuperates “America” as a liberatory space by contrasting it with the violent, racist multiculturalism of Britain. The space of the Manhattan bar is distinctly marked “American,” decorated with the U.S. national flag and the visual is accompanied by the soundtrack of the national anthem. The group of strippers call themselves the “sons of liberty” alluding to the rhetoric of liberty and freedom associated with the United States. The bar is having an exclusive ladies’ night and the South Asian women’s group meets up at the bar as the culmination of their day long “female fun time.” I suggest that the scene cannot be read either as a neutral depiction of American capitalism and
commerce or as a simple parody of the U.S. rhetoric of liberty, because it echoes two other scenes of the film.\textsuperscript{7} The bare male bottoms at Manhattan bar are presented in contrast to the bare male bottoms that the women face as a racist gesture on their journey over to Blackpool. While the bare male bottoms in the Manhattan bar do not provide women sexual pleasure as is evident in Pushpa’s discomfort when the men faux-grope her body, they enact a narrative of rescue and liberation for the South Asian diasporic women.\textsuperscript{8} The male strippers force Ginder to dance with them and remove her jacket to reveal the bruises of domestic abuse, which provides the older women “visibility of ‘physical evidence’” that leads them to believe her allegations against her husband that they had previously dismissed (Desai, \textit{Beyond Bollywood} 149).

While the connotation of coercive sexual advances in the above scene problematizes the American rescue narrative, the scene cannot be understood as a parody of American rhetoric of liberty if we examine it in conjunction with the failed rescue of Asha by Ambrose. In contrast to the racist underpinnings of multicultural discourse expounded by Ambrose, the rescue by the “sons of liberty” is gendered and racialized but not marked overtly racist or Orientalist. The film thus constructs the space of U.S. multiculturalism through the Manhattan bar as a space of rescue and liberation. It is significant that Hashida and Oliver are excluded from the emancipatory space of the bar. The film, therefore, suggests two interconnected resolutions. First, the violence of disruption of Ginder’s “home” and Asha’s “homeland” is resolved through the visibility of bruises on Ginder’s body. It is the revelation of Ginder’s bruises by the “sons of liberty” that are able to resolve for Asha the crises around issues of gender normativity that haunt her hallucinations. Thus the resolution of the violence of “home” and “homeland” occurs on the materiality of Ginder’s body.
Second, the film consolidates its progressive feminist ideals precisely by including Ginder’s bruised body in the community of South Asian women and multicultural Britain and simultaneously excluding Hashida and Oliver, a narrative turn that situates Hashida’s racially marked body pregnant with a “black” child as beyond redemption. The film is able to construct the simulacrum of the United States as a liberatory space in contrast to the grim and bleak racist multiculturalism of Britain through a portrayal of the divergence in the fates of Ginder and Hashida, a split directly connected to Asha’s disillusioning encounter with Ambrose. The heterosexual romance between Hashida and Oliver constitutes the limit of British multiculturalism and of the seemingly progressive feminist politics of the South Asian community, which has been facilitated by the American rhetoric of liberty. The exclusion of Hashida and Oliver from the diegetic space of resolution is also significant because it marks the early 1990s as the time of irretrievable loss of the coalition that was “black British.” On the other hand, the legibility of the specific issue of domestic violence as a condition for the South Asian women’s inclusion in British multiculturalism speaks to the recasting of South Asians in cultural terms in the aftermath of the fragmentation of “black British.” That is South Asians are visible in the British mainstream insofar as they confirm the existing narrative of Asian “cultures” as “anachronistic, collective, pre-modern” and the racial dynamics ensure that gender “issues” such as domestic violence and “arranged marriages,” remain particularly amenable to functioning as evidence of British Asian otherness (Alexander 563).

The resolution of Hashida’s narrative is rather ambivalent and tentative. She decides to abort the baby, the embodiment of her transgression of racial hierarchies, but solidifies her romantic commitment to Oliver. Oliver understands her reasoning to abort the baby as her effort to not lose her parents or the wider community of elderly “aunties.” But this scene is an uneasy
resolution and a disavowal of the conflict between Oliver and Hashida regarding her simple compliance with her parents’ “arrangements” for her, rendering Oliver invisible. This resolution also rests uneasy with the fact that the issue at stake is not only Hashida’s pregnancy by a black man but that she is romantically involved with him. Therefore at the end, when Hashida, standing with Oliver on the beach, waves tentatively at the group passing by in their bus, Pushpa shrugs her shoulders and says “What can you do?” even as she consoles battered Ginder. *Bhaji on the Beach*, therefore, recuperates the U.S. as a liberatory space by pointing its opposition to the racist multiculturalism of Britain and by disavowing the racist underpinnings of the feminist politics forged at the end through the exclusion of Hashida and Oliver.

2.2 **Racial and Sexual Economies of a Mississippi Motel**

Whereas *Bhaji on the Beach* explores the opposition between Britain and the United States in the context of dismantling of the “black British” political coalition, Mira Nair’s *Mississippi Masala* traces the same opposition through Afro-Asian diasporic romance in the American South. As in V.S. Naipaul’s representation of the South, which I discuss in Chapter 5, the South of *Mississippi Masala*, especially the Indian-owned motel, is a geographical space where the South Asian diasporic imaginary intersects with the interethnic conflicts and racial exclusions that are the specific result of the history of the U.S. North-South relations. The film is the story of the Loha family that is expelled from Uganda following Idi Amin’s ruling. The family leaves Uganda for Britain, where they stay for fifteen years, before they finally settle in the U.S. in Greenwood Mississippi. The film is set in 1990, when the Loha family has been in the U.S. for three years, but the central storyline oscillates between Greenwood and Kampala, Uganda. In Greenwood, the family stays in a motel owned and run by their relatives, Jammubhai and his
family. The protagonist of the film is Mina, the daughter of the Lohas, who works in Jammubhai’s motel, cleaning bathrooms. Her mother Kinnu runs a liquor store in a run-down black neighborhood while her father Jay spends his time writing to the current regime of Uganda to reclaim his lost property. The plot of the film revolves around Mina’s romance with Demetrius, an African American who runs a carpet-cleaning business. Mina faces the wrath of her parents and the Indian community when Jammubhai’s son Anil and his friends find Mina in bed with Demetrius in a Biloxi motel. In spite of her father’s warnings, Mina leaves Mississippi with Demetrius because she loves him and feels that they both can be partners in Demetrius’s carpet-cleaning business.

Scholars have analyzed the chronotope of the motel by privileging ideas of travel, tourism, diasporic mobility and identity. For instance, Binita Mehta points out the “quintessentially American” character of motels: “convenient, inexpensive and linked to working class life both as rest stops for traveling families and as sites of illicit sexual encounters” (156). James Clifford argues that the motel might be a better chronotope for traveling cultures because it disrupts the hotel’s “nostalgic inclination” and its associated privileges of race, class, and gender (32). But then Clifford swings to the other extreme and offers the motel as a liberatory place by looking at it from the angle of the deracialized traveler. “The motel has no real lobby,” writes Clifford, “and it’s tied into a highway network – a relay or node rather than a site of encounter between coherent cultural subjects” (32). Meaghan Morris, whose work Clifford draws on to make his argument, writes the following about motels: “… motels, in fact demolish sense regimes of place, locale, and ‘history’. They memorialize only movement, speed, and perpetual circulation” (3). While Clifford’s account of the motel holds it up as deterritorialized because it almost becomes incorporated into the highway, Morris’s argument, in spite of the above mentioned
quote, understands the motel as “a transit-place, a fixed address for temporary lodgement” and she also accounts for the ownership of the motel rather than just the travelers (6-8). Focusing on the Henry Parkes motel in Australia, Morris deconstructs the myths of nationality that the narrative of the motel constructs, offers a feminist account of the motel through discussion of women tourists and ideas of “home” as engaged by the space of the motel, and argues that “[T]he touristic, the neighborly, and the proprietorial are related not by opposition (mobile/fixed, touristic/everyday, itinerant/domestic) but along a spectrum divided by degrees of duration, ‘intensities of staying’ (temporary/intermittent/permanent)” (8). Therefore while Morris accounts for differences of race, class, nationality, and gender as observed between the outside and inside of the motel, it does not engage such differences within the space of the motel itself because the motel devolves into “a space of movements” in her argument (41).

*Mississippi Masala* then offers an interesting counterpoint to Morris’s and Clifford’s arguments by constructing the motel as a racialized and gendered diasporic space of conflict, and an archive of racialized history of displacement in the U.S. multicultural space with its limited possibilities of negotiation. The film’s landscape is one dotted with motels owned by Indian community. Lest the motel become an essentialized site in the diaspora, Nair emphasizes that these motels are owned and inhabited by the subjects of varied and multiple diasporic itineraries thus intervening in the public discourse that makes motels synonymous with the Gujarati Indian community of “Patels.” For instance, the Monte Cristo motel is owned by Jammubhai, who tries to foster an Indian Hindu community by organizing hymns and prayers but Jay, on account of his past in Uganda, does not feel included in this Hindu Indian American community and dozes off at Jammubhai’s religious ceremonies. *Mississippi Masala* challenges the often romanticized narratives of immigrant families helping and sustaining each other by highlighting
the conflict in the relation of dependency between the Loha family and Anil, a relation that Anil constantly threatens to break off by pointing out that he is not running a charity.

More importantly, we can understand the motel as a space of engagement between the U.S. national racial imaginary and South Asian diasporic imaginary if we understand the Indian-owned motel as a space produced by racialization processes. It is not by random coincidence that Jammubhai, Pontiac, and Kantibhai own motels in the racially charged American South. Their ownership of motel is the result of racialized discourses of exclusion. Mira Nair describes her inspiration for *Mississippi Masala* as follows: “I began to read about the weird phenomenon of every southern motel being owned by an Indian, and many of them were exiles from East Africa after Amin had thrown them out” (Interview with Bonnie Greer). Nair thus situates the motels in a longer history of racialization of Indians as traders and merchants that connects their racial position in Uganda and as corner store-owners in Britain as exemplified by *Bhaji on the Beach*. Both popular discourse and scholarship have naturalized the ownership of motels by Indians exiled from Uganda and displaced from other areas of African continent. The Asian American Hotel Owners Association (AAHOA) describes that “The hospitality industry was a popular career choice because it offered immediate housing and cash flow, as well as the opportunity to ‘blend in’ despite any cultural differences.” Along similar lines, Mehta writes in her analysis of *Mississippi Masala* that “the motel creates a *natural* community for immigrants like Jay and his family” (156; emphasis added). In his influential book on Afro-Asian relations in the U.S. *Everybody Was Kung Fu Fighting*, Vijay Prashad warns us against such naturalization because it obscures the mechanisms of racialization that determine what kind of spaces can be occupied by differently racialized diasporic “American” subjects. I quote him at length here to emphasize the racialized politics of space at play in the understanding the motel in *Mississippi Masala*:
The “trader as stranger,” in many of the sociological accounts, appears as a result of conscious choices among an ethnic group, who, by some sort of rational process, chooses the job of provisioning the U.S. working poor. There is little analysis of the place of the multiracist state in its guidance of the immigrants into such jobs, not just at the level of the Immigration and naturalization Service, but also through the discriminatory credit regimes (which often favor those who are stereotyped as good business people [such as Gujaratis]) and racist law and order strategies (which incarcerate large numbers of black youth, thus removing them from economic activity) (*Everybody Was Kung Fu Fighting* 103).

The Indian-owned motel in *Mississippi Masala* holds a precarious position in the black-white racial dynamic in Greenwood, Mississippi where Anil and Pontiac as young motel owners and as the face of white capitalism can afford swanky cars while African American youth such as Demetrius’s brother Dexter are forced to hang out at street corners in the absence of economic opportunities and jobs. Demetrius himself is included in the racialized economy to the extent he is willing to obey the racial logic and accept his place in the hierarchy without attempting to change it either through an interracial romance or through economic ambition.

The motel in *Mississippi Masala* becomes what Meaghan Morris, following Paul Virilio’s arguments, calls the “notion of the ‘lodgement’ as a ‘strategic installation’” not from the angle of the tourist as it is invoked in Morris’s arguments but from the angle of its ownership/resident family (6). The motel as a strategic racialized installation fulfills a middleman minority position that is used by a “capitalist structure that relies upon ethnicity to camouflage its power” (*Everybody Was Kung Fu Fighting* 117). The motel-owning South Asian diasporic subjects, in occupying this vulnerable position in a racialized economy, share an experiential position with
the other often ignored section of the diaspora – the South Asian taxi drivers. They both face “working class racism” and face “strong economic resentment, cultural fears and social anxiety” but this racism strategically effaces “whiteness as fantasmatic prosthesis … the real of racism” (Prashad 123; Dayal 90). The motel owner/residents become specifically sensitive to “working class racism” and immune to dominant white racism on account of their particular diasporic itinerary that originates in expulsion by Amin. For instance a respondent for Tunku Varadarajan’s New York Times article “A Patel Motel Cartel?” says the following about racism faced by motel owners: “If we survived Idi Amin, a couple of redneck motel-owners aren’t going to bother us much. In any case, our motels are American-owned too. We are Patels, and Americans” (4). Such claims to space connote another kind of nostalgia evoked by the motel, akin to the nostalgia associated with the hotel as outlined by Clifford: the nostalgia for “American owned” motels in which “American” denotes a white racial identity.

In spite of delineating the interracial conflicts that define the site of the Southern motel—including the expulsion of South Asians from Uganda by Idi Amin and the tension between African American working-class aspirations of stability on the one hand and South Asian model minority aspirations on the other—*Mississippi Masala* produces a celebratory portrayal of interracial romance in multicultural U.S. by resolving these conflicts on Mina’s exoticized and hypersexualized body. In other words, Mina’s hypereroticized body becomes an overdetermined site that signifies the resolution to the conflicts between Asian and African diasporas in the context of the violence of British colonialism in Africa and the racism of American multiculturalism, of the invisibility of South Asians in the black/white binary and the pathologized hypervisibility of African American masculine sexuality. There are two specific instances in the film that help us arrive at this conclusion. First, the film’s aesthetic exoticizes
and sexualizes Mina by repeatedly pointing to the illegibility of her race and ethnicity in her conversations with African American men. When Mina runs into Demetrius at a lounge one evening, his friend Tyrone wonders aloud if she is a Latina. Similarly when Mina tells Demetrius and his family that she is an “Indian” from Africa who has never been to India, there are looks of disbelief and bewilderment all around. She explains to Demetrius’s family that her grandfather was brought to Uganda by the British to build the railroad and then maintains her silence on the episode of her family’s expulsion from their “homeland” by a black African dictator, feeling that a recounting of the episode would make African Americans uncomfortable. Mina’s declaration that she is “Indian” who has never been to India leads Dexter to exclaim in solidarity “we from Africa but we have never been there either.” But Demeterius’s old grandfather’s failed attempts to situate Mina within the American geographical imaginary of Indiana and Indianola, which the film depicts as signs of his old age and mines for humor, suggests the “forever foreigner” status accorded to South Asians when the only legible racial configuration is the black/white binary. But it is the idea of her “foreignness” (after Demetrius is persecuted for his sexual relationship with Mina, Tyrone instructs him to leave the “foreigners” alone) and the indeterminacy surrounding her racial status that exoticizes Mina and is the core of her sexual allure for both Demetrius and Tyrone.

In this context, I read the film’s depictions of Mina’s use of the term “mix-Masala” to inflect her self-identification as “Indian” as less about proclaiming a hybrid identity and more about the film’s exoticization of her, which is central to the film’s resolve to claim America as an exceptional space for Afro-Asian romance in spite of the antagonisms and racism that precede this resolution. Mina’s claim of the label “Indian,” notwithstanding Jay’s and her identification with Uganda as their “homeland,” is an example of R. Radhakrishnan’s argument that ethnicity
should not be forced into an essentialist straitjacket, because in the diasporic context, ethnicity marks a “historical rupture within the ‘same’ community” and resists the essentialisms that usually plague representations of generational conflicts (123). Radhakrishnan, however, does not use the film to interrogate how the narrative complicates his arguments about ethnicity but instead uses it to critique its “reveling uncritically in the commodification of hybridity” (124). While I agree with Radhakrishnan that the film commodifies hybridity for consumption by the audience, this hybridity is made manifest only for Mina and not the other equally “hybrid” diasporic characters in the film, because it is her exotic sexuality that becomes the point of resolution of racial tensions. Radhakrishnan ends up being so dismissive of the film because he forgets that it is a cultural representation with a specific context; whereas he sees that the film’s resolution “trivializes histories … and celebrates causeless rebellion in the epiphany of the present,” I suggest that the narrative feels compelled to resolve itself through “individualized escapes” precisely because it is etching a certain history of U.S. exceptional multiculturalism that relies on ahistoricity and individualism (124-125).

Second, the lingering camera shot on Mina’s body intertwined with Demetrius’s black body in the sex scene set in a Biloxi motel underscores both the transgression of interracial sex as well as the hypersexualization of Mina’s body as the site of healing of racial exclusion and violence. Their bodies are draped not in the white motel sheets but in Mina’s colorful stole that evokes not only her “Indian” self-identification but also her conversation with Demetrius the previous day, when she was walking with him in her Indian attire on the Biloxi beach, discussing racism. When Mina talked on the beach about the circumscribed space of the motel as the only place that “Indians” are allowed to own within the racial economy of the South, Demetrius says, “Well, Miss Masala, racism—or as they say nowadays, tradition—is passed down like recipes.”
What is significant about the sex scene is that it reminds the audience that Afro-Asian conflicts in the diaspora are not new to Mina, and that she is less familiar with the specific racism of the South and more intimately familiar with the Afro-Asian conflicts as legacies of British colonialism in Uganda. Mina’s intimacy with Demetrius in the Biloxi motel is interrupted by a flashback of her familial intimacy with Okelo, the black Ugandan whom Jay considered as his brother. The flashback breaks up when she remembers an African man’s body smeared with blood and filled with maggots. The juxtaposition of the flashback of the black body mutilated with violence, with Demetrius’s black body twined with Mina’s resolves the imagined reality of Afro-Asian violence of Uganda through her initiation as the subject of U.S. multiculturalism as a hypersexualized body. Mina’s hypersexualized body allows this scene to be read as a scene of healing of the violence associated with the diasporic itinerary. Unlike the exclusion of Hashida’s pregnant body and Oliver’s immigrant black body from the spaces of rescue and reconciliation in Bhaji on the Beach, the inclusion of Afro-Asian heterosexual romance as a site of reconciliation is key to the celebratory reading of U.S. multiculturalism in Mississippi Masala.

Even though the fragile racial peace maintained through the highly unequal economic relationship of African Americans’ labor in the South Asian-owned motels falls apart after Mina’s male cousins find her in the motel bed with Demetrius, Mina is represented as hopelessly optimistic and in denial about the complexity of racial relations in the South. In response to her parents’ rage about her intimate relation with Demetrius she exclaims, “This is America, Ma. No one cares.” This scene is then followed by a series of vignettes articulating the responses of the different segments of the racialized community to the interracial relationship pointing out that in America, “everyone cares” about the inviolability of the racial code. The range of responses indicates multiple levels of anxiety about interracial sexual relations from Indian motel owners’
refusal to employ Demetrius’s cleaning business and the white banker’s threat of revocation of the loan he had given to the business as he had concluded that Demetrius was not “someone responsible” or of good character. It is precisely through the narrative’s hypersexualization of Mina and her obliviousness of the racial structures that make Demetrius the sole bearer of economic impact of their transgression of racial structures that allow the film to be read as an optimistic romance.

If, as Arif Dirlik has argued, to invoke the idea of place historicizes the diaspora and enables us to grapple with hierarchies of race, class, gender, and sexuality, *Mississippi Masala’s* resolution is able to disavow the histories that undergird Afro-Asian tensions because it ends in an unmarked space in America, that shows the limitless American landscape. The scene, a wide angle aerial shot, depicts Mina and Demetrius in colorful, ethnic attire kissing romantically, and in its combination of exotica and erotica, the image echoes the key sex scene in the Biloxi motel. This ending would have had a much more ambivalent resonance on account of both the characters’ excommunication from their respective communities and their lack of a means of a livelihood but for the scene’s juxtaposition with the scene of Jay in a Kampala market holding an African child, watching an African woman dance enthusiastically to music. The visual is accompanied by the following words in Jay’s voice-over through a letter he writes from Uganda to his wife Kinnu: “Home is where the heart is and my heart is with you.” This statement cannot be dismissed as sentimental cliché keeping in mind Jay’s inability to separate the idea of “home” from property ownership. If the South Asian diaspora is characterized by the idea of “homelessness” and displacement, then its itineraries of optimism culminating in the United States are generated by reifying the woman’s body as the space of home. Thus, Jay’s words importantly remind us that analysis of place in the diaspora is bound up with the idea of price for
the place and idea of ownership. *Mississippi Masala* achieves a celebratory resolution to Afro-Asian romance in America by erasing the black/African/African American woman’s body from the screen and by representing the Indian woman’s body as a medium of exchange between South Asian and black masculinities.

In this chapter, I have compared and contrasted the opposition between British colonialism and American multiculturalism that frame the trope of Afro-Asian in South Asian diasporic working class narratives by South Asian directors. Specifically I have argued that the Afro-Asian romance in *Bhaji on the Beach* lends itself to a grim resolution because the narrative conflict resolves itself by situating the interracial couple at the fringes of South Asian feminist politics, enacted within the framework of American rhetoric of liberty. *Mississippi Masala* recuperates United States as a liberatory space for Afro-Asian romance by representing Mina’s hypersexualized body as the site of resolution of racial violence in the British colonial context in Uganda as well as the racial exclusions of U.S. multiculturalism. This analysis traces the transformations in Afro-Asian relations within the racial formations of “black British” and “model minority,” demonstrating that relations with other racial minorities do not remain constant but are nevertheless important in the South Asian diasporic itinerary. At stake in this chapter is an exploration of the limits of understanding Afro-Asian solidarity through the diasporic trope of romance because it points out that imaginations of this romance often rest on an ahistorical individualism and a disavowal of the complexities of racial tensions and therefore, are not easily translated into political solidarities. It is also useful to consider the extent to which Afro-Asian romances emerge into representation only in narratives about the working class, a question I seek to address as I shift the analytic focus to representations of the upwardly mobile South Asians in the diaspora.
Notes

1 For a detailed account of the contours of the contentious relationship between South Asians and the category “Asian American,” and its ramifications, see the anthology *A Part yet Apart*, edited by Rajini Srikanth and Lavina Dhingra Shankar.

2 I find Joppke’s theoretical discussion of multiculturalism within the triangular framework of the nation, historically impoverished groups’ rights, and anticolonial struggles illuminating. But his empirical reasoning to support his arguments is less convincing as it seems to be guided overtly by ideology. For instance his suggestion that “[c]ontemporary America is not so much ‘racist’ as plagued by guilt about its racist past,” is simplistic because it erects rigid boundaries between past and present, individual and collective, racism and nationalism.

3 Examples of scholarship that explore how the black/white binary becomes the racial formation that defines America as a nation by casting the Asian immigrant simultaneously as “white” and racialized “alien” include Helen Jun’s *Race for Citizenship* and Sanda Mayzaw Lwin’s essay “A Race So Different from Our Own’: Segregation, Exclusion, and the Myth of Mobility.”

4 For an excellent account of the various articulations of American citizenship that produce Asian Americans as “forever foreigners,” inassimilable within the national body politic, see Leti Volpp’s article “Obnoxious to Their Very Nature’: Asian Americans and Constitutional Citizenship.”

5 Another example of the “empire at home” can be seen in Rekha’s exclamation of “Bombay!” on seeing the kitschy decorations of Blackpool’s seaside promenade.

6 For an example of a reading of Chadha’s films through the trope of generational conflict, see Shoba S. Rajgopal’s article “The Politics of Location.”

7 Here I am not denying the presence of these two elements but suggesting that the scene is not simply reducible to either one.

8 The violence and injury of racism and regulation of women’s sexuality that Ginder and Hashida experience is often inscribed on Pushpa’s body, which comes to form a conduit or link in the interweaving of various women’s narratives. For example, it is Pushpa’s body on which Hashida throws hot coffee after Pushpa calls her a “whore,” and then the same body is also coercively groped in the Manhattan bar.

9 The colonial trope of “white men saving brown women from brown men” is central to British mainstream’s skewed emphasis on institutions such as “arranged marriages” and gendered issues such as domestic violence. For more on how this colonial trope functions in contemporary post-“black British” racial formations, see Fauzia Ahmed’s essay “The Scandal of ‘Arranged Marriages’ and the Pathologisation of BrAsian Families.”
The website for The Asian American Hotel Owners Association, a group of predominantly Indian motel and hotel owners describes the organization’s history as follows: “Soon, the name ‘Patel’ became synonymous with the hotel business.”

There are a number of other instances in the film that highlight the racial indeterminacy or misrecognition of South Asians as further evidence of their status as “forever foreigners.” For instance, Nair interrupts the focus on the Indian-owned Monte Cristo Motel to depict white motel owners saying that these “Indians” should be sent back to their “reservation.”
3. “UK IS FINISHED; INDIA’S TOO CORRUPT; ANYONE CAN BECOME AMRIKAN:” RECONFIGURATION OF MODEL MINORITY IN *BEND IT LIKE BECKHAM AND BRIDE AND PREJUDICE*

The Afro-Asian romances that preoccupied South Asian women directors of the diaspora in the early 1990s did not capture the imagination of diasporic cinema again. The working-class narratives of *Bhaji on the Beach* and *Mississippi Masala* were more amenable to imagining encounters between racial minorities in both Britain and the U.S., although America is portrayed quite clearly as an exceptional space for Afro-Asian romance. But since the mid-1990s, working-class representations have received scant popular attention while representations of South Asians as the wealthy model minority have proliferated due to forces of globalization and economic liberalization in South Asia. This trend in diasporic cinematic production is commensurate with trends in Bollywood films in which, Sheena Malhotra and Tavishi Alagh suggest, “There has been an alarming erasure of all but the upper and wealthy classes amongst popular protagonists in the 1990s” (27). The most accurate prediction of success of Bollywood films portraying stories from South Asian diaspora, according to Malhotra and Alagh, was the class status of the people on the screen: “Though a spate of films in the 1990s told stories of NRI [Non-Resident Indian] life, the success of these films has been limited to portrayals that address a very select segment of diasporic Indian communities. Films…that look at the lives of working class disenfranchised Indians abroad have not succeeded at the box office” (27).

Diasporic cinema subtends a similar arc. For instance, *Bhaji on the Beach*, story of working-class women, was popular in Britain but “did not attain international mainstream success, playing to limited audiences in the United States and hardly making any dents in Chadha’s original homeland, India” (Rajgopal 52). But when Chadha shifts to depictions of the
wealthier segments of the diaspora in her later films *Bend It Like Beckham* (2002) and *Bride and Prejudice* (2004), the focus of this chapter, her films ranked much higher in popularity and box-office revenues in India and across Britain and the U.S. These films were characterized as “international hits,” marketed and appealing to a wide range of audiences. Interestingly, the shift toward representations of the wealthier and upwardly mobile sections of the diaspora has also been accompanied by a shift away from Afro-Asian encounters of working-class narratives and a renewed emphasis on exploration of the South Asian-white dynamic both in depictions of both heterosexual and homosexual romances in films such as *My Beautiful Laundrette*, *Chutney Popcorn*, *Touch of Pink*, and *The Namesake*.

In this chapter, I consider representations of the diasporic itinerary in Gurinder Chadha’s *Bend It Like Beckham* and *Bride and Prejudice*, both of which feature protagonists who consider America, in contrast to Britain, as the place where their dreams, professional or romantic, can be fulfilled. British Punjabi Jess of *Bend It Like Beckham* leaves the conservative and potentially racist soccer scene in Britain to play in Santa Clara University in United States. Similarly Lalita in *Bride and Prejudice* marries the American Darcy in spite of her incisive critiques of America, Americans, and of Indians in America. The chapter explores the extent to which portrayals of upwardly mobile diasporic South Asians influence the films’ narrative turn from Britain to the U.S., their commercial success, and their access to wider diasporic circuits of production and reception. Or in other words, while Chadha’s portrayal of America as a space of fulfillment for her protagonists is commensurate with the American racialization of South Asians as a model minority, how is this racial formation reconfigured when it intersects with a diasporic engagement with Britain? The narrative of America as an exceptional place for South Asians becomes particularly intriguing in the politico-economic context of the films’ release in a post-
9/11 scenario, marking unique conjunctions and disjunctions between the racialization of South Asians in the diegesis of the films and the intertextual racial discourse about South Asians as potential terrorists.

The model minority racialization of South Asians is conventionally situated within the national framework of U.S. racial paradigms, but Chadha’s films, I argue, demonstrate that this distinctly American racial formation is based on a diasporic romanticization of South Asians’ status as erstwhile British subjects. The films’ disavowal of the American history of patriarchy, racism and economic exploitation is predicated on the hypervisibility of the British colonial subject and an engagement with British imperial history. The films, no doubt, occupy structures, circuits and narratives that are complicit with the United States’ imperialist ideologies, and they also suggest that in the context of South Asian diaspora, United States’ imperialism is a “crisis management” of the British imperial order.1

As part of the “crisis management,” the American imperialist project invokes the model minority racialization in form, but simultaneously evacuates its content through racist technologies such as limiting the rhetoric of Asian American success to the economic sphere, rendering an indefinable “American way of life” as central to claiming citizenship, and ensuring that another possible racialization of South Asians as potential terrorists is always lurking in the background. The simultaneous invocation and vacuation of model minority is an important tool that constructs the South Asian diaspora through management of anxieties generated by gendered and racialized bodies as terrorists, possessors/transmitters of primitive sexualities and as British post/colonial subjects poised to take over the global economy, setting up an anxious loop of wresting jobs from Americans and feeding capital into American transnational corporations. And it is at this juncture of anxiety management that the categories of “model minority” and “South
Asian” fracture along lines of religion, nation and gender. The specific mythos of the model minority, such that it is rendered as a category without content, is manifested spatially in the diegesis of these films. For instance, the wealthy Indian Hindu accountant Mr. Kohli’s residence in the Valley becomes a symbol of his reluctant incorporation as model minority within the American multicultural milieu of *Bride and Prejudice*.

Post-9/11, the category “model minority” is increasingly gendered male and is labeled Indian and Hindu. The anxiety generated by economic success and the resultant threat to existing racial and economic hierarchies posed by Indian diasporic subjects is diffused by racialization of South Asian Muslim and Sikh males as terrorists. Therefore, I contrast the representation of Kohli’s racial status with that of the turbaned Sikh Mr. Bhamra in *Bend It Like Beckham*, who is intertextually excluded from a model minority status. In contrast to representations of men in these films as lacking cultural capital whether or not they are included as “model minorities,” the women, irrespective of their religion and class, are cast as assured cultural ambassadors who can belong effortlessly in multiple diasporic places. Whereas the discontinuities of South Asian diaspora are gendered male, South Asian women, cast as native informants and knowledge brokers, are central to the idea of diasporic continuity. Because of their role as cultural translators, South Asian women become conveniently situated to follow the “American way of life.”

While this chapter attempts to understand the forces of American exceptionalism as they structure/fracture the Indian diaspora, its aim is not to replicate the problematic of situating the diaspora in the West. Chadha’s films do not as much challenge American nationalism as they chart out the complicities between American, British and Indian nationalisms, and centralize the connection between nationalism and race, with its ensuing implications for discourses of gender
and class. My argument that the South Asian diaspora is characterized not only by concepts of displacement but also by a project of transnational racial management arises out of the urgency of the contemporary historical moment marked by unique convergences between the racialization processes of Britain and United States who are allies in the war on terrorism in a post-9/11 world.

3.1 Model Minority and Popular Culture

To understand the transnational processes of model minority racial formation, it is worthwhile to trace a brief genealogy of model minority discourse in the United States with a special focus on the composition of this category and the role of popular media in the category’s construction and propagation. Model minority is a racial discourse that has been applied historically to Asian Americans; it relies on rhetoric of individual economic success, education, and hard work and is used by white supremacy as an “ideological weapon” against African Americans (Prashad 168). Vijay Prashad’s *The Karma of Brown Folk* traces the origins of model minority discourse to a story on Chinese Americans in the 26th December, 1966 issue of the *U.S. News & World Report*, titled “Success Story of One Minority Group in U.S.” He rightfully places the emergence of model minority in the context of Civil Rights Act and the Watts uprising of 1965 and adds that “the entry of desis in large numbers after the passage of the Civil Rights Acts” prompted the media “to add desis to the model minority category” (Prashad 7,169). Although Prashad connects the model minority category to the discourse of African American pathologization, he does not explain the shifting composition of the category such that the term “model minority” is increasingly being employed to describe South Asians rather than as a broader term for pan-Asian America racialization technologies. That is, how, when and why did
the “model minority” shift from denoting Asian American racialization to denoting primarily South Asian racialization and how do we account for the consequences of the fission of the category for the already ambivalent relation between South Asians and the category of Asian Americans?

Popular media has served as a crucial site for the formation and reconfiguration of model minority. Newsmagazines such as *U.S. News & World Report, Time*, and *Newsweek* continue to signal paradigmatic shifts in model minority discourse. Therefore, I will examine a couple of instances of the recent rhetoric being propounded in these magazines to highlight its resonances with the implications being drawn by the films and to underscore that diverse popular media, in this case South Asian diasporic film and magazines, often work in conjunction to construct and manage model minority discourse.

South Asian diasporic film serves as a productive site for analysis of transnational engagements of race, racisms, and racializations. First, in order to deepen their transnational audience base and to attract white and non-South Asian viewers, South Asian diasporic films not only circulate across different continents but also make a concerted effort to carry content that engages with spaces of South Asia, Europe, and America. Such engagement is often not found in the content of other popular media as television or music although their circulation might span the diaspora. In other words, the storyline itself travels through the different continents and nations and unwittingly comes to bear the contradictions and problematics of traveling this itinerary. For instance in *Bride and Prejudice*, Lalita and her family are based in India, Balraj and his family in Britain, and Darcy and his family in the United States. To further supplement the transnational content, directors like Chadha have set a trend to release the film in multiple languages across multiple diasporic spaces. In 2002, *Bend It Like Beckham* played in two
versions simultaneously across cinema halls in India – the English version that was also being
played to audiences across Britain, and the Hindi dubbed version titled *Football-Shootball Hai
Rabba*. The assumptions, politics, and contradictions of such a move to widen South Asian
diasporic film audience by segmenting it along lines of race, class, and gender are worth
exploring in another project. Such assumptions are also operative in the case of *Bride and
Prejudice*, which was simultaneously released in Hindi dubbed version as *Balle Balle Amritsar
to LA* – a title that makes no reference to the Jane Austen text *Pride and Prejudice* on which the
movie is based but foregrounds instead the diasporic itinerary of the film.

South Asian diasporic films also provide a unique opportunity for analyzing transnational
constructions of race because the films’ visibility and consumption are imbricated with the
racialization processes for South Asians. Gayatri Gopinath argues that the increased visibility
and consumption of diasporic films in a post-9/11 racial landscape “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). At the level of circulation, the consumption of South Asian
diasporic film represents consumption of multicultural diversity and non-engagement with
difference. Gopinath observes that the consumption and “fetishization of Bollywood as
sexualized and gendered spectacle” is “inseparable from the material and representational
violence currently being enacted on South Asian communities in the United States” (“Bollywood
Spectacles” 162). The content of South Asian diasporic films manifests the aforementioned
claim. The films often make their narratives palatable to the elusive white, non-South Asian
audience by translating Bollywood to Hollywood. The modes of translation involve complicity
with the American nationalist project, through resurrection of Orientalist tropes such as repressed/primitive female sexuality, and with white liberal feminism through representations of exoticized and “othered” rituals of marriage. The modalities of representation in South Asian diasporic film make it not only a contested terrain for discourses of race, nationalism, sexuality, and gender, but also implicate it as yet another technology that monitors racial boundaries, maintains racial hierarchies, and contributes to the production of racial formations such as the model minority.

The discourse on race in *Bend It Like Beckham* and *Bride and Prejudice* remains illegible for most reviewers of popular media. Many reviewers thought that *Bend It Like Beckham* became tremendously popular precisely because Chadha broke out of the ‘racism’ mode of *Bhaji on the Beach*. For instance, Uma Mahadevan-Dasgupta’s review for the *Hindu* echoes the words of many other reviews: “*Bend It Like Beckham* is not a deep, crusading film filled with issues. It is not about life on the margins, or about rioting and racism. Race isn't the great theme of the film — it's a given.” But Chadha wards off criticism that she has veered off the sophisticated track she set in *Bhaji on the Beach* to pay homage to Bollywood by asserting the continued centrality of issues of race for her films: “The problem with race in Britain is a lot of people have an idea about what kind of films I should be making… The fact is I do make films about race but I do it my own way” (Roy). Thus, while the films are complicit with United States’ imperialist ideologies, they cannot help but bear out the contradictions and crises of complex transnational racializations mobilized by the American imperialist project and a reading against the grain will yield the critical nuanced, unpredictable, subtle ways in which the gendered and classed concept of model minority is being reconfigured.
To briefly recapitulate the dominant storylines of the films, then, *Bend It Like Beckham* is a narrative of culture clash in which the British Punjabi girl Jess Bhamra faces pressure from her immigrant parents to give up her passion for soccer in order to have a regular career and marriage. Jess does not break rules but bends them, just as she does her soccer ball, to both have an interracial relationship with her Irish coach Joe, and to escape the racist climate of Britain and the repressive climate of her home. At the end of the film Jess and her white British team mate Jules (Juliette), with whom she is mistaken to have a lesbian relationship but in fact has a conflict with for Joe’s affections, leave for the emancipatory space of America where they can pursue their dream of playing professional soccer.

Chadha’s *Bride and Prejudice* is a transposition rather than a translation of the British classic Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice*. The film transfers Bollywood to the Hollywood side of the cinematic equation accompanied by a change of sign such that Elizabeth Bennet becomes Lalita, an Indian girl from Amritsar; Mr. Bingley becomes Balraj, a British Punjabi lawyer; Mr. Collins is transposed to Mr. Kohli, an NRI accountant from California; and Will Darcy is an American hotelier. The film ends in Darcy’s and Lalita’s wedding as a culmination of their romance after Darcy has rid himself of his imperialist attitude and his disparaging remarks against Indian culture and has also cleared a misunderstanding that he had caused between Balraj and Lalita’s elder sister Jaya.5

### 3.2 **Culture, Capital, and the Model Minority**

*Bend It Like Beckham* and *Bride and Prejudice* individually and in conjunction with each other indicate the shifting contours of the model minority racialization. I ground my discussion in the key scene of Kohli’s dinner with the Bakshi family in *Bride and Prejudice* to demonstrate
that the film salvages the United States as a sanitized multicultural space through a simultaneous fear and loathing of the South Asian post/colonial subject. In the figure of Kohli, the United States is constructed as a mythical, almost an empty space of freedom by defining it against Kohli’s embodiment of multiple failures—a failed British colonial project, failed modernity, and failed inclusion in bourgeois America. And then, by contrasting Kohli’s portrayal with Mr. Bhamra’s in *Bend It Like Beckham*, we can bring model minority racialization to a crisis by positing that Mr. Bhamra would be excluded from both the model minority racialization in the United States and from valorization of such model minority diasporic subjects in India.

The scene of Kohli’s dinner with the Bakshi family runs as follows and I quote at some length here:

KOHLI. You [Mr. Bakshi] must join me in U.S. you must, you must. I could help you start a business there. That’s where the money’s to be made. UK is finished. India’s too corrupt.

MR. BAKSHI. Kohli Sahib, India’s still a young country since Independence. I hardly think its potential is over.

LALITA. And what do you think your U.S. was like after sixty years of Independence? They were all killing each other over slavery and blindly searching for gold.

KOHLI. I’ll tell you what. I have made a packet as an accountant in L.A. The Indian community there is very professional – all doctors and computers and not like these uneducated minicab, 7-Eleven types. It’s ours for the taking. Anyone can become Amrikan.

MR. BAKSHI. Then… why come back here?
KOHLI. [...] There’s only one problem with Amrika. Our girls that are born there, they’ve totally lost their roots. Completely clueless!

MRS. BAKSHI. Our girls are very rooted. They’re very very very traditional.

KOHLI. You know, in U. S., they’re all too outspoken and career-oriented – and some – have even turned into the lesbian.

In this scene, we see that Kohli defines his racialization in a transnational framework to identify himself – an Indian, Hindu, wealthy diasporic male – as the ideal subject of model minority discourse. Kohli’s differentiation between Indian and non-Indian overlaps with a distinction between Hindu and non-Hindu South Asian communities. Kohli defines the “professional Indian community” in the United States not only against Britain-centered manual labor-based diasporas but also against cabdrivers who primarily are South Asian Muslims from Bangladesh and Pakistan or Sikhs from India, who are racialized as potential terrorists in contemporary American racial formations. Thus, the scene indicates that the model minority racialization, while being defined transnationally, is being applied to a narrower segment of the South Asian population defined by nation, class, religion, and gender as Indian, Hindu, wealthy male.

Kohli’s racialization in the United States as model minority is based on his status as a British postcolonial subject. The current ideal model minority subject—Indian, Hindu, wealthy male – is also the “authentic” British post/colonial subject forming the core of the class that was educated in English so that they could be what Thomas Macaulay, in his “Minute on Education,” labels “interpreters” between the British colonizers and the Indian masses (Visweswaran 10). And it is this bourgeois, neocolonial class with access to an education system set up by a Britain fetishized in the American imaginary that has been harnessed by the United States capitalist structures in their pursuit of globalization. The American-centered globalization in our
postmodern moment is made possible precisely by neocolonial subjects like Kohli. But Barnor Hesse and S. Sayyid warn us that understanding post-war migration from colonies in terms of labor shortage can erroneously erase its “deeply re-inscribed colonial dynamics” (21). They argue that “In these accounts the movement of people is reduced to the working of an implacable economic logic, which transcends any particular embodiments, and works in a universal space, the invisible hand of the market, outside of historical processes or cultural formations” (21). They emphasize that the divide between capital and culture is central to the colonial logic and, as discussed later, is an issue that drives the narrative of *Bride and Prejudice*. In light of Hesse’s and Sayyid’s argument, it becomes important to note, as Kohli does, that the British system of education is central not only to American capitalist structures but also to the racialized institution of American citizenship. Kohli clearly considers education as defining the limit of belonging to the emancipatory space of the United States. He states that “anyone can become Amrikan” but then includes the model minority “professional Indian community” and excludes “uneducated minicab, 7-Eleven types” from the category “Amrikan.” The British system of education is a crucial component of the relation between the racial project of British colonialism, model minority racial formation, and the racist determinations of American citizenship.

The proposition that South Asians’ model minority status is increasingly based on their status as postcolonial subjects renders more ambivalent the contentious relationship between the categories of “South Asian” and “Asian American.” Since 9/11, there has been an increase in violence against South Asians, but there has also been a concomitant increase in the frenzied rhetoric of South Asian success in popular newsmagazines, which has significantly reinforced the model minority stereotype for a select section of South Asians. The rhetoric that was earlier characterized by anxiety about the economic success of India *and* China now exclusively focuses...
on Indians in India and in the United States. Therefore, on the one hand, following the events of 9/11, the racialization of South Asians as potential terrorists places them in the specific historical trajectory of racial formation that has defined Asian presence in America: the external “enemy” as the insider “alien” (Lowe 8). Lisa Lowe writes that America’s relations with Asia and Asian immigrants have followed a distinctive logic whereby “American orientalism displaced U.S. expansionist interests in Asia onto racialized figurations of Asian workers within the national space” (5). This particular genealogy has influenced the inclusion of groups as diverse as Filipinos, Japanese, Koreans, and after 9/11, South Asians into the category “Asian American.”

On the other hand, limiting the model minority label to the “authentic” British post/colonial subjects deepens the fissures in the category “Asian American.” For instance, an article in *Newsweek* titled “American Masala” situates British colonialism vis-à-vis divisions in Asian America as follows:

> But what sets [Indians] apart is a strong work ethic combined with the grace of people comfortable with living among strangers: India was, after all, colonized by the British. “Becoming part of America comes more naturally to the Indians than perhaps the Chinese or Japanese cultures,” says Arvind Panagriya, an economics professor at Columbia University. (Setoodeh 39, emphasis mine).

The article defines Indians as the “model minority” by romanticizing India’s colonization by the British and characterizing Indians as graceful in their colonization. Charting the model minority racial formation as a “natural” progression from the history of British colonialism, the article naturalizes the inclusion of Indians and the exclusion of other Asian groups from the American national space. The popular media examined here posits that the model minority status of South Asians is predicated on the hypervisibility of British post/colonial subject, which fractures the
terms “South Asian” and “Asian American” along lines of nation, religion, and gender. From these emergent conjunctures of model minority arise the contours of a new American exceptionalism defined in the transnational frame.

The American imperialist project invokes the model minority category and its accompanying rhetoric of success because this racial formation is not merely an abstraction but is sutured to capitalist material structures of domination. Therefore, as the model minority racialization is reconfigured in a transnational frame, so it leads to, what Dirlik calls, “transnationalization of the class structures associated with capitalist domination” (“Is There History” 24). The cinematic and diasporic spaces of *Bride and Prejudice* (2004) are claimed as bourgeois. The only working class character in the film, Johnny Wickham, is got rid of as a villain. Also notable in this regard is the representation of the servant of the Bakshi household in the scene titled “Hollywood Visitor” which, of course, refers to Kohli’s visit. When the servant, who bears the feminized name of Bijli, rushes to take Kohli’s luggage, Kohli’s face contorts with disgust and he expresses his fears of contamination in that all-American expression “Ewww.” The scene signals that Indians’ economic success, a story being flaunted in the popular media, has not brought about alleviation of poverty in India but rather implies a widening differential among incomes of which the presence of servants is the most visible manifestation.8

The film also establishes that the invocation of Kohli’s model minority status and his economic success are crucial for the consolidation of American exceptionalism in the film. Kohli’s success as an immigrant accountant in America maintains the prevailing class and racial hierarchies. His status contributes to the maintenance of Darcy’s success by both providing labor for Darcy and consuming the services of Darcy’s hotel for his wedding. Many critics like Prashad, Purnima Mankekar, and Tavishi Alagh and Sheena Malhotra have noted that the
economic success of Hindu model minority subjects like Kohli, so crucial for the racially charged projects of American nationalism and exceptionalism, has also financed the inextricably linked revival of Hindu nationalism in India. Mankekar argues that the NRIs are overvalorized in India because of their economic prowess to invest in India and that “NRIs being courted for their capital were gendered as male” (746). Prashad further elaborates that the NRI prowess and influence extends far beyond the economic sphere and that United States’ racism-inspired “Indian cultural dilemma” is being harnessed by Hindu bourgeoisie to finance Hindu nationalism (134,147). The intertextual analysis of Prashad and Mankekar, when translated into popular culture idiom, indicates the inevitable and inextricable link and complicity between American and Indian nationalisms in the figure of the gendered NRI Kohli, who is valorized in the United States as a model minority and is also valorized in Indian nationalist contexts.

But the possibility of Kohli’s uncircumscribed success raises fear and anxiety of disruption of the dominant racial and economic order that is then managed, in accordance with United States’ imperialist ideologies that aim to maintain American exceptionalism, by circumscribing Kohli’s model minority status. Kohli’s economic success is valid only insofar as it maintains dominant racial and economic order but beyond that Kohli is excluded from bourgeois America, from the “authentic” circuits of American commerce and culture that Darcy embodies. The anxiety generated by Kohli’s economic success is diffused through his residence in the Los Angeles neighbourhood of the Valley. His home in the Valley stands as a clear counterpoint to Darcy’s residence and workplace in Beverly Hills and marks the limit of his success as an immigrant accountant and of his wealth and status as an NRI. For instance, just before his dinner with the Bakshi family, Kohli shows pictures of his American home to Mrs. Bakshi on a handheld gadget. “Dream home colonial style – 5 bedrooms, 3 ½ bathrooms- $ 850,000,” Kohli
boastfully describes his home. But when Mrs. Bakshi asks, “Is it near Beverly Hills 90210?” Kohli’s voice becomes tentative as if he has been caught stealing something that does not rightfully belong to him. “No, No… No,” Kohli begins in a weak voice, “it’s in the Valley.” His voice picks up again when he adds enthusiastically “But twenty minutes down 101 freeway and you are in North Hollywood” to which Mrs. Bakshi promptly responds “Look Lalita, he lives in Hollywood.” The connotation in this scene that is never explicitly stated is the status of the Valley as “uncool suburbia” as compared to the “cool, urban, hip” status of Los Angeles in the American/Indian imaginary. In his book City of Quartz, Mike Davis notes the Valley as a space that “encapsulates this ethos of untranscendable parochialism” and a space where “fierce localisms [are] disguised by a superficially homogeneous landscape” (204-205). The screen image of Kohli’s home in a drab suburban area, in which all the surrounding homes look identical to each other, echoes Davis’s idea that the Valley is the antithesis of opulent globalized cosmopolitan space. The landscape is lined with palm trees and the proximity of his home to the desolate Mojave Desert than to the “urban cool” Los Angeles marks the last frontier of Kohli’s American dream.

Any possible threat posed by Kohli’s economic success is completely diffused by his ensured failure at everything except his job. His portrayal as a successful accountant is countered by his representation as a vulgar buffoon. The DVD subtitles compare Kohli’s laugh to a “donkey braying;” he spews food while eating dinner and makes inept use of American slang words like “dude” and “What’s up.” The same imperialist structures that invoke the model minority racialization also evacuate its content through the racist colonial logic of creating a divide between culture and capital. Kohli is financially successful but culturally inadequate. The film does not privilege a narrative of cultural inadequacy and cultural clash but emphasizes that
Kohli’s cultural inadequacy is closely associated with the anxiety regarding his role in the class structures. Kohli’s portrayal is in complete contrast to Prashad’s conception that desis in the West have always been understood in the Indian imaginary as possessors of cultural capital. The divide between culture and capital, according to Prashad, is not only a weapon in imperialism’s arsenal, but also a tool that allows desis to negotiate their lives in the West by allowing them to “take cultural refuge… protect and preserve tradition at home and at the same time be culturally safe when in the domain of capital” (104-105). The film, however, does not allow for such redemptive readings of the divide between culture and capital.

_Bride and Prejudice_ allocates cultural capital along lines of gender and nationality. Lalita, for example, is endowed with cultural citizenship in a manner that Kohli will never be (I will elaborate more on this in the next section). Kohli’s vulgar excess and loneliness in America offers a glaring contrast with Balraj’s glamorous, sophisticated masculinity, his originality, and to his comfort in Britain as “home.” Balraj’s cultural capital is manifested in his seamless negotiation between his status as a British lawyer and the Indian culturescape which he transcends through his ability to “transform into the Indian MC Hammer” at the “Indian version of the American Idol.” The contrast between Kohli’s vacuous model minority status and Balraj’s cultural capital, insofar as they are being constructed in the national spaces of the United States and Britain respectively, can be understood in the context of fetishization of Britain in the American imaginary. Historian Antoinette Burton argues that America bears a “nostalgia for Britain… [that] represents one expression of the contemporary desire for what America has not been in the twentieth century: that is ordered, white, untouched by social upheaval, homogeneous…” (365). Burton notes that the fiction of Britain as white, homogeneous and free of racial strife is the result of an even greater fantasy of the segregation of empire and race, thus
exporting to America the same colonial racial imaginary that was the driving force of the empire (362). The empire has been a “central feature of Britain for export” through cultural productions (broadcast in America as part of the cultural caché of PBS) but its accompanying racial problems are neither considered a part of “Britain’s ‘real’ history” of empire nor form a part of Britain’s present (360-362). *Bride and Prejudice* is complicit with American imperialist ideologies and serves to sustain this fiction about contemporary Britain as a place free of racial problems, and therefore, represents Balraj as sophisticated and comfortable with his Britishness while Kohli’s economic success is perceived as the heart of racial anxiety in America, which needs to be diffused. If Kohli’s economic success as qualified labor in the United States is understood in light of his status as British colonial subject, so also his characterization as a buffoon and as an embodiment of vulgarity and bodily excess represents the failure of modernity and the failure of the British colonial project, as outlined by Macaulay, of “creating a class of persons, Indian in blood and color, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect” (qtd. in Visweswaran 10). The film’s representation of Kohli’s loathsomeness, his loneliness, of his lack of English taste and intellect that coincides with failure to lead “the American way of life,” renders the racial category of model minority vacuous.

We now shift our focus to Mr. Bhamra in *Bend It Like Beckham* whose belief that British racism and American exceptionalism are discontinuous breaks down in light of Kohli’s assertion of model minority status in the United States and his overvalorization as a Hindu, wealthy, diasporic model minority subject in Indian nationalist formations in the homeland and in the diaspora. As one of the few popular films that at least try to offer a sophisticated portrayal of a Sikh family, the disjunction in *Bend It Like Beckham* between the textual portrayal of Mr. Bhamra’s vision of the United States as a space free of racism for his daughter Jess and the
intertextual racialization of Sikhs as potential terrorists in both United States and in India throws the model minority discourse in crisis.

In a scene that sets up the resolution of the film, Mr. Bhamra grants Jess permission to play soccer in the United States and explains his decision to forbid Jess from playing in Britain as follows: “When I was a teenager in Nairobi, I was the best fast bowler in our school. Our team even won the East African Cup. But when I came to this country, nothing. I was not allowed to play in any of the teams and these bloody goras in their clubhouses made fun of my turban and sent me off packing.” And when Jess’s coach Joe insists that things are changing now, he says, “Now what? None of our boys are in any of the football leagues. You think they’ll let our girls. I do not want you to build up Jesminder’s hopes. She will only end up disappointed like me.” In this scene, three main issues emerge. First, Mr. Bhamra asserts his patriarchal authority in the context of British racism. Mr. Bhamra’s casting of his decision to forbid Jess from playing soccer as a means of resistance and to counter racism complicates readings that might posit the Bhamra family as traditional and read Jess’s agency to play soccer or have an interracial relationship as escape from her conservative home and family. While this is not to deny the patriarchal violence or violation experienced by Jess, the scene emphatically offers an alternative portrayal of racialized patriarchy, which is different from Western structural notions of patriarchy and leads to a revision of readings that understand the film in ostensibly liberal feminist frameworks.¹⁰

Second, Mr. Bhamra’s assertion of patriarchal authority is complicated by his centralizing the turban in his experience of racism. In her discussion of the symbolic importance of the turban to the racialization of Sikhs as terrorists, Jasbir Puar notes that in the Sikh community “the turban wearer, usually male, bears the typically female burden of safe-guarding and transmitting
culture and of symbolizing the purity of nation” (134). Whether the invocation of the turban should be seen as a self-feminizing gesture remains debatable but for certain, Mr. Bhamra is visually marked as a potential terrorist in ways that neither Kohli or Balraj or his own daughter Jess can be. This gendered racialization of Mr. Bhamra enables him to understand the United States as a liberatory space for Jess but not for himself.

Third, the resolution of the film is interesting in that Mr. Bhamra constructs the United States as a utopian multicultural space for Jess by juxtaposing it with a Britain in which he experienced racism. I note this because the only incident of racism that Jess experiences in which she is called a “Paki” does not occur in Britain; it occurs when her team travels to Hamburg to play a local German team and a player from the opposing team uses the racial slur. Mr. Bhamra fixes British racism as historical, related to its colonial legacy and therefore, always situated in the past; this view distorts the full comprehension of the workings of racism in its new avatar of multiculturalism in contemporary Britain and the resonance of British multiculturalism with American multiculturalism. Through a disavowal of both racism in the United States and the hostility toward Sikhs in India, Mr. Bhamra foregrounds his exclusion from the model minority racialization in the United States and from the valorization of this racial status in India. In the figure of Mr. Bhamra, we can infer the collusion between the United States and Indian nationalisms that situate him at the margins of the model minority discourse, nationalistic discourses, and national and diasporic cinemas.

3.3 **Gendered Continuities of the Diaspora**

In two similar projects about the diaspora, critics Gayatri Gopinath and Jigna Desai present readings of *Bend It Like Beckham* that analyze the film through frameworks of gender and
sexuality. Both of them argue that the film articulates issues of gender and sexuality through ideas of liberal feminism with an emphasis on feminist (hetero)sexual agency (Gopinath, Impossible Desires 128; Desai 212). They both contend that the film operates through a “strategic containment of queer female sexuality” in order to render it more palatable or consumable for cross-cultural viewers and non-South Asian audiences (Gopinath, Impossible Desires 128; Desai 212). While I mostly agree with Desai’s and Gopinath’s accounts and they do consider race as an important vector in their analysis, I believe that race continues to be too broad-based in their readings and fails to account for the specificities of racism and racialization of the (hetero)sexualized Indian women in the diaspora. How is the racialized diaspora of the above discussion conceived of and constructed in highly gendered ways in Bend It Like Beckham and Bride and Prejudice? What kinds of subjectivities of Indian women are produced by the gendered anxieties of the diaspora and the management thereof?

In order to answer these and other questions, I suggest that we retrace our steps to the dinner scene with Kohli and the Bakshi family. In this scene, Kohli declares that his only problem with America is the state of Indian American women who have forgotten the Indian womanly virtues of chastity and modesty and instead have become outspoken, career-oriented, and some have become sexually perverted and transformed into lesbians. In light of my suggestion that Kohli’s model minority racialization is invoked in form while simultaneously evacuated of content through his embodiment of failed modernity, we can read Kohli’s view of the Indian American women as his attempt to displace the anxieties about his own modernity onto the figure of the Indian woman. In other words, Kohli displaces anxieties of his own vulgarity and excess onto the figure of the Indian woman in the West whom be portrays as modern and therefore, vulgar. The question then arises: Are the Indian women in the films
included in the model minority racialization in the United States and if so, what are the terms of this inclusion?

Here the films reinscribe the racist divide between culture and capital. Lalita and Jess are excluded from economic circuits of labor that define the diasporic model minority subject but are selectively included through accordance of a cultural capital that the male characters in the films are denied. This characterization is different from Prashad’s argument that the desi woman is incorporated in the model minority logic through encouragement to work and “excel in school and careers” while “the special divide made by desis between capital and culture provides the context for the violence visited upon desi women in the United States” by allowing patriarchal control in the sphere of the home even as economic success is emphasized in the public sphere (105). Kohli excludes Lalita from diasporic economies of labor by emphasizing that she would not have to work if she married him because of his “work for some of the richest men in Amrika” and his savings, stocks and bonds. Thus, Kohli uses the very terms of his inclusion in the category of model minority to exclude Lalita. For Kohli, the two factors that define his model minority racialization, his love for the United States and his condescension for India, break down at the question of Indian woman’s sexuality.

Jess and Lalita are selectively included in the model minority racialization because they possess cultural capital, which, as I have discussed earlier, the films allocate in a gendered manner. What does the possession of cultural capital imply for the Indian women in the diaspora? It implies that Indian women in the diaspora like Jess and Lalita are racialized as native informants. The women’s role as native informants leads to a gendered construction of the diaspora, whereby women see themselves as participants in the diaspora through economies of knowledge rather than through economic relationships, which are gendered male. For instance,
in *Bend It Like Beckham*, Jess is included and accepted in the soccer community, especially in the “girls’ locker room”—which Gopinath suggests is “imagined as a space of British multicultural (racial and gender) egalitarianism”—precisely because of Jess’s role as a native informant (*Impossible Desires* 129). It is in the locker room that Jess explains to her multiracial, curious teammates the intricacies of Indian culture and traditions. We notice that Jess has already overcome her initial awkwardness at being semi-clad in the presence of other teammates, and explains comfortably the hierarchy of racial choices available to a South Asian Sikh girl for marriage: “White, no. Black, definitely not. A Muslim eh-eh (makes slitting action at throat).” In *Bride and Prejudice*, Lalita explains to Darcy how the arranged marriages in a globalized world are akin to a global dating service. She waxes eloquent about the histories of India and the United States and accuses Darcy of being an imperialist who is converting India into a theme park through his hotel project. Lalita, played by the ex-Miss World Aishwarya Rai, is rendered a cultural ambassador both on and off screen. Similarly, the other Indian diasporic woman in the film Kiran, Balraj’s sister, offers a translation of the rituals at an Indian wedding to Darcy: “The Indian version of American Idol. I hope you brought earplugs… Brace yourself, Darcy. [Balraj’s] about to transform into the Indian MC Hammer.”

South Asian women’s racialization as native informants and their participation in diasporic communities through economies of knowledge do not occur in the context of individual emancipation but in the context of translating India for global capital or for the transnational project of racial management. In making this point, I do not mean to suggest ideas of women as “race traitors” but to emphasize instead the new post-9/11 contexts in which the role of Indian women as native informants is being articulated. Salman Sayyid argues that intelligence agencies in Britain and United States have “discovered the merits of diversity” as “native informants are
increasingly turned into police informers” (9). Thus, the racialization of women as native informants is being mobilized in the war on terror. The other context in which women are being tapped as native informants is that of India’s economic success as depicted in the popular media. For instance, Bride and Prejudice posits a divide between culture and capital and the gaps in this division are filled by cultural translations offered by Lalita and Kiran. These cultural translations affect global capital investment decisions. For example, against the backdrop of Darcy’s Beverly Hills hotel, Darcy suggests to his mother Catherine in the presence of the Bakshi family that it was Lalita who had helped him make a decision not to invest in India, referring, of course, to the instance when Lalita had interpreted his hotel business venture in Goa as an imperialist gesture to convert India into a theme park. On hearing this, Catherine is visibly displeased on having lost a profitable business opportunity. “Everybody has their hand on India these days,” Catherine says, “but Will refused.” She blames Lalita for “a decision that cost us a fortune.” The films, therefore, point out that the racialization of South Asian women as native informants marks the limits of West’s engagement with multiracial diversity and defines the limits of legibility, translatability and possibility in the South Asian diaspora.

As cultural translators between different sites in the diaspora, South Asian women are portrayed as particularly amenable to the technologies of Americanization, such as the use of cosmopolitan knowledge of various places in the diaspora for expansionist and imperialist ends. In these representations, South Asian women articulate continuities between various national spaces, thereby revealing the proximity between cosmopolitanism and American cultural citizenship. Analyzing the contemporary constructions and uses of the diaspora, Sujata Moorti suggests that “through an invocation of the geographic space and category of the diaspora, the global and the local are seamlessly sutured on the female body to produce a globalised Indian
subject” (51). According to Moorti, the “cosmopolitan Indian imaginary” is distinctly “registered in the feminine idiom” (51). Her argument challenges Mankekar’s point that “if diasporic women are especially burdened with the transmittal of Indian culture, NRI men anthropomorphize the mobility of culture” (750). The two arguments differ because Mankekar’s claim is situated in a pre-9/11 imaginary when the NRI category was not fractured by a potential terrorist racialization. The representations of Indian women in *Bend It Like Beckham* and *Bride and Prejudice* bear more resonance with Moorti’s analysis. Jess and Lalita are self-styled cosmopolitan subjects who can situate “India and the West together within the same frame not as binary categories but as supplementing each other” (Moorti 53). The men in the films, however, cannot embody or construct these continuities in the diaspora because they are either, like Mr. Bhamra, visually marked, intertextually racialized as potential terrorists or, like Kohli, are denied the cultural capital to negotiate multiple diasporic spaces. As embodiments of diasporic continuity, South Asian women construct the United States as a space of possibility and articulate the contours of American exceptionalism. These diasporic women’s cultural capital and knowledge equips them to follow the “American way of life,” a racist technology at the heart of American exceptionalism. Their ability to follow the “American way of life” assuages anxieties and fears of cultural contamination and disruption of prevalent racial, economic, and gender hierarchies. Thus Jess and Lalita are accorded American cultural citizenship on account of their cultural capital and knowledge.

Does the diasporic continuity represented by women also make women *transcend* the binaries of “here” and “there,” “nation” and “diaspora?” In other words, do Jess and Lalita in traveling the diasporic itinerary transcend the spaces associated with the itinerary? Gopinath and Puar and Rai read *Bend It Like Beckham* as a diasporic translation of the *ghar/bahar* or
home/non-home, home/abroad narrative. In Gopinath’s view, “Chadha mobilizes a conventional framing of home as a space of racial and gender subordination that stands in contradiction to a presumably freer elsewhere (here the United States)” (Impossible Desires 128). Chadha’s films problematize the categories of home/non-home not through their ambiguity but by emphasizing their spatial specificity; that is, the “freer elsewhere” that Gopinath refers to is very specifically the United States and cannot be anywhere else. The films are narratives that cannot just occur anywhere in the diaspora: they do not just privilege the itinerary but are rooted in specific spatial sites. For example, we have already discussed the significance of Kohli’s residence in the Valley. The films emphasize that while there is no single space called the diaspora, diaspora is also not an abstract space in the global.

The conjunctive yet differential constitution of specific places in the narratives of South Asian diaspora problematize both the seamlessness of global capital and the stark separation posited between homeland and hostland, and between imperialist pasts in the colonies “over there” and nationalist presents “here.” Specifically, the two songs in Bride and Prejudice, symbolic of diasporic cinema’s Bollywood idiom, exemplify how analysis of specific spatial sites can reveal histories of racist and imperial violence that constitutes the diasporic itinerary and that otherwise remains hidden in celebratory portrayals of diasporic mobility and cultural syncretism. The song “From Amritsar to UK” is set in the streets and bazaars of Amritsar where Lalita is shopping with two friends for one of the friends’ wedding. Various shopkeepers market their wares as suitable for the wedding while turbaned Sikh men sing and dance along the streets to celebrate. “Take me to Love” is on the surface a romantic song that allows for the progression of love between Lalita and Darcy but its appeal lies in the visual juxtaposition of multicultural spaces of Los Angeles, such as mariachi singers in a Mexican restaurant and African American
gospel singers on a beach. The songs highlight the diasporic spaces as spaces of consumption though the modes of consumption remain highly differentiated. In these songs, the specific places of Amritsar and Los Angeles become sites of consumption of not only products like Indian jewelry and Mexican food but also of a spectacle of religious, ethnic, and racial multicultural diversity. But the spectacle of celebration of religious and racial diversity in public and urban spaces is not innocent in the images it evokes. Behind the spectacle of the Sikh men dancing in the streets of Amritsar is the specter of violence against Sikhs during the 1980s, the epicenter of which lay in the vicinity of the bazaars depicted in the song. This reading is reinforced by the iconic status of the Golden Temple, the holiest place for Sikhs and a powerful symbol of violence against Sikhs, as the backdrop of the film. Similarly between the images for consumption of harmony of the African American gospel singers on the Los Angeles beach lurks the specter of racial riots, ranging from Watts riots of 1965 to the Rodney King uprising of 1992, which was the result of a verdict given by a jury drawn from the Valley of Kohli’s residence and imaginary. The songs posit an alternate diaspora that disrupts the seamlessness of capital, which is often achieved through an overwhelming emphasis on cities such as Bombay and New York as representative of South Asian diaspora. Thus, insofar as the films point out that the South Asian diaspora is being increasingly structured through a project of transnational racial management, the songs’ portrayal of Amritsar and Los Angeles depicts the violence accompanying such a project.

In this chapter, I have argued that Gurinder Chadha’s films *Bend It Like Beckham* and *Bride and Prejudice* demonstrate the paradigmatic shifts in the model minority racialization of South Asians in a post-9/11 context. The narrative of American exceptionalism, exemplified by the model minority racial formation, is based on a diasporic romanticization of South Asians’
status as erstwhile British subjects, which manifests as a complex affect of simultaneous fascination and fear. The transnational reconfiguration of model minority challenges definitions of racial formations as exclusively nation-based concepts that remain static over space and time. This analysis further demonstrates that the label of “model minority” is classed and gendered. South Asian women are included in the category to the extent that their cultural knowledge serves the ends of American neoliberalism. A select section of South Asian diaspora—mostly Indian, wealthy men—are able to imagine themselves as incorporated in America as the model minority while working-class Muslims and Sikhs find themselves increasingly vulnerable to racialization as potential terrorists, to which I now turn.

Since the beginning of 1990s, there has been a steady proliferation of texts that offer complex portrayals of South Asian Muslim life in the diaspora. While diasporic films discussed in the first two chapters use the trope of interracial romance, whether Afro-Asian or Asian-white, to show how the “model minority” racial aspirations are reconfigured when refracted through the lens of British colonial history and “Black British” formations, diasporic literature is invested in tracing the intimate connections between racialization of South Asians as model minority and as potential terrorists, connections that puzzle the wider public imaginary. South Asian authors have responded creatively to mainstream discussions linking Muslim masculinity and Islamic fundamentalism by adopting the form of fan fiction or memoir and fan film, exploring fandom of American pop icons as a challenge to perceptions of Muslim men as terrorists. Narratives of American pop fandom are often bildungsromane—the literary form most commonly associated with national subject formation—that provide insights into how diasporic representations of yearning for America are employed to render South Asian Muslim men as British multicultural subjects. I begin to chart these insights by analyzing texts written as deliberate responses to the
two political events that bookend the narrative of *The Diasporic Itinerary*: Hanif Kureishi’s fan fiction *The Black Album*, an attempt to understand the aftermath of the fatwa against Salman Rushdie, and Sarfraz Manzoor’s fan memoir *Greetings from Bury Park*, a response to the events of 9/11.
Notes

1 I take the term “crisis management” from Gayatri Spivak’s work. Spivak defines “crisis” as the “moment at which you feel that your presuppositions of an enterprise are disproved by the enterprise itself” (“Negotiating” 139). The expansion of British colonialism throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries unraveled and rendered unsustainable the project of Third World modernization sought through the project of territorial domination. Rather than this being a moment of weakness for the project of imperialism itself, in my reading, it offered an opportunity for American imperialism to flourish through management of this crisis through a form different from direct territorial domination. In contemporary times, one instance of this “crisis management” is the racial basis of selective immigration of South Asian “tech workers” facilitated by American capital and state. The “tech labor” is drawn from Indian middle-class that is appealing to American capital precisely because it is educated in the system set up by the British, and this class is eager to immigrate as it finds itself in crisis due to the failed modernity of Indian state.

2 Rinaldo Walcott warns us of the dangers and limits of any diasporic analysis that is situated only in the West: “But why is that the black studies project has hung its hat so lovingly on U.S. blackness and therefore a ‘neat’ national project? And how does a renewed interest in questions of diaspora seem to only be able to tolerate U.S. blackness and British blackness?” (92). Walcott’s questions and concerns are equally valid for analysis of South Asian diaspora.

3 It is crucial here to distinguish between South Asian diasporic film and Bollywood – the Bombay-based primarily Hindi film industry. This terminology might not be accurate because Bollywood is a diasporic medium and enjoys immense popularity among pan-South Asian diasporic audiences but the distinction is important with regards to production circuits and audience structures. Whereas Bollywood films have gained visibility among mainstream non-South Asians, their audience remains primarily South Asian (their release in Hindi language might be a factor here). South Asian diasporic films, on the other hand, do not follow the Bombay-centric production structure; they are popular films that have often adopted the Bollywood idiom (they are different from South Asian or Indian art house and parallel cinemas) and have acted as self-appointed translators of that idiom in a bid to attract white and non-South Asian audiences. They are mainly released in English or in multiple languages across multiple spaces of the diaspora.

4 Gopinath’s conception of Bollywood in the article titled “Bollywood Spectacles” is more in accordance with an emerging rubric called “Planet Bollywood,” which includes Bollywood films from Bombay and diasporic films that adopt the Bollywood idiom.

5 That the narrative of the film was set across the three continents was a disorienting factor for most reviewers I studied. Most reviewers also had no referential framework for reviewing the film other than Austen’s Pride and Prejudice, and in their reviews they often resurrected a colonial telos through which they represented “appropriations of Bollywood … in terms of a prehistory of Hollywood cinema and the West” (“Bollywood Spectacles” 163). For instance, Michael Wilmington writes the following in The Chicago Tribune: “[Bollywood’s] a lavish,
outlandish genre, just as the *old* Hollywood musicals were, built on grand purple emotions, operatic ballads and scintillating, gorgeously silly dances” (emphasis mine).

6 Jasbir Puar and Amit Rai also note that “qualifications came to assume an even greater importance in the exclusions that have defined American immigration policy, indeed, the very contours of the citizen itself” (80).

7 Both *Newsweek* and *Time* carried exclusively India related cover stories in 2006. The cover story of *Newsweek* issue dated 6th March, 2006 was titled “India Rising.” The picture accompanying the story was of an Indian woman in a sari, an image that carries Orientalist connotations of the exotic or traditional “East.” The issue of *Time* magazine dated 26th June, 2006 was titled “India Inc.” and was accompanied by a picture of a lady’s face adorned with traditional Bharatanatyam dance jewelry and a telephone head-set.

8 Srinivas notes that “it is not the wealthiest countries that have the highest servant ratios but those with the largest income differentials” (qtd. in Sangari 292).

9 Davis also notes that the mixed-class neighborhood combined with the absence of smugness that would come with owning property in Beverly Hills, the inhabitants of the Valley are hyper-insecure about their property which is reflected in their “nimby” (not in my backyard) attitude (204).

10 These readings include those by Gayatri Gopinath (*Impossible Desires*) and Jigna Desai (2004).

11 Puar and Rai argue that the turban is a central and “integral component of racial profiling within surveillance technologies of counterterrorism” (82). Operating within a “fetish of the visible,” the turban is simultaneously a “target” and “a symbol of guilt” and “produce[s] the terrorist and the patriot in one body, the turbaned body” (Puar and Rai 82).

12 For more on the politics of how the film’s narrative masks the workings of multiculturalism in contemporary Britain, see Michael D. Giardina’s “‘Bending it Like Beckham’ in the Global Popular.”

13 My use of “here” and “there” in this articulation is indebted to John Hutnyk’s essay “The Dialectic of Here and There,” in which he suggests that spatial separation in analyses between homeland and hostland, and between the post/colony and imperial nation, results in apolitical scholarship in the fields of diaspora, postcolonial and cultural studies. For theorizations to be politically rigorous, he argues, scholars need to be attentive to the “co-constitution of here and there,” and to the convergences between domestic race relations and international relations. “Imperialism overseas [‘there’] is co-constituted with inequalities in the domestic sphere [‘here’],” writes Hutnyk (84).

14 For more on the specifics of the state-sponsored violence against Sikhs in Amritsar especially the 1984 Operation Blue Star, which was directed by Mrs. Indira Gandhi and involved the violation of the Golden Temple in Amritsar, see *Amritsar: Mrs. Gandhi’s Last Battle* by Mark Tully and Satish Jacob.
4. POLITICS OF THE “PROMISED LAND”: AMERICAN POPULAR CULTURE AND SOUTH ASIAN MASCULINITY IN GREETINGS FROM BURY PARK, THE BLACK ALBUM, AND TOUCH OF PINK

“...the only good thing America's ever given us is Aretha Franklin.”

-- Mohsin Hamid in Moth Smoke

The above epigraph taken from Mohsin Hamid’s novel Moth Smoke illustrates the dilemma American popular culture presents for a South Asian subject. The novel features Murad, an autorickshaw driver in Lahore, who discovers Aretha Franklin, when a foreign tourist leaves a cassette in his rickshaw. Listening to Franklin transforms Murad. He says: “Life was never the same. In the past, when people said America has never given us anything, I used to agree. Now, I say ‘Yes, but America has given us Aretha Franklin, the Queen of Soul’ and they look at me strangely. I never explain any further: one cannot explain Aretha Franklin; either you are enlightened or you are not” (62). Hamid’s use of the word “strangely” indicates his assumption that readers might detect a discordant note in a working-class Pakistani man’s unabashed admiration for an African American woman artist. The feminized title “Queen of Soul” to mediate the portrayal of South Asian masculinity signifies that gendered and racialized representations are central to interpreting the role of American pop culture in South Asian diasporic narratives. Set in Pakistan during the nuclear bomb testing contest with its neighbor India, Hamid’s novel emerges from the geopolitical context of a long, troublesome history of American engagement with the region. Hamid’s brilliant passage illustrates the complexity of South Asians’ response to their close encounters with American imperialism: their critique of American empire co-exists with the belief that American popular culture is exempt from this
critique. That is, American popular culture is considered as an exception to the other modes of power wielded by American empire.

Since this chapter aims to analyze the complex role of American popular culture in portrayals of South Asian diasporic masculinities as they navigate the intersections between Britain and the U.S., it is useful to place the discussion within the historical context of debates about American pop culture in Britain. Debates on the post-war presence of American popular culture in Britain have long divided the British ideological left. These debates range from accusing America of cultural imperialism, such as cultural studies theorist Raymond Williams’s famous assertion that “at certain levels, [Britain is] culturally an American colony,” to more sophisticated critiques that account for contradictory responses to American popular culture, similar to the one from Hamid’s *Moth Smoke* (qtd. in Campbell 131). In his article “Landscapes of Americanisation in Britain,” Neil Campbell not only discusses the ideological span of this debate, but more significantly for our purposes here also suggests that the encounter between American pop culture and Britain is manifested spatially. On the “cultural imperialism” end of the debate, Campbell provides the example of W.G. Hoskins, who suggests that imperialist geographies, as defined in American popular culture, consumerism, and military installations, have contributed to the loss of an idyllic British rural landscape, the repository of British national culture and the nationalistic symbol of its greatness. On the other end of the spectrum is architectural historian Peter Reyner Banham’s paradoxical enthusiasm for American spaces, such as Detroit and Los Angeles, and simultaneous critique of America.¹ “[H]ow to reconcile unavoidable admiration for the immense competence, resourcefulness, and creative power of American commercial design,” Banham writes, “with the equally unavoidable disgust at the system that was producing it?” (qtd. in Webster 247). Thus, a section of the British left had a
contradictory response toward American popular culture instead of outright critique: enthusiasm for its political potential even as they simultaneously felt that such art was the product of consumer capitalism and elicited “disgust.”

In delineating these debates, my purpose is not to dwell on the complex relationship of mutual influence between the U.S. and Britain. Instead I am more interested in the role played by this “discourse of Americanization” (I’m taking this term from Duncan Webster) in mediating Britain’s domestic issues of racism and class hierarchies. For example, we can interpret Hoskins’s indictment of American cultural presence for the decline of a pastoral vision of Britain as a response to Britain’s loss of its own colonies, its “post-imperial power declining into nostalgia and xenophobia” (Webster 212). In other words, the response to American popular culture mediates and displaces “the issue of British decline and homegrown tensions,” including racism against immigrants from erstwhile colonies (Webster 214). Similarly, the enthusiastic response of leftist critics like Banham can be traced to their belief in American popular culture’s democratizing potential, which they felt would lead to greater participation by the working classes in the British public sphere, thereby challenging or even subverting “homegrown tensions” of class.

This chapter interrogates the role of American popular culture in portrayals of South Asian diasporic masculinities and their navigation of the intersections between Britain and the U.S. Toward what aesthetic and narrative purposes has American popular culture been used in South Asian diasporic texts? How is American pop culture used for narrative production of place and for articulating the relation between South Asian masculinities in their national and diasporic contexts? I attempt to answer these questions by analyzing Hanif Kureishi’s novel *The Black Album* (1995), Sarfraz Manzoor’s memoir *Greetings from Bury Park* (2007), and Ian Iqbal
Rashid’s film *Touch of Pink* (2005), texts that use the trope of an American popular culture icon as father figure for the South Asian Muslim male protagonist. The chapter demonstrates that gender formations of American pop culture—whether it is the hybrid sexual identity embodied by Prince in Kureishi’s novel, the white working-class masculinity performed by Springsteen in Manzoor’s memoir, or the fluid gender boundaries of Cary Grant’s screen persona in *Touch of Pink*—mediate the formation of South Asian masculinities in their diasporic and national contexts.

*The Black Album* and *Greetings from Bury Park* chart a diasporic itinerary in which American popular culture becomes crucial to the formation of South Asian masculinities in contradictory ways: it both raises the possibility of political consciousness and manages its limits, producing masculinities that seek assimilation into the British multicultural nation state. These texts throw out the proverbial baby with the bath water as on the one hand, they reject essentialist conceptions of race- and Islam-based diasporas but on the other, also forego the possibilities of diaspora for articulating oppositional politics against nationalism. Whereas Paul Gilroy in *The Black Atlantic* considers diaspora as critique of both essentialist ethnic absolutism and nationalism, Kureishi’s and Manzoor’s texts present a scenario in which use of diaspora to critique ethnic absolutism does not necessarily result in, or translate into, a critique of nationalism (15; emphasis mine). Representations of American pop culture challenge ethnic absolutism by portraying South Asian diaspora not as a racially cohesive entity but one divided by hierarchies of class and religion and debates on normative masculinity. That is, the texts posit divisions between South Asian Muslims based on their responses to American pop culture—divisions that not only dispel essentialist ideas of race but also render the Muslim fan as incorporable in Britain by diffusing anxieties about the characters’ race and religion that would
otherwise threaten the texts’ bildungsroman form. American popular culture displaces British multiculturalism’s anxieties about Islam and South Asian diasporic masculinity, a displacement that mimics the British government’s strategy of rhetorically containing Islamic fundamentalism by framing it as a national cultural problem rather than a transnational/diasporic political issue.² Kureishi’s and Manzoor’s commitment to the bildungsroman form reveals the fragile terms by which South Asian Muslims are included in the nation.

I then contrast The Black Album and Greetings from Bury Park and their reverence for American pop music icons with Rashid’s movie Touch of Pink, a coming-out narrative of a South Asian gay man, which adopts a much more critical stance toward Hollywood star Cary Grant, the film’s central muse, and the long history of Orientalist representations in American pop culture.³ The critical stance that defines Rashid’s representations of South Asian male homosexuality makes it impossible to sustain a developmental narrative arc that can ensure the protagonist Alim’s belonging to a nation-state. Alim’s diasporic mobility enables a critique of U.S. Orientalism but also demonstrates that diaspora is a precarious state of being for a South Asian gay Muslim rather than a state of uninhibited freedom. Although the genres of the three texts analyzed here have different modes of circulation in the diaspora and the texture of American popular culture is markedly different in the cinematic versus the literary aesthetic, the comparison between Touch of Pink and Kureishi’s and Manzoor’s literary texts highlights the limits of the cultural politics of American pop culture fandom—in spite of its opposition to the perceived colonial connotations of British cultural forms—in narrating the political promise of America.

4.1 Music, Masculinity, and Bildungsroman
*Touch of Pink* is different from *Greetings* and *The Black Album* in that the former is a film in conversation with films whereas the latter two are literary representations employing the medium of popular music. Therefore, we must pay attention to not only the cultural meanings, aesthetics, social values, and class, racial, and gender imaginaries associated with the music of their central muses, Prince and Springsteen, but also to the narrative structure of the bildungsroman that they use to incorporate this music into their texts.

The American popular culture employed in Kureishi’s and Manzoor’s texts is quite different from the Bollywood aesthetic that informs the works of South Asian authors such as Salman Rushdie and Vikram Chandra, as noted by Ruvani Ranasinha in her monograph on Kureishi’s oeuvre (15). The narratives’ use of Prince and Springsteen represents the authors’ desire to escape ghettoization, assert freedom from the demand to produce “authentic” portrayals of South Asians using Bollywood or bhangra, and avoid easy binaries between “tradition” and modernity or between homeland and hostland: all desires also harbored by their protagonists. In other words, these authors want to debate race but also refuse to be confined within narrow ethnic labels or racialized discourses.

But the question remains: Why do Kureishi and Manzoor choose Prince and Springsteen as their central muses respectively instead of British artists? As Pankaj Mishra states, it is not that American artists are inherently “superior” to their British counterparts or that “the American culture industry disseminated its products more efficiently.” Since Kureishi’s and Manzoor’s texts navigate representations of diasporic race and masculinity, the turn toward American pop music is even more curious considering the long and well-documented history of the centrality of racial syncretism and anti-racist politics to the development of British iterations of rock, punk, bhangra and hip hop. Interestingly, these British musical forms have been deeply influenced by
American music, and scholars have noted that diasporic modes of production and circulation are integral to British music’s radical possibilities against “both racist nationalism and nationalist racism” (Gilroy, *There Ain’t No Black* 125). For instance, Ashley Dawson writes that the antiracism of British rock “was predicated on evoking links with anti-racist struggles outside the sclerotic confines of the British body politic, in sites such as South Africa and the United States” (2). Similarly Gilroy articulates the relation between U.S. and British musical forms by suggesting that black American musical cultures function as “raw materials for creative processes which redefine what it means to be black, adapting it to distinctively British experiences and meanings” (Gilroy 154). In these examples, American pop and rock music, especially hip hop, is seen as the repository of utopian anti-racist oppositional politics that crosses over seamlessly into British musical forms.

A reading of American music as unambiguously oppositional and mobile ignores the hierarchical relation between the U.S. and Britain, whereby the American cultural forms function as the vanguard that British forms “re-work” and not vice-versa. It also ignores the ideological underpinnings of American pop culture, which, even if anti-racist, cannot be completely disentangled from notions of the “American dream” or capitalist consumption. That is, the unequivocal subversive potential of American pop music arises from a dissociation of this music from the specificity of its national context. Thus, notions of diaspora such as Gilroy’s, discussed in the dissertation’s “Introduction,” engender deterritorialized understandings of American pop culture. Obscuring the American ethos of Prince, Springsteen, or even Cary Grant’s Hollywood, problematically naturalizes the global hegemony of American popular culture, which makes it much harder to understand its function or dismantle its hegemony. 5
My reading of *Greetings* and *The Black Album* explicitly connects representations of American pop culture with interpretations of American values, racial and gender formations and cultural meanings. Situating American popular music such that it reflects the assumed superiority of the U.S. over Britain on the one hand, and American ideological struggles on the other, enables my interpretation of these texts to eschew romanticized notions of pop music and reveal a much more contradictory picture. The contradictory role of popular music is integral to the bildungsroman form of these representations of South Asian Muslim diasporic masculinity. While the idea that the contradictory role of popular music propels these narratives’ developmental arc might seem counterintuitive, according to Lisa Lowe, it is contradiction, rather than reconciliation, that is the central defining feature of ethnic bildungsromane or narratives of immigrant assimilation into the nation (45). She argues that the linear impulse and developmental telos of ethnic bildungsroman form is always interrupted by histories of racialization, colonialism, and disenfranchisement (Lowe 56, 47). Lowe emphasizes that instead of privileging the developmental trajectory, our readings and analyses of the bildungsroman novel must pay careful attention to the interruptions of the developmental arc, wherein lie “the most interesting conflicts and indeterminacies in the text” (45).

Bildungsroman is a form most commonly associated with the nation-state but Kureishi’s and Manzoor’s texts provide us with the opportunity to discuss the circulation of this genre for South Asian subjects across national lines. To the extent that popular music has been pigeonholed by scholarship as diasporic, anti-racist, and anti-nationalist, it disrupts the texts’ developmental form by drawing attention to a history of colonialism. But popular music can also consolidate hierarchies of class and gender. The reinforcement of class and gender hierarchies, in this case, operates in the service of the British nation, thereby serving to recuperate the
bildungsroman form. For example, in his analysis of Nick Hornby’s *High Fidelity*, another British male bildungsroman that integrates pop music in its structure, Barry Faulk challenges characterizations of pop and rock as unequivocally subversive by pointing out the “persistence of class and rank in the putatively classless world of rock” (162). Faulk connects American rock musicians to American notions of entrepreneurship and “success on their own terms,” even as they simultaneously “share the goals of economic and political justice associated with civil rights activists” (160). Rock music, therefore, can be invested in resurrecting the very race and class boundaries that it is supposed to transgress. Faulk’s point exemplifies that when we consider American pop music as manifesting American values, we can understand its conciliatory role in addition to its subversive potential. This contradictory function makes American popular music more amenable for Kureishi’s and Manzoor’s bildungsromane as it points to the history of diasporic racism and colonialism while also responding to this history by replicating hierarchies of class and nationality.

Whereas Faulk explores the contradictory role of popular music in terms of class hierarchies, Gayatri Gopinath articulates a similar argument in relation to gender. In her influential text *Impossible Desires*, she contends that South Asian diasporic popular music can articulate radical anti-racist politics only to the extent that it also replicates “dominant gender and sexual ideologies” (30). According to Gopinath, the radical sounds of pop music gain currency in South Asian diaspora precisely because they espouse patriarchy and heterosexism, and in general are based on the invisibility of South Asian women (*Impossible Desires* 30-31). In contrast to Gilroy’s and Dawson’s conceptualizations of popular music as utopian, my argument relies on analyses, such as Gopinath’s and Faulk’s, that are cognizant of pop music’s ability to articulate
progressive politics along certain axes of inequality while offering conservative articulations for others.

Kureishi’s and Manzoor’s use of popular music to construct their South Asian male bildungsromane revises the oedipal masculinist paradigms that, according to Gopinath, structure diaspora discourse. The oedipal paradigm, for instance, is operational in South Asian diasporic music, which “tracks forms of ‘radical’ cultural politics only in so far as they circulate between men and pass literally and metaphorically from fathers to sons” (Gopinath, Impossible Desires 30). The term “diaspora,” for Gopinath, is structured by “heteronormative paradigms of biological inheritance, oedipality, and blood-based affiliation” (34). Although Kureishi and Manzoor rely on “relationality between men” to inscribe relations between diaspora and nation, they recast the conventional biological trope of fathers and sons by writing narratives in which their protagonists’ biological fathers are dead. Instead the fatherly and protective presence in these texts is that of American pop culture icons, and the narratives eschew essentialist or biological understandings of diaspora.

The oedipal triangulation in the texts under consideration, therefore, is dissociated from its familial structure and coincides instead with the spatial triangulation of the diasporic itinerary between South Asia, UK, and the U.S. Lowe explains that the oedipalization narrative is central to the bildungsroman form. She writes that the narrative of assimilation of the immigrant subject, usually coded as masculine, is “not dissimilar to the family’s oedipalization or socialization of the son,” whereby the immigrant identifies with the paternal state while disavowing his “ties with the feminized and racialized ‘motherland’” (Lowe 56). My reading of Greetings and The Black Album goes beyond Lowe’s discussion of the revision of the oedipal triangle for immigrants and Gopinath’s for colonized masculine subjects in order to understand the
reorganization of oedipal structures for diasporic subjects. Instead of the homeland-hostland binary that is in play in Lowe’s articulation, in the texts analyzed here, the South Asian masculine subject’s paternal identification occurs diasporically with an American pop culture artist, who in Manzoor’s memoir is textually displaced or annihilated and in Kureishi’s novel is internalized in order to achieve both reconciliation with the British “motherland” and the bildungsroman form.

4.2 Hollywood and Prince in London Streets

*The Black Album* is a novel about British Asian Muslims dealing with the aftermath of the controversy surrounding Salman Rushdie’s *The Satanic Verses*. The protagonist Shahid moves to London from the suburbs, where he feels excluded because of his race. His recognition of racism emerges from, among other things, reading Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* and seeing the author’s interview on TV. Looking for racial belonging in London, he falls in with a group of Muslims who are agitated about Rushdie and their protests culminate in a staged burning of *The Satanic Verses*. In the novel, American popular culture functions as a “common denominator” between characters, used to differentiate several characters’ traits based on their varied responses to pop culture (Viol 43). That is, American pop culture becomes the fulcrum of intellectual and ideological debates between the forces that constitute the tripartite structure of the novel: liberal multiculturalism, Islamic fundamentalism, and Thatcherism-- forces in the process of being defined anew in relation with each other in the era of what came to be known as “the Rushdie affair.”9 Prince fan Shahid symbolizes liberal multiculturalism; Chad has to repress his Prince fandom to be a fundamentalist, and Chili, Shahid’s brother, is the Hollywood-loving Thatcherite.10 By making these categorizations, my purpose is not to replicate the criticism
levied by most scholars that Kureishi’s novel is too simplistic. In the following analysis, I intend to show that if we trace the thread of American popular culture, we can see that Kureishi avoids representing these three forces as ideologically pure. Instead they exist in a state of critical tension, each dependent on the others for its meaning while also holding them in check. The novel is not completely dismissive of the fundamentalists, and it offers a critique of Thatcherism and liberal multiculturalism, even though it also ends up reinstating the latter as a superior alternative to the other two.

In order to understand Kureishi’s use of Prince as a literary device, it is helpful to know the various ways in which pop music can be integrated into prose structure and to think about what influence the integration of music can have on literary forms. Claus-Ulrich Viol shortlists three ways in which music has been historically incorporated into literature. First is the intertextual use of pop music or “short but meaningful references to songs, albums, concerts, genres, singers—including their looks, styles, beliefs, and biographies” (Viol 151). Second is the transmedial use that “arises from extensive lyrical quotation from specific songs” (Viol 161). In contrast to the intertextual, the transmedial use relies on readers’ ability to recognize a specific tune and evokes the performance of music. Third is the intermedial parallel between musical and literary structures in which entire musical genres “shape and give sense to…narratives” (Viol 183). Although Kureishi does not invoke any specific Prince tunes, we see both intertextual and intermedial uses of Prince in The Black Album. But even the least musical—the intertextual use—does not mean that Prince is peripheral or only performs a background role in the text. All three modes can play an integral role in narrative structure elements like plot, character, tone, and themes and convey “complex cultural meanings” and “aesthetic, social, generational, and attitudinal values/ messages” (Viol 151, 183).
The novel employs Prince as the “common denominator” to explicate the differences in Shahid’s and Chad’s attitudes toward Britain and religion. Instead of the more common association of the political overtones of “militant tough Asian masculinity” with musical forms such as British Asian bhangra or hip-hop, a depiction of Shahid’s embrace and Chad’s repression of American pop music fandom resurrects the often troubling binary between religious fundamentalism and secularism. As Virinder Kalra argues, the emerging dichotomy in theorizations of South Asian diasporic masculinity between “‘rioting, deprived, under-educated Muslim males’ and ‘partying secular Indian/Asian youth’” problematically dismisses religion as not worthy of serious consideration as an organizing principle of diasporic lives and demonizes Muslim men, thereby situating them on the fringes of South Asian racialized communities. Kureishi, however, does not present an opposition between these two versions of masculinity along religious Muslim/Hindu or national Pakistani/Indian lines. Instead by portraying Chili’s, Chad’s, and Shahid’s—all three of whom are Muslims—different responses to American popular culture, he dispels the idea of South Asian Muslims as a monolithic community unified by ideas of racial essentialism. It is important to note that Kureishi is interested not just in rendering South Asians as a plural community, but in explicating conflicts of class, religion, and gender that define relations among these pluralities.

Shahid’s unbridled love for Prince is the basis of his interracial heterosexual bonding with Deedee Osgood and is the symbol of his quest for racial belonging. For example, in Shahid’s first conversation with Deedee that inspires him to move to London to attend college, she describes the cultural importance of Prince as follows: “He’s half black and half white, half man, half woman, half size, feminine but macho too. His work contains and extends the history of black American music, Little Richard, James Brown, Sly Stone, Hendrix…” (Kureishi 25). Most
critics read this passage as an example of Kureishi’s promotion of ideas of racial and gender hybridity. Moore-Gilbert, for instance, suggests that in this passage, Prince’s music symbolizes celebration of “plurality of identity—whether at the level of ethnicity, class, gender, or sexuality” and Viol suggests that it symbolizes “mixed and modern patch-work identity” (117; 159). The emphasis on identity in these analyses replicates the language of liberal multiculturalism, and therefore, these analyses lend credence to Sheila Ghose’s charge that Kureishi’s critics end up replicating the same binary between liberalism and fundamentalism that they fault the novel for not being able to avoid (Ghose 122). Ghose is right in pointing out that “we can perceive ambivalence and critique of both discourses in this novel if we resist rehearsing the oppositional mode it sets up” (122).

We can avoid replicating this binary oppositional dynamic that critics rehearse by considering two important aspects of the broader context in which the above-cited passage is situated that take us beyond the hybridity-centered vocabulary of liberal multiculturalism. First, the passage does not consider Prince’s music in isolation, but places it on the longer historical trajectory of African American music and artists like Sly Stone and Jimi Hendrix. Soon after this passage, we see that Deedee begins a class on the topic of America with Hendrix’s “Star Spangled Banner” and situates black American music within the American history of miscegenation, racial violence and the anti-racist struggles of “King, Malcolm, Cleaver, Davis, and the freedom riders” during the Civil Rights movement (Kureishi 27). Prince, thus, explicitly indexes the national specificity of American racial history. Shahid’s transnational identification with Prince is not merely limited to the celebratory rhetoric of plurality and identity, but symbolizes the promise of anti-racist political consciousness.
Second, while critics often quote the above passage as an example of the importance of Prince’s racial and gender hybridity, they almost never quote the section that follows immediately after which describes the centrality of Prince to Shahid’s and Deedee’s interracial sexual relationship. As Deedee is talking eloquently about Prince’s hybrid identity, Shahid experiences her movement in that room as an “erotic landslide of rustling and hissing [which] was so sensational and almost provided the total effect of a Prince concert that his mind took off into a scenario about how he might be able to tape-record the whisper of her legs, copy it, add a backbeat and play it through his headphones” (Kureishi 26). While the idea of Prince as “half man, half woman, . . . feminine but macho too” suggests transgressive masculinity and sexuality, the above sentence indicates that here his transgressiveness is co-opted and pressed into the service of heterosexuality.

*The Black Album* both invokes Prince’s defiance of racial, gender, and sexual categories and reiterates his much more conventional relation to these categories. According to Ellis Cashmore, Prince does “not so much question [boundaries between categories] as confound them” (153). Cashmore’s analysis points to a much more equivocal understanding of the cultural meaning of Prince than the radicalism bestowed upon him by many cultural critics. For example, for all the hype about Prince’s hybrid persona and its challenges to the normative gender binary of “male” and “female,” Cashmore points out that ultimately, he cannot escape being seen as a black male who “both reaffirmed the myth of black sexual potency and undermined it” (Cashmore 152). The same characteristics that make people think of Prince as transgressing boundaries also render him susceptible to stereotypical representations as effeminate and emasculated. That is, if people question whether he is a transvestite, gay, or bisexual, it is because his “sexual prowess was visibly uncertain” (Cashmore 152). And it is precisely because
of Prince’s transgression of categories that he becomes, in Cashmore’s words, a “symbolic eunuch,” “prurient but manageable,” and therefore, can also be accepted as a crossover icon, that is, can be accepted by white audiences (153). Cashmore’s astute analysis is reflected in the text’s representation of Shahid’s masculinity which, as seen in the abovementioned passage, is based on his love for Prince. Because Shahid’s sexuality is mediated through popular culture, his father and Chili call him a “eunuch fool” (Kureishi 52). Shahid’s interracial desire and Deedee’s attraction to him are predicated on his projection of an effeminate masculinity, similar to that of his icon Prince and in contrast to Chili’s aggressive and Chad’s violent masculinity, the two other models of South Asian masculinity presented in the novel.

The novel represents Chad’s masculinity and his Islamic fundamentalism through his repressed love for Prince’s music. Chad confesses to Shahid that he “used to be a music addict” but now has to “[tear] himself away from Prince” (Kureishi 78, 19). Kureishi connects Chad’s suppression of his love for Prince to his journey toward fundamentalist violence. Chad is a Pakistani Muslim who was adopted by a white racist couple and the novel traces his transformed attitude toward pop music to his realization of his exclusion from England. But Kureishi is careful not to attribute his fundamentalism to a “search for roots” narrative. Chad’s quest for belonging leads him to religion as he is excluded from both England and Pakistan: “In England, white people looked at him as if he were going to steal their car or their handbag….But in Pakistan, they looked at him even more strangely” (Kureishi 107). Thus, he crushes his desire for pop music in order to belong to the only people who offer him refuge and the prospect of making sense of life: Riaz’s fundamentalist group. Chad’s repressed desire for Prince is manifested in the “suppressed violence” that Shahid senses in his body, that responds to loud music by “bang[ing]
his palms over his ears while simultaneously…bouncing his foot” (Kureishi 78). Thus, Chad’s propensity for fundamentalist violence is connected to his repression of desire for popular music.

Within the overarching contrast between Shahid’s fandom of and Chad’s resistance to Prince, which appear to be stereotypical portrayals of liberal multiculturalism and fundamentalism respectively, is a more complex representation of the terms of this binary. While at the beginning of the novel, Prince seems to bear the mantle of anti-racism for Shahid, as the novel progresses, it is Chad’s fundamentalism that is also associated with the diasporic anti-racism of the South Asian working classes. For instance, Riaz, the self-styled leader of the fundamentalists, is a community leader who helps disenfranchised South Asians write to government officials to protest issues like police brutality. Furthermore, protecting a Bangladeshi immigrant family in the projects against racist violence, Chad connects the fight against British racism in London streets with anti-imperialist struggle that is diasporic in scope, as part of a “fight for our people who are being tortured in Palestine, Afghanistan, and Kashmir” (Kureishi 82). In the book’s multi-layered portrayal, Islamic fundamentalism is not just an issue of race and religion but also a class issue (Ranasinha 135, n.8). For instance, Dr. Brownlow, the representative of Marxist politics in the novel, points out to Shahid that liberals fighting ostensibly for Rushdie’s literary freedom are doing so only for “standing by their miserable class” (Kureishi 215). Similarly the mosque, in Kureishi’s rendering, is not merely associated with Riaz’s Islamic lectures but is also a multicultural, multinational space with “men of so many types and nationalities—Tunisians, Indians, Algerians, Scots, French” a space where “race and class barriers had been suspended” (Kureishi 132). The above examples show that Kureishi does not believe in representing Islamic fundamentalism as a pure ideological positions but these complexities are lost between the broader contrast that the novel posits between Chad’s and
Shahid’s responses to Prince. It is not only Chad’s religious conservatism and his refusal of Prince’s music but also the progressive force of diasporic anti-racism that, as Ghose puts it, “negates the possible trajectory of Bildung,” (132). Thus, in order to function as a bildungsroman, the novel’s resolution involves Chad’s destruction, and the coupling of fundamentalism with a diasporic vision of anti-racist struggle and working-class solidarity makes it easier for critics to forget the resistance to racism offered by Chad’s group (Moore-Gilbert 148).

Just like fundamentalism, liberal multiculturalism is not a pure ideological position in the text. At the beginning of the novel, using a wider spatial lens that clarifies national distinctions between Britain and America, Kureishi interprets Prince as a symbol of diasporic anti-racism. Later in the novel, he points out the role of American popular culture in perpetuating class hierarchies by pivoting to a narrower spatial lens that focuses on London’s streets and the competing soundscapes that define them. Compared to the dissolution of barriers of race and class in the space of the mosque, the hierarchies persist in the run-down housing projects in London as Kureishi demonstrates by juxtaposing sounds of “Rule Britannia” with Prince’s album “Sign O’ the Times.” When Chad’s group congregates in the apartment estate to protect an impoverished Muslim family from white skinheads, the voices of three or four men humming the nationalist and colonialist soundtrack of “Rule Britannia” signal the low-intensity war that pervades the South Asian diasporic streetscape (Kureishi 135; Hutnyk 2). On the one hand, listening to “Rule Britannia,” Shahid is “convinced the words were aimed at him,” reminding him of his inferior racial status (Kureishi 135). On the other, listening to Prince’s “‘Sign o’ the Times’ on his headphones” makes him conscious of his class privilege compared to the people in the projects, who he thinks are poor as they are “living without culture,” and makes him feel that
he is “striding around the estate like a Britisher in India” (Kureishi 134, 137, 136). Kureishi, thus, uses the juxtaposition of these musical elements to trigger Shahid’s realization that his own bourgeois class position mirrors the British colonialist position and its contemporary manifestation of white racism.

The novel implicates American popular culture in colonialist attitudes, thereby further demonstrating the ideological proximity between liberal multiculturalism and colonial benevolence. As a source of knowledge about Prince and his racial and gender hybridity, Deedee epitomizes liberal multiculturalism. Her lessons on Prince, however, also underpin an attitude of colonial benevolence as she considers American popular culture a mode of uplift for her South Asian and black students. Shahid repeatedly thinks of how this emphasis on popular culture enables Deedee to reinforce class hierarchies and racial boundaries. For Deedee, an engagement with Prince and anti-racist African American struggles remains merely an academic exercise. While she includes Prince, James Baldwin, and the Freedom Riders in her curriculum, she is dismissive of the anti-racist politics espoused by her South Asian Muslim students. As Sadiq, Shahid’s college mate and Riaz’s follower, says: “Our voices suppressed by Osgood types with the colonial mentality. To her we coolies, not cool” (Kureishi 217). In spite of Deedee’s intellectual pursuits in black popular culture, her personal life is based on a spatial separation between her whiteness and black bodies whom she mostly objectifies as “specimens of theories she might have about music, fashion, or street-life” (Kureishi 154). Chili frames this spatial separation at the heart of Deedee’s colonial benevolence in his description of Deedee’s home: “Nearly fashionable neighborhood. On a clear day she can see the niggers and workers without having them on her doorstep or ripping off her microwave” (Kureishi 44). Deedee is, thus, an embodiment of the central contradiction of multiculturalism identified by cultural studies
Shahid critiques Deedee’s incorporation of pop culture into the curriculum as an attempt to racially ghettoize her students of color. He proclaims that “he didn’t always appreciate being played Madonna or George Clinton, or offered a lecture on the history of funk as if it were somehow more ‘him’ than Fathers and Sons” (Kureishi 135). While Deedee lectures Shahid on the dismantling of racial boundaries in the persona of Prince, Shahid sees that such a move reinstates racial boundaries and pigeonholes his intellectual endeavors along racial lines. Similarly, when Deedee pushes Shahid to write a paper on Prince’s funky videos after her lecture on Prince’s cultural value, Shahid wonders if this emphasis on pop music is designed to perpetuate class hierarchies. He questions whether an educational institution teaching pop music is “like those youth clubs that merely kept bad kids out of trouble” and that students studying in better colleges were not being taught about Prince but were “studying stuff to give them the advantage in life” (Kureishi 26). The above discussion of role of Prince and popular culture in perpetuating race, gender, and class hierarchies clarifies the novel’s critique of liberal multiculturalism, countering Ranasinha’s reading that “Kureishi never questions the assumptions and biases of liberal ideology nor the limits of liberalism in accommodating minorities in pluralistic societies” (83).

Ultimately, the novel’s resolution erases the complex critiques of both Islamic fundamentalism and liberal multiculturalism that I have been tracing so far, in order to present a
simplistic reconciliation of Shahid with Deedee. It is Shahid’s brother Chili who plays a crucial role in this resolution. Chili is an arch-Thatcherite who views Britain as too small to accommodate his ambitions in contrast to America, a place that carries the promise of material fortune, as seen in Hollywood movies. The novel sets up the contrast between Britain and America as follows:

[Chili’s] most recent ambition was to make it in America, though it wasn’t so much the voice of liberty that called Chili, as the violent intensity. Time and again he watched *Once upon a Time in America*, *Scarface*, and *The Godfather* – as careers documentaries. He had even cursed Papa – out of earshot – for coming to old England rather than standing in line on Ellis Island with the Jews, Poles, Irish and Armenians. England was small-time, unbending; real glory was impossible in a country where the policemen wore helmets shaped like sawn-off marrows. Chili thought he could be someone in America, but he wasn’t going to go there poor. He’d get himself more established in London and then hit New York with a high “rep”, or reputation (53-54).

Despite the irony that Chili’s yearning for America is inspired by the grim vision of Hollywood immigrant crime dramas, the opposition between Britain and the U.S. rests on his romanticization of the specific site of Ellis Island, which allows Chili to re-imagine his racialized diasporic experience in Britain in terms of the narrative of upward class mobility and assimilation that has historically been available only to white immigrants in the U.S.

American pop culture’s promise of “idyllic elsewhere” is the basis of the transnational impulse in *The Black Album*, but the text’s investment in the bildungsroman form leads to a dismissal of the diasporic impulse and hence of the promise of pop culture, whether it is the
promise of political consciousness in case of Shahid and Prince or that of material fortune in case of Chili and Hollywood. Chili’s Hollywood-inspired brash masculinity, characterized by rampant womanizing and produced at the intersection of American pop culture and American capitalism, interrupts the bildungsroman’s developmental trajectory of incorporation into Britain. Kureishi quashes this interruption by rendering Hollywood’s promise for Chili as unfulfilled. Chili’s consumption of America ultimately consumes him as he becomes a drug addict and a drug dealer to earn quick money to escape to America. His physical degeneration indicates a failure of the promise of American pop culture to serve as an escape from stifling Britain. In his state of drug-induced physical dissipation, Chili realizes the racist character of Britain: “Our people, the Pakis are the new Jews, everyone hates them” (Kureishi 201). He understands the inhumanity of class inequality under Thatcherism: “We [Thatcherites] wanted to crush [the English working class and poor]. Yes! For laziness, for failure, for poverty! What had they ever done to us?” (Kureishi 249). He even justifies the Islamic fundamentalism of Riaz’s group: “I don’t blame those human beings you call lunatics…they’ve got something to believe in, to lean on…If we believed in something, we would be happier” (Kureishi 251). The text adopts the strategy of spatial containment for Chili’s consciousness of social hierarchies of class, race, and religion that threaten the bildung of the text. Whereas dreams of Hollywood power Chili’s flight of imagination to the U.S. and his mobility between the suburbs and the city of London, his consciousness of hierarchies needs to be contained, “holed up in a semi-derelict house with bricked-up windows” in the nether regions of London (Kureishi 199).

Chili plays a crucial role in the resolution of the novel in which Shahid chooses Deedee Osgood, his white college teacher and the character who symbolizes liberal multiculturalism, over Riaz, who espouses Islamic fundamentalism. It is Chili who, in the mold of his Hollywood
hero Robert De Niro, dispenses with the fundamentalists in the violent showdown between Shahid and Riaz’s group. Chili has to resort to violence so that Shahid does not have to break his persona of pop music-loving passive masculinity. Symbolically, this scene suggests that both Hollywood and other forms of American pop culture like Prince’s music work in tandem to ensure the ultimate resolution in favor of British liberal multiculturalism, which is further underpinned by the American capitalist ethos of Thatcherism. Thus, in contrast to critics like Brad Moore-Gilbert who consider Chili’s story to have “only a somewhat adventitious relation to Shahid’s problem of choosing between the values represented by Deedee and Riaz respectively” (146), the above analysis demonstrates that Chili plays an integral role in Shahid’s choice of Deedee and, in the process, also reveals the politics of American pop culture in reinforcing the hierarchies that form the limits of British multiculturalism.

The final image in the novel is that of Shahid and Deedee in a train hurtling away from London bonding over the prospects of attending a Prince concert for which Deedee has acquired tickets. Shahid’s national belonging in Britain is indicated spatially by his movement away from London, the site of racial and religious unrest, and his presence in the countryside. It is also predicated on his heterosexual interracial romance with Deedee, which is legitimized by their common reverence for Prince, and on the consolidation of his bourgeois class status. The contradictory role of Prince in mediating Shahid’s effeminate (yet heterosexual) masculinity and his transgressive interracial romance with Deedee on the one hand, and in perpetuating class hierarchies on the other, serves the political function of displacing anxieties of race, religion, and diasporic allegiance. While this resolution may not be subversive, it is not consequently apolitical or a sign of “micropolitics,” which creates a problematic separation between “personal” and “public” notions of politics (Ghose 123; Ranasinha 17). The novel uses Prince
fandom and the image it projects of passive/effeminate South Asian Muslim American music fans to diffuse anxieties about “dangerous/violent” Muslim masculinity. Kureishi relies on a dichotomy between “rioter” and “rapper,” which, Virinder Kalra notes, has become problematically central to theorizations of South Asian diasporic masculinity. Following Kalra’s analysis, these two images should not be considered oppositional but part of the same colonial logic that strategically imposes both these labels on racialized men at various times. American pop music functions in The Black Album to uphold this dichotomy and, therefore, replicates British colonial logic, even as it simultaneously appears to resolve British colonialist attitudes by displacing one stereotypical image in the dichotomy with another.

The textual dichotomy that enables the Prince fan to displace anxieties associated with the fundamentalist “rioter” is based not on an opposition between pop music and religion but on blurring the lines between the two. The novel blurs distinctions between the profane and the sacred in two ways. First, it uses an intermedial parallel between the plot structure of the novel and what Viol calls “meta-musical structures,” such as the pop history of Prince’s “Black Album,” to suggest that the sacred is often cast as or read as the profane (187). Prince’s “Black Album” emerged as a response to his critics who had asserted that he had “turned his back on his R&B roots” and had “carefully avoided an upfront assertion of a black identity” (Nilsen 243). In order to cement an “authentic” African American identity, Prince created “Black Album,” music that was “hard and uncompromising, focusing on manic funk” (Nilsen 245). But at the very last minute, he withdrew the release of the album, citing a “conscience crisis.” According to Per Nilsen’s biography of Prince’s first decade, he repeatedly told his managers and promoters that the “Black Album,” which “place[d] sex and lust above love and spirituality,” was the result of “the devil working through him” (245, 248, 250). This history of Prince’s “Black Album” is
similar to a plot thread in Kureishi’s novel in which Shahid changes the words to Riaz’s Islam-inflected prose, words “he couldn’t bring himself to transcribe,” with sexual fantasies (Kureishi 234). In other words, Shahid recasts Riaz’s ostensibly sacred words as profane. Similarly, the other intertext of *The Black Album*, Rushdie’s *The Satanic Verses*, also questions the line dividing the sacred and the profane by portraying the devil as recasting the words that Archangel Gabriel had revealed to the Prophet. This theme explains the connection between Salman Rushdie and Prince, who might seem to be an unlikely pair of muses for the novel.

Second, in addition to casting the sacred as profane, the novel also designates the profane as sacred, which enables Prince to function as an alternative to and a replacement for Islamic fundamentalism. Kureishi diffuses anxieties associated with race and fundamentalism that threaten to derail the novel’s bildungsroman form by constructing reverence for Prince as a religion. Postcolonial critic Amitava Kumar claims that pop music, which in Kureishi’s texts operates as part of his broad and inclusive conceptualization of sex, works as an antidote to fundamentalism. He writes that in *The Black Album* “[l]ove, sex, alcohol, rock music, literature, fashion, and even food are defenses against the crushing certainties of strict religious doctrines” (*Bombay-London-New York* 160). I would like to extend Kumar’s argument by suggesting that pop music functions as an antidote or, more accurately, as an alternative to fundamentalism precisely because Kureishi creates a complex equivalence between sex, American popular culture, drugs and religion. For example, Chili says the following of his own drug habit to Shahid: “I’ll throw away my drug when you do the same...The religion” (Kureishi 255). Chili, thus, considers religion to be a debilitating addiction, just like his drugs. As a religious fundamentalist, Chad considers art and music as drugs. Chad says the following of Shahid’s stash of Prince records: “Get clean! Gimme those Prince records!...We are slaves to Allah. He is
the only one we must submit to!” (Kureishi 80). Chad considers Shahid’s devotion to Prince as misplaced, as in Chad’s world, such unswerving adoration can only be reserved for religion. In another example of the text’s fluid transference between religious, sexual, and American pop culture imagery, Shahid composes an erotic story for Deedee titled “The Prayer-mat of the Flesh” while listening to Prince’s “Sign o’ the Times” on his headphones. This set of equivalences ensures that in the novel’s final image of Shahid with Deedee cheered by the thought of attending a Prince concert, Prince fandom works as an acceptable form of religion that can replace Islamic fundamentalism. Therefore, in The Black Album, American pop culture fandom becomes a way for South Asian masculinities to seek incorporation into a multicultural Britain, a point made even more forcefully in Sarfraz Manzoor’s memoir *Greetings from Bury Park.*

4.3 Springsteen and the Journey to the Promised Land

While *The Black Album* deploys pop to invigorate the genre of the novel by exploiting its ability to bring into representation a cross-section of all strata of society, including unseemly ones that might be avoided by what Kureishi calls “more refined forms” of fiction, Sarfraz Manzoor’s *Greetings from Bury Park* is a fan memoir, a genre that owes its very existence to pop (Kureishi, Introduction xviii). In his Introduction to the *Faber Book of Pop*, Kureishi attests to the power of pop phenomena to engender new genres and literary forms, even though he believes that And although Manzoor’s Springsteen fan memoir is quite uneven as its intellectual concerns are occasionally tempered with clichés, its textual aesthetic draws much more deeply on lyrics than Kureishi’s novel. The memoir uses American rock legend Bruce Springsteen not only intertextually, similar to Kureishi’s shorter references to Prince in *The Black Album*, but also
transmedially providing “lyrical quotation from specific songs” in chapters and chapter titles, evoking the performative sound of pop music (Viol 161). The memoir relies on Springsteen’s music to organize its narrative structure as it does the narrator’s entire life, which according to Viol’s terminology would be a constructionist or constructivist use of popular music in that in this representation “musical concepts enable and order the characters’ access to the material world outside them” (229). In other words, Springsteen’s music becomes the framework or scaffolding, the verbal “representational system,” through which the narrative is ordered and the narrator’s experiences are constructed (Viol 230).

Unlike Prince, whose image of multicultural urban funk and androgyny and whose close connection to African American cultural forms is seen to be in conversation with experiences of racialized minorities such as South Asians, Springsteen’s embodiment of white American working-class nationalist masculinity makes him, according to critics, an unlikely mediator between the British and South Asian Muslim identities of Manzoor’s narrator. In a review for the *Time* magazine, Pico Iyer writes that “what gives the memoir its special kick” is that the narrator arrives at his British Muslim identity “not by becoming an assimilated Englishman, nor by turning to radical Islam, but by becoming of all things a Springsteenite.” Along similar lines, Diamond Duggal writes in her review for the *Guardian*: “The bizarre but compelling idea that Manzoor, feeling neither British nor Pakistani,…finds some sort of solace in the American, working-class, sociopolitical lyrics of the Boss provides an intriguing backdrop to his life.” These critics explain Springsteen’s unlikely presence in a South Asian diasporic narrative through the simplistic argument that his music transcends various divisions. For instance, the book’s blurb notes that the memoir is about “how music transcends religion and race,” and Duggal suggests that the memoir “offers the hope that by connecting with our own choices in
music we can transcend cultural and generational differences.” But according to Bryan Garman, Springsteen, far from offering transcendence of differences or acting as a bridge between races and genders as seen in the persona of Prince, acts as a marker of boundaries between races, genders, and classes. In A Race of Singers, Garman writes that Americans consider Springsteen a “white hard-body hero whose masculinity confirmed the values of patriarchy and patriotism, the work ethic and rugged individualism, and who clearly demarcated the boundaries between men and women, black and white, heterosexual and homosexual” (225). Thus, the view of Springsteen’s music as transcending social hierarchies does not explain how a distinctly American icon throws into relief the complex and contradictory processes by which South Asian diasporic masculinity is constructed through a contrast between Britain and the United States.

In an op-ed for The New York Times, columnist David Brooks is similarly baffled by the frenzy for Springsteen, the quintessential American artist, in the markedly different context of Europe. Brooks responds to the European fans screaming “I was born in the U.S.A!” at a Springsteen concert in Madrid by writing: “Did it occur to them at that moment, in fact, that they were not born in the U.S.A?” Or as in Greetings, the narrator articulates his initial reluctance to listen to Springsteen’s music as follows: “[Springsteen] had sung ‘born in the USA’ and Asian boys from Luton had no business listening to his music” (Manzoor 89). Unlike the critics’ explanation of Springsteen’s presence in Manzoor’s memoir, Brooks does not think that Springsteen’s music offers a transcendence of divisions of race, gender, or class that allows people from all nations and creeds to partake of some universal appeal in Springsteen’s music. The European fans’ unlikely passion for Springsteen and his music’s “widest global purchase,” according to Brooks, can be paradoxically explained by the music’s rootedness in local and particular places, whether Main Street or backstreets, Nebraska or Asbury Park, NJ. Like
Garman, Brooks emphasizes that the source of Springsteen’s appeal are the “hard boundaries” that endow his work with “more depth and definition than…the far flung networks of pluralism and eclecticism, surfing from one spot to the next, sampling one style then the next, your identity formed by soft boundaries, or none at all.” Manzoor, as the British South Asian Muslim narrator of a self-consciously post 9/11 memoir, needs Springsteen’s personification of these “hard boundaries” to define himself in no uncertain terms as a “good Muslim” and a patriotic British subject, unlike Shahid in *The Black Album* who has to overcome Prince’s “pluralism and eclecticism” in order to define the boundaries that allow him to be incorporated into the British nation.

Whereas critics have rightfully noted the irony in using Springsteen as an anchor for a British South Asian memoir, the memoir itself often seems invested in producing an unironic South Asian diasporic subject whose Springsteen fandom is an end in itself. This obsessive, unironic fandom is represented through clichés such as “Springsteen’s songs were about being true to yourself and being the best you could be…” and “whether it was possible to say you were a Springsteen fan if you couldn’t live your life by the values of his music” (Manzoor 101, 102). My reading of the memoir’s use of Springsteen often goes against the grain and seeks to interrogate the contradictions and complexities of fandom as a diasporic masculinist practice and as a diasporic literary aesthetic. Using Springsteen, an artist whose overarching concern is with American geographic space and landscape, enables Manzoor to map his British Asian Muslim diasporic masculinity through ideologies and myths associated with the “promised land,” one of the most prominent spatial metaphors in Springsteen’s work. I suggest that the metaphor of “promised land” is the source of narrator’s political consciousness of his working class hometown of Luton as well as of his desire to escape from Britain to America. But the fantasy of
America as the “promised land,” and by extension the diasporic political consciousness, is unsustainable for the narrator after 9/11, and he reluctantly returns into the fold of multicultural Britain by asserting Springsteen as his only religion, which diffuses any anxieties that readers might have of the narrator’s relation to Islam.

There is an overlap but, more importantly, also a distinction between the local and the national in Springsteen’s spatial motif of the “promised land” that Manzoor uses to construct his British hometown, Luton, as contiguous with deindustrialized landscapes in the U.S. and also paradoxically to contrast racist Britain with America, which is represented as a place of refuge and emancipation. The “promised land” is a recurring spatial motif in Springsteen’s oeuvre. Besides the most prominent usage of the metaphor in the obvious song title “The Promised Land,” we also find it in other songs, such as “Goin’ Cali,” “Galveston Bay,” “The Price You Pay,” “Thunder Road” etc. In these songs, the “promised land” refers to various spatial scales ranging from “small towns in the Gulf of Mexico,” California, to America. Exploring Springsteen’s reworking of biblical myths in this significant trope, Stephen Arnoff writes that for the rock legend “[t]he tale of the Promised Land conveys a communal myth distinctly applicable to America…” (180; emphasis mine). But there is a spatial paradox at the core of this trope: when referring to the local, the Promised Land “serves as a rock and roll translation…of human struggle,” whereas when representing the national, it takes on mythic and anthemic overtones that are liable to be read as celebratory (Arnoff 182). It is this spatial paradox that Manzoor relies on to portray continuities between the immigrant working class community of Luton and the America of desperate yearning seen in the desolate geographic landscapes of Springsteen’s work, while simultaneously portraying America as an exceptional place for diasporic South Asians, especially men.
The spatial paradox is further represented in the memoir through an underlying grid, or what Viol refers to as the “‘deep structure’ of stardom”: on the one hand, the star has “a direct involvement in the humdrum life experience of the fan,” which the memoir articulates at the level of the local, and on the other, the star embodies “a form of escapism from everyday life and the mundane,” that operates at the level of nation (115). It is Springsteen’s music that facilitates the narrator’s consciousness of his father’s struggles against economic decline and racial inequality in the working class community of Luton. The textual representation of the narrator’s relationship with his father is heavily musicalized. The passage that most clearly establishes the narrator’s realization of his father’s working class struggles is rendered with quotes from lyrics of Springsteen’s “Independence Day.” Manzoor writes, “When Springsteen sings ['Independence Day’] he doesn’t sing with anger, he is not taking any pleasure when he tells his dad that ‘they ain’t gonna do to me what I watched them do to you’…Those lines made me understand the fear that drove my father and men like him…Until I heard ‘Independence Day’ I’m not sure that fear was something I had even bothered to consider” (41). Drawing on Springsteen’s lyrically-rendered empathy for his father who had been a bus driver, the narrator identifies with his own immigrant father who “met with racism on a daily basis,” worked long hours in Luton’s Vauxhall car factory, and could only afford to buy clothes and furniture from salvage yards and second-hand stores (Manzoor 26, 18). The narrator’s father also clearly comprehends his experience of racism and menial working conditions in Britain as a direct result of the nation’s colonial history: “You know what the trouble with this country is?…It was built on theft…They take everything from other countries and claim it as theirs and then tell the world they are better than everyone else” (Manzoor 243).
As with many other American working-class towns depicted in Springsteen’s songs, the town in “Independence Day” seems to be undergoing the upheaval of industrial decline, as seen in the following lines included in Manzoor’s text: “Because there’s just different people coming down here now/ and they see things in different ways/ And soon everything we’ve known will just be swept away” (41). The above description coupled with the song’s images of “darkness of this house” and “darkness in this town,” resonate with the deindustrializing landscape of Luton in which the narrator’s father is laid off from the car factory and feels “deeply shameful,” “embarrassed and emasculated after losing his job” (Manzoor 36, 38). The bleakness persists in the narrator’s account of his brother who is “[f]rustrated by the lack of work in Luton” and “drifted from job to job” (Manzoor 70). Springsteen’s working class towns are predominantly white, and the specter of racialized violence in deindustrializing geographies, as seen in prominent cases such as Vincent Chin’s murder in Detroit where people were being laid off from car factories just like Mohammed Manzoor was, hangs in the margins of his songs. Manzoor connects the South Asian working-class geographies of Britain, places encumbered by violence of racism and colonialism, with the desolate landscapes of class struggle in America of Springsteen’s songs. Even as listening to these songs fills the narrator with “desperation to leave Luton for somewhere else,” after he leaves, he still periodically returns to Luton “only because of guilt, duty, and Bruce Springsteen” (Manzoor 42).

The Springsteen-engendered realization of working-class hardship is also bound up with the desire to escape from the site of struggle. While Springsteen’s mediation of the narrator’s everyday life at the local level makes him politically conscious of the race and class hierarchies that structure his life, the rock star also generates a desire for escape to America as the Promised Land. The narrator always finds a way back to Luton because of Bruce Springsteen but he also
“love[s] America and hate[s] Luton” because of him (Manzoor 99). Because the narrator’s fascination with and desire for America is linked to his awareness of working class hierarchies in Britain, the spatial quest for the Promised Land symbolizes not just escape but also struggle against these hierarchies. As geographer Pamela Moss notes, in Springsteen’s rock lyrics “contesting of class oppression is equated with the ability to set off in search of a promised land” (175). Desire for the Promised Land is the basis for formation of normative working class masculinity in Springsteen’s lyrics. The following lines from the song “The Promised Land” demonstrate that the transition from boyhood to adult masculinity hinges on a quest for the Promised Land: “Mister I ain't a boy, no I'm a man/And I believe in a promised land.” In Greetings, it is the narrator’s best friend Amolak who introduces him to the rock legend’s music with the following words: “You woke up a boy and tonight you will go to sleep a man” (Manzoor 91). As the narrator characterizes his father and brother as feeling “emasculated” on account of the racial and class oppression that determines their working class diasporic masculinity in Britain, his desire for America as the Promised Land, as the final destination of his diasporic itinerary, where he can seek racial and class equality is seen as recuperation of South Asian masculinity (Manzoor 38).

The narrator constructs America as the Promised Land for South Asian diasporic masculinity by defining it in relation not only to Springsteen’s white masculinity but also to black American masculinity. In a passage reminiscent of the section in The Black Album that describes Chili’s desire for America, Manzoor establishes the contrast between Britain and America as follows:

The more bored I was with my life in Luton the more America appealed. All my hopes were encapsulated in the life I imagined was possible in the United States. Why
had my father not landed on Ellis Island? We could have been living in Manhattan, not Marsh Farm. It wasn’t that I was unaware the United States had its own race problems but even those seemed glamorous. I read about the black civil rights struggle, the bus strikes and Freedom Riders…In the absence of British Pakistani role models I borrowed Martin Luther King and Malcolm X. For all my interest in the black struggle I was not black, I had not read of any discrimination against Pakistanis in America and so the United States remained a place for second chances. Why would they care that I was Pakistani? (130-131).

While the narrator portrays Britain to be a racist place for South Asians, he suggests that in contrast, America’s racism is demographically restricted to African Americans and temporally to the Civil Rights era. As with Springsteen’s notions of the Promised Land, the narrator sees struggle for racial and class equality as exclusively masculine. He especially considers black American masculinity to be in the vanguard in anti-racist movement, which makes him think of anti-black racism as somehow romantic. Therefore, the narrator’s perception that South Asians in America do not face racism and are incorporated in the multicultural body politic along with the idealization of black American racial politics as role model to counter the racism he experiences in Britain render America as an exceptional place for South Asians. It is ironical then that in spite of invoking the vanguard role of Civil Rights movements, of which music was an important part, Manzoor does not adopt a musical icon from that tradition as his central muse. But at the same time in tracing a diasporic racialized subject’s desire for America to both Springsteen’s white masculinity as well as to black American masculinity, he acknowledges the debt of white rock to African American anti-racism. The passage also indicates two significant elements of the history of South Asians’ incorporation into American racial formations. First, the idea that South Asians
do not experience racism in U.S. is an example of the model minority myth, which is used to obscure the existence of racial subordination and to uphold the fiction of equality of opportunity for economic success in neoliberal America for all minority groups, as argued by Asian American scholars such as Timothy Fong, Keith Osajima, and Vijay Prashad. Second, the passage also exemplifies the placement of Asian American anti-racism as secondary to African American anti-racist struggles, a move that perpetuates hierarchies between minority groups and limits discussions of race to ideas of victimhood.

Based on the spatial paradox that creates both continuities and contrasts between Britain and America, the memoir offers a simultaneous paean to and critique of the U.S. The text’s complex portrayal of America navigates the opposing impulses of Springsteen’s chronicles of betrayals of the American working-class and of America as the Promised Land. For instance, we can see these competing impulses in the book’s representation of Asbury Park, New Jersey, the geographic space most closely associated with Springsteen. Asbury Park is hallowed ground for the Springsteen fan, and Manzoor uses the spatial metaphor of a “pilgrimage” that designates Asbury Park as religious space. Although he marks the pilgrimage as “perfect” and walks around muttering in disbelief, “I am here, I am in Asbury Park, New Jersey,” he also describes the place as an “unpromising neighborhood populated entirely by unsavoury-looking young men” (Manzoor 141,140). His pilgrimage to Springsteen’s Promised Land is marked by imagery of “ruins of an amusement park” and “dusty arcades with the Atlantic Ocean lapping a deserted beach,” rendering Asbury Park a desolate, haunted place (Manzoor 140).

But in spite of this complex portrayal, the book’s representation of America, especially in the first half, reads as celebratory. For example, in the chapter titled “The Promised Land,” which relates the story of narrator’s travels to America for the first time as an employee of a
company that recruited students to sell encyclopedias door-to-door, the fading of the narrator’s American Dream is bookended by representations of America as a glorious place for a South Asian Muslim. Sandwiched between claims of America as the Promised Land is an account of the narrator’s “American dream beginning to fade fast” because he is not able to sell many encyclopedias (144). The narrator’s American Dream also runs into obstacles when Americans’ obliviousness to the history of British colonialism and racism exposes his precarious status as a racialized British subject. “For all my love of everything American I knew I did not look how Americans imagined Brits looked and I was worried that something in my daily behaviour would expose me as not being quite British enough,” Manzoor writes (142). While the narrator’s imagination of America through Springsteen’s songs allows him to recognize his working class status in Britain, it takes a journey to the physical space of Springsteen’s Promised Land to recognize the contours of his racialization in Britain.

Instead of pursuing the chronological trajectory of the narrator’s fading American Dream, however, the chapter abandons chronology to end with a memory from the narrator’s first week in New York, when the idea of America as Promised Land was still viable. The narrator describes the “truly magical” moment when he stood on top of the tallest building in New York, the World Trade Center, witnessing a ticker tape parade in honor of Nelson Mandela: “I was thinking that I was in a country where no one cared if I was Pakistani or Muslim. Standing in the baking heat on the longest day on the tallest building in New York, I was thinking that I had finally reached the promised land” (Manzoor 153). These lines are haunted by a foreboding of events of 9/11. The celebratory image of the Promised Land conceals the anxieties of race, religion, and class embodied by the South Asian Muslim narrator, which threaten to expose the fissures of American Dream. Thus, manipulation of the chapter’s temporal structure elicits a
more celebratory reading, even though everything preceding the ending offers a much more contradictory portrayal of America.

If initially the memoir’s critique of America can be contained and subsumed within its portrayal of the promise of America, even if through a delicate balance, the fiction of the Promised Land for South Asians, especially Muslim men, becomes unsustainable after the events of 9/11. As the narrator’s British Sikh friend and a Springsteen fan, Amolak, brutally puts it: “[9/11] means that America isn’t ours anymore” (Manzoor 235). 9/11 marks a new kind of intersection between Britain and America in the context of South Asian diaspora, as partners in the war on terror, and Manzoor writes that “reports of innocent Asians being detained and then slung back to Britain confirmed Amolak’s grim theory that the United States was no longer our promised land” (Manzoor 236). The events of 9/11 threaten to derail the developmental trajectory of the memoir as they signal a crisis for the narrator’s South Asian diasporic masculine Muslim identity. Following this loss of America as the Promised Land, Manzoor salvages the memoir’s developmental trajectory by an unexpected narrative turn to claim the nation of Britain as his “land of hope and dreams.”

Here I quote at length Manzoor’s words at the end of the memoir that diffuse the narrator’s diasporic consciousness and signal a turn toward the British multicultural nation-state:

When I was young I used to fantasise about renouncing my British passport and moving to the United States. I was fascinated by the idea of the American Dream, the suggestion that everyone had an equal chance to make something of their lives and to be considered equally American….Bruce Springsteen changed my life because in his music I saw the promise of hope and escape and self-improvement, but where once I longed to escape to the United States, these days I’m convinced my father did the
right thing coming to Britain. [...] My father used to tell me he regretted coming to Britain, but in truth it was the greatest gift he gave his children. I was born in Pakistan but made in England; it is Britain which is my land of hope and dreams (268-269).

This passage is a culmination of the numerous ways in which Springsteen mediates the narrator’s South Asian Muslim diasporic identity and its relationship with Britain. The narrative turn in the passage, whereby the events of 9/11 compel the narrator to relinquish his hope in America and accept his present place in Britain, is similar to the pattern followed by the spatial metaphor in Springsteen’s songs, which Pamela Moss describes as follows: “The promised land as envisioned by the ‘pilgrims’ never materializes. Instead recognition of the present environment as the promised land ensues and hope is displaced by despair. In some instances hope does survive, unbelievably so given the circumstances” (177-178; emphasis original). The narrator’s reconciliation with multicultural Britain as the “land of hope and dreams” is predicated on rejecting the Springsteen-mediated political understanding of Britain’s colonial history and racial hierarchies that have relegated his family to the diasporic working class. In other words, it is the despair of compromise and acceptance of the working-class milieu and its racial and cultural burden that the above-quoted passage seeks to displace through the claim to the nation as the land of hope.

The sudden, unexpected, and somewhat reluctant turn toward the British nation-state, especially as it follows a discussion of “home-grown terrorists” from the narrator’s hometown of Luton responsible for the London train attacks of 7/7, comes across as hollow national pride. The turn from America to Britain is based on a spatial and temporal elision that is a central tenet of politics of multiculturalism, according to which British imperialism is restricted to the past and to the space of the colonies while contemporary Britain is a place of racial tolerance where the
narrator can find acceptance. In spite of detailing the economic decline and impoverishment of his working-class hometown of Luton, the product of histories of racism and colonialism, the narrator struggles to understand the connection between these racial hierarchies and “what was it about Luton?” that it had become “inextricably linked with Islamic radicalism” (Manzoor 262). After the bombings of 9/11 and 7/7, the narrator realizes that as a South Asian Muslim he “didn’t seem to belong anywhere,” neither in Pakistan, nor in Britain nor America; and it is this loss and failure that he shrouds in his emphatic claim to the British nation-state (Manzoor 255).

The narrator’s incorporation into the British nation state is predicated not only on the short-circuiting of diasporic political consciousness but also on using Springsteen fandom to perpetuate the very distinctions of gender, race, and religion that are harmonious with the state’s rhetoric and policy of multiculturalism. Unlike Springsteen’s song titled “Land of Hope and Dreams”—a song that portrays a train that carries both “saints and sinners” “losers and winners,” espousing a vision that this desired land will not discriminate between people—claiming multicultural Britain as a land of hope and dreams does not meet this ideal due to persistent hierarchies and inequalities between state-designated “saints and sinners.” Springsteen fandom reveals that South Asian diaspora is not a coherent entity built around essentialist ideas of race but fractured along lines of gender, class, and religion. For example, the narrator’s mobility, which depends specifically on his adoration of Springsteen, is gendered. He travels the world to see Springsteen concerts in Paris, Bologna, and Barcelona and multiple times in the U.S. (Manzoor 119, 151). The text contrasts the narrator’s mobility with his sisters’ immobility and exclusion from Springsteen’s Promised Land. This exclusion is on account of their gender and not due to their lack of interest in Springsteen. For it is the narrator’s elder sister, Navela, who adores pop music and introduces him to it. His younger sister, Uzma, “loved Bruce Springsteen
almost as much as [the narrator] did,” but the same adoration does not result in similar mobility (Manzoor 82). She is portrayed as dependent on her brother who has to “make sure to take her to a Springsteen concert” (Manzoor 82). Therefore similar to the charge levied about the rock star’s lyrics by critics such as Pamela Moss, the memoir’s American dream is also a masculine dream, and its portrayals of progressive diasporic racialized class consciousness that fuel the narrator’s quest for the Promised Land do not challenge unequal gender relations.19

The narrator’s reverence for the American rock artist marks not only a narrative of masculine self-empowerment and pleasure but also a desire for whiteness, which he uses to distance himself from other South Asians. He labels his love of Springsteen as a “white taste” that sets him and his friend Amolak apart from the rest of the Asians (Manzoor 122). Amolak too feels that as a Springsteen fan he had “all this extra wisdom, this special knowledge and those muppets were listening to bloody bhangra!” (Manzoor 97). Thus, the South Asian diasporic community is divided on the basis of predilections for different popular cultural forms, which coincide with class divisions in the diaspora. For example, before flying out to the U.S. to attend the opening night of Springsteen’s Rising tour, the narrator is invited to a “Bollywood themed party in central London,” attended by “trendy Asians” and “girls with their immaculately applied make-up and plucked eyebrows” (Manzoor 120). He describes as follows the disconnect he feels from the wealthy South Asians and their choice of Bollywood as the pop culture form that defines their lives: “I share a skin tone with these people, I remember thinking, but that is all. This is not my world, these are not my people, this is not how I like to have my fun” (Manzoor 120). The narrator does not feel solidarity with South Asian diaspora community on the basis of race but envisions a different form of transnational community based on class consciousness fostered by Springsteen fandom. Thus he feels kinship with the “local New Jersey folk” lined up
to see Springsteen. It is interesting that he describes other Springsteen fans, who are white for the most part, in terms of their jobs and professions as “lawyers and waitresses, nurses and military men,” in contrast to his description of South Asian Bollywood fans as “trendy” and therefore wealthy and far removed from his South Asian working-class identity. He portrays the wide chasm of class divisions in South Asian diaspora as unbridgeable, but suggests that the class consciousness of American Springsteen fans can tide over differences of race and religion.

Manzoor writes of Springsteen fans in America: “I might not look like these people, I might speak in a different accent and follow another religion but in my heart I felt more connected to the fans I found waiting for Springsteen in the New Jersey night than I did with the Asians at the Bollywood party a week earlier” (120). As a fan, the narrator partakes of Springsteen’s whiteness in order to distinguish himself from other South Asians, which accords with the failure of multiculturalism to challenge structures of white supremacy even as it employs a vocabulary of inclusion and plurality. We can also see from this discussion that Springsteen fandom allows the narrator to indicate his upward class mobility—he can, after all, afford to attend Springsteen concerts all over the world—while also contradictorily claiming working class authenticity.

Thus, it is American popular culture’s role in mystifying these hierarchies of race and class that render the narrator suitable for assimilation into British multicultural body politic.

The narrator can claim belonging in Britain because *Greetings* uses representations of Springsteen to diffuse any anxieties about the narrator’s South Asian Muslim diasporic masculinity, which has come to be associated, in the public mind, with fundamentalist views of Islam. In the current historical moment in which we mark time by plotting the dates of bombings by Islamic fundamentalists, 9/11 and 7/7, and when narratives about South Asian Muslims are met with intrigue and microscopic scrutiny for any tell-tale signs of jihadism, the memoir
portrays the narrator (and by extension Manzoor) as a “good Muslim,” whose only religion is Springsteen. For example, Manzoor offers Springsteen as an alternative to Islam as follows:

If religion was about answering the profound questions of how to live, I found that Bruce Springsteen gave me more persuasive answers than Islam. At college Amolak and I went around referring to ourselves as disciples of Bruce, arguing to anyone who would listen that the man was nothing less than a prophet. We called Dave Marsh’s biography of Springsteen “the holy book” and quoted Springsteen lyrics as if they were psalms. We planned on forming our band which was going to be named “Yasser Arafat and the Ayatollahs of Love” (Manzoor 226).

The narrator here asserts and assures the reader that Springsteen is the only religion he follows and not Islam. In this passage and elsewhere, Manzoor wraps his adoration of Springsteen with the vocabulary of Christianity, indicated by words such as “psalms,” “gospel of Bruce,” “evangelize for Bruce,” in order to further assuage readers’ anxieties about his religion (226, 97, 99). The need to dispel these anxieties, or as Manzoor puts it, “I had to prove that I was not a ‘bad Muslim’” is particularly acute for him as Britain’s first domestic suicide bombers were from his hometown of Luton (Manzoor 263).²⁰

Far from connecting Islamic fundamentalism to the failure of political promise of the multicultural nation—as seen in the racism and continuity of colonialism manifested in the deindustrializing landscape of Luton that does not offer the inclusiveness and refuge of home to diasporic communities—using Springsteen to displace anxieties about Islam renders fundamentalism a problem of cultural integration, nothing a little Springsteen fandom cannot resolve. For example, at a Springsteen concert in New Jersey, a white man, in doubt about Manzoor’s fandom for no other reason but the color of his skin, asks him “So how do we know
you’re not a terrorist here to blow this whole stadium up?” (119). In response to that question, Manzoor recites a list of his favorite Springsteen songs including some obscure ones as proof that he was not a terrorist. Furnishing examples from Springsteen’s canon startles the white man, who exclaims “Dude, you’re a fan. No doubt about it” (Manzoor 119). This episode illustrates the extent to which Springsteen fandom and terrorism are constructed as mutually exclusive. Pico Iyer mentions this episode in his review of the memoir to suggest, in an unironic manner, that the narrator’s response to the white man makes “the clash of civilizations…sound remote, and we’re in the midst of a mass sing-along in which white and black and ‘other’ hardly make any sense at all.” But Manzoor’s attempt to displace the politics of race and religion through the use of Springsteen also has its limits. The author writes as follows about his seeming frustration with the reception of the book at a book festival: “The alliterative subtitle to my childhood memoir is ‘race, religion, rock’n’roll’; those attending the session were inevitably rather more interested in discussing race and religion and rather less bothered about rock’n’roll.” Manzoor seemed frustrated with the audience’s response, but as a reader and a critic, I am heartened by this anecdote as it illustrates that “textual complexities cannot be contained within authorial intentions” (Ranasinha 92). The racial and geographical specificity of American working-class landscapes in Springsteen’s songs reveals, rather than obscures, the contradictions that constitute South Asian diasporic Muslim masculinity at the intersection of British and American empires.

4.4 Cary Grant’s Ghost and the Diasporic Itinerary

The juxtaposition between The Black Album and Greetings on the one hand and Ian Rashid’s 2005 film Touch of Pink delineates the limits of the role American popular culture can play in mediating the assimilation of South Asian Muslim diasporic subjects into the nation-state. The juxtaposition reveals the extent to which South Asian Muslim men’s incorporation into the
nation state and its narratives is predicated on American pop culture’s production of gender normative, even if sexually transgressive, racialized diasporic masculine identity. Rashid’s film explores the Britain-U.S. dynamic through the story of Alim, a South Asian gay Muslim from the Ismaili sect. At a fundamental level, the film is a diasporic coming-out narrative. Alim, raised in Kenya and then Toronto, is a closeted homosexual in love with the white British Giles, and through the course of the film gathers the courage the come out to his family, guided and mentored in this process by none else than Hollywood star Cary Grant, whose ghost Alim conjures up to replace both his dead father and physically-present-but-emotionally-absent mother. Cary Grant, who originally hailed from Britain but went on to signify the epitome of American romantic masculinity, becomes the perfect vehicle to track the intersections between U.S. Orientalism and British colonialism that define South Asian diasporic masculinity and to refract these intersections through the pleasures afforded by images of Hollywood icons. In contrast with Kureishi’s and Manzoor’s texts, which exhibit utmost reverence toward their pop cultural icons, Touch of Pink’s use of Grant is irreverent, ironical, and pragmatic. As reverence for Prince and Springsteen is central to the incorporation of Shahid and Manzoor into the nation state, Rashid’s representation of Alim’s Grant fandom as a pathological coping mechanism, one that needs to be overcome before the South Asian diasporic Muslim gay subject can come into his own, also precludes Alim from the nation state’s structures of assimilation.

The trope of Hollywood’s Orientalist representations as mediators of South Asian diasporic homosexual desire is not a new one for Rashid. In his 1996 short film Surviving Sabu, Rashid visually incorporates screen images from Hollywood’s Orientalist ventures of 1930s and 1940s, featuring the South Asian actor Sabu to explore the relationship between a heterosexual immigrant father and his homosexual son Amin. In her brilliant analysis of the film, Gopinath
argues that even though Sabu’s Hollywood images are signs of immigrant success for the father and function quite differently for the son as markers of the Orientalist colonial gaze, the depiction of Sabu as the fulcrum of desire for both father and son points to an alternative “queer diasporic genealogy” that dispels the binary between heterosexuality and homosexuality and challenges constructions of normative South Asian masculinity (75). Touch of Pink, then, replaces Sabu with Cary Grant as the Hollywood figure formative to South Asian homosexual masculinity. Grant also comes to stand in for the immigrant father, displacing the dynamic of desire from the intra-racial father-Sabu-son equation to the inter-racial prism of homosexual desire of the Alim-Grant-Giles triad.

Although the film’s central plot of a coming out narrative can be seen as clichéd, the use of Grant as the creator and manager of Alim’s diasporic closet opens up interesting interpretive possibilities as it allows Rashid to both critique the history of Orientalist representations in American popular culture and dispel the East-West binary reflected in their supposedly opposing stances toward the paradigm of the closet. The critical text and intertext for Touch of Pink is George Stevens’s 1939 film Gunga Din, in which Grant plays the role of British army officer Cutter serving in imperial India. Cutter mentors and bonds with the Indian native and racially subordinate Gunga Din, the lowly water-carrier for the regimental army, who saves Cutter’s life by sacrificing his own in the British fight against nationalist Thugs, a sacrifice that ostensibly places Din at par with the British as he is inducted into the regiment posthumously.²¹ Relying on Orientalist stereotypes such as the “noble savage,” Gunga Din is largely viewed as an empire film, an American contribution to the glorification of British empire. But in their complex reading of the film, critics Frederick Cople Jaher and Blair B. Kling also identify a competing and contradictory subtext which they trace to a pull of sympathy for the anti-imperialist
sentiments of the subjugated Indians based on the common historical thread of America’s past as a British colony (33). Thus, the film straddles the contradictory impulses of Orientalizing condescension and egalitarianism, a contradiction that Jaher and Kling consider is most clearly represented in the Cutter-Din connection.

In *Touch of Pink*, the intertext of *Gunga Din* resonates not only in Grant’s reprisal of Cutter’s role in the climactic scene in which Alim finally comes out to his family, but also in his bond with and guidance to Alim, which spans the entire film. Grant’s mentorship of Alim through the coming out process to achieve parity with Western ideas of “out of the closet” gay closely mirrors the Cutter-Din relation and also shares its contradictory impulses. The movie’s second scene set in a gay bar shows Grant’s spirit urging Alim to not come out to his mother Nuru as “she is a Muslim from the Third World.” Although Grant’s ghost considers Alim’s family as provincial and his hometown of Toronto as the proverbial backwaters, he also protects Alim, especially against fears of abandonment by his mother. Visually, the film represents these competing impulses by using two different shots: a close-up of Alim in the foreground, often blurred, with the focus on the towering visage of Grant’s ghost in the background or a variant of this shot in which Grant’s image is placed at a higher plane than Alim in the same focus; and shots in which Grant and Alim are at the same horizontal plane. While Grant’s embodiment of these competing impulses can be read as white American masculinity’s view of South Asian men through the lens of British colonial ideologies, Jaher and Kling analyze these competing impulses to draw a distinction and contrast between Britain and the U.S. In their reading of the Cutter-Din connection in *Gunga Din*, they attribute the racial condescension part to British imperialism and claim the egalitarian half of the relationship as “culturally American rather than English,” stemming from the film’s production in Hollywood (Jaher and Kling 41). Their line of
analysis thus resurrects the rhetoric of America as exceptionally benevolent toward British postcolonial subjects. The implications of Jaher’s and Kling’s analysis are quite similar to those of other representations in South Asian cultural production discussed in this dissertation that portray America’s egalitarian acceptance of South Asian subjects compared to the colonial and racist attitudes of Britain.

Rashid’s choice of Grant to play Alim’s mentor enables him to destabilize the conventional boundaries between heterosexuality and homosexuality. Although Grant’s screen persona reflects his standing as the ultimate cultural symbol of American heterosexual masculinity, off-screen he was a bisexual, known to have a longstanding relationship with actor Randolph Scott along with a succession of heterosexual marriages (Cohen 395; Hinton 199, n.25). It is indeed ironical, then, that the figure guiding Alim through the coming out process, out of his “backwardness” into open homosexuality is a Hollywood icon who was widely believed to be bisexual himself but never came out to his audiences. Through this ironical use of fandom, Rashid challenges the idea of “closet” as backward and primitive, applicable only to racialized queer subjects. His critique is similar to that of other Asian American queer studies theorists such as Martin Manalansan, who have argued against the “teleological narrative of progress” reflected in the paradigm of the closet (Manalansan 99). The film indicates that in light of the cultural expectations of clear-cut “coming out” narratives, even progressive representations that emphasize ambivalence and destabilize binaries between homosexual and heterosexual are vulnerable to being interpreted as the “closet” and marked as “primitive.” But this unsettling of the binary between homosexuality and heterosexuality does not come into play solely through Grant’s biography; it is also in play in his films. As film scholar Steven Cohen suggests, the heterosexual coupling at the closure of Grant’s films must be read as a symptom of the anxieties
caused by his unsettling of conventional gender binaries (395). According to Cohen, Grant’s onscreen image is that of “feminized masculinity, an interplay between “heterosexual attractiveness,” and his portrayals of bachelor playboy with its accompanying notions of “latent homosexuality” (402, 395, 401). Whereas Grant’s heterosexual male virility is associated with American nationalism, Cohen repeatedly associates his particular mobility between homosexuality and heterosexuality with his mobility between Britishness and Americanness (398-399). This diasporic mobility between Britain and America, is thus the foundation of both Alim’s and Grant’s embodiment of unsettled sexual differences.

In Grant’s films and in Touch of Pink the aesthetic device used to bridge heterosexuality and homosexuality, which by extension is the source of diasporic mobility between Britain and America, is that of “disguise” or “masquerade.” Cohen writes that in his films, Grant’s gender mobility is manifested in roles that “keep grounding the sexual appeal of Grant’s masculinity in a masquerade of one sort or another” (397). In Touch of Pink, the visual representation of Grant’s ghost, itself a masquerade instructs Alim to pretend he is heterosexual in order to ultimately get the guy and realize his “true” sexual identity, just as the screen icon pretended to be many different men and took on many disguises in the film Charade in order to get the girl. It is Grant’s theatrical performance of American romantic masculinity, in contrast to “authenticity” inscribed by the popular personae of Springsteen and Prince, which propels Alim’s masquerade. Alim’s diasporic mobility between London and Toronto is driven by his bid to unravel what he perceives is the closet at the core of this masquerade.

The film’s irreverence toward Grant and critique of his embodiment of colonialist attitudes renders his particular brand of balance between nationalist heterosexual virility and “feminized masculinity” elusive for Alim. According to Cohen, the fluidity that Grant embodies is not
without limits: “…the fluidity with which Grant moved between binarized terms like masculine/feminine, British/American, genteel/common, allowed him to personify their contradiction” (399). Therefore, whereas reverence for Prince and Springsteen and their respective embodiment of American multicultural and American working class masculinities allows the protagonists of Kureishi’s novel and Manzoor’s memoir to be included in the nation-state, Grant’s critique in *Touch Of Pink* ensures that Alim’s mobility, insofar as it is derived from fluidity of Grant’s onscreen persona as discussed by Cohen, does not translate into inclusion in British, American, or other spaces. The film highlights Alim’s exclusion from national assimilation in two ways: through the spatial aesthetic of interplay between inside/ outside, in contrast to the horizontal streetscapes of *The Black Album* and the clash between the spatial scales of local and national in *Greetings*; and through the visual aesthetic of close-up shots in which one or two characters occupy the entire screen, cutting off the surrounding space and geography.  

*Touch of Pink* connects the “outside” with heterosexual couplings, especially when not sexual in nature, and the “inside” with homosexual ones. We see Alim and his mother Nuru, or Giles and his sister in public settings of grocery stores and farmers’ markets. The most glorious views of London and its sites and monuments that make it a global tourist destination are seen in the montage with panoramic shots in which Giles takes Nuru out to show her the city. But for the most part, we see Giles and Alim together, along with Grant’s ghost, inside the home. This spatial distinction between outside and inside is reinforced by the visual aesthetic of rendering the outside with long shots and the inside in close-up shots. The heterosexual/ outside/ long-shot and the homosexual/ inside/ close-shot binary allows us to postulate that heterosexual couplings are included and homosexuality is excluded from the nation’s public spaces. But re-locating
queer desire within the site of the home and as a generative force in the narrative production of home is, according to Gopinath, a significant contribution of Rashid’s films to queer diasporic cinema. The use of close shots to represent the queer diasporic home in *Touch of Pink* not only proves Gopinath’s point but also extends it to show that home can also function as a site of containment of queer desire.

While Anglophone Grant’s ghost seems at home in London, the spatial and visual aesthetic of the film combined with the film’s critique of Grant’s Orientalist attitude ensures that neither Alim nor Nuru, both of whom can trace their presence in London due to their Grant fandom, can belong there. Alim’s itinerary from Canada to London is the same one that his mother had taken to follow her meager dreams of training as a secretary to support Alim after losing her husband. She had traveled specifically to London rather than elsewhere because it was the city where dreams came true in Hollywood films of Cary Grant and Doris Day, stars she was smitten by. Rashid emphasizes that Nuru’s Hollywood dreams of London are thwarted not just because they are based on fantastical celluloid illusions but because she is a racialized postcolonial subject. “I went to London to be Doris Day,” Nuru tells Alim, “But London wasn’t interested in Indian Doris Days then or now.” Alim’s journey to London is similar to Nuru’s, mediated as it is by Cary Grant fandom, who again serves as the repository of both heterosexual longing, seen in Nuru’s dream to be Day, and homosexual desire. But like Nuru’s dreams, Alim’s dreams of inclusion in family and nation as a racialized queer subject are not realized in London.

The resolution of the film and Alim’s reconciliation with Giles takes place not in London but in Toronto. Two elements of this conclusion, its predication on Alim’s rejection of Cary Grant’s ghost and its visual aesthetic of close shots that excises any territorial signifiers of Toronto, serve to locate Alim as a representation of the diasporic idiom of “belonging nowhere,”
which is not a romanticized space of liberation in Rashid’s iteration as it often is in diaspora theory but a precarious state of exclusion. After the film’s climactic scene in which Alim comes out to his family and kisses Giles at his closeted gay cousin’s heterosexual wedding, both Alim and Giles return to Nuru’s apartment. Alim also brings along Karim, the building’s janitor who he senses is attracted to Nuru. Nuru’s budding relationship with Karim signifies transgression of class hierarchies, and Karim’s volunteering to make dumplings in the kitchen suggests the possibility of gender role reversal as well. But Nuru and Karim exit the scene leaving the stage for Giles’s and Alim’s homosexual union. The final scene in the film does not occur within the space of the home but in the inside/outside space of the apartment balcony. The scene begins with a close frontal shot of the two lovers but when Alim hints about leaving the crutch and shackle of Cary Grant’s spirit to become his own independent person, the camera moves behind Alim and Giles. This resolution indicates greater homosexual intimacy between Giles and Alim, but is also pessimistic and tentative about what space the couple can occupy either in the nation or in diaspora. The close shot ensures a narrow cinematic frame that does not look out into Toronto’s cityscape. Alim’s decision to be free of Grant’s spirit, revealing it to be a coping mechanism at best and pathology at worst, also erodes the possibility of the couple’s inclusion in London, Grant’s preferred space for them. They also cannot embody Grant’s ideal of American fluid sexual identity or his oscillation between British/ American heterosexual and homosexual masculinities. The final shot of the film, a pull back medium long shot of Alim and Giles standing in the frame of the balcony with their backs toward the viewer as the camera retracts into the dark recesses of Nuru’s apartment, reveals the limits of the role of American popular culture icons in defining South Asian diasporic Muslim masculinities.
In this chapter I have argued that American pop culture fandom becomes a way for South Asian masculinities to seek incorporation into a multicultural Britain. British Muslim male fandom in Kureishi’s *The Black Album* and Sarfraz Manzoor’s *Greetings from Bury Park* raises possibilities of political consciousness but also reinstates hierarchies of nationality, religion, gender, and class, hierarchies that are, ironically, central to the texts’ containment of anxieties about Islam and their commitment to the bildungsroman form. This analysis also interrogates the limits of cultural politics of American popular culture fandom—in spite of its perceived opposition to the colonial connotations of British cultural forms—in narrating the political promise of America. The Cary Grant fan film *Touch of Pink*, on the other hand, cannot sustain a developmental arc as it critiques the U.S. Orientalism that is often on dazzling display in American popular culture, and in the process reveals that the diaspora is a precarious state of being for a South Asian gay Muslim. Muslim fan narratives gain high visibility in Western mainstream discussions because they are amenable to being celebrated as evidence for the problematic binary that Virinder Kalra calls “rapper/rioter” and Mahmood Mamdani refers to as “Good Muslim/Bad Muslim.” While cultural performances such as those enacted by the Muslim punk music subculture “Taqwacore” and Bangladeshi performance artist Aladdin Ullah’s one-man show about his baseball fandom titled “Dishwasher Dreams” challenge “terrorism” as the only framework of legibility for South Asian diasporic Muslims, they also feed into the chain of reasoning that goes: Muslims who are American culture fans are “good” Muslims because they are not religious and therefore not terrorists. The fan narratives, therefore, end up equating religion with terrorism, an equation these narratives ostensibly set out to challenge.

In light of my discussion of spatiality, pop music, and literary forms in this chapter, it becomes significant to note that the “good Muslim/ bad Muslim” binary is mapped quite
unevenly on to the urban/ rural divide as South Asian Muslim cultural performances and discussions about them are mostly concentrated in the urban sphere. This divide is central to the thematic and aesthetic differences that emerge between the choice of Prince for the tale of urban racial and religious strife in *The Black Album*, and the choice of Springsteen lyrics to draw connections between Luton and rural American geographies in *Greetings from Bury Park*. I will now apply the comparative framework of the diasporic itinerary to portrayals of the rural in V.S. Naipaul’s work and the urban in Salman Rushdie’s fiction in order to delineate the different national histories and racial geographies that these spatial imaginations subtend.
Notes

1 The contradiction that exists between harboring anti-American viewpoint while simultaneously taking pleasure in American pop culture and embracing it enthusiastically is also documented in R. Laurence Moore and Maurizio Vaudagna’s anthology *American Century in Europe*. In the “Introduction” to their anthology, they describe the paradox as follows: “Commentators have recorded the curious fact that the enthusiastic embrace of American culture by many peoples of the world has happened simultaneous with the eruption of anti-American sentiments. They criticize American materialism yet flock to Hollywood films in which abundance is conspicuously displayed. They find fault with American individualism and dance to American music” (5).

2 Prem Poddar and Graham MacPhee identify this state-sanctioned containment strategy in the introduction to their anthology *Empire and After: Englishness in Postcolonial Perspective* as follows: “…the attempt to identify a political framework for [the London bombings] was obscured by the insistence on its character as purely cultural problem—the supposed failure of multicultural society—rather than the political question of Western involvement in the Middle East” (8-9; emphasis original)

3 Henceforth, I will refer to Manzoor’s memoir in the shortened form as *Greetings*.

4 The most influential example of this scholarship is Paul Gilroy’s *There Ain’t No Black in the Union Jack*, which suggests that the growth of British rock, punk, and hip hop is inextricable from an understanding of British racial politics, including collaborations and dialogues between white working class and black styles. For the role of anti-racist politics in British rock, see Ashley Dawson’s “‘Love Music, Hate Racism’: The Cultural Politics of the Rock Against Racism Campaigns 1976-1981.” For a similar discussion in the context of Bhangra, see *Dis-Orienting Rhythms* edited by Virinder Kalra, John Hutnyk, and Sanjay Sharma; and Gayatri Gopinath’s *Impossible Desires*.

5 In his article “European Elitism, American Money, and Popular Culture,” historian Volker Berghahn argues that the hegemony of American popular culture in Europe is not “natural” and should not be taken for granted. Its hegemony is guaranteed by the influence of “American money in U.S. cultural policy making” in order to secure American economic and political hegemony (118). Charting the growth of American popular culture in Europe, Bergahn also argues that all American popular culture media do not enjoy the same acceptance or value. Hollywood and jazz occupy a higher place in the American pop culture hierarchy in Europe than pop music (127). This finding strengthens the case to not study these diverse media as part of an abstract, undifferentiated “American pop culture.”

6 In her analysis of Marina Lewycka’s novel *A Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian*, Heather Fielding also discusses the contradiction between “inclusive and exclusive models of the nation” that characterizes ethnic bildungsromane. She further connects these two models with to Paul Gilroy’s distinction between “convivial” and “melancholic” versions of British national culture as delineated in his book *Postcolonial Melancholia*.
Claus-Ulrich Viol makes a similar point in *Jukebooks* when he writes: “Far from dissolving into a value-free consumerism…the basic high-low, authentic-inauthentic, and art-market distinctions have, on the contrary, been reproduced and multiplied within the field of popular music itself” (75).

In this case for instance, both Prince and Springsteen have carefully calibrated images as workmen-type artists with great work ethic as exemplified by their prolific song-writing, hyper-productive careers, and business-promotion skills. For examples of this image for Prince, see Per Nilsen’s biography titled *Dancemusicsexromance: Prince – The First Decade* and for Springsteen, see the documentary “The Promise: The Making of Darkness on the Edge of Town.”

Because critics like Ruvani Ranasinha and Sheila Ghose do not focus their analyses through representations of American pop culture, they suggest that the bildungsroman form of Kureishi’s novel operates through a binary opposition between violent, intolerant Muslim fundamentalism and pop culture-loving liberal multiculturalism.

Kureishi has often been criticized for characters that act as symbols for set of ideological beliefs or “mediators of entire socio-political networks” and *The Black Album* is no different (Hutnyk). But I agree with John Hutnyk that any loss of complexity here is made up by the potential of these characters to “open up possibilities for discussion of political diagnostics of the present time” (Hutnyk).

According to Cashmore, a prominent example of Prince’s transgression of gender boundaries is his renunciation of his name in favor of a symbol, a “runic hieroglyph, seemingly made up of male and female gender symbols” (144).

Deedee’s white liberal feminism is similar to Rosie’s in Kureishi’s *Sammy and Rosie Get Laid*. For an excellent discussion of the limits of liberal multiculturalism espoused by Rosie, see John Hutnyk’s unpublished paper manuscript titled “Sexy Sammy and Red Rosie?: From Burning Books to the War on Terror.” Hutnyk castigates Rosie’s liberalism and its espousal of ostensibly progressive politics as “underpinned by racism, economic privilege and brute force;” this critique holds for Deedee too. For other critiques of liberal multiculturalism on account of its compatibility with structures of power and domination, see Hazel Carby’s essay on “The Multicultural Wars,” in *Cultures of Babylon* and Vijay Prashad’s ‘Summer of Bruce.”

Chili’s encounter with American popular culture is similar to that of Charlie Hero’s and Karim’s in Kureishi first novel *The Buddha of Suburbia*. Charlie, too, can belong to an abstracted, deterritorialized notion of American rock music but is miserable and lonely in America. The novel’s British Asian protagonist Karim refuses Charlie’s offer that he stay in New York with him, and thus like Shahid, refuses a more global belonging in order to belong in England.

For more on the relation between Springsteen’s masculine sexual authority and whiteness, and his relation to African American musical forms, see Bryan Garman’s *A Race of Singers: Whitman’s Working Class Hero from Guthrie to Springsteen*, especially pages 212-226.
In an article for the *Guardian* titled “The Boss and Me, which in many ways is the seed of this book-length memoir, Manzoor pre-empts Iyer’s and Duggal’s line of reasoning. “Springsteen is perhaps not an obvious choice [as a hero] for someone like myself,” he writes.

For an excellent discussion of how the spatial intersection and disjunction between the local and the national is crucial to the structure of Springsteen’s hit “Born in the USA,” see Jefferson Cowie’s and Lauren Boehm’s “Dead Man’s Town: ‘Born in the U.S.A.,’ Social History, and Working Class Identity.”

For example, see Timothy Fong’s *Asian American Community*, Keith Osajima’s brief essay “Asian Americans as the Model Minority” and Vijay Prashad’s discussion of model minority, specifically in the context of South Asian Americans in *The Karma of Brown Folk*.

“Land of Hope and Dreams” is the title of a Springsteen song originally released in the album *Live in New York City*.

For an analysis of Springsteen’s work that challenges this oft-repeated criticism, such as Moss’s, of him as an “artist who perpetuates gender divisions,” see Liza Zitelli’s “Like a Vision She Dances.” Zitelli points to representations of women in Springsteen’s songs as “Christ-figures,” as saviors of men, and to the narrative construction of subversive feminine spaces as evidence for her reading of Springsteen’s work as offering a feminist portrayal (153). But such nuances of interpretation do not make their way into Manzoor’s memoir.

See Mahmood Mamdani’s book *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim* for insights into the cultural and political work performed by this binary on behalf of U.S. imperialism. Part of my argument in this chapter is that fan narratives end up resurrecting this binary, in spite of their stated intentions to challenge the perceptions and stereotypes that equate Islam with terrorism.

Stevens’s Hollywood venture is loosely based on Rudyard Kipling’s poem “Gunga Din.”

This is in contrast to the tilted shots used in the film *Gunga Din* that suggest loftiness of the eponymous character and also hint at his equality with Cutter.

Mark Chiang makes a similar argument in his analysis of the articulations between homosexuality and transnational capitalism in the film *The Wedding Banquet*. He writes that since national identification is based on heterosexuality, the “diminishment of national distinctions,” in the transnational moment “entails leveling the opposition of heterosexuality and homosexuality” (385).

The trope of masquerade or mistaken sexual identity is exploited for humor in diasporic comedies such as Ang Lee’s *The Wedding Banquet* and Gurinder Chadha’s *Bend It Like Beckham*.

In their analyses of *The Wedding Banquet* and *Surving Sabu* respectively, Mark Chiang and Gayatri Gopinath both suggest that a reworking of the relationship between inside and outside is the hallmark of queer diasporic texts (Chiang 386; Gopinath 76).
For more on the “Taqwacore” phenomena and their online presence, see Dhiraj Murthy’s article “Muslim Punks Online: A Diasporic Pakistani Music Subculture on the Internet”
5. URBAN MULTICULTURALISMS, COUNTRY RUINS: LANDSCAPES OF SOUTH ASIAN DIASPORIC FICTION

Memory is no longer confused, it has a homeland—

Says Shammas: Territorialize each confusion in a graceful Arabic

--Agha Shahid Ali

This chapter examines the work of Salman Rushdie and V.S. Naipaul, two South Asian diaspora writers most identified with the state of diasporic homelessness, rootlessness, and exile, and the contrast they posit between Britain and the U.S. as they reckon with the territorial paradigms of the city and the countryside respectively. In the milestones of Rushdie’s literary production (and in his life), we detect a diasporic itinerary from the setting of Midnight’s Children (1982) in Bombay through the multicultural London of The Satanic Verses (1988), culminating in a full-throated swan-song about New York in Fury (2001) and The Ground Beneath Her Feet (1999). On the other hand, V.S. Naipaul’s representations of rural America and Britain in A Turn in the South (1989) and The Enigma of Arrival (1987) produce a different itinerary in which the narrator of his highly autobiographical work feels one with the British rural landscape and the country house. As in the epigraph from Kashmiri American poet Agha Shahid Ali, the texts analyzed here epitomize these authors’ struggle to territorialize their diasporic memories and confusions in language—specifically in the literary spatial aesthetic. Reading Rushdie and Naipaul in the framework of the diasporic itinerary reinforces the significance of 1989 as a turning point in South Asian authors’ imagination of the opposition between Britain and the United States. While writers like V.S. Naipaul from an earlier generation imagined Britain as the place of opportunity, authors from succeeding generations, including Rushdie, turned to the U.S. as a space of refuge and emancipation. As I note in the Introduction,
in the case of Rushdie, of course, this refuge was both literal and metaphorical as he sought protection and went into hiding in New York after the 1989 fatwa against him. As an arch-chronicler of diasporic hybridity and “mongrelization,” Rushdie is fascinated with urban spaces.

The Rushdie novel that I focus on in this chapter *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* was written specifically as a response to his fatwa. The novel begins on the date February 14, 1989, the day the fatwa was issued, and distills the Bombay-London-New York itinerary within the scope of one book. Whereas Rushdie’s novel emphasizes the aural texture of the multicultural city, Naipaul’s *The Enigma of Arrival* and *A Turn in the South* emphasize the visual character of British and American postcolonial rural landscapes in the genre-crossing form of travel writing interlaced with autobiography. The comparison between Naipaul and Rushdie compels us to question the extent to which an urban paradigm ensures a culmination of the diasporic itinerary in America or rather New York, while representations of the rural engender the British countryside as homeland for the South Asian diasporic memory. Or in other words, what specific diasporic memories and confusions can be rehabilitated by the American city versus the British countryside? What specific contours of the contrast between Britain and the U.S. emerge in each of these two literary geographical sites? Naipaul and Rushdie are most commonly studied within the rubric of postcolonial Anglophone literature, and therefore, the stakes of their writing about America remain relatively unexplored. The comparative framework of the diasporic itinerary, which attends rigorously to the differences among specific national histories and racial geographies, clears the space to think about what these writers’ engagement with America might mean within the overall scope of their oeuvre.

The city and the countryside subtend vastly different meanings in diasporic cultural production because each site bears the burden of national history differently. The city is always
presumed to be a part of the global networks of mobility and in that sense is seen as disassociated from the national context. Sarah Phillips Casteel argues that there is a distinct “urban orientation of diaspora studies” so much so that the “city comes to stand in for modern (diasporic) life itself,” while the role of the rural landscapes has largely been ignored (4). Such “denationalization of the city” clearly makes it an exceptional space for multicultural encounters, but it also feeds into the political rhetoric that seeks to contain the rights of racialized populations by excluding them from the nation at large (Casteel 4). This is the kind of conservative rhetoric, for instance, that dismisses New York as not part of the “real America.”

The rural, on the other hand, is characterized as the nation’s heartland and, contrary to the city, is viewed (inaccurately so) as rooted and outside the flows of global mobility. For instance, in the U.S. context, Casteel notes, the rural landscapes of the American West symbolize not only the national character traits of rugged individualism and freedom but also racial traits and white dominance. In the British context, the pastoral both “covers and names” English colonial wealth and racial anxiety, while also maintaining an innocent rootedness (Baucom 163-165; Hart 193). The rural has historically been difficult to situate as part of the histories of empire and imperialism because the specific romantic imagery of nature and wilderness renders these forces invisible or recasts them in terms of nationalism. Naipaul takes on the task of locating the British and American rural heartlands as central to the national architectures of empire and neoimperialism, and illustrates along the way the blind spots and limits imposed by his obsession with race and ruins.

5.1 The Lay of the Land: British and American Empires in V S Naipaul’s Postcolonial Landscapes
This is our ruin; that’s what we’ve been looking for.

--Amitav Ghosh in *The Shadow Lines*

_In this—Valparasio’s former aspirations to grandeur—I was reminded of Lahore and of that saying, so evocative in our language: the ruins proclaim the building was beautiful._

--Mohsin Hamid in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*

The above epigraphs refer to postcolonial ruins that could not be more different. Ghosh’s “ruin” is Calcutta’s Victoria Memorial, the monument to colonial grandeur established in a bustling city, now trying to hold on to its cultural significance amidst postcolonial poverty. Is it a site of reconciliation with history as it is for the protagonist’s uncle Tridib or is it a site of unbearable violence and guilt, as experienced by his white British lover May? The ruins in Hamid’s novel are the slums of Valparaiso in Chile—monuments to postcolonial poverty, fortified by neoliberal opportunism. The iconography of ruins allows both writers to signify the multiple valences of the encounter between the colonizer and the colonized, including postcolonial decay and the violence of colonial history. Most importantly, the imagery of “ruins” registers these valences in the idiom of romance—heterosexual love, pleasure, memory, and invocations of grandeur. Ghosh’s and Hamid’s ruins are those of the postcolonial Third World city.

But in *A Turn in the South* and *The Enigma of Arrival*, Naipaul locates these ruins in the West, and the romance between the colonizer and the colonized takes on a decidedly different meaning in the First World compared to the places collectively labeled the Third World. Following the nation-based divisions between “American Studies” and “British Studies,” divisions that the diasporic conceptualization of my project is trying to challenge, these two books are rarely considered together, set as they are in different nations. Postcolonial and
diaspora scholars, with their Anglophone focus, have directed most of their critical energies on the representations of the British countryside in *The Enigma*, while *A Turn* has mostly received critical attention not from South Asian diaspora scholars but from African American critics such as Colin Dayan and Arnold Rampersad. Other postcolonial scholars like Rob Nixon sense that taken together these two texts represent a change for the location of Naipaul’s writing from the Third World to the First and along with it a “newfound conciliatory mood,” a getting away from his “customary intrusive, spiky manner” (160, 164). But these commonalities obscure the contrast between Naipaul’s approaches to Britain and the U.S., failing to explicate how each of these sites illuminates differently his problem of the Third World. Although *The Enigma of Arrival* was published two years before *A Turn in the South*, both texts had their genesis in the same event—Naipaul’s coverage of the 1984 Republican Convention at Dallas for the *New York Review of Books*. The overscripted, overperformed vulgarity of the American political scene drives him to the seemingly natural landscape of the South and the British countryside, the journey functioning as postcolonial “metaphor and event” (Nixon 161). The lens of the diasporic itinerary enables a conversation between these texts to interpret why Naipaul’s subsequent journeys mimicked his first journey from Trinidad through New York to Britain, an itinerary that he considers neither natural nor an accident and yet inevitable for a New World South Asian diasporic subject of a particular generation.

By placing these two texts within the same framework I aim to elucidate the relationship that Naipaul posits between British colonialism and American neoimperialism by weaving the Trinidadian landscape of his beginnings—“there was no landscape like the first one knew,” he writes—with the landscapes of the American South and the British countryside (*Turn* 268). Using a postcolonial lens to understand Naipaul’s itinerary from America to Britain, this analysis
demonstrates that Naipaul defines the American South through its relationship with the North as well as with the Caribbean. I suggest that by employing a form that interweaves autobiographical elements of Trinidadian landscape with the travel writing form, Naipaul locates the South, with its particular abrasions between U.S. post-slavery domestic race relations and post-plantation colonial legacy, as an integral part of global colonial geopolitics. Naipaul’s complex reading of the South sits alongside his rather simplistic reading of America as a space of possibility for black Americans. But ultimately, the South is, for Naipaul, too close both to the Trinidadian past of Afro-Asian encounters he wants to relinquish as well as to the New York he had fleetingly experienced on his first journey as a city of small racial anxieties and humiliations. Instead of the South, which he considers only a “landscape of small ruins,” he finds his territorial home in the British countryside, the landscape whose ruins evoke grandeur. While Naipaul has been criticized for his obsession with Britain, I suggest that his British pastoral imagines a postcolonial intimacy with the white colonizer which is simultaneously more easy and more difficult to imagine: easier because of a continuity with colonial desire for whiteness and difficult because the British rural landscape is defined in nationalistic terms outside of the reach of colonial history and memory.

Naipaul’s travels in 1989 to situate the South in relation to his postcolonial preoccupations predates by at least ten years what Jon Smith identifies as a spate of books that invigorated Southern Studies through postcolonial approaches (145-146). An important feature of the postcolonial approaches, according to Smith, has been the re-imagining of the South through an erasure of the borders between the South and the Caribbean and those between the American North and South (147). Naipaul discusses both these erasures in his attempt to establish the U.S. as part of the postcolonial geography of the “postplantation New World” (Smith 147). In spite of
the shared history of slavery in the plantation societies of the Caribbean and the South, the disciplinary separation between postcolonial and American national frameworks makes their proximity difficult to imagine and ensures Naipaul’s surprise at his rather belated discovery of these connections. In his interviews with white Southerners whose ancestors went to the Caribbean to partake in the wealth generated by slavery, he unearths the proximity that had never struck him before: “What is not easily called to mind now is how close in the slave days, the slave territories of the Caribbean and the South were” (*Turn* 87). The North American plantations and their systems of exploitation, he finds, were modeled after the Caribbean plantations, and in a reversal of the First World-Third World hierarchy, it was the British West Indies that had been the “colonial land of opportunity” for white Southerners seeking out fortune in the professions (*Turn* 89). There is, he admits, strangeness in “tiny Barbados finding an echo in Grand South Carolina” (*Turn* 87).

Specifically, it is the Southern landscape in which Naipaul finds the most formidable example of the continuity between American slavery and British plantations. While colonial modes of circulation often account for commodities and people, Naipaul is invested in showing that the “natural” landscape beyond the cotton and tobacco fields, integral to the romance of the South, is produced by the history of colonialism. He remarks that “tropical plantations and colonies of the imperial time acquired a similar look, with the vegetation that was brought together from different parts of the world” (*A Turn* 81). Thus, the North Carolina landscape is similar to the saman trees of Trinidad and reflects the continuity between plantation life in the South and the Caribbean.

In addition to contemplating the continuity between the colonial and plantation cultures of the Caribbean and the South, Naipaul also thinks about the stakes of the erasure of boundaries
between American North and South. Amidst what he describes as the romance of the “small-time beginnings” of the white town of Charleston on display for tourists, he is intrigued by the side-by-side existence of the Civil War memorial and another memorial celebrating the Spanish American War. He uses this juxtaposition to meditate on the connection between the global dimensions of U.S. imperialism and the postcolonial South as follows:

It was as though the grief of the Confederate Memorial had found its expiation in the jauntiness of the other memorial to celebrate the Spanish American War of 1898; as though the unmentioned Southern Cause had lived on and found justification in the later imperialist war; as though the unmentioned racial anguish of the period after Civil War, the later hardness toward blacks had become incorporated into something a good deal less squalid than the slave cabins with the very black and ragged slaves of South Carolina, had become incorporated, as some Southerners had said, into the wider cause of white civilization, spreading to Africa, Australia, and the East Indies (Turn 101).

Like the work of hemispheric studies scholars such as George Handley, Naipaul’s text considers the Civil War and incorporation of the postcolonial South into the North as the moment that channeled the Southern cause of white supremacy into the American global imperialist project. As Handley describes it, “U.S. imperialism, when read in the context of the extended Caribbean, reveals itself as a result of the United States’ own failed struggle to heal slavery’s wounds” (7). That is, while the plantation structures were abolished within U.S. borders, they were fortified elsewhere on a global scale in accordance with the same underlying racial logic.

Drawing a link between American global imperialism and the nation’s imagination of the South, Naipaul’s point is resonant with Houston Baker’s in Turning South Again. Baker states
that American “internal colonialism,” which engendered a fierce Southern nationalism around the question of slavery, allowed the North to maintain its ideological righteousness while “capturing the anticolonialist resentment” to define the U.S. nationalist and imperialist project (Baker 21; emphasis original). In other words, the Civil War and the victory of the North over the South made it possible for the U.S. to dismiss and disavow the South’s racism and white supremacy as regionalism while simultaneously enabling the central tenets of this “regionalism” to form the core of American national race relations and its global imperialist project.

Considering the geographical scope of my project, it is important to point out that this dimension of North-South relations, whereby the North defines itself against the South and also adopts its most conservative tendencies, is, according to C Vann Woodward, a prominent historian of the South, similar to the U.S.-Europe connection as follows: “The North and South have occasionally used each other in the way Americans have historically used Europe—not only to define their identity and to say what they are not, but to escape in fantasy from what they are” (qtd. in Smith 160). Similarly, according to Allen Tate, it is the South that harbored and advanced the colonial and racial legacy of Europe: “The South could be ignorant of Europe because it was Europe;...it was European where the New England position was self-conscious and colonial” (171). Even in Naipaul’s quote, the reference to Australia and East Indies in the list of U.S. imperialist ventures suggests the co-extensiveness of American imperialism with British colonialism. Geographically, the South is in the U.S., but Naipaul situates it squarely within the circuits of British colonialism and within the bounds of the problem of the “Third World.” His turn toward the rural South should therefore be read not as an anomaly but as an extension of his romance with the ruins of the British countryside in Enigma as well as a reckoning with the memory of the colonial history he grew up with in Trinidad. In Naipaul’s delineation of
America’s historical imagination of the South we can see a “coming to terms with a more desperate kind of New World history,” one that imagines a Third World within the First, and therefore dismantles the “easy binarism” between the two that, according to Smith, often plagues New World Studies (Turn 307; Smith 155). But the contrast that Naipaul posits between the U.S. and the Caribbean, to which I now turn, draws more on the autobiographical and imbues the U.S.-Caribbean binary with a hint of romance that represents the Third World subjects’ yearning for equality and parity within a global system of inequities.

The South’s vicious racism from its days of slavery is co-opted into America’s global imperialist project and, within the national sphere, into “race relations.” While Naipaul detects the resilience of the Southern cause of racism and white supremacy in the continuity he sees between the Caribbean and Southern landscapes, he fails to find racism in the benign-sounding national term “race relations,” which he understands by contrasting the Caribbean and the South. I begin my Introduction to this project with the idea that South Asian writers’ portrayal of America rather than Britain as a space of emancipation for racialized diasporas goes against the grain of the historical fact that Britain abolished slavery before the U.S. did. Naipaul repeatedly asserts this history and also acknowledges that blacks in America had been practically free for only thirty years considering that Jim Crow continued the racial logics of slavery. But despite this history, he considers the U.S. as the “place of greater potential” for African Americans compared to the fate of his own Indian family and that of other blacks in the Caribbean (Turn 198). While America was the land of opportunity for blacks, according to Naipaul, the blacks in Trinidad were now “just people who went to the wrong place” (Turn 89).

At first glance, such an enthusiastic response to the U.S. as a place of great opportunity for African Americans can seem, at best, a sign of the authors’ naiveté, and at worst, yet another
sign of his utter disregard for blacks.⁴ But Naipaul’s enthusiasm does not come without qualification and tempering, and is therefore not without complexity. He illustrates his thinking on the difference of the fate of blacks in Trinidad versus the U.S. through the case of Marvin Arrington, president of the Atlanta City Council, whom he discerns as “someone who might have been created by Caribbean circumstances” (Turn 58). Thinking about the differences between the outcome of a black politician’s life trajectory in the two spaces, he explains that in Trinidad, after the end of the colonial reign, black politicians, since they emerged in a black majority country, come to stand in for the colonial power they replaced. They overthrow the old system and assert complete power like the colonizer albeit in a new system and are, therefore, mere mirror images of the colonialist. But Naipaul’s assessment that blacks’ access to this power is an inherently much inferior outcome rests on his initial idea that power, whether it be of politicians or aristocrats, does not amount to much when you are in the “wrong place” (Turn 89).

Naipaul’s view of America as a place of possibilities for blacks is in direct contrast to that of scholars such as Houston Baker who, examining race relations in the national perspective, make a case that there is great continuity between racial technologies during and after slavery. Naipaul reads Marvin Arrington’s story of limited access to power as evidence of America as a place of possibility for blacks because of his specific understanding of the South as both postcolonial and neoimperial. The co-optation of the Southern cause into the race relations of the domestic sphere functions by according circumscribed power to blacks, which allows the persistence of the narrative of possibility of progress, functions as a resolution to the history of black deprivation and impoverishment. As seen in Arrington’s story, American race-relations conceal their origins in “internal colonialism,” specifically in the mind of the South, by giving blacks “position without strength,” thereby co-opting, drawing off, resolving, if only partially
and temporarily, black rage about the continuity of their circumstances since times of slavery (Turn 58).

This stance toward American race relations and toward the South is further illustrated in Baker’s and Naipaul’s differing responses to the controversial figure of Booker T. Washington, who is central to both these authors’ explorations of the South. For Baker, Washington’s Tuskegee is nothing more than a “Tuskegee Plantation,” a continuation of the “systems of disciplining black bodies that originated on the plantation.” But Naipaul views Washington as a much more ambiguous figure, one who combined the project of “racial uplift” with a desire not to offend the dominant whites, and as one who was impressed with British aristocracy and their ability to command complete subservience from their servants (Turn 153). Naipaul’s generous response toward Washington emerges from his particular South Asian postcolonial viewpoint, which signifies a contentious relationship with African diaspora, but also from the tender memories of his father from his time in Trinidad. This is not to say that Naipaul’s response is somehow justifiable or special merely because of his transnational lens, and if anything, my own viewpoint aligns closely to Baker’s. But this difference shows that historical figures are read quite differently in different geographies, and their narratives acquire new meanings when they cross spaces. To the extent that Naipaul’s reading of the South is defined by his postcolonial understanding of the Trinidadian landscape, he does not read Washington by placing him, as Baker does, in the Oedipal drama of American race relations: as the “bad father because he loves and fears the great white father too much” (Smith 157). Instead Washington evokes the memory of Naipaul’s Indo-Trinidadian father, poor in spite of his ambition and whose figure looms large in Naipaul’s literary ambitions, who held Washington in great respect because he was particularly struck by his book *Up From Slavery*. In Naipaul’s Trinidadian context, Washington
becomes “stripped both of race and historical time,” and his journey to Tuskegee is tinged with his childhood romance of his father (Turn 136). Far from the “Tuskegee plantation,” his diasporic perspective enables him to see Washington’s university as an ‘achievement on the American scale, nothing slave-like or Trinidad-like about Tuskegee” (Turn 139).

Rob Nixon’s words for the specific geographical setting of Enigma—that “No other British writer of Caribbean or South Asian ancestry would have chosen a tucked-away Wiltshire perspective from which to reflect on the themes of immigration and postcolonial decay”—hold equally true for Naipaul’s choice to travel in and write about the South (161). Naipaul’s rumination on ruins in the South through the particular combination of autobiography and travel writing is amenable to binary modes of thinking on race and history without having to reconcile them. For instance, Naipaul’s sophisticated argumentation is evident is his delineation of the South as both postcolonial and neoimperial, but this idea exists in an uneasy juxtaposition with his essentializing of Southern identity as rooted in considerations of a sense of place and past, land and community. Other South Asian representations of the South, such as Mira Nair’s Mississippi Masala, which I discuss in Chapter 2, and Abraham Verghese’s My Own Country: A Doctor’s Story, establish their protagonists as bona fide Americans through love and labor, respectively, in the rural South. The South in these works becomes a site of reconciliation of racial and colonial violence or of the upheavals of immigration and search for identity. But in Naipaul’s pages, elements of violence and romance jostle much more uneasily without being reconciled. He derives pleasure in the ruins of the South, which seize the violent past in Lefebvrian “layers of history” reflecting the Indian land, slavery, Civil War, reconstruction, the Great Depression, the Civil Rights movement to the agricultural and industrial depression of the late 1980s, but the pleasure is devoid of joy (Turn 35, 178, 180, 263).
This reckoning without reconciliation is partly a function of the limited and superficial use of the autobiographical in the travel writing form of *A Turn in the South* as compared to *The Enigma of Arrival*, in which the autobiographical is much more intensely and deftly woven with the fictional elements. Rampersad suggests that the “secondary art” of travel writing and critical essays is the “art of nihilism” and is only suited to expressing radical alienation, whereas the idea of belonging can emerge only in the imaginative possibilities of fiction. It is therefore in the more fictional and the more autobiographical *Enigma* that we see a contemplative aesthetic which results in the narrator’s claim of oneness with the British landscape. But the reliance of *Turn* on the travel writing mode and interviews restricts the autobiographical and the claims on American landscape. In spite of the resonance of the Caribbean that Naipaul finds in the South, there is a distinct sense in the text that the South is not *his* landscape; these are not *his* ruins; this is not *his* colonizer. At the same time, somewhat paradoxically, in the rural South, he finds a landscape and racial tensions that are too close to the Trinidadian beginnings that he has spent his lifetime trying to escape. For instance, Rampersad finds that in spite of Naipaul’s “spikiness” about race, the author “concedes a crucial similarity between his black subjects and himself.” Just like the African American Howard, whom we are introduced to at the beginning of the book, Naipaul “cannot go back more than two generations before losing the past” (Rampersad). He finds his Trinidadian reflection in both black and white viewpoints in the South. He begins the book with Howard and concludes it with the Southern poet James Applewhite, with whose ideas of a simultaneous co-extensiveness with and separateness from the landscape of one’s childhood Naipaul feels a deep intimacy (*Turn* 303, 268). If, as Rampersad attests, Naipaul “desires a reconciliation with Trinidad,” this reconciliation is unavailable to him in the pages of *A Turn in the South* due to the limited use of autobiography in understanding the Southern landscape that
evokes the racial wounds and colonial anxieties of Trinidad. He frames both the prologue and the conclusion, in which he feels most intimate with his American subjects, through an idea of the South as a “landscape of small ruins” (Turn 10, 276). His reconciliation with Trinidad can occur only in the grandeur of ruins of the British countryside, which he chronicles in The Enigma of Arrival.

The turn from the U.S. to Britain is foreshadowed in the first journey that Naipaul’s narrator in Enigma takes from Trinidad to Britain in which he fleetingly experiences New York, an inaugural journey whose pattern all his subsequent journeys have replicated. The New York episode occurs in one of the most autobiographical sections of the book that has been labeled as a mixture of fiction and memoir. In the narrator’s mind, New York is “not associated with romance but with humiliation and uncertainty” (Enigma 120). These urban humiliations center on his experiences as a first-time traveler to a Western metropolis, where his racial anxieties from Trinidad seem to have accompanied him. He feels humiliated when he is unable to tip an African American who helps him with his luggage at the hotel because he was left with no money as the taxi driver had overcharged him, another source of his humiliation. He hints that he understands similar humiliations must have been encountered by the African Americans he meets on this journey but ultimately he resists that comparison. “The topic of race was too close to my disturbance, my vulnerability,” writes Naipaul as he describes his narrator’s racial encounters in the urban metropolises of New York and London, encounters reminiscent of his travels in the South (Enigma 124).

Instead of reconfiguring the representations of the urban to reckon with his kinship with diasporic blacks that the cramped, contained geography of the city imposes, he turns to the British countryside that enables him to imagine an intimacy with the colonizer. Nixon finds
Naipaul’s turn toward rural Britain “ingenious yet perverse” as it “screens out the violent decrepitude of London and Birmingham’s inner cities as well as the monumental industrial collapse of the rusting north, all regions where he could not have nurtured the sensation of his ‘oddity’ or mused with delicate melancholy on the England of Roman conquerors and Camelot” (163). “Ruin,” he further elaborates, “in its unpopulated, bucolic English mode, becomes a ruminative poetic affair where in the Third World it made [Naipaul] irascible and accusatory” (163). The postcolonial intimacy with the white colonizer that a turn toward the English country house allows Naipaul to imagine is, in a way, perverse because it is easy and convenient—postcolonial mimicry continuous with the colonial desire for whiteness and the power it represents. But this is only half the story. To assess the value of Naipaul’s turn toward the rural British landscape, it is also necessary to consider that the city offers privileged citizenship in multicultural societies, as seen in Rushdie’s representation of cities bristling with multicultural solidarities and conflicts. In the postcolonial moment, there is nothing easy, convenient or “natural” about a racialized subject’s imagination of intimacy with the white British colonizer in the rural landscape because the countryside is defined increasingly in nationalistic terms, entirely outside of the reach of colonial history and memory. While Ian Baucom in Out of Place argues that the colonial imagination was based on considering the far-flung colonies as nothing more than outer counties under London’s dominion co-extensive with the British landscape, I suggest that the postcolonial moment and its disavowal of colonial history is marked precisely by a spatial separation between empire “over there” in the colonies and nation at home “here.”

It is this postcolonial imagination of the separateness of empire and nation, Third World and First, that Naipaul disrupts through an iconography of postcolonial ruins that emerges from the projection of Trinidadian landscape onto the British countryside. Critics like Nixon (for
instance, the abovementioned quote) and Baucom see Naipaul’s ruminations in *Enigma* as statements only on the British landscape defined against his thoughts on landscapes in the Third World. Therefore, they forget that Naipaul employs autobiography to develop an aesthetic akin to painting that he uses to paint himself and the landscape of his Trinidadian past onto the British countryside, both the Third World and First World landscapes tied together through colonialism. Naipaul himself professes that his task in the book was to arrive at a synthesis of the landscapes that had produced him, and in the process situate Trinidad as “part of the globe,” that is as part of the history (*Enigma* 157). In an astute reading, Stanka Radovic has referred to *Enigma* as a “geographical palimpsest,” constituted by the layering of the Indian peasant past of Naipaul’s forebears and the Trinidadian countryside with the rural British landscape, the layering of the “pain of colonialism with the perception of decay.” The rural landscape and country house that Naipaul renders in elegiac tones is one whose grandeur was built on altering the landscape of colonies such as Trinidad, “a colony created for agriculture, for the growing of a particular crop” (*Enigma* 238). Thus Naipaul’s realization is not only that what appears “natural” in the British landscape is a construction, an artifice produced by the violence of colonialism—“Nothing was natural here, everything was considered”—but also, more importantly, that the Trinidadian drabness which he had similarly presumed natural, and hated, “had been man-made, that it had causes, that there had been other visions and indeed other landscapes” (*Enigma* 220, 156). In the postcolonial moment, with the wealth from the colonies gone, the same drabness that inflicted the Trinidadian landscape had descended upon the British countryside, its ruins now a shadow of erstwhile grandeur. Naipaul’s project is, therefore, not about staking a claim on the beauty of the land that has historically excluded racialized postcolonial subjects but about dismantling the very
idea of “natural beauty” by revealing the colonial injustice that produced the grandeur of the
countryside in the first place.

What, then, are we to make of the pleasure and romance Naipaul feels in the British
country ruins? In an attempt to answer this question, Baucom highlights the multiplicity of
Naipaul’s approaches to the ruins. While Naipaul recognizes the artifice of the landscape’s
grandeur, Baucom suggests, he fetishizes these ruins and continues to value the decay “not for
itself but for what it gestures toward” (179). According to Baucom, the ruin signifies for Naipaul
the grandeur of the British countryside that existed in the past and which can now be
 appréhended only as loss, the inheritance of which Naipaul sees as redemption. But Baucom’s
reading is based on Naipaul’s responses toward the British countryside and does not give full
consideration to the “geographical palimpsest” of Naipaul’s narrative or the “reciprocity” he
portrays between the Trinidadian and British landscapes (Casteel 43). The ruins also “gesture
toward” what the past grandeur of British countryside indexes beyond its national shores: the
injustice of a Trinidad radically impoverished. Baucom also finds in Naipaul more subtle
responses to the idea of decay, which includes seeing “perfection in the moment of ruin” rather
than in grandeur past (182). He suggests that Naipaul has “fallen in love with decay itself and has
written the love song for the empire’s ruin” (182).

Seeing perfection in the moment of postcolonial ruins might not constitute a condemnation
of British colonialism, as Baucom attests, but it serves to establish an intimacy between the Third
World racialized subject and the white British colonizer, both elements of debris left in the wake
of colonialism finding refuge in these ruins. Naipaul writes, “And coming to the manor at a time
of disappointment and wounding, I felt an immense sympathy for my landlord, who starting at
the other end of the world, now wished to hide like me. I felt a kinship with him…” (Enigma
If the erstwhile grandeur of the countryside was built on the exclusion of racialized colonized subjects like the narrator, it is only in these ruins of the invisible heart of empire and the impenetrable heart of the nation, in this state of decay, that he can achieve inclusion and parity with the British colonizer. Unlike the memory of the Trinidadian landscape in the American South, which does not bring any reconciliation with the pain of colonial violence, the overlaying of the Trinidadian countryside with the decaying British rural landscape brings solace to the narrator because in the ruins he, in the words of Nixon, “detects a hint of historical justice” (103). The redemption and solace in the ruins resides not only in the idea of simple inheritance, as in Baucom’s reading, but in retributive justice for colonial violence. The particular diasporic itinerary of Naipaul and his narrator ensures that their oneness with the landscape cannot occur anywhere else but in the British countryside because this geography underscores “the geometry of their historical abuse” (Nixon 20).

As a result, Naipaul’s narrator finds that his presence in the British countryside was historically unlikely but not an accident (Enigma 52). The ruins of the British countryside are the site of his arrival as a postcolonial subject. For the first time, he finds himself “in tune with a landscape in a way that [he] had never been in Trinidad or India (both sources of different kinds of pain)” (Enigma 173). The violence of colonialism is not so much submerged as melded in Naipaul’s contemplative aesthetic in which he renders the ruins of the British countryside. His visual aesthetic, similar to a painting, is seen in his words: “I saw things slowly; they emerged slowly” (Enigma 16). He repeats the mapping of the British countryside and with each repetition overlays it with the Trinidadian landscape, each repetition having the effect of deepening the strokes, bringing into clearer focus these two landscapes’ conjoined fates in the history of colonialism. It should be emphasized that this literary visual aesthetic does not draw on the
British countryside’s evocation of memory or resemblance to the Trinidadian landscape but of projection. Just as in his earlier life Naipaul’s narrator had projected an all-English Dickens onto the streets of Port of Spain and re-made him as “colonial, tropical, and multiracial,” so in these ruins, he projects the Trinidadian landscape onto the English countryside such that “Trinidad also became Wiltshire…also the land created by my pain and exhaustion” (Enigma 170, 171). It is Naipaul’s historical imagination that layers these two landscapes and his oneness with the British country ruins.

The above discussion proposes that Naipaul’s claim on the rural British landscape is more complex than Baucom’s conclusion that the ruins in Enigma speak of the loss of an authentic Englishness. But I agree with his analysis that there is an increasing tendency in postcolonial studies to see Naipaul as an easy target of critique, an author who on account of his conservative racial politics and personal failings is dismissed rather than engaged with. Without absolving Naipaul of his racial bigotry and his own dismissive attitudes toward Trinidad, is there a way for us to engage with his positing of an intimacy with the white colonizer through the ruins of the British landscape? In my reading of Naipaul’s layering of the Trinidadian and British landscapes, I have proposed that his portrayals of oneness with the British countryside and an intimacy with the white colonizer indicate a racialized diasporic subject’s quest for inclusion. We can situate Naipaul’s narrator’s quest as part of a long line of other such masculinist quests in fiction as well as sociological discourse in African and South Asian diasporas: Booker T. Washington’s narrative of racial uplift; Houston Baker Sr’s desire to “know Grand Opera, sample Great Literature, attain Culture,” which his son tenderly delineates as part of his effort to court “refined (read ‘white’) power on grounds of total equality;” Chanu in Monica Ali’s Brick Lane, who takes immense pride in his knowledge of the great works of British literature; the judge and his
colleagues in Kiran Desai’s *The Inheritance of Loss*, who had “broken their souls” to learn the ways of the British (Baker 28; Desai 224). Even Mr. Biswas in Naipaul’s celebrated *A House for Mr. Biswas* aspires not only to the eponymous house but also to be recognized as a man of English letters. But not all of these representations have equally earned the wrath and derision of critics, which itself indicates the scope for nuance in understanding postcolonial and racial intimacies. The same desires for the colonizer that arouse our pathos in fiction elicit our disgust in the autobiographical representations of *Enigma*. Perhaps, if the gravitational pull of the British countryside is, according to Derek Walcott, not enigmatic but predictable, it is worth our critical efforts to engage with the contours of the colonial project that makes such predictable outcomes inevitable in the postcolonial moment.

### 5.2 “Frontier of the Skin”: Salman Rushdie’s New York Lyric Dream

In this section I argue that in *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*, Salman Rushdie portrays New York as an exceptional place for middle-class, cosmopolitan-savvy, deracinated South Asians by dwelling on a series of oppositions: between urban and rural, Britain and America, and most importantly, city and nation. The central characters in this narrative re-telling of the Orpheus myth—Ormus Cama, Vina Apsara, and the narrator Umeed Merchant aka Rai—traverse borders between India, Britain, and the U.S., and it is only in New York that they can transcend the racial frontier or the “frontier of the skin” (Rushdie 55). The vehicle that allows such transcendence, “to cross the color line, not to rub it out,” as Rushdie puts it, is that of rock music, that central vortex of American cultural imperialism (480). While Hanif Kureishi’s and Sarfraz Manzoor’s South Asian Muslim fans of American popular music realized that their reverence for America is ultimately circumscribed by the fear that America too would exclude them, no such fears of
exclusion riddle the characters’ urban imaginations in *Ground*. America’s interaction with India is not through military operations as in Vietnam and Korea, but through what Rushdie calls the “real warriors of America,” or its neoimperial means of conquest, which include rock and roll (441). Whereas Rushdie finds the success of “U.S. values—that is greenbacks set to music” in Vietnam ironical, such irony is lost in the rendering of his own characters who do not resist, complicate, question or metamorphose American rock music (441). For Rushdie, the West is always already an integral part of the East, but not vice-versa. Though he challenges the origins of rock music in the West by painting Ormus as a musician in Bombay singing Elvis Presley’s songs before Elvis, such questioning of the originary myths of culture does nothing to prohibit Ormus’s desire for New York as a superior alternative to Bombay, which the protagonist considers a “provincial” “hick town” (Rushdie 101).

Ormus’s journey from Bombay to New York is bound with the history of British colonialism. The narrator’s father Vivvy Merchant, the consummate historian of Bombay, finds that “Bombay and New York are forever yoked together” in the historical figure of Queen Catherine of Braganza (Rushdie 354). Bombay came to England in her dowry, when she married Charles II, and she is the Queen in the New York borough of Queens. This detail establishes New York as situated firmly within British colonial circuits, and challenges the imagination of New York as a “global city” that is proposed as a tidy alternative outside of the provincial as well as of the messy hierarchies and dominations of the villainous empire of Britain. The yoking together of New York and Bombay through British colonialism underscores the imperial lineage of cities now marked as “global.” Because Rushdie’s investment always lies in showcasing the migrant condition as virtuous and exemplary, his global cities are privileged multicultural institutions where all sorts of frontiers are crossed and plurality challenges misplaced ideas of
authenticity. But the above bit of history reminds us that ultimately these cities are also always inscribed within the colonial logic. For instance, in her study of postcolonial cities, Jane Jacobs writes: “Colonial cities also operated as important sites in the deployment of technologies of power through which indigenous populations were categorized and controlled. Here town planning became the mechanism by which colonial adjudications of cleanliness, civility, and modernity were realized quite literally on the ground” (20). Even after the colonizers leave, the cities continue to be marked by the physical legacy of colonialism in the form of buildings and infrastructure and the accompanying social structures. In the contrast Rushdie portrays between a cosmopolitan Bombay as “apart from the rest of the country” and the “sheer unchartedness of rural India,” to which Rai makes a brief journey on an assignment as a photojournalist, Vassilena Parashkevova detects a “manner reminiscent of the colonial homogenizing constructions of the land as blank or empty” (164, 238; 7). Thus, the cosmopolitanism of Rushdie’s Bombay in The Ground is based precisely on its cultural proximity to the colonizer and its separateness from rural India, which he, without qualms, characterizes as the “heart of the country” (239).

The Anglophile love for Bombay is also at the heart of Rushdie’s comparison between Britain and America. The author uses both generational and mythic tropes to establish the opposition between Britain and the U.S. Darius Cama, Ormus’s father, is an Apollonian rationalist, a staunch Anglophile who loves Bombay for it was the creation of the British, and like the narrator is obsessed with the idea that “Bombay isn’t India” (49). As an extension of his love for the imperial city, he yearns for the country houses of old England and desires Britain as the “better elsewhere,” the place where his dreams would be realized. Rendered as a rationalist’s destination, Britain becomes an expected destination for the elite citizenry of Bombay, who are, the book proclaims, as much a creation of the British as is the city itself (Rushdie 31). In contrast
to the Apollonian Britain, Rushdie represents America in the Dionysian idiom. Ormus is the book’s Dionysian figure and his love for America carries shades of irrationality and emotion but also the potential for sublimity. Rushdie describes Ormus’s dream of America as follows: “But the land of Ormus’s dreams [unlike his father’s] was never England. No white mansion for him, but that other house, the place of light and horror, of speculation and danger and power and wonder, the place where the future was waiting to be born. America! America!” (100). The roots of Ormus’s desire for America in sentiment rather than rationality endows this desire with a measure of inexplicability and hence, ever greater power. Similarly, Vivvy Merchant is obsessed with Bombay’s colonial history and digs deeper underground to expose the various layers of its past while his son Rai envisions America as free of colonial baggage, his father’s Catherine of Braganza link notwithstanding. “America, which got rid of the British long before we did,” Rai says, “Let Sir Darius Cama dream his colonialist dreams of England. My dream-ocean led to America, my private, my unfound land” (Rushdie 59). Bombay is associated with the subterranean past and America with the future surface-world in the Orpheus story, or as Parashkevova asserts, the “ground” becomes “a normative mid-point between ‘developed’ and ‘developing’ worlds” (140).

London too occupies a similar transitional point in Ormus’s trajectory from Bombay to New York. The London of The Satanic Verses is a city whose multiplicity of narratives, according to Baucom, attests to the city’s impure and inauthentic identity, marking the “conjunction of diverse pasts, the overlapping of the histories of the English here and the imperial elsewhere in London’s present” (212). But in the 1960’s Britain of Ground, neither imperial history nor the neocolonial future belongs to London, and its present cannot be trusted by the immigrants from erstwhile colonies, who have to “imagine [England] into being, from the
ground up” (Rushdie 268). The only reminders of the nation’s imperial past, in the form of memorabilia of British India, have been relegated to the British countryside in the Methwold estate. If a part of the country functions as ersatz India, the other is ersatz America. Rushdie writes, “England may be my immediate destination, but it is not my goal, Ormus’s clothes announce, old England cannot hold me…Not funky but defunct. History moves on. Nowadays England is ersatz America, America’s delayed echo, America driving on the left” (251). While critic Randy Boyagoda suggests that the tale’s turn toward London is inevitable for both metaphorical and historical reasons, Ormus, as if commenting on Rushdie’s aesthetic decision, declares England to be nothing more than involuntary entrapment in his onward journey to America (32). Ormus says: “England kidnaps people….England seizes hold, (he says,) and won’t let go. It’s uncanny. You arrive for whatever reason, just passing through en route to the rest of your life, but watch out, or you’ll get stuck for years” (Rushdie 275-276).

England is the site of rejection and disenchantment for both Ormus and his father, Darius, demonstrating that the nation had little regard for including its erstwhile subjects irrespective of their enthusiastic Anglophilia or love of America, Britain’s new benefactor as it reluctantly picked up the pieces of its colonies. But while neither Darius nor Ormus is included or welcomed in Britain, such rejection does not lead to similar outcomes. As Boyagoda remarks, “[I]n England, Sir Darius is rejected for being a pretender; in America, this ability is the very guarantor of success” (36). Darius Cama is shamed for falsely claiming knighthood. Ormus’s fraud concerns his racial identity. In London, Ormus disowns the memory of his countryside-loving Anglophile father and replaces it with the American shape-shifting father-figure Mull Standish, under whose guidance he undergoes a racial metamorphosis: “Race itself seems less of a fixed point than before. He finds that to these new eyes he looks indeterminate. He has already
passed for Jewish,…an Italian, a Spaniard, a Romany, a Frenchman, a Latin American, a ‘Red’ Indian, a Greek” (Rushdie 291). This “invented biography” is the first step in Ormus’s adoption of the American-identified trait of self-invention. Portraying London as a transitional but necessary step in Ormus’s preparation to pursue a career in rock music in America, Rushdie reveals that the opposition between Britain and America is central to the fashioning of a South Asian American identity. Contrary to Boyagoda’s argument that Ormus’s case reinforces a “tautological definition” of America in which the nation’s greatness refers to nothing outside of its own ability to import immigrants, I suggest that the above discussion demonstrates that American greatness in Ormus’s eyes operates though its definition against Britain and the present-day manifestation of its colonial history as racist exclusion (34).

In pointing to the limits of postcolonial studies, critics like Homi Bhabha, Ruth Frankenburg and Lata Mani have remarked on the field’s overwhelming focus on the postcolonial elites and intellectuals, and that critique is certainly valid for Rushdie’s portrayals in *Ground*. Ormus Cama and Rai immigrate to the U.S. because of the political anxieties of the Bombay elite class, of which they were a part. After the colonizers left, the elites who replaced them are shown to be either fraudulent, as in the case of Darius Cama, or diminished morally and politically and even financially, as we see in the case of the Merchants. Without these other powers, the artistic power of Ormus’s music and Rai’s photography cannot be sustained either. Because of their class status, the metamorphosis of Rai and Ormus is seamless as they cross from Bombay through Britain to America. So we do not expect to find in Rushdie’s fiction characters like Kiran Desai’s Biju whose ordeals include standing for hours in the visa line and whose view of New York is from the basement. Ormus, the celebrity rock star, and Rai, the successful photographer, inhabit New York’s phallic spires. The contrast between London and New York,
central to Ormus’s story, is accentuated specifically by his life in New York skyscrapers, away from the city’s “vulgarity, its third-world feel”: “Groovy Manhattan is plainly no better than Swinging London. He retreats into high-rise heaven and watches the city float in space. This celestial Manhattan is what he loves” (Rushdie 387). Indeed like his private Bombay separate from the rest of the country, Ormus finds his private New York which is not part of the rest of America.

The novel explores the tense division between the city and the imperatives of the nation through the motif of the tragic love story of Ormus Cama and Vina Apsara and the gender politics that attends such masculinization of the city and feminization of the nation. Vina Apsara is the other half of Ormus’s band Vertical Takeoff or VTO and the love of his life. Like Saladin Chamcha in *The Satanic Verses*, she is a product of constant self-invention. She is a person of mixed heritage raised until her teenage years in rural America, Virginia and upstate New York. Following familial tragedies including her Greek American mother’s death in a murder-and-suicide and rejection by her aunt, she is parceled off to India and we see her enter the narrator’s world in a stars-and-stripes swimsuit, a moment that marks the first pangs of his desire for America. She then leaves India for America, via Britain, to become an artist and activist, a celebrity who seems like a combination of Madonna and Angelina Jolie and is “not just America’s sweetheart but the beloved of the whole aching planet” (Rushdie 412).

Vina’s character is very much in the mold of what I have identified in this project as the emerging dominant representation of South Asian women as cosmopolitan travelers and “cultural ambassadors” who belong effortlessly in multiple diasporic places because they have intimate knowledge of all cultures and not just of “native” ones. Rushdie’s portrayal of Vina in his “unique brand of extraterritorial prose,” in which she is repeatedly rendered in the diasporic
idiom of a woman who was “nowhere,” is precisely what allows her to be both cosmopolitan and an “archetypal American” (Israel 158; Rushdie 143, 180; Bayogoda 37). That is, the trajectory and fate of Vina clearly demonstrate the extent to which archetypal Americanness indeed masquerades as cosmopolitanism and the extent to which the diasporic idiom of belonging nowhere undergirds the privilege of belonging everywhere. In this particular case, the question is not only of class privilege or of mobility as in Jhumpa Lahiri’s work discussed in the following chapter, but Vina’s embodiment of cosmopolitanism and Americanness also points to the intimate connection between American nationalism and its imperial ambitions across the globe.9 For instance, Rushdie writes the following about Vina: “Knowing she came from nowhere, had nothing but what she made of herself, she had learned to treat the whole world as her possession, and I, like the rest of the planet, meekly acquiesced, and acknowledged her dominion over me and mine” (224). Deterritorialization is at the heart of Vina’s all-consuming, all-appropriating, forever-expanding Americanness, which expands till it encompasses the entire globe. Because of her embodiment of American nationalism and imperialism, her feminism comes across as a parody and only skin deep, reduced to her choices of attire such as the “single black glove of black American radicals” (224-225).

The novel employs the contrast between Vina as the deterritorialized index of the nation and its imperial ambitions and Ormus’s rooted identification with New York City to drive the tensions in their romantic relationship. Rushdie describes the conflicted romance in spatial terms: Ormus’s dream was of “conquering the sky, and [he] never itched for the thronged streets of Queens….Vina on the other hand,…never ceased to be a street urchin in her heart, even when immense celebrity forced her into its glittering cage. But New York, for Ormus, was from the beginning a doorman, an express elevator and a view. You could say it was Malabar Hill” (355).
Vina’s globe-enveloping Americanness, therefore, ironically embodies the Third World-vulgarity that Ormus, residing in a New York skyscraper, wants to escape from. The novel also connects Vina’s belonging nowhere and the refusal to be tied to a place to her refusal to be tied down to one man. She “refuses this new captivity” offered by Ormus’s wedding proposal (369). Her sexual promiscuity and rootlessness are inextricable as Rai’s description of Vina as always being in the “wrong place” also extends to her views of men, which propels her from one place to another, one man to another. Ormus’s extreme desire and yearning for Vina interspersed with his vow of celibacy for ten years, in light of the casting of their romance in spatial scales, begins to symbolize the fraught relationship between the city and the nation.

Whereas in the London-set *The Satanic Verses*, Rushdie’s investment is to locate the multiple racial histories of the colonized people as part of British history, in the quest to render New York as exceptional in *Ground*, the multiplicity of histories results in a dehistoricization of America. For an author who has mined history exceptionally well for fictional purposes in *Midnight’s Children* and *Shame*, *Ground* inscribes both an historic astuteness in marking tectonic events such as the Vietnam War, the 1984 assassination of Indira Gandhi and various earthquakes, as well as a cavalier attitude toward history within the American national sphere. While the ramifications of India’s imperial past are visible in Britain, the only references to American racial histories of segregation and discrimination are visible in the rural and the transnational, and remain tangential to the urban epicenter of the text. Growing up biracial in segregated rural Virginia in her earlier incarnation of Nissy Poe, Vina faces the dilemma of her racial classification in the black-white binary. To resolve the dilemma, Vina’s stepfather, a white man, draws on anti-black racism to place his “Indian” stepdaughters on the white end of the racial spectrum (Rushdie 105). In another instance, the text ascribes America’s crossing the
racial barrier and accepting Ormus’s and Vina’s music to the rise of American multiculturalism in response to the nation’s defeat in its imperialist venture in Vietnam. An America chastened on the global stage accepts the “un-American sounds Ormus adds to his tracks” (Rushdie 379). But Ormus, with dreams of worshipping New York City, grapples with the question of history in America in a way that names these multiple histories but simultaneously trivializes them:

I want to be in America, America where everyone’s like me, because everyone comes from somewhere else. All those histories, persecutions, massacres, piracies, slaveries; all those secret ceremonies, hanged witches, weeping wooded virgins and horned unyielding gods; all that yearning, hope, greed, excess, the whole lot adding up to a fabulous noisy historyless self-inventing citizenry of jumbles and confusions (Rushdie 252).

The sheer multiplicity of these histories renders the American domestic sphere as “historyless” and therefore fabulous. American history becomes abstract and amorphous and is reduced to a mishmash of phrases. The list, a postmodernist aesthetic device that Rushdie employs frequently to indicate fragmentation and multiplicity and lack of an authentic master narrative, here begins to indicate a false equivalence between “slaveries,” “hanged witches,” and unspecified “secret ceremonies.” This attitude toward history is substantiated by Rushdie’s use of the Orpheus myth to tell the story of American immigrants in which, unlike in The Satanic Verses, a backward glance can result in doom.

This abstraction of American history, resulting from the cacophony of histories, and breaking down of various boundaries of race, class, and color is, according to the novel, a specific characteristic of the New York milieu and the urban aesthetic. Vina urges Ormus to move from Britain, which she refers to as a place of “living death,” in light of its imperial
history, to New York, which in her conception is free of such burdens of history and is a place of infinite malleability (Rushdie 330). Vina proclaims that the British countryside carries echoes of “grass-hut Africa” of the imperial domain, and she coins words like “immigrunt” and “immigrovelling” to indicate the harsh burdens that Ormus would have to bear as an immigrant in the empire-nation (Rushdie 330-331). But New York is free of such burdens of history, according to Vina:

You get to be an American just by wanting, and by becoming an American you add to the kinds of American it’s possible to be, that’s in general I’m talking about?, okay?, and New York city in particular. However you get through your day in New York city, well then that’s a New York kind of day, and if you’re a Bombay singer singing the Bombay bop or a voodoo cab driver with zombies on the brain or a bomber from Montana or an Islamist beardo from Queens, then whatever’s going through your head?, well that’s a New York state of mind (Rushdie 331).

New York, in Rushdie’s representation, creates an ideal version of America in its urban isolation. The particular breaking down of boundaries between the mythic and the real, the fictional and the real, between disciplines and histories, according to Rushdie, is the hallmark of an urban aesthetic. In the heavy rotation of commentary in *Ground*, which prompts critic Pankaj Mishra to refer to the text as an “anti-novel,” Rushdie writes that such “decompartmentalization” is “intimately connected to the urbanization of artistic sensibility or rather to the artist’s conquest of the city” (Rushdie 386). Ormus Cama, like Salman Rushdie, mixes high and low, and melds various streams of knowledge, including biology and genetics, into his musical aesthetic. Therefore Rushdie renders New York as an exceptional place giving rise to new artistic sensibilities that “made people color-blind, race-blind, history-blind” (413).
The “urban genius” is an elitist conception and if the city seems race-blind and history-blind to Ormus and Rai, it is because they are wealthy and their view of the city is from a skyscraper. That is, their view of New York as exceptional relies very much on the existence of boundaries of class and race they purportedly see as dissolving in the urban milieu. Rai articulates this problematic as one of “double vision”:

Because the America in which I led my well-off, green-carded life, Orpheum-America in which love is the sign of our humanity, America below Fourteenth Street, loosey-goosey and free as air, gave me more of a sense of belonging than I’d ever felt back home…But ask the rest of the world what America meant and with one voice the rest of the world answered back, Might, it means Might (Rushdie 419).

The divergences that the narrator’s “double vision” articulates, between the wealthy urban “America below Fourteenth Street” and the rest of the nation with its racial hierarchies and imperial ambitions, overlap with the divergences between Ormus and Vina, which intensify toward the end of the novel and serve to keep intact the vision of New York as an exceptional place for racialized South Asian diasporic subjects. The symbolic promise of Vina is that she allows us to see the intimate connection between American nationalism and imperialism, between domestic race relations and the global scale of imperialism. But her ability to symbolize these connections, along with her “street-urchin” character that visualizes the messy city at street level makes her a threat to the ideal vision of America that Rushdie wants to realize in his representations of New York. In order to diffuse this threat, Vina meets a tragic end in an earthquake in Mexico, where she is swallowed up by cracks in the earth opened up by tectonic forces and her body is never recovered. In contrast, while Ormus is murdered by a Vina look-alike, in death too, he does not lose his intimacy with New York. Compared to the violence of
Vina’s end, the scattering of Ormus’s ashes is peaceful and recalls the majesty of New York: “Ormus was flying from us, spreading over the city he had loved, he was a small dark cloud dispersing over the great white metropolis, losing himself in that whiteness, he merged with it” (Rushdie 572). Even in death, Ormus continues to evoke the potent combination of racial indeterminacy or passing and extreme wealth that enables him to approximate the whiteness of the metropolis in which racial hierarchies persist by the exclusion of threats such as Vina’s “dark skin [that] had a burnished quality to it” (Rushdie 224).

The diasporic itinerary from Bombay through London to New York in The Ground Beneath Her Feet and Rushdie’s turn toward America coincides with the fatwa issued against him. Many critics have pointed out that the date at the beginning of the novel, 14th February 1989, is also the date of issuance of the fatwa that literally sent him underground and searching for refuge in New York. Rushdie’s obsession with questions of home and belongingness has usually resulted in his privileging of the migrant and deterritorialized condition, but this novel finds his characters, like him, settling for the territorial security of New York. The turning point of 1989 that we see in Rushdie’s work is significant for the temporal arc of my project. It is after 1989 that we see a proliferation of narratives from South Asian diaspora that proclaim America as the ultimate destination of their diasporic itinerary while an earlier generation of South Asians imagined Britain as the place of possibilities. It is interesting to consider, then, that Naipaul often drew ire and criticism for his fascination with the British countryside, whereas authors such as Rushdie and Jhumpa Lahiri who have claimed unequivocal belonging in America in spite of the injustices and inequities of U.S. imperialism have not drawn similar wrath from critics. The discrepancy in critical reception of writers like Naipaul compared to Jhumpa Lahiri, whose work
I explore in the next chapter, reveals the extent to which the South Asian diasporic itinerary from Britain to the U.S. has become naturalized.
Notes

1 Baker’s discussion of this point draws on Howard Zinn’s words in James Cobb’s *Redefining Southern Culture: Mind and Identity in the Modern South*. In this discussion, the questions of defining South as a victim of American “internal colonialism” and its own perpetuation of the extreme racial violence of slavery are inextricably linked. Rampersad critiques Naipaul for tilting toward the former while ignoring the latter, thereby aligning himself, a “non-white writer,” with the “prevailing attitudes of whites toward blacks.” Rampersad takes particular offense, rightly so, for Naipaul’s inclusion of Anne Siddons’s quote “We were a conquered and occupied people, the only people in the United States to be like that” which prompts him to remark “as if blacks had not been conquered and occupied in ways the white South could never have imagined for itself” (*A Turn* 40).

2 Houston Baker writes, “From the inscribed beginnings of the American Republic to the present day, it is the mind of the South…that frames American being” (26).

3 These insights are crucial for *A Turn in the South* to function as “the consummation of [Naipaul’s] New World ventures” (Nixon 166).

4 For a scathing indictment of *A Turn* as an example of Naipaul’s “racial arrogance” and a reading of his pleasures in the ruins of the South as an attempt to “trivialize the most heinous crimes,” see Joan Dayan’s “Gothic Naipaul” (162). Rampersad sees in *A Turn in the South* a similar “dismissal not simply of the intellectual lives but also the artistic and spiritual lives of African Americans” but he also contextualizes Naipaul’s self-loathing and anti-black racism—without dismissing, excusing, or justifying these elements in his work—by locating them in the Afro-Asian racial tensions and hostilities that Naipaul grew up with in Trinidad. In citing a resemblance between the affective and literary trajectory of Naipaul and Richard Wright, Rampersad affirms that he does not see this self-hatred and fascination with Europe as peculiar to Naipaul, a South Asian diasporic subject, but as wider symptoms produced in writers of color by the histories of colonialism and slavery.

5 Naipaul plays upon the gardener Pitton’s use of the word “refuge” to include both “refuse” and “refuge” to make this point.

6 Naipaul’s aesthetic is not about memory, which is more about keeping the image intact and is something that preoccupies Rushdie’s literary aesthetic that draws on photography rather than painting in *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*.

7 This point is indebted to Ifeoma Nwankwo’s suggestion in *Black Cosmopolitanism* that racialized diasporic subjects’ desires for nation or their transnational imaginings of intimacy—longings often read as primitive, essentialist, or unsophisticated—must be situated within the cartography of rights and read as their yearning for equality.

8 For another example that illustrates that American cultural institutions of the nation’s formative years were firmly entrenched within the British colonial circuits, see Gauri Vishwanathan’s essay “The Naming of Yale College: British Imperialism and American Higher Education.”
In addition to Vina, Yul Singh, the blind founder of the successful American company Colchis Records is also an example of Rushdie’s suggestion that cosmopolitanism is not always antithetical to nationalist strains. Singh is a “consummate rock ’n’ roller, who has always presented himself to the whole world as the ultimate cosmopolitan, wholly secularized and Westernized, Boss Yul, Coolest of the Cool” but he turns out to be a secret Sikh nationalist, channeling his American riches to the separatist movement in Punjab (Rushdie 407).
6. “A PLACE WHERE THERE WAS NOWHERE LEFT TO GO”: HOMES AND
HOMELESSNESS IN SOUTH ASIAN WOMEN’S DIASPORA LITERATURE

The spatial metaphor of homelessness has been the dominant mode of imagining diaspora in theory and literature. A range of scholars including Paul Gilroy, Daniel and Jonathan Boyarin, Vijay Mishra, Carol Boyce Davies, bell hooks, James Clifford, and Arif Dirlik have grappled with the seemingly contradictory question of pinpointing geographies of home in diaspora. Scholars have often resolved this contradiction between the territorializing impulse of home and the deterritorializing impulse of diaspora by way of metaphor, which naturalizes diaspora as a state of homelessness, foreclosing questions of why this particular metaphor assumes dominance and whose interests it serves. As diaspora theorist Avtar Brah notes, “far from being mere abstractions of a concrete reality, metaphors are part of the discursive materiality of power relations” (198). In order to examine the aesthetic function of the metaphor of homelessness, this chapter explores the relation between the “discursive materiality” and the geographical materiality of the space of home. Specifically, I seek to address the following questions: What is the spatial logic inscribed by the metaphor of homelessness? What kinds of diasporic homes does this logic allow us to imagine and represent and what others does it obscure? I attempt to answer these questions by carrying the metaphor to its literal extreme. That is, I examine what happens when the metaphor of homelessness is literalized by juxtaposing representations of home with notions of homelessness in the work of two prominent South Asian women authors, Jhumpa Lahiri and Kiran Desai.

The work of these authors, ascendant in canon debates because of the awards they have garnered and the critical acclaim they have won, presents an interesting, if glaring, contrast. For the purposes of my discussion here, I focus on Lahiri’s short story “The Third and Final
Continent” from her Pulitzer Prize-winning collection _Interpreter of Maladies_ (1999) and her novel _The Namesake_ (2003) as an example of her portrayals of the American suburban home as the repository of South Asian diasporic subjects’ wealth and model minority status, a formation that denies racial subordination, tension, or conflict. The narrator of the story, an immigrant from India who works as a librarian, considers himself a pioneer, establishing home in the isolated security of American suburbia, which reflects the placelessness of the American frontier. The narrator’s suburban home is represented as all the more exceptional and worth celebrating, narrated as it is through a spatial contrast with his cramped rental row house in London and through a comparison with America’s conquest of the ultimate frontier—the moon landing. The narrator’s “homelessness” is, in this case, a manifestation of the diasporic idiom of “belonging everywhere.” The suburban home, to the extent that it underpins the metaphor of homelessness, therefore, both symbolizes and masks the racialized status and class privilege of Lahiri’s characters. Women in Lahiri’s fiction are usually not confined to the space of the diasporic home but simply reading her representations as narratives of women’s mobility and liberation obscures the complex ways in which this mobility is predicated on the class privileges afforded by the suburban home.

Instead of the contrast between America and Britain that we see in Lahiri’s story, Desai’s novel _The Inheritance of Loss_ (2006) portrays a continuity between British colonialism and American neoimperialism by literalizing the metaphor of homelessness. The novel’s protagonist Biju is a poor undocumented Indian immigrant who lives and works in New York city basements, spaces of homelessness. Biju’s spatial confinement in subterranean New York reveals the extent to which histories of colonial racial difference underpin structures of American multiculturalism. In this essay, I argue that Desai’s delineation of class and racial hierarchies that
literalize the metaphor of homelessness throws into relief the naturalization of this metaphor in narratives like Lahiri’s, in which homelessness comes to represent all diasporic experience, thereby creating a false equivalence between elite and impoverished South Asians and fueling the notion of a racially cohesive South Asian community. *The Inheritance of Loss*, on the other hand, refuses to romanticize Biju’s poverty and homelessness as a diasporic state of freedom, and suggests that there is no deterritorialized figment of memory and imagination that can assuage the pain of being denied the physical place of home.

I preface my analysis here with the caveat that I am arguing neither for a localization of the site of home as separate from the transnational nor for discarding metaphorical understandings of the imaginaries that inform the site of home. Rather I am suggesting that home as geographical space and home as metaphor are co-constituted. It is the exclusive focus on home as a metaphor, along with the refusal to engage with it as a geographical place, that prohibits a critical understanding of the privilege that underwrites the materiality of home. The foregrounding of home as a metaphor and the difficulty of analyzing it as a spatial site are particularly acute in diaspora studies. Home as a physical space is legible only within nation-based paradigms, in which it is often conceptualized as an embodiment of the nation. Therefore scholars such as Vijay Mishra have argued that home as a territorial entity is simply impossible in the context of diaspora. Discussing V.S. Naipaul’s semi-autobiographical novel *The Enigma of Arrival*, Mishra writes that “the diaspora can never find home, can never belong through the logic of territoriality” (130). For Mishra, the diasporic home can only be a metaphor: “Home becomes…an aesthetic order, a travel/travail, a pos(i)ting of the past on to another landscape. In this act the fracture of displacement…can only be deflected and aesthetically contained or ordered” (130). The above formulation yields limited ways of conceptualizing the diasporic
home because it not only emphasizes the process of dislocation and the abstract idea of belonging, but is also temporally stuck in the past and geographically synonymous only with the “homeland.” That is, the diasporic home in the host-nation does not figure in this formulation at all, whether as a sign of belonging or as a marker of hierarchies of race, class, gender, nationality, and religion that inscribe its very existence. Mishra’s analysis, therefore, leaves unexamined the ideologies and power relations that underpin the aesthetic containment of the diasporic home through the metaphor of homelessness.

Similarly, for Jewish diaspora scholars Daniel and Jonathan Boyarin, the logic of territoriality in the diaspora is not only impossible but also undesirable. The diaspora is antithetical to the nation-state, according to the Boyarins, because of its perpetual unsettlement and exile, whereas space “belongs to the despots” and “race and space together form a deadly discourse” (713, 718, 714). But their critique of territoriality manifests itself rather unevenly. While they criticize the Zionist demand for Israel as a territorial home and ask for “displacement of loyalty from place,” they do not establish any relationships between this critique and the logic of territoriality of the host-nations where they and other Jewish diasporic subjects might reside (Boyarin and Boyarin 719). Although the Boyarins’ argument emerges from the specific context of Jewish diaspora, similar gestures of deterritorialization and metaphorization of home are widely prevalent in other sub-fields of diaspora analysis. For example, Caribbean diaspora artist Annalee Davis, struggling with her feeling of dislocation, suggests that home is a state of mind: “… ‘home’ may no longer be a real physical space but a notion we carry deep within ourselves” (460; emphasis mine). Similarly, feminist theorist Susan Stanford Friedman writes in “Bodies on the Move: A Poetics of Home and Diaspora”: “Perhaps…home is ‘NoWhere’—that is ‘nowhere’ and ‘nowhere,’ everywhere and always elsewhere” (197).
In what seems like the logical culmination of the Boyarins’ argument, Friedman’s assertion demonstrates how the metaphor of homelessness enables an equivalence between diapsoric idioms of “belonging everywhere” and “belonging nowhere.” The stakes of my analysis in juxtaposing Lahiri’s and Desai’s fiction are not to interrogate diaspora through notions of homesickness or sickness of home, to echo Gayatri Gopinath’s challenge to accepted theorizations of home as places associated with comfort and nostalgia, but to reveal the racial and gender formations, economic stratifications, and political ideologies that unravel the equivalence posited by Friedman. As Avtar Brah puts it, “the multiplacedness of home in the diasporic imaginary does not mean that diasporan subjectivity is rootless” (197). The metaphor of homelessness steers the Boyarins to claim that the same Jewish cultural practices are ethical and radical when carried out in the context of diaspora but oppressive when carried out in the context of territorialized nation-state, but when the metaphor becomes literal as in Desai’s novel, we can understand homelessness as a product of racist exclusion and an experience of great vulnerability and violence. This analysis thereby serves as a necessary reminder that inequality in diaspora is no more admirable or egalitarian, or less dangerous, than when it exists within the bounds of the nation-state.

A focus on material geographies as well as imaginaries of home and homelessness enables us to historicize the hierarchies that constitute the South Asian diaspora. As Arif Dirlik argues, place-consciousness allows us to “raise the issue of difference on a whole range of fronts, including those of class, gender, and ethnicity” (119). Critique of deterritorialization, Dirlik emphasizes, “need not imply an urge to return to the nation with its colonial, homogenizing, and assimilationist ideology” (118). Indeed, my analysis territorializes home in order to historicize the relationship between the nation-states of Britain and the U.S. that is central to the formation
of South Asian diaspora and its literary production. Critique of deterritorialization also must not imply, feminist critics like Rosemary George and Avtar Brah remind us, an erasure of the desire for home, as the Boyarins propose. A more productive approach, Brah contends, is to hold “home and ‘dispersion’ in creative tension, inscribing a homing desire while simultaneously critiquing discourses of fixed origins” (193). In other words, the place of home indexes desires for racial equality and economic aspirations while also recognizing the violence that excludes racialized and gendered subjects from that space, exclusions that fail to register in the metaphor of homelessness. The crucial challenge remains to recalibrate the relation between the geography of home and the metaphor of homelessness while refusing to reduce home to a “diasporic state of mind.”

6.1 Metaphor of Homelessness and Naturalization of Home

In Lahiri’s “The Third and Final Continent,” the narrator, an Indian immigrant, tells the story of his journey that begins in Calcutta, India, and through an interlude in London, culminates in the United States. As in most of Lahiri’s work, including other stories in the Interpreter of Maladies such as “The Blessed House,” the title story of her recent collection Unaccustomed Earth (2008), and her novel The Namesake, the culmination of the characters’ diasporic journey in “The Third and Final Continent” is symbolized by the ownership of an American suburban home. The story naturalizes the suburban home as a place of comfort and permanence through a spatial contrast between Britain and the U.S. That is, the narrator regards his ownership of an American suburban home as extraordinary, especially because he constructs its isolation and security in opposition to the grim image of his overcrowded rental row house in London:
I lived in north London, in Finsbury Park, in a house occupied entirely by penniless Bengali bachelors like myself, at least a dozen and sometimes more, all struggling to educate and establish ourselves abroad….We lived three or four to a room, shared a single, icy toilet, and took turns cooking pots of egg curry which we ate with our hands on a table covered with newspapers” (“Third and Final Continent” 173).

In contrast, he describes his American home as follows: “Mala and I live in a town about twenty miles from Boston, on a tree-lined street much like Mrs. Croft’s, in a house we own, with a garden that saves us from buying tomatoes in summer, and room for guests. We are American citizens now, so that we can collect social security when it is time” (“Third and Final Continent” 197). The material and physical comfort of the American suburban home is heightened because the story defines it against the cold discomfort of the British row house. The narrator’s journey is, therefore, a developmental narrative, in which his transitory stay in London functions as a brief but necessary interlude in his American success story. The economic struggle the narrator faces in London, and the homosociality it necessitates, is a stage of “getting by,” a stepping stone to a well-paying job and a heterosexual marriage, key elements of his middle-class status in America. As a postcolonial subject in London in 1964, only fourteen years after India gained independence from the British, the narrator is distinctly conscious of his Bengali ethnicity, whereas no such consciousness of his racial or ethnic status pervades his declaration of American citizenship, based as it is on the ownership of a suburban home. The narrator, thus, uses the opposition between Britain and the U.S. to define himself as an American.

Furthermore, the description of the suburban home’s idyllic surroundings at the outskirts of the town and the narrator’s rhetoric of self-sufficiency indicate his vision of himself as a pioneer establishing a household in the placelessness of the American frontier. Like many of Lahiri’s
protagonists, the narrator immigrated to the U.S. after the 1965 National Origins Act, the legislation that abolished national quotas and allowed Asians entry on the basis of their professional qualifications. Therefore, he is a part of the wave of educated, upper-middle class Asians who arrived in the U.S. during the 1960s and who are racialized as the “model-minority.” The suburban home both reflects and masks his racialized status. On the one hand, the isolation of the suburbs reflects his class status and situates him above the fray of racial hierarchies and conflicts. But, on the other hand, the suburban location is also the parochial margin of the American multicultural body politic. His suburban home, therefore, also marks the limits of his inclusion in America.

The narrator’s suburban home is rendered extraordinary because the story not only contrasts it with the grim conditions of his London row house but also likens it to the “magnificent desolation” the American astronauts encounter after landing on the moon (“Third and Final Continent” 179). The narrator’s suburban home and garden on the “tree-lined street,” an image that projects solitude and silence, reflects Lahiri’s description of the lunar landscape in terms of the geographical formation called the Sea of Tranquility—the precise spot where the astronauts landed. The moon landing represents America’s conquest of the ultimate frontier and the story’s image of the American flag on the moon indicates that there is no space that lies beyond or can escape America’s imperial ambitions. The metaphor of homelessness embodied by the diasporic home is, thus, underpinned by this comparison between the suburban and the lunar landscapes, both of which are rendered through the image of placelessness of the American frontier.

Just like the narrator’s transitory stay in London functions as a necessary interlude in the contrast between Britain and the U.S., the comparison between the suburban home, which the
narrator ultimately inhabits, and the moon landing is punctuated by his six-week stay as a tenant in Mrs. Croft’s home. The moon landing is central to his relationship with his white, hundred-and-three-year-old landlady, Mrs. Croft, whose daily ritual includes commanding the narrator to say “splendid” in response to her exclamation that there is an American flag on the moon (“Third and Final Continent” 179). Mrs. Croft’s commands leave the narrator “both baffled and somewhat insulted” but he obeys them because he knows that his acceptance as a tenant in Mrs. Croft’s old and huge home—and by extension, as a racialized subject in America—is predicated on his subservience to his white landlady (“Third and Final Continent” 179). Mediated by the moon landing, these encounters between the narrator and Mrs. Croft interrupt the trajectory of his incorporation into America by revealing that his status is defined by forces of racial subordination, American imperialism and exceptionalism. ³ But the story recovers its developmental arc by portraying the narrator’s ownership of his suburban home as his overcoming of this racial subordination and attaining a status equal to Mrs. Croft’s.

The three interrelated elements that serve to naturalize both the diasporic home and the metaphor of homelessness in “The Third and Final Continent”—the suburban geography, the American moon landing, and the spatial contrast between Britain and the U.S.—enable Lahiri to portray South Asian American experience as extraordinary and grand. The exceptionalism of the narrator’s journey after all, does not lie in merely traveling from India and settling in America, but in his diasporic itinerary that includes his transitory stay in Britain—a testament to his ability to “survive on three continents” (“Third and Final Continent” 197). Lahiri interweaves the “three continents” with the moon-landing in the final sentences of the story as follows: “…if I can survive on three continents, then there is no obstacle [the narrator’s son] cannot conquer. While the astronauts, heroes forever, spent mere hours on the moon, I have remained in this new world
for nearly thirty years. I know that my achievement is quite ordinary….As ordinary as it all
appears, there are times when it is beyond my imagination” (“Third and Final Continent” 197-
198).

Ultimately, Lahiri’s portrayal of South Asian diaspora as exceptional, in the words of
Amitava Kumar, “grants the U.S. a certain innocence”—an innocence that makes her stories of
Indian immigrants quite appealing to a wide mainstream audience. In her fiction, Lahiri often
represents the grandeur of diasporic journeys to America by refracting them through the sublime
elements of American landscapes. For instance, in *The Namesake*, Ashoke realizes that the U.S.
is the final destination of his journey against the backdrop of the iconic American image of a
lighthouse in Cape Cod where he walks with his son Gogol to the tip of the land jutting out into
the ocean. He says to Gogol, “Remember that you and I made this journey, that we went together
to a place where there was nowhere left to go” (*Namesake* 187). The narrative devices Lahiri
uses to create rather mild-mannered stories that avoid any suggestions of racial, class, or gender
conflicts are often not examined in literary analyses, which have mostly focused on questions of
identity in her work.⁴ In *The Namesake*, as in “The Third and Final Continent,” the device of the
suburban aesthetic, reminiscent of post-war American literary engagement with suburban history
and mythology, is central to the creation of a sanitized narrative of America, devoid of racial and
class confrontations. Whereas the urban milieu of racial strife is predominant in the cultural
imaginary of minority groups, the suburban imaginary has historically “achieved salience as a
master narrative for the white middle classes,” indicating that racial divides of American body
politic are manifested as spatial divides in literary representations (Tongson 198). The
racialization of the suburban literary landscape in Lahiri’s fiction recuperates an arc of upward
class mobility and racial assimilation for South Asian diaspora akin to the trajectory taken by the
“white diaspora,” to use Catherine Jurca’s term, to maintain the mythology of their class and racial status.

*The Namesake* grapples with the various connotations of the suburban landscape by employing a reversal of the generational trope of assimilation that imagines each successive generation as more assimilated. Gogol, who is part of the second generation in the diaspora, is ambivalent about his Americanness because he recognizes his parents’ suburban residence as the “last stop(s) in a trajectory of triumph and fortune” (Tongson 206). Notwithstanding his own despair about suburbia’s distance from the urban-rural frame that defines debates about both authentic diasporic subjectivity and unequivocal belonging in America, he acknowledges that for his immigrant parents Ashima and Ashoke, the suburban life remains “stubbornly exotic” and a “proud accomplishment” (*Namesake* 281, 146). The suburban home is at the core of Ashima’s and Ashoke’s assured belonging in America, the realization of their “American Dream” and “model minority” status. To the extent that Ashima and Ashoke rather than Gogol seem to be the anchors of the novel (an aspect captured brilliantly by Mira Nair’s film adaptation), it is their imagination of the suburbs—rendered through the all too frequently employed trope in Lahiri’s fiction of an “arranged marriage” morphing into romantic love in America—that becomes the dominant spatial vision in the novel.5 The representations of the grandeur and romance of American spaces, especially the suburban home, encourage readings of Lahiri’s texts as developmental narratives of racial acceptance and gender mobility.

The naturalization of both the diasporic home and the metaphor of homelessness in her work forecloses the questioning of class privilege that often underpins the seemingly progressive portrayals of race and gender. For instance, “The Third and Final Continent” can be read as a narrative of America’s acceptance of the racialized South Asian diasporic subject. Tracing the
story’s portrayal of Mala, the narrator’s wife, we can read it as a narrative of her emancipation in America where she “no longer drapes the end of her sari over her head” and where she finds love in spite of her arranged marriage (“Third and Final Continent” 197). The narrative of women’s emancipation and their diasporic mobility is even more pronounced in *The Namesake*, in which both Moushumi and Ashima, I suggest, are cosmopolitan travelers, while Gogol’s and Ashoke’s mobility is highly restricted. For instance, in the following passage, Gogol contemplates his circumscribed mobility:

> for all his aloofness toward his family in the past, his years at college and then in New York, he has always hovered close to this quiet ordinary town that had remained, for his mother and father, stubbornly exotic. He had not traveled to France as Moushumi had, or even to California as Sonia had done. Only for three months was he separated by more than a few small states from his father, a distance that had not troubled Gogol in the least, until it was too late. Apart from those months, for most of his adult life, he has never been more than a four-hour train ride away (*Namesake* 281).

Gogol associates his father’s move away from home to do research in Ohio with his death. Gogol is so closely associated with his home in the narrative that everywhere else, he is and “wants simply to be a tourist” (*Namesake* 231).⁶

While the story indeed performs a gender role-reversal of the usual trope of masculine mobility and women’s confinement to the home, it is significant for my argument here that the novel’s metaphor of homelessness and women’s mobility operates through the logic of territoriality. That is, a failure to examine the centrality of the suburban home obscures the extent to which women’s mobility is predicated on the class privilege that the ownership of the home signifies.⁷ For instance, when Ashima decides to split her time between Calcutta and Boston

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⁶ For the sake of clarity, only key references are included. Full citations are provided in the original text.

⁷ This point is elaborated in greater detail in the subsequent section of the document.
following Ashoke’s death, Lahiri characterizes her as “without borders, without a home of her own, a resident everywhere and nowhere,” which seems to falsely equate “belonging everywhere” and “belonging nowhere” because Ashima’s belonging in multiple places is always anchored in the territorial logic of home and nation (Namesake 276). Even though Ashima is going to spend half a year in India, Lahiri assures the reader that “in her wallet will remain her Massachusetts driver’s license, her social security card,” and that “she is not the same Ashima who had once lived in Calcutta” because she “will return to India with an American passport” (Namesake 276). This example establishes that Ashima’s global or world citizenship is predicated on her American citizenship. In another instance Lahiri writes about Ashima: “And though she still does not feel fully at home within these walls on Pemberton Road she knows that this is home nevertheless—the world for which she is responsible, which she has created…” (Namesake 280). Thus, it is not the “‘to-not-be-at-home’ feeling,” which Mishra suggests characterizes the ambivalence of diasporic belonging, but the feeling of “not-fully-at-home-but-home-nevertheless” that defines home as the source of cosmopolitan assuredness for the South Asian women in the novel. The suburban home, for example, demonstrates that diasporic belonging for Ashima never challenges her claims to the American nation and vice-versa. Thus, an interrogation of the relation between the diasporic home and the metaphor of homelessness enables us to postulate how progressive representations of race and gender might be underpinned by perpetuation of class hierarchies and and how mainstream acceptance of texts hinges on portrayals of upper-class diasporic subjects.

6.2 The Luxury of Metaphors
Whereas an analysis of the geography of home in Jhumpa Lahiri’s fiction reveals the literary architecture of the metaphor of homelessness, Kiran Desai’s novel *The Inheritance of Loss* literalizes the metaphor in order to delineate how this architecture is pressed in the service of maintaining the status quo of power relations. In other words, while Lahiri’s work demonstrates what is sayable about the diasporic home or what *can be* represented by the realm of metaphor, Desai’s novel is invested in revealing what the metaphor of homelessness seeks to conceal.\(^9\)

Instead of the grandeur of American spaces that naturalizes the metaphor of homelessness through a contrast between Britain and the U.S. in Lahiri’s story, Desai’s literalization of the metaphor demonstrates a continuity between British colonialism and American neoimperialism. This continuity manifests itself in the novel’s representation of the spatial order of New York city. Desai denaturalizes New York as the city of the skyscraper and instead presents the urban space through a horizontal configuration, as a series of basements in which protagonist Biju both works and resides. The basement, thus, embodies an intimate relation between seemingly contradictory forces of the global capitalist logic of profit maximization—an ultra-modern, sophisticated project that relies on the labor of workers like Biju and homelessness, a supposed relic of primitive times. For instance, Desai uses phrases such as “shifting population of men” and “hunting and gathering territory” to describe Biju’s living quarters in the basements of Harlem, phrases that are often used to describe “primitive” societies (58). But she describes the basements not as exceptional spaces outside of the logic of capitalist accumulation but as integral to it. The basements, meager and decrepit enough to be the roaming places of the homeless, are not free; instead these too have been incorporated into informal capitalist economies by being rented out to the impoverished by an “invisible management company” (Desai 57). The
company, writes Desai, “owned tenements all over the neighborhood, the superintendent
supplementing his income by illegally renting out basement quarters by the week, by the month,
and even by the day, to fellow illegals” (58). Thus, the economy of the basement mimics the
formal global economy in using flexible and migratory labor to maximize its profits while also
serving as a site of reproduction of labor for the forces of production.

While Biju’s living space in the basement indexes the intimate relation between global
capitalism and homelessness, his basement workplace traces a continuity between British
colonialism and American neoimperialism. The New York basements are not isolated spaces but
are bound to the visible structures of the urban space in a relationship of exploitative
dependence. Desai’s New York is a striated space with the visible skyscrapers undergirded by
basements, and the relationships between these strata evoke Henri Lefebvre’s explanation of the
“symbolic force” of each: “[h]orizontal space symbolizes submission, vertical space power, and
subterranean space death” (236). These strata suggest not only a repression of the subterranean
by the vertical and visible but also a temporal orientation and history of space. Lefebvre argues
that analyzing the layering of space illuminates the history of its production: “In space, what
came earlier continues to underpin what follows” (229). The vertical space in Biju’s New York is
that of cosmopolitan, upscale restaurants serving global cuisine to an America hungry for
consumption of multiculturalism and the subterranean space is occupied by workers like Biju
from the former colonies. “Biju at Le Colonial,” Desai writes, “for the authentic colonial
experience. On top, rich colonial, and down below, poor native” (23). Biju migrates from one
low-wage job in one basement to another low-wage job in another basement and the nationalities
occupying these strata change in accordance with the empire’s respective colonial histories but
the spatial logic remains the same: “On to the Stars and Stripes Diner. All American flag on top, all Guatemalan flag below” (Desai 23).

The cosmopolitan, multicultural spaces of these restaurants appear in the New York cityscape as sanitized visual markers that repress the history of colonial violence such that it remains confined to the basements, while also acting as resolutions to the history of such violence. For instance, Desai draws a direct line of causality between Biju’s homelessness and labor in the New York city basements and his family’s poverty in India, which she traces to British colonialism. Biju is poor because his grandfather and father spent their lives as servants, first in the households of British colonizers and then for the families of colonial elites, like the judge, who were trained in Britain and replaced the white men but continued the reign of colonial exploitation. Biju’s inheritance of poverty is a result of the crisis of British colonialism, which promised modernity to all colonial subjects but delivered it only to the elites and not to the impoverished like Biju.11 Biju, thus, flees to the U.S. precisely to recover the promise of modernity denied to him by the British colonial project. For instance, Biju’s father, the cook, explains his son’s decision to get a job in America to the upper-class Mrs. Sen, whose daughter works for CNN in the U.S.: “Best country in the world. All these people who went to England are now feeling sorry…” (Desai 94).

In turn, American multiculturalism seeks to resolve this history of British colonialism by continuing its racialist and imperialist violence but concealing it in benevolent forms. For instance, Biju’s fellow dishwasher in a steak restaurant, Achootan (the name literally means “untouchable”), exclaims, “[America] is better than England…At least they have some hypocrisy here. They believe they are good people and you get some relief” (Desai 150). Similarly, Biju’s Indian employers at the fusion eatery Gandhi Café justify cuts to wages and benefits, which
exacerbate Biju’s impoverishment, by employing the rhetoric of “a happy family” (Desai 163). In her article “Model Minorities Can Cook,” Anita Mannur uses Lisa Lowe’s words to argue that culinary multiculturalism functions specifically by “masking the existence of exclusion by recuperating dissent, conflict, and otherness through the promise of inclusion” (Lowe; qtd in Mannur 74). In Mannur’s conception, culinary multiculturalism enables consumption of diversity while eliding the racial and economic violence of global neoliberalism that underpins it. She writes that “[culinary multiculturalism] downplays the importance of larger historical and social issues that have brought Asians to America and also elides the fact that much of the food, if sampled in a restaurant, might be prepared by persons who are not necessarily given full access to citizenship” (87). Desai focuses on the spatial regime inscribed by culinary multiculturalism as a mode of understanding the “larger historical and social issues.” The spatial striation of the city that confines Biju to the space of basements reveals the extent to which the history of colonial racial difference underpins structures of American multiculturalism. Instead of resolving the history of British colonialism and its failed promises of modernity, American neoimperial structures are made all the more efficient by drawing on them. Therefore, it is the continuity, and not the contrast between Britain and the U.S., which indexes processes of racial exclusion and class subordination, and dismantles the fiction of America as an exceptional place for the South Asian diasporic subject.

But Biju’s homelessness is not a function of essentialist white/Asian racial conflict. The narrative function of Biju’s homelessness is not to dispel the model-minority stereotype—which is often propped up by the metaphor of homelessness, as seen in fiction such as Lahiri’s—by highlighting the presence of poor South Asians in addition to the upper class model minority subjects. Desai goes beyond merely pointing out the existence of poor and undocumented South
Asians. Her depiction of homelessness suggests that South Asians racialized as model minority are complicit with structures of American neoimperialism and depend on and exploit the labor of workers like Biju for replication of their class status and for the privilege to speak for all South Asians. Indeed the nadir of Biju’s homelessness is the point where the basement kitchen, or his workplace, also becomes his living space, and the earlier distinction between the two is eradicated. This new model of capitalist efficiency is implemented at the Gandhi Café, where his employers are an Indian couple Harish-Harry and Malini, who instruct their staff “to live down below in the kitchen” because then they could get away by paying Biju and his fellow-undocumented workers a quarter of the minimum wage (Desai 162). Harish-Harry calls this arrangement “free housing” and Malini justifies it by saying “We are a happy family here” (Desai 162). The rhetoric of filiation enables the complete overlap between the space of production and the space of reproduction of labor.

The novel demonstrates that the rhetoric of filiation/affiliation based on racial essentialism institutes efficient exploitation and replicates rather effortlessly the benevolence of the capitalist logic of American multiculturalism. For instance, when Biju asks for extra money to see a doctor after hurting himself in a fall in the basement, Harish-Harry denies him by cushioning the very factors that allow him to extract maximum profit from his workers—their undocumented status and their homelessness—in a rhetoric of familial obligation. He says, “I hire you with no papers, treat you like my own son and now this is how you repay me! Living here rent-free” (Desai 206). Biju recognizes Harish-Harry’s rhetoric of family as “an old Indian trick of master to servant, the benevolent patriarch garnering the loyalty of staff; offering slave wages, but now and then a box of sweets, a lavish gift…” (Desai 207). In South Asian diasporic texts, such as Bharati Mukherjee’s Desirable Daughters and Monica Ali’s Brick Lane, ethnic enclaves and South
Asian grocery stores are associated with “home” and “homeland.” Although Gandhi Café is steeped in markers of India and Hinduism, Desai’s novel represents it clearly as a space of homelessness for Biju. Thus, Biju’s homelessness dispels the idea of a racially cohesive South Asian community and reveals class and gender divisions that fragment the diaspora.

Authors and scholars often aim to dismantle the model minority myth by pointing out that wealthy South Asians also face racism. Desai, however, shows that the racism faced by these elites is innocuous to the extent that it can only be narrated in the register of farce. For instance, while Harish-Harry is responsible for Biju’s homelessness, he sees any slight affront to his authority over his own home as racism. Desai represents his charge of racism at being denied his favorite television channels as laughable and trivial. She elaborates that he had “already mounted a giant satellite dish smack in the middle of the front lawn despite the fact that the management of his select community insisted it be placed subtly to the side like a discreet ear; he had prevailed in his endeavor, having cleverly cried, ‘Racism! Racism! I am not getting good reception of Indian channels’” (256). Desai does not frame the South Asian diasporic home in terms of public/private debates, or in terms of debates about its ability, or its failure, to offer belonging and refuge from racism. Rather she refuses to romanticize the South Asian diasporic home and shows that the ownership of these homes is often predicated on exploitation and homelessness of other South Asians.

Desai not only implicates the upper-class South Asian business-owners Harish-Harry and Malini in Biju’s homelessness but also reserves a particularly incisive critique for “English-speaking upper-educated” Indian women, whom she represents as adaptive figures with the ability to mix “self-righteous” arrogance, politically-correct cosmopolitanism, and cultural knowledge to achieve upward mobility and assimilation into America. While the model minority
status of an upper-class South Asian like Kohli, as discussed in Chapter 3, depends on the colonial logic of separation between culture and capital—such that South Asians are seen as incorporated into the economic sphere while still being considered cultural outsiders—Desai shows that increasingly capitalist exploitation is more efficient when fused with cultural concerns. Like Lalita and Jess from *Bride and Prejudice* and *Bend It like Beckham*, South Asian diasporic women in *The Inheritance of Loss* take on a pedagogical role of cultural translators in order to reap economic benefits. South Asian women, according to Desai, capitalized on their “heavyweight accounting books,” by being equally at home at “mimosa brunches” and at eating their “Dadi’s roti with adept fingers” (56). She elaborates as follows:

> They considered themselves uniquely positioned to lecture everyone on a variety of topics: accounting professors on accounting, Vermonter s on the fall foliage, Indians on America, Americans on India, Indians on India, Americans on America. They were poised; they were impressive; in the United States, where luckily it was still assumed that Indian women were downtrodden, they were lauded as extraordinary—which had the unfortunate result of making them even more of what they already were (56).

Desai’s point is not only that women are now increasingly bestowed with the same model minority status that used to be limited to South Asian men but that upper-class women are complicit with and participate in the racial and class logic of American neoimperialism while, like Harish-Harry and Malini, maintaining the garb of benevolence. For instance when Biju delivers take-out Chinese to the apartment of three Indian women, far from receiving any empathy or solidarity from fellow-diasporans, Biju receives thanks in multiple languages so that “he might comprehend [the women’s] friendliness completely in this meeting between Indians
abroad of different classes and languages, rich and poor, north and south, top caste bottom caste” (Desai 56). The friendliness is not only meaningless in changing the status quo of listed hierarchies but has the opposite effect of throwing into stark relief the very diasporic divides that it ostensibly seeks to overcome. The narrative of gender emancipation does not necessarily translate itself into a broader politics including the cause of class equality.

The innocence that pervades Lahiri’s narratives of diasporic South Asians is clearly missing from Desai’s portrayals of the complicity of model minority subjects with structures of American neoimperialism that keep undocumented workers like Biju homeless. Instead of the grandeur of American spaces enabled by the metaphor of homelessness in Lahiri’s fiction, Desai’s literalization of the metaphor re-presents New York as a space of confinement. For instance, while the second-generation protagonist of Lahiri’s *The Namesake*, Gogol, embodies a tourist sensibility in awe of New York’s wide urban spaces and skyscrapers, of “sites like Rockefeller Center and Central Park and the Empire State Building,” Desai describes Biju’s view of the global city from his basement as follows: “From every angle that you looked at this city without a horizon you saw more buildings going up like jungle creepers, starved for light, holding a perpetual half darkness congealed at the bottom…” (*Namesake* 127; Desai 207). Desai’s description of the labyrinth of basements through which Biju moves repeatedly employs the imagery of tombs, symbolizing them as places of death (59, 163). In contrast to Lahiri’s characters’ mobility-at-will and their vacations in India, Biju is part of a “shadow class [that] was condemned to movement” (Desai 112). Instead of the permanence of 67, Pemberton Road, the address that any Lahiri fan would recognize as the Gangulis’ from *The Namesake*, in Biju’s world “[a]ddresses, phone numbers did not hold” (Desai 112). Whereas the narrator of Lahiri’s “The Third and Final Continent” confirms the exceptional status of his diasporic itinerary by
comparing it to the extraordinariness of Americans’ moon landing, Biju likens his “tenderness for his own journey” to that of a “dead insect in the sack of basmati that had come all the way from Dehradun” (“Third and Final Continent” 197; Desai 209). Similarly, the opposition between Britain and the U.S. that enables the narrator in Lahiri’s story to Americanize himself is not available to Biju in a narrative that instead posits a continuity between the two. The spaces Biju inhabits, from the New York basements to the dilapidated flight that takes him back to India, are not part of the globalized “American” world inhabited by Lahiri’s characters but “lingered back in the old age of colonization” (Desai 313; emphasis mine).

Desai refuses to romanticize America as “home” for the South Asian diasporic subject and also refuses such romanticization of the homeland. Biju’s homelessness forces him to return to India, where soon after landing he is robbed of his meager belongings, including his clothes and his masculinity, as he returns to his father’s servants’ quarters in a woman’s nightgown. If Biju’s homelessness in New York represents the continuity between Britain and the U.S. so does his return, for the novel presents a clear parallel between Biju’s return to India from U.S. and his father’s employer Judge Jemubhai Patel’s return from Britain in 1944, both of which are portrayed as emasculating experiences. The close similarities of return from both Britain and the U.S. also suggest that South Asian diaspora is not constituted by random transnational flows. Rather the relations between Britain and the U.S. determine the direction in which variously racialized and gendered subjects of different class positions can travel. Earlier in this chapter, I demonstrated that Biju travels to the U.S. to recover the benefits of modernity that had been promised, but not delivered, by the British colonial project. The judge goes to Britain to train as a lawyer and civil servant, but as a colonial subject, he cannot serve in Britain and has to return to India. 13 The novel renders the racialized symbols of the power that he wields over the other
Indians as a representative of the British Raj—the white wig, the skin whitened by the powder puff—as effeminizing. As the judge’s sister says, “We sent you abroad to become a gentleman, and instead you have become a lady!” (Desai 183). His powder puff betokens both his desire for whiteness and his shame at being an Indian who can exercise his new-found power only over other natives: “He envied the English. He loathed Indians. He worked at being English with the passion of hatred and for what he would become, he would be despised by absolutely everyone, English and Indians, both” (Desai 131). Thus, the judge’s obsession with the artifacts of whiteness that his profession mandates, and the accompanying rituals, such as his “dusting of powder” or placing his “white powdered wig over white powdered face” represent not only his emasculation as a colonial subject but also the grotesqueness engendered by colonialism (Desai 69-70).

The similarity, if not equivalence, that Desai posits between Biju’s and judge’s feminized returns is interesting, considering their different class positions and the text’s investment in pointing out that the judge’s wealth and status are based on Biju’s and his father’s exploitation. The similarity indicates that both British colonialism and American neoimperialism incorporate South Asian men into their racial logic as effeminate, irrespective of their class status. Desai portrays that while the upper class characters’ investment lies in maintaining boundaries between classes, these boundaries are impossible and their experiences are intertwined with those of lower class characters whom they despise. This is particularly evident in Desai’s representations of homes. While the spaces of homelessness in the novel, including basements and servant-quarters, are subject to surveillance and control by owners and authorities, the homes of the wealthy are also violated, broken into, and associated with shame. For instance, the property of the wealthy sisters Lola and Noni, the pretentiously titled Mon Ami, is broken into and taken over
by Gorkha National Liberation Front guerillas, and the judge’s home, already in a state of decay, is terrorized and robbed. The wealthy are ashamed of their homes in the face of the overwhelming poverty that surrounds them and that progressively takes over their living space.

Biju’s homelessness and exclusion from the U.S. nation-state, the diaspora, and the homeland ensures the novel’s refusal to offer the diaspora as a resolution for the racial and class violence inflicted by nation-states. Because of his abject poverty, Biju’s diasporic itinerary can only entail an inheritance of loss. Desai refuses to associate Biju’s victimization with the consciousness of resistance or to romanticize his homelessness as a metaphor for freedom. Instead, she suggests that metaphors are luxuries unavailable to Biju.

In this chapter, I have argued that the metaphor of homelessness obscures both the class privilege that underpins South Asian model minority racialization and the racial violence that literalizes the metaphor. Juxtaposing Lahiri’s and Desai’s fiction, this analysis dismantles the false equivalence between South Asian elites and the impoverished that diasporic literature often creates through the use of this metaphor. Representations of space continue to be important but underexplored elements in understanding racial and gender formations in deterritorialized conceptions of diaspora. Our investment in metaphors of home and homelessness defines what enters our diasporic cultural imaginaries and what is refused representation. Literary analysis must foreground the relation between the metaphors and representations of physical space in order to understand the ideologies and power relations that constitute such metaphorization.

Metaphors of home and homelessness assume particular importance in narratives of South Asian diaspora in which progressive portrayals of racial inclusion and women’s mobility are often predicated on the invisibility of class differences. The diasporic home is often a reminder of the complicity of elite South Asians with the system of racial classification and capitalist
accumulation that accords them privilege but keeps racialized labor in a perpetual state of impoverishment. This chapter’s suggestion that the diasporic home and the metaphor of homelessness are defined through the hierarchical relationship between Britain and the U.S. has significant implications for understanding the model minority racialization in a transnational framework. The physical space of home and notions of homelessness have acquired new urgency in post-9/11 literature such as H.M. Naqvi’s *Home Boy* and Lorraine Adams’s essay “The Trials of Faisal Shahzad,” compelling us to reckon with new relationships between American neoliberalism and British colonialism manifested in that other racialization of South Asians as terrorists, which always lurks behind the glass façade of the model minority.
Notes

1 In her book *The Politics of Home*, Rosemary Marangoly George provides an excellent synopsis of the intellectual strains that have defined the home as the “territorial core” that denotes the nation as a whole. She refers to the work of anti-colonialist intellectuals and writers, such as Ngugi Wa Thiong’o and Jomo Kenyatta, and scholars such as Douglas Porteous and Mary Layoun in order to delineate the mechanisms by which home comes to be accounted for in nationalist terms. For analyses of home-related adages and other metaphors inscribed by home such as “home as body,” “home as novel,” and “home as empire,” see Susan Stanford Friedman’s “Bodies on the Move: A Poetics of Home and Diaspora” and Kathy Mezei’s and Chiara Briganti’s “Reading the House: A Literary Perspective.”

2 For more on how model minority racialization of Asian Americans emerged during the 1960s as part of state’s strategy of racial management that involved creation of racial conflict between Asian Americans and African Americans through the rhetoric of equality of opportunity, see Keith Osajima’s brief essay “Asian Americans as the Model Minority.” For an in-depth discussion of the role of state in construction of South Asians as the model minority, see Vijay Prashad’s *The Karma of Brown Folk*.

3 Robert G Lee situates the 1965 National Origins Act and the emergence of model minority racialization in context of the Cold War and Lahiri’s story makes a valuable addition to that theorization by framing the South Asian immigrant narrative in terms of the moon-landing, an important element of American neoimperialism that defined the Cold War. Literary analyses of this story, such as Judith Caesar’s “American Spaces in the Fiction of Jhumpa Lahiri” define Mrs. Croft’s home in opposition to exterior spaces. Such binary opposition between home and exterior spaces romanticizes Mrs. Croft’s home and does not account for the racial hierarchies and symbols of American imperialism that permeate the home’s boundaries.

4 A few notable examples of such analyses include Joel Kuortti’s “Problematic Hybrid Identity in the Diasporic Writing of Jhumpa Lahiri” and Judith Caesar’s “Gogol’s Namesake: Identity and Relationships in Jhumpa Lahiri’s *The Namesake*.”

5 In a similar vein, the romantic fulcrum of the novel too lies with Ashima and Ashoke, whereas Gogol struggles with finding love and romance in his life, and is romantically uninvolved and single at the end of the novel. Gogol’s struggles with finding romantic fulfillment, deeply entangled with searching for belonging in America and in the diaspora, are always mediated by representations of place. For instance, he first becomes aware of the difference between his white girlfriend Maxine’s effortless belonging in America and his status as a racial outsider when he compares his upbringing in the suburbs—a landscape “foreign” to Maxine—with her family’s unqualified claim to New York history and architecture as well as the rural countryside (Namesake 130-134; 154-156). Vacationing with the Ratliffs in their summer home in the New Hampshire woods, he notes that “[Maxine’s] family seems to possess every piece of the landscape, not only the house itself but every tree and blade of grass….The Ratliffs own the moon that floats over the lake, and the sun and the clouds” (154-155). Similarly, the contrast
between Moushumi’s urban cosmopolitanism and Gogol’s parochial suburbanism plays an important role in the failure of their marriage.

6 For more on Gogol’s tourist sensibility, see Natalie Friedman’s article “From Hybrids to Tourists: Children of Immigrants in Jhumpa Lahiri’s The Namesake.”

7 In her article, “The Geography of Female Subjectivity,” Susan Koshy discusses a similarly complex entanglement between gender and class in Bharati Mukherjee’s fiction. She finds that often in Mukherjee’s texts “gender conflicts overwrite and obscure class conflicts,” a critique that is also applicable to Lahiri’s fiction (Koshy 70).

8 This analysis connects the suburban home to all spatial scales from the neighborhood through the nation to the transnational or global and thus resists the “association of home with [only] the most local level of analyses” (McDowell 816).

9 My understanding that metaphors are integral to the logic of spatialization and that they posit a specific relationship between space and language is indebted to Henri Lefebvre’s The Production of Space. See pages 97-99 and 139-140 for Lefebvre’s discussion of the logic of metaphorization of space.

10 My reading of the spatial order in literary representations, therefore, reflects what Lefebvre has called the aim of architectonics, which is “to describe, analyse, and explain this persistence, which is often evoked in metaphorical shorthand of strata, periods, sedimentary layers, and so on” (229).

11 Besides Biju, the novel portrays various other characters including Biju’s father, the cook, and Gyan, Sai’s tutor and love interest, as people in search of this promise of modernity and their failure to find it in postcolonial India (Desai 62, 280). Since the promise of modernity remains outside these characters’ grasp, she sees it as “modernity proffered in its meanest form” (280). Desai attributes various crises of postcolonial India, such as poverty and separatist movements that challenge Indian nationalism, as crises of failure to deliver on the promise of modernity.

12 The comparison between the mobility that Lahiri and Desai accord to their characters points to two distinct regimes of mobility apportioned on the basis of class status. These differences become critical counterpoints to the concept of cosmopolitanism which valorizes all mobility as same and equal. For instance, Gita Rajan and and Shailja Sharma consider South Asians as “new cosmopolitans,” whose effortless mobility is the result of a diasporic subjectivity that is not “grounded in a nation-state or in a class (intellectual or working class)” (2). But Desai, especially, demonstrates that mobility does not necessarily break down boundaries between nation-states and classes, but that these hierarchies dictate opportunities and forms of mobility. While the wealthy European-North American travelers can contemplate their metaphorical homelessness aboard “brisk no-nonsense flights with extra-leg room and private TV,” Biju can only dream of “a house with solid walls, a roof that wouldn’t fly off every monsoon season” in his cheap-ticket third-world flight that was more “like a flailing bus laboring through the sky” (Desai 313, 314).
Jemubhai’s diasporic journey is reminiscent of Benedict Anderson’s conceptualization of “pilgrimage,” the nation-based secular version of earlier religious journeys. Anderson suggests that with the emergence of the nation alongside colonialism, individuals are allowed to travel only along specific itineraries on the basis of nationality that reflect directional logics of power “essential to the stability of the empire” (57-58).
7. AFTERWORD: PLACE, POLITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS, AND THE DIASPORIC ITINERARY

Throughout this dissertation, I have suggested that the opposition between Britain and the United States is integral to interpreting the cultural imaginings of South Asian diaspora. Paying attention to the geographical specificity and directional logic of cultural texts, the concept of diasporic itinerary challenges conventional diaspora theories of spatial abstraction, racial cohesion, and the homeland-hostland binary. I have sought to chronicle the spatial and temporal elisions that sustain the narrative of American exceptionalism, configuring U.S. racial formations as resolutions to the histories of British colonialism. There is a renewed sense of importance and necessity of diasporic itinerary as an interpretive tool and a reading practice if we consider the new post-9/11 South Asian diasporic literature, texts which, in their bid to challenge racial essentialisms and damaging stereotypes of South Asians as “terrorists,” showcase diverse characters drawn from nations that are significant players in contemporary geopolitics — Russians, Afghans, Pakistanis, Americans—and invoke multiple geographic sites. In light of what I have argued in the preceding chapters, then, it is interesting but not surprising that these texts, in spite of their critiques of American neoimperialism, portray America as the space of refuge for South Asians or, at the very least, as the space that animates their diasporic longings and desires. Situating the diasporic itinerary between Britain and the U.S. within the context of other geographic sites compels us to widen our understanding by accounting for both continuities and contrasts between the two, but it does little to alter the underlying dynamic of American exceptionalism. Nevertheless, analyzing the texts’ spatial itineraries enables us to grapple with the connections between geographies created by British and American empires in the context of post-9/11 geopolitics, a central preoccupation of recent diasporic cultural narratives.
is a tendency to celebrate the emergence of South Asian diasporic literature that is critical of American imperialism, as seen in the overwhelming attention these texts receive as “timely” artifacts, employing a reading that follows the spatial and directional logic of these texts reveals the deeply ingrained strain of American exceptionalism and the limits of the texts’ critique.

I point to two such recent novels here whose critique of American neoimperialism, which emerges from a spatial imagination that encompasses multiple geographic sites, marks the most recent strategy by which the diaspora is mapped unevenly on to nations and empires. On the one hand, I seek to understand how these texts’ critique of the American state and its neoimperialist tendencies connects with the impulse for further scattering and movement within the diaspora or, in other words, with the impulse to diasporization. On the other hand, I also suggest that while these texts render “terrorism” as a political rather than a cultural problem, their representations of “terrorism” without terror, and reliance on the trope of familial and romantic intimacy to draw connections between multiple geographic spaces recuperates America as their site of hope and refuge.

Kamila Shamsie’s rendition of the South Asian diaspora in her novel Burnt Shadows (2009) begins in Nagasaki. The protagonist, a Japanese woman by the name of Hiroko Tanaka, flees the traumatic memories of the atomic bomb to go live in New Delhi with a British colonial officer, James Burton, and his German wife, Ilse Weiss, the sister and brother-in-law of her fiancé who was killed by the bomb. In New Delhi, she marries the family’s Muslim servant and lives in Pakistan after the Partition. After her husband’s death, Hiroko moves to New York to live with the Burton-Weiss family she had lived with in Delhi, whose son Henry worked for the CIA in Pakistan and Afghanistan, while her own son Raza, after a short stint at a mujahideen camp in the Soviet-Afghan war during his teenage years, ultimately works as a translator with an
American private military contractor in Afghanistan. In many ways, the novel presents as stark an opposition between Britain and the United States as we see in other texts discussed here. For example, in Harry’s telling of his life story—a narrative that is central to his bond with both his daughter Kim and Raza, whom he takes under his wing after Raza’s father’s death—he describes England as nothing more than a “way station” (Shamsie 172). Even though Harry is the son of a British colonial officer, he finds his English identity to be restrictive and instead embraces the Cold War strain of American exceptionalism in his conversations with Raza. Harry proclaims to Raza his love for America, in words that evoke the critical dinner scene from *Bride and Prejudice* discussed in Chapter 3: “I truly [loved Delhi]. But in India I would always have been an Englishman…In America, everyone can be American. That’s the beauty of the place” (Shamsie 188). Raza feels a deep desire for Harry’s vision of America, an “ache for something to believe in,” amidst his feeling of loss and alienation as a half-Japanese, half-Pakistani teenager growing up in Karachi (Shamsie 189).

Within the novel’s context of global geopolitics leading up to and beyond the events of 9/11, the usual diasporic tropes of mobility, flexible identities and knowledge of multiple languages take on sinister overtones. Almost all characters in the novel are polyglots and translators of multiple languages. The novel dissociates languages from notions of national identity and allegiance and therefore, challenges ideas of cultural nationalism. Languages are represented as bridges between the characters from different nations, helping them establish familial and romantic intimacies, but the knowledge of multiple languages and proficiency in translation are also most often employed in the service of American imperialism. For example, Harry is proficient in German, English, and Urdu; Raza is fluent in numerous languages, including Persian, Japanese, Urdu, and German. Raza looks up to Harry as a father figure and
they share a special bond built on their passion for languages, but this passion is also what makes them especially valuable for American private military contractors, the newest incarnations of the flexible, invisible workings of the American empire. Therefore, the languages that Harry and Raza acquire because of their familial connections to colonial and postcolonial South Asia are what American imperialism capitalizes on in the “war on terror.” In Shamsie’s conception, the flexibility of American neoimperialism also makes it expansive and all-usurping to the extent that there is no diaspora outside American empire.

The spatial itinerary of the novel from Japan of 1945, through India of 1947, Pakistan of 1982, and the United States and Afghanistan in 2001-2002 narrates a story that does not render the events of 9/11 as exceptional but instead portrays them as a culmination of America’s imperial actions in global geopolitics starting from World War II and the bombing of Nagasaki, through the Cold War. The narrative itinerary of *Burnt Shadows*, therefore, offers a counterpoint to contentions by critics like Rachel Greenwald Smith, Pankaj Mishra and Richard Gray that post-9/11 fiction has failed to represent a transformed relation between the U.S. and global geopolitics. While the novel’s spatial imagination ensures that the text does not read as a U.S.-centric portrayal and it casts the events of 9/11 as a political rather than a cultural issue, the novel is curiously dismissive of “terrorism” and “fundamentalism” attributing Raza’s brief stint with the mujahideen fighting against Russia to teenage angst and failure in his school exams. The novel is therefore quite uneven in its diasporic political commitments. It refuses to obscure the American imperialism underlying global geopolitics of 9/11 but at the same time renders apolitical its representations of “terror” and violence.

Similarly, the novel implicates America as an imperial actor on the global scene but continues to represent its domestic sphere as a place of refuge for the protagonist Hiroko, the
composite, non-essentialized South Asian diasporic subject constituted by her lives in Nagasaki, which was bombed by the U.S., and Karachi, where her husband fell to a CIA informant’s bullets and her son fell for a CIA agent’s vision of America. When Hiroko lands in New York in 1998, the immigration official looks at her Pakistani passport, which indicates Nagasaki as her place of birth, and says to her “You’ll be safe here” (Shamsie 293). Hiroko is only too cognizant of the irony of the official’s statement and of the idea “that she should have chosen this, of all countries, as her place of refuge from a nuclear world” (Shamsie 293; emphasis mine). The novel is aware of this irony as Hiroko is but nevertheless portrays her refuge in New York as inevitable. “[Hiroko] felt she had been waiting all her life to arrive here [in New York],” Shamsie writes. That Hiroko arrives in New York for no other reason but her deep friendship with the British colonial officer’s wife, Ilse Weiss, and mostly remains confined to Ilse’s apartment heightens the idea of America as a place of refuge. The final representational choice that contributes to a portrayal of America as an exceptional place is the novel’s placement of all racial hierarchies, violence, colonial and imperial histories in geographic sites elsewhere in the world, while the U.S. domestic sphere remains free of such implications of imperialism. Raza’s wrongful arrest, for instance, which is attributed to his racial status takes place in Canada and not within the U.S. borders, whereas within the American domestic sphere, Hiroko finds “nothing foreign” at all (Shamsie 295).

The sites invoked by the spatial imagination of *Burnt Shadows* are somewhat predictable in terms of the geopolitics of the region. In his novel *The Wasted Vigil* (2008), Nadeem Aslam turns to a similar cast of characters—a Russian woman looking for her brother, a British physician married to an Afghani man, a former American spy, and an Islamic radical—in order to draw connections between histories of British colonialism, the Cold War, and Islamic fundamentalism.
I conclude my analysis with a reading of Mohsin Hamid’s 2007 novel *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* that takes up the task of redefining “fundamentalism” by inscribing a spatial itinerary that does not fit into the mold of connecting the events of 9/11 to the geopolitics of World War II and the Cold War, even as it traces the relation between the history of British colonialism and American neoliberal empire. The novel’s protagonist, Changez, is a young Pakistani Muslim Princeton graduate employed as a financial analyst by Underwood Samson, a New York firm that assesses the value of companies for acquisition or downsizing. After the events of 9/11 and America’s launch of the “war on terror” in the Afghanistan-Pakistan region, Changez experiences anger as well as desire to interpret his place in this seemingly new world order. Following his failure to evaluate the fundamentals of a book publishing company in Valparaiso, Chile, he is fired from his job and his only option is to return to Lahore, where he participates in anti-American protests. The novel’s spatial imagination encompasses not only the Pakistan-U.S. spatial axis of the homeland-hostland binary but also Philippines and Chile. The reading practice suggested by the diasporic itinerary compels us to ask: Should we consider Changez’s journeys to Valparaiso and Manila to be distractions, mere detours, that only serve to make the novel’s plot rather unrealistic? Or further, does the narrative suggest that while Changez’s experiences in these places might be relevant, the places themselves are irrelevant and immaterial? That the novel employs the device of unreliable narration, in the form of a “half-conversation” which gives voice only to Changez and not to the American sitting across from him at the table in a Lahore café, only makes these questions more intriguing as it compels us to reckon with the text’s deliberate engagement with multiple places irrespective of the reliability of Changez’s narration of his itinerary.
I answer these questions by reading the transnational spatial itinerary of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* using Edouard Glissant’s concept of “diversion.” The forces of racial and imperial domination remain invisible to Changez within the U.S. national context because he is accepted in multicultural America as a model minority subject. I suggest that it is the invisibility of racial domination in the national context that propels Changez’s transnational narrative itinerary through Manila, Valparaiso, and Lahore, which leads him to the political consciousness that these places are co-constituted by the racial and economic violence of American imperialism. Diversion is one of the two strategies that Glissant suggests are available to a diasporic population in coming to terms with the host nation. The first strategy of “reversion” is the impulse to return and is available to a diasporic population that has not been transformed by contact with the hostland and whose domination in the hostland is clearly marked. Glissant finds reversion to be an unsatisfactory impulse, one that is marked by “obsession with a single origin” and a refusal of the possibilities for creolization (16). Diversion, on the other hand, is a strategy for a diasporic population that has been transformed through contact with the host nation into a racialized and powerless people, but the principle of their domination remains invisible due to the terms of this racialization. Glissant explains diversion as follows:

There is no diversion when the community confronts an enemy recognized as such. Diversion is the ultimate resort of a population whose domination by an Other is concealed: it then must search *elsewhere* for the principle of domination, which is not evident in the country itself: because the system of domination…is not directly tangible (20; emphasis original).

According to Glissant, it is the camouflaging of relations of domination in a national context that provide the impulse to diasporization or the further “scattering outward.” The spatial strategy of
diversion, therefore, seeks to resolve the foreclosure of politics signaled by concealment of racial domination.

The words Glissant uses to describe the “context that facilitates diversion” – “concealment” and “camouflage” – are echoed in Changez’s assertion of his model minority status as flows: “I was the only non-American in our group but I suspected my Pakistaniness was invisible, cloaked by my suit, by my expense account, and—most of all—by my companions” (Hamid 71; emphasis mine). Changez tells the story of his inclusion in America using the elements central to the narrative of racialization of Asian Americans as model minority: individual economic success, hard work, and education. In other words, his inclusion in the multicultural American body politic is predicated on his employment in the service of neoliberal capitalism.

Following Glissant’s logic of diversion, the invisibility of Changez’s racial domination in the U.S. should be interpreted not as a problem of his individual denial of racism but as a structural principle of American imperialism. Glissant emphasizes that diversion should not be mistaken for denial or for an escapist fantasy from the reality of racism as follows: “Diversion is not a systematic refusal to see. No, it is not a kind of self-inflicted blindness nor a conscious strategy of flight in the face of reality” (19). Therefore, his transnational journey becomes a mode of revealing the structures of American racial paradigms and of recuperating the political possibilities that are foreclosed when “model minority” is explained as mere unwillingness of individuals to see the racism perpetuated against Asian Americans, a stereotype that can be dispelled if we highlight enough instances of racism or poverty in the Asian American community. The diasporic spatial itinerary, as a strategy of diversion, tells a complex story in which the model minority subject is not just an inadvertent victim of processes of American racial domination but complicit with them, a story that changes the political implications of
“model minority” even as it points to the structural inevitability of this racialization. Because of Changez’s model minority racialization, American racial and imperial domination remain invisible to him within U.S. borders, and therefore, the narrative has to, in Glissant’s words, “look for it elsewhere in order to be aware of it,” and that propels the narrative to Manila and Valparaiso (23; emphasis original).

Changez’s itinerary through Manila, Valparaiso, and Lahore articulates a political consciousness by making the invisible global dimensions of racial and class hierarchies visible. In Manila, Changez becomes conscious of his “Third World sensibility” when he encounters the gaze of a jeepney driver that reveals to him the racialized subservient status accorded to him by the white gaze of his corporate companions. In Valparaiso, Chile, publisher Juan-Bautista explicitly implicates Changez as a “modern-day janissary, a servant of the American empire” (Hamid 152). The encounters with the jeepney driver and Juan-Bautista on his transnational itinerary make Changez conscious of his complicity with the inequitable world economic order wrought by neoliberalism. Following the spatial logic of diversion, Changez’s final epiphany about America’s imperial domination can only travel in one direction. Because it cannot travel to the U.S., where racial hierarchies remain invisible, the final node in his itinerary is Lahore.

Changez’s political consciousness stems from his realization that the places on his itinerary are not isolated but are co-constituted and connected by America’s racial and imperial violence. The slums of Manila, his shabby and crumbling ancestral home in Lahore, and the economic decay of Valparaiso are connected in his consciousness as places “condemned to atrophy” by American imperialism (Hamid 97). Even though Changez returns to Lahore to translate his political consciousness into action, I suggest that his return is not based on a longing for origins or on any assumptions of a natural solidarity based on race. Glissant’s theory of diversion is instructive in
interpreting his return to Lahore: “We must return to the point from which we started. Diversion is not a useful ploy unless it is nourished by reversion: not a return to the longing for origins, to some immutable state of Being, but a return to the point of Entanglement, from which we were forcefully turned away” (26). Far from being an argument for nativism, Changez’s return to Lahore is necessary for a meaningful reckoning with his own racialized status and for the crafting of a politics based on his consciousness of pan-racial “Third World” solidarity.

The novel’s spatial imagination is central to its redefinition of “fundamentalism” because it reveals that the U.S. state labels Changez as a “terrorist” not on account of any religious fervor or violence but precisely because of his political consciousness of the racial hierarchies that undergird neoliberal geography. In other words, the label of “terrorism,” while seeming to denote cultural conflict, is deployed by the U.S. state to contain critiques of the racial and spatial logic of global neoliberalism. Changez’s consciousness is particularly threatening to the status quo because it expands political possibilities by making visible how the racial ideologies of American imperialism harness and capitalize on racist structures of British colonialism while seemingly functioning as benevolent resolutions to the past colonial violence. For instance, Changez’s dilapidated house in Lahore symbolizes this historical continuity between the racialized structures of U.S. neoliberalism and British colonialism. Changez belongs to a class of Pakistanis who rose to prosperity during the British colonial reign. His father and grandfather were both educated in England, but the colonial promise of upward mobility had since disintegrated into the postcolonial shabbiness of his home, which now “smacked of lowliness” (Hamid 9, 124). Both Changez’s “model minority” participation in and his consciousness of the ravages of neoliberal capitalism, the two different valences of his “fundamentalism,” have their roots in the crumbling foundations of his ancestral home in Lahore.\(^5\) Changez’s move to New
York and his transnational itinerary is an attempt to recuperate the lost grandeur of his home that symbolizes the failure of modernity, which had been promised by the British colonial project. “I felt I was entering in New York the very same social class that my family was falling out of in Lahore,” Changez says (Hamid 85). Thus, Changez’s “model minority” status renews through a racial logic the same promise of upward mobility that had disintegrated in the postcolonial aftermath of the British reign. This interpretation of Hamid’s home suggests that the racial formations of the American imperial project are historically and structurally connected to racist ideologies of British colonialism.

The novel invokes the image of Changez’s home not only as the source of his diasporic itinerary but also as part of a broader spatial metaphor of “ruins” that describes the various places in this itinerary. The ravages of empires become visible to Changez only through this transnational cross-section of ruins. For example, he visualizes an intimacy between Lahore and Valparaiso based on their decaying urban landscapes as follows: “In this—Valparaiso’s former aspirations to grandeur—I was reminded of that saying, so evocative in our language: the ruins proclaim the building was beautiful” (Hamid 144; emphasis original). Echoing the ruins in V.S. Naipaul’s The Enigma of Arrival discussed in Chapter 5, the The spatial metaphor of “ruins” becomes the point of intimacy between the colonizer and the colonized, between Changez and the unnamed American, and between the racialized peoples of Lahore, Manila, and Valparaiso “whose lives the empire thought nothing of overturning for its own gain” (Hamid 152). Thus, Changez’s consciousness of intimacies between the racialized geographies in his itinerary makes visible the connections between British and American empires which threaten the U.S. state’s narrative of a new cultural conflict with Islam and capitalism’s narrative of distinct places as autonomous profit-centers.
Not only does the novel posit intimacy between the racialized people of the Third World, but it also represents intimacy, instead of a binary opposition, between Pakistan and the U.S. through the trope of romance. The representation of intimacy between Changez and Erica/America ultimately undercuts the novel’s incisive critique of America and grants the U.S. a certain kind of innocence. As Richard Gray observes, “Even as Changez describes it, his repudiation of America is a curiously frictionless affair” (*After the Fall* 60). In the post-9/11 world, when the narrative of America as an exceptional place for South Asians has come under a lot of strain, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, its critique of America notwithstanding, resurrects that narrative using a variety of textual strategies that reveal the limits of the text’s political possibilities. In an interview with Deborah Solomon of *The New York Times*, Hamid himself says that “[t]he novel is a love song to America as much as it is a critique.” The feminization of America and the eroticization of Changez’s relationship with the U.S. indicated by the phrase “love song” are supplemented by the representation of his allegorical relationship with Erica as one of unrequited love, a tragic romance, which reinforces her status as a victim and invokes in the reader both pathos and desire for her.

In addition to the portrayal of Am/Erica as the victim, Hamid’s decision to represent Changez’s “terrorism” as non-violent combined with his privileged class status makes us question the causal relationship between the two. Hamid uses Changez’s status as an upper-class professional to present a sanitized, rather mild-mannered, portrayal of “terrorism” that avoids “crude hysteria about jihad and Islam” and therefore does not ruffle any feathers or upset what Kumar has referred to as the “easy liberal pretensions about multiculturalism” (“End of Innocence”; *A Foreigner* 184). Such a portrayal does not account for the role of violence in addressing the gross inequities in the global world order that the book represents. Finally, the
same transnational itinerary that articulates progressive politics is also the source of political blind spots as it locates all incarnations of “terror,” whether they be in the form of racial and class hierarchies produced by American empire or political contestations engendered by geopolitical consciousness, outside of the U.S., while keeping all racial hierarchies invisible within the U.S. domestic context (the invisibility of racial hierarchies within U.S. borders continues even after the events of 9/11 have transpired within the narrative timeline). For all of Hamid’s attempts to chart a nuanced relationship between the U.S. domestic and global geopolitics, this spatial separation allows the novel to function as a “love song” to America.

This analysis of *Burnt Shadows* and *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* shows that the concept of diasporic itinerary, as delineated in this dissertation, holds the key to animating the political consciousness of literary representations, while also pointing to the limits of such consciousness. The spatial imagination of diasporic narratives remains central to making visible that which the empire’s narratives want to conceal. That is why we see a proliferation of spatial metaphors and representations in South Asian narratives of “terror,” ranging from Lorraine Adams’s essay “The Trials of Faisal Shahzad” to H.M. Naqvi’s novel *Home Boy*. Making the invisible visible, or in Glissant’s words, “the conquest of the unspoken or the unspeakable” through the geographic and the spatial, is the core impulse of diversion (26; n.7). The empire’s racial techniques, therefore, make diversion not only a political strategy but also a representational strategy, central to the stories we tell ourselves. The spatial imaginations of South Asian narratives that illuminate the hazy contours of the “terrorist” within the politically conscious model minority subject, of the diasporic within the national, and of the racial within the religious continue to be our points of entanglement to which, through different routes, we will have to return.
Notes


2 Hamid uses the term “half-conversation” to describe the structure of The Reluctant Fundamentalist in an interview with the website for The Man Booker Prizes. In a more recent interview with Mohsin Hamid published on The New Yorker website, the author describes the novel’s setting of a “one-sided conversation in a Pakistani café” in terms of what he calls “selective abstinence,” or the constraints he sets upon his writing in order to “de-exoticize the context, to see it fresh.”

3 The extent to which model minority racial form of Asian Americans is defined by their circulation in global capitalist logics has been discussed extensively in the context of Chang Rae Lee’s novel Native Speaker. For two excellent examples, see Jodi Kim’s essay “From Mee-Gook to Gook” and J.Paul Narkunas’s “Surfing the Long Waves of Global Capital with Chang Rae-Lee’s Native Speaker.”

4 In this direct complicity with neoliberalism, model-minority racialization of Changez is different from that of the scientists and librarians who populate Jhumpa Lahiri’s fiction. Lahiri’s South Asian professionals are wealthy but their location away from the fast life of high finance and New York and their relative isolation in small towns and suburbs also situates these “model minorities” above the visible fray of racial hierarchies and conflicts, thereby lending their portrayals an aura of innocence—a key reason for Lahiri’s appeal for a wide mainstream audience.

5 In the narrative of Changez’s “fundamentalisms,” we find the familiar but deeply unsettling echoes of broken homes and broken promises of upward class mobility as seen in Lorraine Adams’s representation of Faisal Shahzad’s radicalization in her essay for the Granta special issue on Pakistan.

6 The “ruins” in The Reluctant Fundamentalist are evocative of representations in Amitav Ghosh’s extraordinary fictional rumination on postcolonial space The Shadow Lines, in which even a grand colonial monument like Victoria Memorial in Calcutta is seen as a postcolonial “ruin” that marks the intimacy between the colonizer and colonized. “This is our ruin; this is where we meet,” Tridib says to May in a scene with particularly romantic overtones (Ghosh 167). Both in The Reluctant Fundamentalist and The Shadow Lines, this hierarchical intimacy is manifested in interracial friendships and heterosexual romantic relationships between South Asian men and white women.

7 In a particularly compelling instance of this spatial logic in the novel, we see that the invisibility of America’s racist imperial order within U.S. borders is total and complete, to the extent that Changez has to leave his final epiphany about American imperialism at the U.S. border. When Changez arrives at the New York airport after his trip to Valparaiso, where he has attained this epiphany, he is aware that his racial status makes him a “suspect” and an
“indentured servant.” He describes the airport as follows: “...I was struck by how traditional your empire appeared. Armed sentries manned the check post at which I sought entry; being of a suspect race I was quarantined and subjected to additional inspection; . . . I myself was a form of indentured servant whose right to remain was dependent upon the continued benevolence of my employer” (Hamid 157). But once out of the airport and within U.S. sovereign space, Changez dismisses his racial consciousness as a “peculiar emotional state” and a “sort of semi-hypnotic daze,” because in the New York morning America appears to him as the space of ultimate hope and possibility (Hamid 157). He says, “Where else could I—without money and family contacts, and at so young an age—hope to attain such an impressive income” (Hamid 157).
CITED LITERATURE


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- M.A. in English with primary concentration in Creative Writing, University of Illinois at Chicago, 2003-2005.

- Masters in Finance and Control (M.F.C), Punjab University, Chandigarh, India, 1997-1999.

- Bachelor of Science (B.Sc), Punjab University, Chandigarh, India, 1994-1997.

Fellowships and Awards


- Chancellor’s Student Service Award, University of Illinois at Chicago, 2007.

Publications

Book Chapters


Peer-Reviewed Journal Articles

“‘UK is finished; India’s too corrupt… Anyone can become Amrikan’: Interrogating Itineraries of Power in Bend It Like Beckham and Bride and Prejudice.” Journal of Creative Communications. 2: 1&2 (2007): 79-100. (A Special Issue on the South Asian Diaspora including contributions from Sujata Moorti, John Hutnyk, and Avtar Brah)

Creative Nonfiction

**Conference Presentations**


“A Place Where There was Nowhere Left to Go”: Homes and Mobility in Jhumpa Lahiri’s *The Namesake,* Women and Gender Studies Conference: At the Border: Transformation and Transition in Contemporary Feminism, Oakton Community College, IL, April 1, 2011.

“On Bridging Asian American Studies and Student Affairs,” East of California Conference, Ohio State University, OH, November 3-4, 2006.

“‘UK is finished; India’s too corrupt; Anyone can become Amrikan’: Interrogating Itineraries of Power in *Bend It Like Beckham* and *Bride and Prejudice*,” 3rd International South Asian Popular Culture Conference, University of Manchester, UK, June 27-29, 2006.

“Meeting at the Margins: Wives, Servants, and Narrators Negotiate Home in Ginu Kamani’s *Junglee Girl*,” Asian Pacific American Graduate Student Conference, University of Illinois, Champaign, IL, March 4-6, 2006.

**Conferences Organized**


**Sessions Chaired**

Session: “Transnational Frameworks,” Project Biocultures Graduate Student Conference, University of Illinois at Chicago, IL, November 16-17, 2007.

Session: “America in Asia, Asia in America,” 2nd Annual Asian Pacific American Graduate Student Organization Conference, University of Illinois at Chicago, IL, March 16-17, 2007.
Session: “Arab-American Imaginings of Home and Identity,” Society for the Study of Multi-
Ethnic Literatures of the United States, University of Illinois at Chicago, IL, April 7-10, 
2005.

Teaching Experience

Adjunct Lecturer, Asian American Studies Program, University of Illinois at Chicago, Fall 
2011-Spring 2012.

Teaching Assistant, Department of English, University of Illinois at Chicago, August 2005-May 
2008, and August 2009-Fall 2010.

Courses Designed and Taught Independently:

- ASAM/SOC 125: Introduction to Asian American Studies 
  Fall 2011, Spring 2012

- ENGL 113: Introduction to Multiethnic Literatures in the U.S. 

- ENGL 201: Introduction to the Writing of Nonfiction Prose 

- ENGL 160: Academic Writing I: Writing in Academic and Public Contexts (Freshman 
  Composition) 
  “Writing Critically, Thinking Analytically: Engaging in Public Conversations,” 2 classes, 
  Fall 2006; 1 class, Fall 2007.

- ENGL 161: Academic Writing II: Writing for Inquiry and Research (Advanced Freshman 
  Composition) 
  “Writing about Immigrant Labor: Intersections of Race, Gender, and Work,” 2 classes, 
  Spring 2006.

Courses Taught as TA:

- ENGL/ASAM/SOC 125: Introduction to Asian American Studies 

Academic Services

- Advisory Board Member, Asian American Resource and Cultural Center, University of 

- Activities Committee Member, Creative Writing Program, University of Illinois at 
Other Work Experience

- **Freelance Editor**, January 2005-present.

Teaching Interests

- Asian American literature
- Multiethnic literatures of the US
- Gender and feminist theories
- 20th/21st century US literature and culture
- South Asian diaspora literature
- Transnationalism and globalization studies
- English Composition
- Creative Writing
- Theories of race and multiculturalism

Technology Skills

- Blackboard Learning Management System
- MS Powerpoint, Excel, Word
- Multimedia Classrooms

Languages

- Hindi
- Punjabi
- Urdu

Professional Affiliations

- Modern Language Association
- Critical Ethnic Studies Association
- South Asian Literary Association