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LOCAL SITES/GLOBAL CONTEXTS

The Transnational Trajectories of *Fire* and "The Quilt"

In early December 1998, movie theaters in Bombay, New Delhi, and other major Indian cities were stormed by dozens of activists from the Shiv Sena, the Hindu right-wing organization that formed the militant wing of the BJP-led Hindu nationalist government then in power. The activists were protesting the screening of *Fire*, the 1996 film by the Indian Canadian director Deepa Mehta which depicts a lesbian relationship between two sisters-in-law in a middle-class, joint-family household in contemporary New Delhi. Screenings were forcibly stopped, film posters burnt, and property vandalized. The Shiv Sena justified its actions by claiming that the film's depiction of lesbianism was an affront to Hinduism and "alien to Indian culture."[1] Significantly, the fact that Mehta was a diasporic filmmaker was repeatedly cited as evidence of her lack of knowledge about the erotic and emotional lives of "real" (Hindu) Indian women. This critique of Mehta as diasporic, and therefore not authorized to speak about "Indian culture," came not only from right-wing Hindu nationalists but also from moderate and leftist commentators in India. The mainstream national newspaper *The Hindu*, for instance, opined that "*Fire* has very weak links to the true Indian milieu."[2] Similarly Madhu Kishwar, a well-known feminist writer and activist, penned a scathing attack of the film in the feminist journal *Manushi*. Framing Mehta somewhat contradic-

torily as simultaneously both "foreign" and a member of the indigenous Indian elite, Kishwar dismissed the film in the following terms: "the director lacks an understanding of family life and emotional bonds in India . . . I wanted to ignore [the film] as an exercise in self-flagellation by a self-hating Hindu and a self-despising Indian—a very common type among the English educated elite in India."[3] These critiques of Mehta from commentators from across the political spectrum as foreign and therefore ignorant of Indian "reality" brings into sharp relief the conflation of both "queer" and "diaspora" as inauthentic and alien within nationalist discourse.

Interestingly, over fifty years earlier, a similar outcry had greeted the publication of Urdu writer Ismat Chughtai's 1941 short story "The Quilt," on which (according to Mehta) *Fire* is loosely based.[4] Chughtai's story centers on the curious relationship between a sequestered wife and her female maidservant in an upper-class Muslim household, as observed by the young girl who narrates the tale. Every night, the girl is alternately fascinated and alarmed by the energetic contortions of the two women under the quilt; curious sounds and smells emanate from there. The quilt becomes the organizing metaphor of the story, and its shifting surfaces suggest the mobile relations of erotic pleasures that Chughtai weaves throughout the text. In a gesture that was to be reproduced by the Shiv Sena almost six decades later in response to *Fire*, Chughtai was charged with obscenity by the Indian colonial government in 1944. Chughtai, in a 1983 interview in *Manushi*, recalls the event: "In 1941, three months before my marriage, I wrote a story called *Lihaf* (The Quilt). In 1944, I was charged with obscenity by the Lahore government. A summons arrived : 'George the Sixth versus Ismat Chugtai.' I had a good laugh at the idea that the king had read my story. So we went to Lahore to fight the case."[5] As Geeta Patel's reading of Chughtai's story points out, the obscenity charges were leveled specifically at Chughtai's representation of *female* homoeroticism, although the story quite clearly maps out male homoerotic relations as well.[6] That the Indian colonial government, alerted by members of the elite Muslim community in Lahore, deemed Chughtai's representation of female homoeroticism a far greater threat to public decency than her representation of male homoeroticism speaks volumes about the tremendous symbolic and discursive weight attached to female bodily desires and practices. The controversies surrounding both Chughtai's "The Quilt" and Mehta's *Fire* make startlingly clear the ways in which discourses of women's sexuality are mobilized in the service of imperial, national, and communal projects. Indeed, as Susie Tharu and K. Lalitha note in their

Radha (Shabana Azmi) and Sita (Nandita Das) in *Fire* (dir. Deepa Mehta, 1996).

analysis of the obscenity charges directed at the work of the eighteenth-century female Telugu poet Muddupalani, when it comes to women's sexuality and artistic production, "the interests of empire and of nation, and the ideologies that ground them, are not always so clearly in contradiction."[7]

In my reading of *East Is East* in chapter 3, Mina's "staying put" within the home signals not her capitulation to the law of the father but rather her defiant claiming of pleasure in the most unlikely of spaces. Similarly, in the Bollywood song and dance sequences discussed in the previous chapter, female homoeroticism suffuses home space rather than existing in exilic relation to it. By reading *Fire* alongside "The Quilt," this chapter further examines the ways in which queer female pleasure and desire remake the home as domestic and national space. Both texts place female homoerotic desire squarely at the center of multiple home spaces in a manner that is unimaginable within the logic of diasporic feminist translations of Bollywood. *Fire* and "The Quilt" thus ask us to consider the interrelation between heteronormative structures of gender and sexuality, and religious and nationalist constructions of community and nation. Tracing the continuities and dissonances between the two texts also allows for a further exploration of the circulation, translation, and transformation of queer representations as they travel between diaspora and nation.

I place Mehta's film and Chughtai's short story within the larger context of

recent Indian feminist theorizations of sexuality, in order to unpack the fraught relation between the study of sexuality and the study of gender in a South Asian context, and the implications of such a relation for studying sexuality in the diaspora. I consider how a film like *Fire* travels across multiple national sites and accrues multiple audiences and meanings in the process of such travel. Although slight reference was made to Chughtai's story during the *Fire* controversy, I would like to restore "The Quilt" as an important intertext to *Fire*. In so doing, I resituate Mehta's film in relation to alternative models of female homoerotic desire that contest Eurocentric structures of visibility and sexual subjectivity on the one hand, and hegemonic structures of authentic communal and national identity on the other. Both *Fire* and "The Quilt" make apparent the way in which, by placing queer female desire squarely at its center, the space of home is reworked and transformed from within.

Situating Sexuality: Genealogies of Indian Feminism

Feminist work on South Asia is crucial to a project on queer diasporas since it allows us to identify the legacies of gender and sexual ideologies that were first consolidated within the bourgeois anticolonial nationalist movement in India in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. These constructions of gender and sexuality have taken on new forms and meanings in the contemporary moment within state and religious nationalisms in South Asia, as well as within South Asian immigrant communities in the diaspora. Clearly, as Ratna Kapur argues, the debates on sexual morality that have surrounded contemporary cultural texts such as *Fire* must be situated in relation to an older history of Hindu nationalist formulations of sexuality and the home.[8] However, as I will discuss, much of this feminist scholarship also stops short at critical instances, in that it fails to address the production of normative and deviant sexualities as central to both the colonial and nationalist projects.

Feminist critics working on South Asia have provided some of the most sophisticated thinking on the centrality of gender ideologies to colonial, nationalist, and contemporary religious discourses and have further extended these arguments to theorizing the concomitant role of sexual ideologies within such discourses. In the introduction to their groundbreaking collection of feminist historiography, for instance, Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid follow Partha Chatterjee in arguing that the early Indian nationalism of the

bhadralok, or Bengali middle class, in the late nineteenth century is predicated on "a series of oppositions between male vs. female, inner vs. outer, public vs. private, material vs. spiritual."[9] The newly created private space of the *bhadralok* home, the authors point out, is one that defines itself in opposition to working-class women and depends on the reconstitution of patriarchal familial ideologies through the figure of the "ideal woman" as the carrier of "tradition."[10] Sangari and Vaid argue that from its inception, elite Indian nationalism is predicated on the regulation and surveillance of women's sexuality and the construction of a "respectable" middle-class sexual morality that both vilifies and excludes those women who are "either relatively independent and literate . . . or [those] from the lower strata, courtesans and prostitutes, i.e. women who have hitherto had greater access to a 'public' sphere of street, marketplace, fair and festival."[11]

Attention to the construction of a private, middle-class, "respectable" sexuality in the formation of bourgeois nationalist subjectivities, as articulated by Sangari and Vaid, has been taken up in more recent work by South Asian feminist scholars analyzing contemporary religious nationalisms in South Asia. Amrita Chhacchi notes that Hindu and Muslim communal identity in contemporary India is predicated on the control of women's sexuality as legislated through both Hindu and Muslim "personal law." Such laws, Chhacchi argues, have historically "laid out the boundaries of the community and established a particular family structure—patriarchal, patrilineal, monogamous—as the norm."[12] In tracing the continuities between discourses of anticolonial nationalism and those of contemporary religious nationalism/communalism, Chhachhi (citing Tanika Sarkar) notes that both rely on the figure of "an inviolate, chaste, pure female body,"[13] in whose defense nationalist/communal identity is mobilized. Paola Baccheta further explicates the deployment of sexuality in religious nationalist discourse by demonstrating the ways in which the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), a right-wing Hindu nationalist organization in India, projects a perverse and excessive sexuality onto its Muslim "Others": within RSS rhetoric, "the counterpart to the chaste Hindu male is the Muslim male polygamist or rapist, and to the chaste, motherly Hindu woman is the Muslim woman as prostitute or potential wife."[14] In other words, female sexuality becomes the ground on which the borders between (male supremacist) religious and national collectivities are drawn. Ritu Menon's and Kamla Bhasin's research on the post–Partition Indian government's "recovery

operation" of Hindu Indian women who were abducted to Pakistan during the Partition makes clear the ways in which women's bodies are quite literally exchanged between nations as a violent means by which to produce religious/national solidarity.[15] As these various critics amply demonstrate, anticolonial nationalism in colonial India and religious nationalism in contemporary South Asia intersect in their deployment of sexual and gender ideologies that harness women's sexuality (their sexual conduct and reproductive capacity in particular) to the propagation of the community/group/nation.

The postcolonial feminist scholarship on South Asia that I have briefly outlined above has been profoundly instructive in tracing the gendered and sexualized nature of colonial, anticolonial nationalist, and contemporary nationalist discourses. Yet despite its powerful critique of "woman" as emblematic of the concept of home as nation, as feminized domestic space, and as a site of chaste and unsullied spirituality,[16] such work is marked by a curious lack of attention to the production of heterosexuality and homosexuality within these discourses.[17] A recent instance of this particular blind spot in postcolonial South Asian feminist theorizations of nationalism and sexuality is apparent in Kumari Jayawardena's and Malathi de Alwis's anthology *Embodied Violence: Communalising Women's Sexuality in South Asia*. The collection is especially strong in exploring the various means by which women's sexuality has historically been disciplined and controlled under nationalist movements. However, the contributors fail to adequately articulate how one of the most powerful methods of disciplining and controlling female sexuality within such movements has been the prescription of state-sanctioned heterosexuality as the structure within which female nationalist subjects are housed. This particular collection, as well as the works by the other critics cited above, recognizes that sexuality historically secures the grounds for the production of gendered colonial, bourgeois nationalist, and religious nationalist subjects. It is therefore all the more surprising that even such attempts to specifically consider the imbrication of discourses of nationalism and women's sexuality still presume the heterosexuality of the female subject. Women's sexual autonomy, as imagined by these critics, never extends beyond the boundaries of heterosexuality; the possibility that there may exist other forms of non-heteronormative subjectivities that challenge the logic of such nationalisms is never addressed. By failing to examine the existence and workings of alternative sexualities within dominant nationalisms, such analyses leave intact the very structures of gender and sexual subordination that they seek to critique and dismantle.

If much of the feminist scholarship on South Asia stops short of analyzing the interconnections between the production of "respectable" and "perverse" sexualities and the production of bourgeois nationalism in India, it does provide a powerful critical frame within which to begin such an inquiry. Mrinalini Sinha's essay on the formation of a "respectable" Indian sexuality in colonial India works within the critical frame provided by South Asian feminist scholarship while beginning to articulate heterosexuality and nationalism as overlapping and mutually constitutive structures of domination.[18] Sinha's analysis focuses on the late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century debates among colonial officials and elite bourgeois nationalists on the restructuring of heterosexual family norms in colonial India, through legislation such as the Age of Consent Act (1891) and the Child Marriage Restraint Act (1929). Sinha notes that the Acts, far from transforming unequal gender, class, and caste relations, instead served to accommodate preexisting social hierarchies within new social arrangements conducive to the formation of nationalist subjectivities and the political community of the "modern" nation state.[19]

The 1929 Child Marriage Restraint Act, which raised the age of marriage for women, was passed after the 1927 publication of the American writer Katherine Mayo's incendiary *Mother India*, a so-called exposé of the plight of Hindu girls and women at the hands of "barbaric" Hindu men. Mayo's book, as Sinha states, linked Indian nationalism to the excessive sexuality and sexual pathology of Hindu society.[20] The reformist nationalist response to Mayo's book reversed the charge of sexual pathology by arguing that the East was marked by a heightened sense of spirituality lacking in the materialist West. Such nationalist responses make apparent how the notion of Eastern sexual propriety, as defined against Western sexual degeneracy, was used as a means by which to shore up a newly created Indian nationalist subjectivity. Homosexuality in particular, and "sexual deviance" and "sexual perversion" in general, were deployed within the counter-rhetoric of Indian nationalists as markers of Western decadence.[21] For instance, Sinha cites a book written in Hindi by an Indian woman, Chandravati Lakhanpal, entitled *The Reply to Mother India*. Lakhanpal's text, Sinha notes, "dwelt on homosexual practices, to which elite British males were exposed in English public schools, and quoted at length from Havelock Ellis and other famous authorities on sex to argue that 'sexual perversion' was more common in Britain than in India."[22] Similarly, in another response to Mayo's book, the Indian feminist Muthulakshmi Reddi countered the charge of sodomy and pederasty that Mayo charged was endemic to Hindu

society by claiming no knowledge of "such immoral and unnatural practices" in India. Reddi goes on to reverse the charge of indecency onto the West by referring to "the famous Leadbeater case," in which Charles Leadbeater, a priest at the Theosophical Society in Madras in the 1920s, was accused of sodomizing young Indian boys.[23] Thus imperial feminists like Mayo, as well as anticolonial nationalist feminists like Lakhanpal and Reddi, evoked the specter of homosexuality as a marker of abject otherness and foreignness, and as a means by which to claim their respective locations as modern and civilized. Sinha argues that such a deployment of sexuality, which pitted Western sexual and moral codes against indigenous ones, "reflected the coming of age of a new nationalist perspective on Indian domestic and sexual norms . . . [one that] allowed the reformist nationalist elite . . . to 'indigenize' and domesticate the norms of bourgeois domesticity in a manner that would enable the nationalist elite to address the West or Britain as 'Indian.' "[24]

I rehearse Sinha's argument in some detail here because it allows us to crucially extend the feminist scholarship on "respectable" Indian sexuality by Vaid, Sangari, Sarkar, and others, by bringing to the fore the critique of state-sanctioned heterosexuality implicit in their work. Sinha's essay also suggests the necessity of a critical examination of a discourse of homosexuality and "sexual perversion" in anticolonial and contemporary nationalist politics in India and provides a useful point of departure in tracing the linkages between these various discourses. Sinha herself acknowledges that "the contemporary implications of a discourse of same-sex relations—whether or not self-consciously gay—for the politics of Indian nationalism today" remain beyond the scope of her essay.[25] In a significant attempt to pick up where Sinha's essay leaves off, the anthology *A Question of Silence? The Sexual Economies of Modern India* addresses more explicitly the deployment of discourses of "perverse" and "respectable" sexualities within colonial and postcolonial India.[26] In the introduction to their important collection, the editors, Mary John and Janaki Nair, note that Indian feminism has situated questions of women's sexuality predominantly within a framework of victimization: "the Indian women's movement, to the extent that it specifically foregrounds sexuality, has usually concentrated on the question of enforcing laws that would act as a restraint on male privileges over the bodies of women."[27] The editors instead argue for a recognition of the centrality of discourses of sexual morality to both colonial and nationalist formulations of modernity and citizenship: "It was not . . . the confessional couch or

the hystericized woman that generated knowledge and anxieties about sexuality in modern India so much as, on the one hand, the administrative urgency of the colonial power to make sense of and thereby govern a baffling array of 'types and classes' . . . and on the other, the nationalist need to define the dutiful place of the citizen/subjects of the incipient nation."[28] Yet while John and Nair recognize that "the dominant and exclusionary structures of heterosexuality . . . have rarely been a focus of explicit critique" within Indian feminist scholarship,[29] the full implications and meanings of a thorough engagement with the question of alternative sexualities still seem to elude them. Alternative sexualities demand theorization not only because such work denaturalizes and points to "the taken-for-granted aspects of our sexual economies,"[30] as the editors suggest. Rather if, as Indian feminist scholars have demonstrated over the past two decades, the hallmark of modernity within nationalist ideologies is the virtuous, domestic, asexual woman, then it is perhaps within those spaces that are deemed outside the modern, and appear as primitive, irrational, and perverse within nationalist framings, that we can look for alternative formulations of community and nation.

Mapping *Fire*

An analysis of *Fire*'s reception both within and outside India underscores the inadequacy of feminist analyses that seek to destabilize heterosexuality without adequately grappling with the significance of alternative sexualities in the constitution of communal and nationalist collectivities. The film and the controversy it engendered demand that we explore more fully the ways in which challenges to state-sanctioned sexual subjectivities are managed within hegemonic articulations of community and nation, and how they simultaneously threaten to interrupt the coherence of such entities. The violent hostility of religious nationalists in India toward a diasporic film like *Fire* highlights the urgent need for feminist scholarship both in India and in the diaspora to extend its scope of analysis in two directions: first, to view heterosexuality and contemporary nationalisms as overlapping structures of domination; and second, to move beyond the nation-state in order to account for the transnational circuits that both prop up *and* challenge contemporary nationalisms.

Fire is but the most obvious example of the increasing visibility of films dealing with alternative sexualities that are produced by Asian diasporic film-

makers and that have an increasingly global circulation. For instance, Ang Lee's 1993 film, *The Wedding Banquet* (which has as its protagonist a gay Taiwanese businessman living in New York), gained huge audiences in Taiwan, the United States, and other international markets. In his reading of *The Wedding Banquet*, Mark Chiang argues that the film "cannot be read solely from within the frameworks of national culture, either Chinese or American, but must be read across them in a transnational analysis that attends to the local and global."[31] Similarly, the politics of *Fire*'s reception in India, the United States, and Canada raises questions of how queerness, as represented and circulated through diasporic cultural forms, becomes legible within a variety of competing and contradictory discourses: first, within developmental narratives of gay and lesbian identity in Euro-American contexts; second, within a discourse of religious nationalism in India, which is reproduced in the diaspora; and third, within liberal humanist discourses within both India and the diaspora. The necessity of utilizing a queer diasporic framework becomes particularly apparent when tracing the ways in which the film's representation of female homoerotic desire signifies very differently within these various discourses.

Fire both adheres to and challenges a developmental narrative of gay and lesbian identity, which underlies dominant Euro-American discourses on non-Western sexualities. The film opens with a scene of the adult protagonist Radha's memory/fantasy of herself as a young girl, sitting beside her parents in an open field of yellow flowers. Her mother urges the young Radha to "see the ocean" lying just beyond the landlocked field: "What you can't see you can see, you just have to see without looking." This scene, with its exhortation to "see" without looking, to "see" differently, recurs and resonates throughout the film and suggests an analogy with the ways in which *Fire* interrogates the notion that the proper location of lesbianism is within a politics of visibility in the public sphere. However, the film's counterhegemonic representation of queer female desire is undercut and complicated by its own history of production, distribution, reception, and consumption. Funded largely with Canadian money, *Fire* had circulated from 1996 to 1998 mostly at international film festivals in India, Europe, and North America and had a lengthy art house release in major U.S. cities. Thus, prior to its general release in India in November 1998, it was available to a limited audience in India but gained a significant South Asian diasporic viewership as well as a mainstream lesbian and gay audience in the United States and Canada. Given the trajectory of the

film's reception, it is worth asking how the film has become available and legible to its diasporic and international audiences.

Fire takes place in the middle-class neighborhood of Lajpat Nagar, in New Delhi, and tells the story of the burgeoning love and desire that emerges between Radha (Shabana Azmi) and her new sister-in-law Sita (Nandita Das), in a joint-family household. Mehta quickly establishes the familiar familial violences and compulsions that inhabit the household: the women do most of the labor for the family business while their husbands ignore or abuse them. Radha's husband, Ashok, is tender and attentive not to Radha but to his guru, with whom he spends all his free time and who preaches sexual abstinence, while Sita's husband, Jatin, is too preoccupied with his Westernized Chinese girlfriend to attend to Sita. The two women eventually turn to each other for sex and emotional sustenance. Mehta rather conventionally frames the dilemma of her heroines as one in which "modernity," with its promise of individual freedom and self-expression, pulls inevitably against "tradition," which demands that the women adhere to the roles prescribed for them as good Hindu wives and remain chaste, demure, and self-sacrificing. Indeed, their very names bespeak these roles. In Hindu mythology, Radha is the consort of the god Krishna, who is famous for his womanizing; together Radha and Krishna symbolize an idealized, transcendent heterosexual union. Sita, the heroine of the Hindu epic *Ramayana*, proves her chastity to her husband, Ram, by immersing herself in fire, and thus represents the ideal of wifely devotion and virtue. The image of Sita emerging unscathed from her *agni pariksha*, or trial by fire, is the inescapable motif around which the women's lives revolve throughout the film: for instance, the background noise in their daily lives is the popular serialization of the *Ramayana*, which plays incessantly on the television. Das's Sita, however, refuses to inhabit the overdetermined role of her legendary namesake: with her penchant for donning her husband's jeans instead of her heavy silk saris, and her willingness to pursue her attraction to Radha, she becomes the emblem of a "new India" and its promise of feminist self-fulfillment. Conversely, the stultifying effects of "tradition" are embodied in the character of Biji, the mute, paralytic grandmother who keeps a disapproving eye on the activities of her daughters-in-law.

The dichotomies through which the film is structured—between Biji and Sita, saris and jeans, silence and speech, self-denial and self-fulfillment, abstinence and desire, tradition and modernity—implicate it in a familiar teleologi-

cal narrative of progress toward the individual freedom offered by the West, against which "the non-West" can only be read as premodern. In fact, a number of U.S. critics have used the film as an occasion to replay colonial constructions of India as a site of regressive gender oppression, against which the West stands for enlightened egalitarianism.[32] Within the dominant discursive production of India as anterior to the West, lesbian or gay identity is explicitly articulated as the marker of full-fledged modernity. After Ashok spies the two women in bed together, Sita comments to Radha, "There is no word in our language to describe what we are to each other," to which Radha responds, "You're right; perhaps seeing is less complicated." Film critics in the United States, most notably Roger Ebert, have taken this exchange (as well as Mehta's own pronouncement in the press notes that "Indians don't talk about sex") as proof of the West's cultural superiority and advanced politicization: "Lesbianism is so outside the experience of these Hindus that their language even lacks a word for it."[33] Indeed, almost all mainstream U.S. reviewers stress the failure of "these Hindus" to articulate lesbianism intelligibly, which in turn signifies the failure of the non-West to progress toward the organization of sexuality and gender prevalent in the West.[34] To these critics, ironically, lesbian or gay identity becomes intelligible and indeed desirable when and where it can be incorporated into this developmental narrative of modernity.

Because *Fire* gains legibility within such narratives for at least some North American, non–South Asian viewers (both straight and gay), it is helpful to resituate it within other discourses of non-heteronormative sexuality that are available to South Asian and South Asian diasporic audiences. Just as Mira Nair's *Monsoon Wedding* can be productively read as a diasporic translation of *Hum Aapke Hain Koun . . . !*, so too can *Fire* be read as a diasporic appropriation and transformation of Ismat Chughtai's "The Quilt." Reading the film through the story provides an alternative to the tradition-modernity axis by foregrounding the complex model of queer female desire suggested by the film but foreclosed by its mainstream U.S. reception. The mirrored relation between *Fire* and "The Quilt" underscores the film's critique of neocolonial constructions in which non-Western sexualities are premodern and in need of Western political development, and challenges dominant Indian nationalist narratives that consolidate the nation in terms of sexual and gender normativity.

Tracing the convergences and incommensurabilities between *Fire* and "The Quilt" reveals the ways in which an apparently geographically and culturally "rooted" national text ("The Quilt") is translated into a mobile, diasporic text

(*Fire*) that is in turn consumed within the national space (India). This is not to create a false binary between the apparent fixity of national forms and the mobility of diasporic forms. Chughtai herself was a major figure (and one of the few women) in the influential, Marxist-oriented Progressive Writers Association in the 1930s and 1940s in Lucknow, North India, a group that included Krishan Chander, Sadat Hasan Manto, Rashid Jahan, and other leading figures of Urdu literature. The group was launched in 1935 in London by Urdu writers strongly influenced by the recent formation of the International Association of Writers for the Defence of Culture, the antifascist organization begun in Paris by European modernists such as André Malraux and André Gide.[35] Chughtai's short stories, novels, and essays bear the marks of these transnational influences, while they simultaneously challenge Marxist orthodoxy in their focus on the complex interrelation of class with gender and sexuality in middle-class Muslim households in late-colonial India.[36]

Chughtai's nuanced engagement in "The Quilt" with the "home" as national, psychic, and domestic space is evident in all of her subsequent work, particularly her semiautobiographical 1944 novel *The Crooked Line* (*Terhi Lakir*), for which "The Quilt" provided a blueprint of sorts.[37] The novel radically departs from canonical novels of nation formation by narrating the birth of the Indian nation through its female Muslim protagonist. Revisiting the terrain of "The Quilt" and drawing explicitly on Chughtai's own experiences as a headmistress of a girls' school in Aligarh, North India, the novel explores the intense intergenerational, cross-class erotic relations between women and girls that mark female homosocial spaces such as the Muslim middle-class home or the girls' boarding school. Chughtai saw much of her family traumatically leave India for Pakistan after the Partition of 1947; her wry, humorous stories detailing the psychic and domestic interiors of elite Muslim families are shadowed by questions of homelessness and the cataclysmic uprootings caused by Partition and communal violence.[38] In an essay entitled "From Here to There," Chughtai recalls her trip to Karachi, Pakistan, in 1975 to visit relatives she had not seen since they left India during the Partition nearly thirty years earlier. She writes,

> Pictures of relatives and friends and heaps of gifts added to the weight of my luggage. So many people came to see me off at the airport. Bombay was calling out to me, Karachi was holding me back. It seems as if I'm leaving one world to go to another. The journey is an hour and a half long . . . How long the road that stretches from here to there! How great the distance![39]

Chughtai's suspension between these two points of belonging, between here and there, Karachi and Bombay, maps out an alternative geography of affect that cannot abide by the logic of the bounded, discrete nation-state and that lays bare the arbitrariness of national borders. Chughtai's own movements within and between these geographic, national, and psychic spaces speak to the ways in which the "nation" itself is marked by fissures, ruptures, and movements within its very borders. These multiple movements compel us to rethink the conventional distinction between "diaspora" and "nation": the nation is marked by diasporic movement just as the diaspora becomes a part of the nation. As such, Chughtai's work can be understood as belonging not so much to the nation—whether India or Pakistan—but rather to what Avtar Brah terms "diaspora space," which she defines as follows:

> diaspora space as a conceptual category is "inhabited," not only by those who have migrated and their descendants, but equally by those who are constructed and represented as indigenous. In other words, the concept of diaspora space (as opposed to that of diaspora) includes the entanglement, the intertwining of the genealogies of dispersion with those of "staying put." The diaspora space is the site where the native is as much a diasporian as the diasporian is the native.[40]

For Brah, the concept of diaspora space is useful in that it troubles ethnocentric notions of Englishness that are defined over and against the foreignness and alienness of nonwhite British populations. While the notion of diaspora space usefully recasts claims to nativism within the former imperial power, it can also productively be applied to the postcolonial nation in order to disrupt overly fixed notions of national homogeneity and boundedness. Understanding Chughtai as inhabiting diaspora space means that we must read her work not as representative of an apparently pure, "authentic" national culture but rather as a product of multiple displacements and exiles that cross-cut the "home" as domestic and national space. Chughtai's work thus importantly prefigures the genre of queer diasporic literature that I engage with in chapter 6.

Beyond Visibility: Ismat Chughtai's "The Quilt"

"The Quilt" puts forth a particular conceptualization of female homoerotic pleasure that challenges colonial constructions of "oppressed Indian women,"[41] and exceeds and escapes existing theorizations of "lesbian" subjectivity. As

such, it converges with the moments of queer incursion in the absence of "lesbians" that are apparent in Bollywood cinema. "The Quilt" must be understood not as a representative "lesbian" narrative but through the very structures set up by the story itself; these demand that female homoeroticism be located as simply one form of desire within a web of multiple, competing desires that are in turn embedded in different economies of work and pleasure. In particular, Chughtai's respacialization of female homoerotic desire through tropes of concealment and visibility, secrecy and disclosure, challenges dominant (and often universalizing) paradigms of same-sex desire. To cite just one out of many instances of this universalizing tendency within queer theory, Eve Sedgwick, in her paradigm-shifting *Epistemology of the Closet*, claims the closet as "the defining structure for gay oppression in this century," thereby disregarding other possible epistemic categories or tropes of spacialization that may exist outside, or indeed within, a Euro-American context.[42] Conversely, Chughtai's work demands a consideration of those bodies and spaces that fall outside the rigid narrative configurations constructed by such sweeping theoretical gestures, and instead opens up a potentially generative site of alternative narratives and significations of female homoerotic desire.

"The Quilt" is set within the confines of the household of a wealthy landowner (the Nawab) and his wife (the Begum, or lady of the house) and is narrated by an adult who tells the story through the eyes of her childhood self. As a young girl, she has been "deposited" in the Begum's home by her mother in the hopes that this sojourn with her aunt will initiate her into proper feminine behavior, given that she has a penchant for fighting with the boys rather than "collecting admirers" as her older sisters do.[43] The adult narrator frames the story as a remembered childhood instance of both fear and fascination, where the Begum's quilt—"imprinted on [her] memory like a blacksmith's brand"[44]—embodies the scene of her own ambivalent sexual awakening and desire for the Begum. Memory in the text works not to evoke a narrative of nostalgia, one that imagines home as a site of subjective wholeness or originary, heterosexual identity; rather, the narrator remembers the domestic arena experienced by her childhood self as an apparent site for the inculcation of gender-normative behavior as well as of complicated, non-normative arrangements of pleasures and desires. This anti-nostalgic narrative radically destabilizes conceptions of the domestic as a site of compulsory heterosexuality, while the partial knowledge afforded by the child's gaze (one that is unable to

fully grasp the meanings of the scenes that it witnesses) allows Chughtai to simultaneously resist articulating these arrangements of desires within prescribed frameworks as "lesbian" or "homosexual."

It quickly becomes evident that the question of space, territoriality, and access is critical to the narrative framing of the story, as well as to the articulation of the desiring subject, whether male or female. The Nawab, we are told, has a curious "hobby" of "keep[ing] an open house for students; young, fair and slim-waisted boys, whose expenses were borne entirely by him," and whose "slim waists, fair ankles and gossamer shirts" torture the Begum as she glimpses them through "the chinks in the drawing-room doors."[45] The Begum witnesses this scene of pleasure, commerce, and desire but she is absolutely shut out of its circuits of exchange—predicated as they are on the consumption and circulation of food, money, and labor—and is thus rendered valueless within its terms: "Who knows when Begum Jan started living? Did her life begin . . . from the time she realised that the household revolved around the boy-students, and that all the delicacies produced in the kitchen were meant solely for their palates?"[46] The introduction of the female servant Rabbo into the narrative, however, shifts the spacial focus of the story away from the Nawab's drawing room and this partially glimpsed scene of an eroticized (male) homosociality, to one that centers on the *zenana* and, in particular, the space beneath the Begum's quilt.

It is Rabbo's entrance into her life that allows the Begum to finally "start living," in that it marks her entry into an alternative homosocial economy of desire that functions parallel to the dominant desiring economy of the household within which the Nawab and the boys operate. The money-food-pleasure nexus that frames the scene of male-male desire also marks the relation between the two women, but it signifies somewhat differently within the context of an eroticized female homosociality. Denied access to the "real," material resources of the household, the Begum and Rabbo generate their own, drawing sustenance and nourishment from the work that their bodies do in the production of pleasure. Indeed, their erotic pleasure is insistently figured in the text in terms of food and the satiation of hunger: "Rabbo came to [the Begum's] rescue just as she was starting to go under. Suddenly her emaciated body began to fill out. Her cheeks became rosy; beauty, as it were, glowed through every pore! It was a special oil massage that brought about the change in Begum Jan."[47] Here and elsewhere, the text reveals an intense preoccupa-

tion with touch, smell, and the enumeration of various body parts (lips, eyes, skin, waist, thighs, hands, ankles) as each becomes libidinally invested through Rabbo's relentless massaging of the Begum's body; as such, the narrative refuses to conceptualize the desired and desiring body as a highly localized and conscribed site of eroticism. Instead, the story configures female desire and pleasure as an infinitely productive and transformative activity that generates and is generated by the literal and metaphoric production and consumption of food. The child narrator, for instance, describes the activity under the quilt in the terms available to her as "the sounds of a cat slobbering in the saucer."[48] She later comments: "Smack, gush, slobber—someone was enjoying a feast. Suddenly I understood what was going on! Begum Jan had not eaten a thing all day and Rabbo, the witch, was a known glutton. They were polishing off some goodies under the quilt for sure."[49] Rabbo's touch becomes for the Begum "the fulfillment of life's essential need—in a way, more important than the basic necessities required to stay alive."[50] Female homoerotic desire, then, is predicated on a survival economy of work and pleasure as intermingled.

While it would be tempting to read the representation of female same-sex eroticism within the text as a paradigm of "lesbian" desire, such a categorization shuts down precisely what is most useful about Chughtai's story. The text resists positing the scene of desire between women as a privileged or purely enabling site outside the hegemonic workings of the household and militates against an easy recuperation of any such space of undiluted resistance or subversion. For instance, as references to the "gluttony" of Rabbo and the Begum make clear, Chughtai evokes female homoerotic desire not only through images of satiation but through those of insatiability, greed, and excess as well. The space beneath the quilt, functioning as it does as a site of nonreproductive pleasure—one that has no use-value within a heterosexual economy of desire—can only be figured in terms of overindulgence and waste. Furthermore, the narrator locates the scene of female homoerotic sexuality within a conflicted relation of pleasure, desire, and disgust, where she finds herself simultaneously attracted to and repulsed by the physicality she witnesses between Rabbo and the Begum. The narrator's ambivalence to such physicality is underscored by her repeated evocations of decay and nausea,[51] and it is most apparent in her reaction to the Begum's advances: Tahira Naqvi's translation has the narrator "nauseated" by the Begum's touch,[52] while Susie Tharu's and K. Lalitha's reading of the same line describes the narrator as "driven to distraction" by

"the warmth of [the Begum's] body."[53] While the text in these instances references dominant configurations of female sexuality,[54] its representation of female homoerotic desire is not reducible to nor fully contained by such framings. Instead Chughtai posits an eroticized female homosociality that functions within multiple discourses, and that contains numerous, often contradictory significations. The erotic circuits within which Rabbo, the Begum, and the girl narrator circulate are marked by radically uneven positions of power, both generational and economic. There are similarly uneven eroticized male homosocial economies in the text; indeed, in the narrative's mapping out of intersecting trajectories of erotic pleasures between men and boys, women and women, women and girls, masters and servants, desiring relations are always infused and cross-cut by other economies of power. Calling to mind the uneven erotic relations between women in *Razia Sultan* or *Khalnayak*, women as desiring subjects in Chughtai's story constantly shift in and out of multiply and hierarchically coded gendered, generational, and class positions, so that the text refuses to allow particular configurations of homoerotic desire to settle into stable structures of sexual identity.[55]

The servant Rabbo figures the text's resistance to conflating sexual practices with identity, for it is through her that Chughtai is able to rework the category of female subalternity in terms of space, gendered agency, masculinity, and desire. Chughtai complicates the notion of domestic labor, desire, and servitude in her refusal to delineate unambiguous relations of exploitation and domination within the household. The figure of the female servant occupies a privileged space of indeterminacy within the gendered and class-marked economy of the household—a location that allows subalternity to be conceptualized beyond mere functionality or instrumentality. Whereas the Begum occupies spaces that are more and more limited as the narrative progresses—from the "prison" of the house at large, to the "closed doors" of her "sanctum," to the territory beneath the quilt—Rabbo is granted tremendous mobility and access to the various classed and gendered spaces of the house. In addition, her ability to leave the confines of the house—as she does when she visits her errant son—contrasts sharply with the Begum's increasingly constricted spacial existence. Indeed, with her ability to transgress spacial boundaries, Rabbo becomes the purveyor of both bodily and psychical knowledge, effecting miraculous transformations on the Begum's body, as well as relieving her of periodic "fits" of hysteria.

Rabbo's spacial, social, and sexual mobility makes her an object of both envy and anxiety within the household: she is repeatedly referred to as a "witch," as possessing unsettling powers that are beyond the understanding of the girl narrator and the other members of the household.[56] Indeed, if "possession" implies both the ownership of property as well as the taking over or inhabiting of another body, Rabbo—in a reversal of the typical mistress-servant relation—can be seen as "possessing" the Begum. This reversal is most evident in the Begum's monstrous metamorphosis as she advances on the narrator, where the Begum appears "possessed."[57] The "claustrophobic blackness" of the room, the darkening of her "upper lip" and "deep eyes" bring to mind earlier descriptions of Rabbo as "black . . . like burnt iron ore."[58] The startling conflation of the "white" body of the Begum with Rabbo's "black" one within this scene of female homoerotic desire can be read not so much as a reinscription of dominant models of "lesbian" sexuality as predicated on narcissistic identification (where, as Valerie Traub has pointed out, "identification with" is conflated with "desire for").[59] Rather, it reads as a textual imperative toward an adequate theorization of female homerotic desire as functioning within a visually coded economy of class difference.

Significantly, this scene also underscores the ways in which the text militates against reading Rabbo as the "real lesbian" in the story, despite familiar dominant discursive productions that locate the "truth" of sexual, class, and gender difference and transgression on particular, designated bodies.[60] For example, the masculinity that characterizes Rabbo and signifies her obvious transgression of a classed and gendered ambit of femininity is not solely locatable on her dark, "solidly packed" body but marks the various scenes of women as desiring subjects. Chughtai masculinizes her female characters when and where they desire or are desired: the Begum's overt masculinity in this scene, as she turns her "arduous heat" on the child narrator, echoes earlier passages where the narrator describes the Begum's face—with its downy upper lip and "temples covered with long hair"—as transformed under her own "adoring gaze" into "that of a young boy."[61] Chughtai thus resists reading female homoerotic desire only on certain bodies and in certain instances; instead, desiring subjects within the story occupy multiple locations within a structure of visuality that renders desire visible through specific markers of class and gender. At the same time, the inscription of such markers on the bodies of the Begum and Rabbo speaks to Chughtai's investment, in this instance, in a hegemonic logic of

visibility that demands that bodily surfaces be intelligible in particular ways. That female desiring agency can only signify and be signified through exterior bodily transformations that work within a visual register of class and gender difference undercuts, to a certain extent, the destabilizing effects of the text's representation of desire as always mutable, unfixed, and mobile.

Just as the text refuses to locate desire solely on particular bodies—and hence avoids reifying desires into identity structures—it also refuses to privilege particular sites as the proper locations of the practice of such desire. Shifting critical scrutiny away from the space beneath the quilt to the quilt itself suggests the possibility of a reterritorialized desire that exceeds the master narrative of the closet as a way of theorizing alternative sexuality. The quilt can be read not so much as a concealing device beneath which the "truth" or visual "proof" of sex and desire lie, as much as a kind of mediating and constantly shifting surface that negotiates and marks the border between different economies and organizations of erotic pleasure. The quilt—as a surface area that is suspended between that which is hidden and that which is visible—calls these categories into question and suggests the impossibility of viewing the spaces they connote as discrete territories. Instead, a much more complicated relation between inside and outside, secrecy and disclosure, visibility and invisibility is suggested by the discursive function of the quilt in the narrative. The text on one level seems to privilege what D. A. Miller terms the "will-to-see,"[62] in the girl narrator's insistent attempts to (quite literally) bring to light the curious goings-on beneath the quilt. Indeed, the narrative is propelled by this scopic drive, this desire for "proof" and the promise of eventual revelation of the "truth" beneath the quilt. The story's final scene, where the narrator does catch a glimpse of what lies beneath the quilt, causes the abrupt shutting down of the narrative:

> Once again the quilt started billowing. I tried to lie still, but it was now assuming such weird shapes that I could not contain myself . . . In the dark I groped for the switch. The elephant somersaulted beneath the quilt and dug in. During the somersault, its corner was lifted one foot above the bed. Allah! I dove headlong into my sheets! What I saw when the quilt was lifted, I will never tell anyone, not even if they give me a lakh of rupees.[63]

This sudden blankness, effected by the narrator's refusal (and inability) to disclose what she sees, defers and thwarts the will-to-know that the narrative produces, and the scopic satisfaction that it promises but fails to deliver. The ulti-

mate refusal to enunciate with which the story ends may initially appear as a capitulation to the "prohibition on a certain naming" and the denial of entry of "lesbian" sexuality into the realm of representation—an apparent consignment to unspeakability of female homoerotic sex and desire.[64] I would argue, however, that the failure to name the activity under the quilt speaks, rather, to the impossibility of containing the erotic configurations within the text through a strategy of "naming," of making "sayable" that which must first be produced as visible. Instead of marking "lesbian" sexuality as spectral or unspeakable, the girl's silence encapsulates the text's refusal to grant this space beneath the quilt privileged status as the paradigmatic site of "lesbian" sexuality; the very notion that the "truth" of sex can be revealed or spoken is evoked, only to be overturned. As such, "The Quilt" foreshadows the framing of female homoeroticism evident in Bollywood song and dance sequences such as "*Choli ke peeche kya hai*" (What is beneath your blouse) that I discussed in the previous chapter. Female homoerotic pleasure within Chughtai's text quite simply exceeds the enclosed space beneath the quilt, just as it does the structures of visibility and visuality that the text references. Rather, it saturates all points of the text, eluding location within the ocular field through its manifestation as oral and aural, in the sensations, sounds, and smells with which the narrative is infused. The sight beheld by the narrator, as well as her subsequent failure to disclose, then, become merely incidental; there is no secret that can possibly be revealed, spoken, or withheld given the continuous eruptions of multiple desires that permeate the text. The text's refusal to say, name, and speak the "truth" of sex is precisely what allowed it to bypass the charges of obscenity leveled against it. In the 1983 *Manushi* interview, Chughtai recalls successfully winning the court case:

> The obscenity law prohibited the use of four letter words. *Lihaf* does not contain any such words. In those days the word "lesbianism" was not in use. I did not know exactly what it was. The story is a child's description of something which she cannot fully understand. I knew no more at that time than the child knew. My lawyer argued that the story could be understood only by those who already had some knowledge. I won the case.[65]

Chughtai's repeated insistence on "not knowing" must be read as a strategy of disarticulation allowing female homoerotic desire to elude a colonial legal apparatus that functions squarely within the logic of categorization, visibility, and enumeration.

The quilt, then, represents a textured and layered form of sexuality that resists solidifying into structures of identity. Same-sex desires and practices in the text produce quilted effects, rather than identity effects, as Chughtai maps out multiple, uneven erotic relations that are simultaneously stitched into and undermine dominant circuits of pleasure and commerce. Chughtai's refusal to privilege either the sight or the site of same-sex desire means that the text resists being rendered intelligible within dominant narratives of "lesbian" sexuality. Indeed, reading the text through such dominant configurations of pleasure, identity, and visibility only obscures Chughtai's contestation of precisely those hegemonic formulations.

Sex in the Postcolonial House

If the diasporic feminist translations of the Bollywood genre that I discussed in the previous chapter fix queerness onto particular bodies and efface queerness on others, how does *Fire* translate the homoerotics of "The Quilt" into a diasporic text, fifty years after its publication in India? What is lost or gained in this particular process of translation? *Fire* to a certain extent flattens out the uneven and hierarchical erotic relations in "The Quilt" by translating the mistress/servant relation to an egalitarian one between two middle-class women. The film most radically departs from the script of Chughtai's story in its depiction of the male servant Mundu, who shares the domestic space with the two women. In "The Quilt," the voyeuristic gaze of the young girl/narrator sets in motion homoerotic cross-generational and cross-class relays of power and desire; in *Fire*, the voyeuristic gaze is held instead by Mundu, who functions in the narrative not so much as a worker but rather as both spy and witness to the women's desire. It is he, for instance, who silently watches the growing attraction between the two women and finally, in the film's climactic ending, reveals what he sees to Radha's husband, Ashok. Thus while the figure of Rabbo allows Chughtai to rearticulate female subalternity as a space of possible agency amid oppressive gender and class formations, Mehta's characterization of Mundu simply reiterates familiar formulations of domestic servitude. Unlike Chughtai's nuanced treatment of class and gendered subalternity in the context of middle-class domesticity, in *Fire* the figure of Mundu functions instrumentally, in that he provides the necessary narrative impetus for the women to finally leave the confines of the home at the film's ending.

Yet *Fire* also echoes Chughtai's depiction of queer female desire emerging at the interstices of rigidly heterosexual structures, detailing the ways in which desire is routed and rooted within the space of the middle-class home. In the film, as in Chughtai's text, the men in the family are able to access pleasure and fantasy through unofficially sanctioned sites that function as "escape hatches" from the strictures of conjugal heterosexual domesticity. Ashok, for instance, immerses himself within the homosociality of religious discipleship, Jatin trades in porn videos and escapes into sex with his exotically "other" Chinese girlfriend, while Mundu (who nurses an unrequited love for Radha) has a habit of masturbating to porn videos stolen from Jatin in front of the old grandmother, Biji. Thus, for the men, desire may be blocked within the officially sanctioned gender and class arrangements of the home but it nevertheless emerges within these other locations. Radha and Sita, however, like Chughtai's Begum before Rabbo's arrival, are absolutely shut out of these economies of desire within which the men circulate; they are in effect like Biji, mutely witnessing men's access to pleasure, fantasy, and desire while being denied their own.

For Radha and Sita then, like the women in Chughtai's story, queer desire becomes the means by which they are able to extricate themselves from the terms of patriarchal heteronormativity by creating their own circuits of pleasure, desire, and fantasy. While some critics have suggested that *Fire*'s depiction of lesbian sexuality capitulates to the familiar notion of lesbianism as merely a reaction to failed heterosexual marriages,[66] I would argue that, at least in the middle-class urban Indian context that Mehta details, it is precisely within the cracks and fissures of rigidly heteronormative arrangements that queer female desire can emerge. As in Chughtai's text, where queer female desire is routed through and against heterosexuality, the attraction between Radha and Sita is enabled by those spaces of sanctioned female homosociality legislated by normative sexual and gender arrangements. In one scene, for instance, the two sisters-in-law massage each other's feet at a family picnic, transforming a daily female homosocial activity into an intensely homoerotic one while the other family members unwittingly look on. Here the slide from female homosociality to female homoeroticism serves to locate female same-sex desire and pleasure firmly within the confines of the home and "the domestic," rather than a safe "elsewhere." In this scene, as well as in another where Radha rubs oil into Sita's hair, the women exploit the permeable relation and slippages between female homosociality and female homoeroticism.

Furthermore, the erotic interplay between Radha and Sita references the specific modality of South Asian femininity in the popular Indian films like *Utsav* or *Razia Sultan*, where the performance of hyperbolic femininity encodes female same-sex eroticism within sites of extreme heteronormativity. The trope of dressing and undressing that threads through popular Indian cinematic depictions of female homoeroticism marks *Fire* as well: in the absence of their husbands, the two women indulge in not only dressing each other but dressing for each other, donning heavy silk saris, makeup, and gold jewelry. Their eroticizing of a particular aesthetic of Indian femininity brings to mind the problematic sketched out by Kaushalya Bannerji in the South Asian lesbian and gay anthology *Lotus of Another Color.*[67] Bannerji remarks on her alienation from a white lesbian aesthetic of androgyny, given her "fondness for bright colors, long hair, jewelry"—bodily signs that have multiple meanings for her as an Indian Canadian woman but read simply as markers of a transparent femme identity within a white lesbian context. Bannerji's presentation of a South Asian femininity elicits fetishistic responses from white lesbians, whereas for her, this particular aesthetic is a means of negotiating and reconciling categories of both racial and sexual identity. Similarly, the two protagonists in *Fire* derive pleasure from a particular, middle-class version of South Asian (and specifically North Indian) femininity that sometimes slips into an equally class-marked articulation of female homoerotic desire.[68] If "The Quilt" detaches masculinity from male bodies and instead uses it as a mobile signifier of female homoerotic desire, *Fire* follows in the tradition of the "femme films" of the Bollywood genre (to use Patricia White's phrase) and detaches femininity from its naturalized relation to heterosexuality.[69] Working against a logic that makes queer female desire visible only when it leaves the ambit of normative, middle-class femininity, *Fire* defamiliarizes the markers of conventional femininity by making them signify not the women's availability to heterosexuality but rather their desire for each other.

While *Fire* references Bollywood film through the production of a queer hyperbolic femininity, it also points in even more explicit ways to the uses of the particular gender and sexual codes of popular cinema in articulating queer desire. In one scene, for instance, Sita (dressed in a suit with her hair slicked back) and Radha (as a Bollywood film heroine) engage in a playful lip-synching duet that both inhabits and ironizes the genre of Bollywood songs. Whereas Radha's fantasy space is that of the field that gives way to the ocean,

this evocation of popular Indian cinema becomes Sita's fantasied site of erotic and gender play. This scene of cross-gender identification stands apart from an earlier scene of playful cross-dressing, where Sita discards her sari and dons her husband's jeans and smokes his cigarettes as a way of temporarily laying claim to masculine authority, freedom, and privilege. In the later scene, cross-dressing is not a means by which to claim male privilege but rather functions as an articulation of same-sex desire; thus the film suggests that if one mode by which to make lust between women intelligible is through the representation of hyperbolic femininity, another is through the appropriation of popular culture and its particular gender dynamics.

Clearly, then, the "mythic mannish lesbian" (to use Esther Newton's term) that haunts Euro-American discourses of twentieth-century lesbian sexuality is not the dominant modality through which female same-sex desire can be read here.[70] Rather, within the context of the middle-class Indian home in the film, it is Radha and Sita's performance of queer femininity that emerges as the dominant mode or aesthetic through which female same-sex desire is rendered intelligible. The film suggests an alternative trajectory of representing female homoeroticism in a South Asian context, one at odds with conventional Euro-American "lesbian" histories that chart a developmental narrative from a nineteenth-century model of asexual "romantic friendship" between bourgeois women in privatized, domestic, gender-segregated spaces, to a modern, autonomous, "lesbian" identity, sexuality, and community.[71] The film's depiction of the ways in which this privatized, seemingly sanitized "domestic" space can simultaneously function as a site of intense female homoerotic pleasure and practices calls into question a narrative of "lesbian" sexuality as needing to emerge from a private, domestic sphere into a public, visible, "lesbian" subjectivity.[72]

Thus *Fire*, like "The Quilt," refuses to subscribe to the notion that the proper manifestation of same-sex eroticism is within a politics of visibility and identity. Rather, it suggests that in a South Asian context, what constitutes "lesbian" desire may both look and function differently than it does within Euro-American social and historical formations, and that it may draw from alternative modes of masculinity and femininity. In other words, the film makes explicit the ways in which not all female same-sex desire culminates in an autonomous "lesbianism," and not all "lesbianism" is at odds with domestic marital arrangements. One critic's assessment that *Fire*'s depiction of lesbian

sexuality is "extremely tame by Western standards" must therefore be read as an articulation of precisely the teleological narrative of sexual subjectivity that the film both reiterates and revises.[73] However, in *Fire*'s "modernized" version of "The Quilt," the two women eventually do leave the confines of the household rather than continue to exist within it as do Chughtai's characters. Thus *Fire*, coming fifty years after the publication of "The Quilt," is available for recuperation within (and bears the marks of) the narrative of sexual emancipation and public visibility circulated by contemporary international lesbian and gay politics, even while it provides a critique of this very narrative.

Fire Storms: Hindu Nationalist and Liberal Responses

In its representation of the complicated desiring relations between women in the seemingly traditional space of the home, "The Quilt" directly confronts notions of proper Indian womanhood on which anticolonial nationalist ideologies depend. As Geeta Patel argues, in locating female homoeroticism within the confines of the *zenana* and not as that which occurs "elsewhere," Chughtai both "queries and queers the arena of 'the domestic,' " while challenging the symbolic function of women as bearers of inviolate tradition within nationalist narratives.[74] Chughtai's configuration of female desiring subjects also troubles dominant representations of Muslim women as generic, chaste, and oppressed, as immured in the home and lost to the living. Female interactions within the *zenana* of "The Quilt" instead produce a particular relation between female homosociality and female homoerotic practices, one that, as Geeta Patel phrases it, "denaturalize[s] the apparently necessary slide from marriage into heterosexuality."[75] Similarly, *Fire*'s representation of female homoerotic desire within the home challenges contemporary Hindu nationalist ideologies that rely on Hindu women's sexual purity and sanctity as a means of ensuring group solidarity and vilifying Muslim minorities. Queer desire in the film functions as a modality through which the women resist complicity with the project of Hindu nationalism and its attendant gender and sexual hierarchies. Within the logic of the film, escaping heterosexuality is synonymous with escaping the violences of dominant Hindu nationalism: the few moments where the two women are seen together outside the space of the house take place within explicitly non-Hindu spaces such as mosques and tombs. Indeed, the film ends with a shot of the two women at Nizamuddin Dargar, a Sufi shrine, having finally left the household behind.

It is precisely *Fire*'s implicit critique of Hindu nationalism that prompted Shiv Sena activists to ransack theaters showing the film in December 1998; as one Shiv Sena member said of the film's depiction of the two women having sex, "this scene is a direct attack on our Hindu culture and civilization."[76] Interestingly, Indian liberals within India as well as in the diaspora were quick to counter the charge of perversion and obscenity leveled at the film from the Hindu right by seizing on the film's strategy of disarticulation and nonspecification (where it refuses to label the women under the fixed sign of "lesbian"). This liberal humanist defense argues that the film is not about lesbianism at all, given that it refuses to name its heroines as lesbians; rather, this argument holds, lesbian desire in the film functions allegorically and merely stands in for larger, more important issues such as women's emancipation as a whole.[77] The problematic nature of this liberal humanist defense of *Fire* was particularly evident in the filmmakers' own pronouncements about the film. At one event, for instance, the producer, David Hamilton, suggested that the film had raised the ire of Hindu nationalists because of the way it addressed issues of "artistic freedom, choice, and women's equality."[78] The question of sexuality was conspicuously absent from his interpretation of the controversy. Hamilton was at least in part taking his cue from the filmmaker, Deepa Mehta, herself, who repeatedly defended the film by using the rhetoric of women's emancipation and personal choice: "the lesbian relationship in the film is merely a symbol of an extreme choice my heroines make . . . it is not a lesbian film . . . rather, I think of it as humanistic."[79] Such a statement prefigures and replicates the incommensurability of queerness and feminism that characterizes her later film, *Bollywood/Hollywood*, as well as the other diasporic feminist films discussed in chapter 4.

These are curious evaluations of the outburst against *Fire* given that the Shiv Sena directed their outrage very specifically at the lesbian relationship between the two women, and worse still, at the fact that the film locates this lesbian relationship within the confines of Hindu familial domesticity. As Shiv Sena leader Bal Thackeray complained, "Why is it that lesbianism is shown in a Hindu family? Why are the names of the heroines Radha and Sita and not Shabana or Saira?"[80] In the same vein, a senior government official in Maharashtra argued, as justification for the banning of the film, "if women's physical needs get fulfilled through lesbian acts, the institution of marriage will collapse, and the reproduction of human beings will stop."[81] As both these comments amply demonstrate, the extreme anxiety that the film provokes

among the Hindu right stems from the threat that its representation of queer desire in the home poses to the Hindu nationalist project. It is precisely this threat posed by queer representation that liberal humanist arguments—in their recasting of the film's queer content in terms of a feminist desire for self-determination—fail to recognize. The liberal critique of right-wing attacks on *Fire* converges with particular instances of Indian feminist scholarship on sexuality, to the extent that both are marked by the subsumption of queerness into feminism, and the subsequent elision of queerness altogether.

Queer Diasporic Activism

The reactions to *Fire* within and outside India force us to consider the function of cultural representation as a site of both "promise and peril,"[82] a site of both the subversion of nationalist ideologies and the reiteration of homophobic sentiments. *Fire* gains multiple and contradictory meanings as it circulates within India, within the South Asian diaspora, and within film festival circuits and theaters in Europe and North America. As the film circulates within India, it may pose a potent challenge to right-wing Hindu nationalism, yet it is simultaneously available for recuperation within a liberal humanist framework that subsumes sexuality under a civil rights rubric. Similarly, as it travels outside India, the film both resists and plays into dominant developmental narratives of modernity. I have focused on *Fire* in particular since it is emblematic of the ways in which South Asian diasporic texts travel along increasingly complex trajectories of production and reception. In a Euro-American context, the film's strategy of disarticulation—where it refuses to collapse female homoerotic acts, desires, and practices into static identities—challenges dominant conceptions of what lesbian and gay identity looks like in the West; yet in an Indian context, this very strategy simultaneously allows for the elision of queer desire and the challenge it poses to dominant conceptions of community, home, and nation. The violent debates that have surrounded *Fire* demand that we develop frames of analysis supple enough to account for these transnational movements and the various discourses of gender and sexuality to which they give rise.

The diasporic political mobilization that took place around the *Fire* controversy between South Asian queer activist groups in the United States and lesbian groups in India offers one such frame of analysis. The activist links

forged between the New York–based South Asian Lesbian and Gay Association (SALGA) and the New Delhi–based Campaign for Lesbian Rights (CALERI), for instance, create a potent counterdiscourse that intervenes into multiple discourses. CALERI was formed in December 1998 as a response to the attacks on *Fire* and comprises a coalition of lesbian, feminist, and progressive organizations whose "stated goal is one of gaining and promoting [lesbian] visibility."[83] CALERI spearheaded protests against the Shiv Sena during the *Fire* controversy and has also campaigned for the repeal of Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code that criminalizes homosexuality. The organization is clearly working within the register of visibility, naming, and identity that, as I have argued, *Fire* and "The Quilt" avoid. CALERI found that the only way to counter the elision of sexuality within progressive defenses of the film was to enact a reverse discourse, responding to the film's strategy of disarticulation with one of explicit articulation and naming.[84]

The transnational activist flows between CALERI and SALGA challenge the violent nationalist rhetoric of the Hindu right, the liberal/feminist subsumption of non-heteronormative sexualities, and conventional gay and lesbian discourse that situates non-Western sexualities in a developmental relation to metropolitan sexualities. These interventions are enacted through a complicated negotiation of conservative claims to modernity and national authenticity. As I have suggested, lesbian and gay organizations in the West tend to see the naming of alternative sexualities under the rubric of "gay" or "lesbian" as the marker of modernity, and the adoption of such identities as indicators of the relative evolution of non-Western locations. Conversely, Hindu nationalist ideologies within India—which are subsequently reproduced by conservative immigrant organizations in the diaspora—constitute the modernity of the Hindu nation through the production of a pure, heterosexual past and the violent excision of alternative sexualities from the national imaginary. If, within Hindu nationalist discourse, the diaspora can only signify as the inauthentic Other of the nation, within dominant models of gay and lesbian organizing, the diaspora is the origin of liberating sexual discourses. The transnational organizing strategies adopted by CALERI and SALGA challenge the neocolonial ideologies implicit in mainstream gay and lesbian organizing, as well as the consolidation of an essential "Indianness" as imagined by the Hindu right. They also simultaneously critique the effacement of sexuality within a progressive liberal-humanist agenda. In their press releases immediately following the

attacks against *Fire*, SALGA activists pointedly drew lines of connection between the rights of sexual minorities and the advocacy of artistic freedom and anticommunalism: "Supporting lesbian rights in India is the only option for our government if it is committed to putting an end to communalism, antisecularism, and the forms of fundamentalism that threaten the lives of our constitutionally protected minorities."[85] In so doing, queer activists in the diaspora were expressly taking their lead from queer activists in India, rather than simply imposing diasporic agendas and models of organizing on Indian activists. Indeed, SALGA members were explicitly cognizant of the need to guard against, as they put it, "the imperialist tendencies of international work that get disguised under the rubric of international solidarity work" in their dealings with CALERI.[86] By consistently reinserting sexuality back into the arguments in defense of the film, queer activists both in India and the United States demanded that sexuality be seen as central to issues such as anticensorship and anticommunalism that have long concerned leftist organizers in India. Given that significant funding for Hindu nationalist organizations in India comes from immigrant communities in the United States, Canada, and elsewhere,[87] such queer diasporic alliances speak to the ways in which transnational circuits of commerce and culture are also being mobilized in the service of alternative visions of community, home, and nation.

NOTES

1 Impossible Desires

1. For an analysis of the racist ideology espoused by the British politician Enoch Powell in the 1960s, see Anna Marie Smith, *New Right Discourse on Race and Sexuality.*

2. See Ian Iqbal Rashid, "Passage to England," for a discussion of *My Beautiful Laundrette*'s reception by the "cultural left" in the UK in the 1980s.

3. In its most general sense, the term "communal" is used here and throughout the book to reference notions of community and collectivity; more specifically, my use of "communal" is meant to evoke the term "communalism," which in the South Asian context names a politics of religious nationalism and the persecution of religious minorities, particularly on the part of the Hindu right.

4. The category of "South Asian" encompasses populations that originated from Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. Annanya Bhattacharjee provides a useful gloss on the term, which gained increasing currency in the 1980s and 1990s within progressive communities in the United States in order to signal a broad politics of coalition that rejected the narrow nationalisms of mainstream South Asian diasporic organizations. Bhattacharjee notes that despite its progressive valence, "South Asian" as an identity marker remains a deeply problematic term, given its origins in area studies and cold war rhetoric, as well as its capacity to evade questions of Indian regional hegemony. See "The Public/Private Mirage," 309–10. Despite these limitations, I find the category "South Asian" invaluable in tracing the lines of commonality and difference between various experiences of racialization of diasporic communities within

different national locations. Clearly the history of racialization of immigrants from the Indian subcontinent is vastly different depending on religion, class, and nation of origin in each of these national sites. Nevertheless the term continues to be useful as it produces strategic transnational identifications that allow for a critique of dominant notions of community in both South Asia and the diaspora.

5. Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," 245.

6. Ibid.

7. Joseph Roach, *Cities of the Dead*, 2.

8. Ibid., 20.

9. Ibid., 6.

10. Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," 245.

11. Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 151–53.

12. Stefan Helmreich, "Kinship, Nation and Paul Gilroy's Concept of Diaspora," 245.

13. Braziel and Mannur, "Nation, Migration, Globalization," 7.

14. Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," 244.

15. For an elaboration of how diasporic cultural forms reverse the diaspora-nation hierarchy, see Gayatri Gopinath, "Bombay, U.K., Yuba City."

16. Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," 244.

17. For instance, as Anupam Chander documents, the right-wing Hindu nationalist government of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) issued "Resurgent India Bonds" following the international sanctions imposed on India after its nuclear tests in 1998. The BJP promoted the bonds by appealing to the diasporic nationalism of NRIs in an attempt to encourage them to invest in the "homeland." See Chander, "Diaspora Bonds." See also Vijay Prashad, *The Karma of Brown Folk*, 21, for a discussion of the Indian government's production of the category of "NRI" as an attempt to garner foreign exchange.

18. Another stark illustration of the double-sided character of diaspora was apparent during the savage state-sponsored violence against Muslims in Gujarat, India, in February 2002. The Hindu nationalist state government in Gujarat received the support of NRIs even while other anticommunalist NRI organizations in New York and San Francisco mobilized against the violence and the government's complicity in the killing and displacement of thousands of Indian Muslims.

19. Sunaina Maira, for instance, documents the ways in which second-generation Indian American youth in the United States are drawn to Hindu religious nationalist ideology as a way of fulfilling a desire to be "truly Indian." Maira, *Desis in the House*, 137.

20. I understand "globalization" and "transnationalism" as a range of processes that, following Arjun Appadurai's formulation, includes the global movements of labor, technology, capital, media, and ideologies. See Appadurai, "Disjuncture and Difference

in the Global Cultural Economy." While transnationalism is the result of the exigencies of late capitalism, I also concur with Lisa Lowe and David Lloyd's assessment that understanding transnationalism as the homogenization of global culture "radically reduces possibilities for the creation of alternatives"; "Introduction," in *The Politics of Culture in the Shadow of Capital*, 1. This book is therefore concerned with the particular cultural forms and practices that arise out of, and in contestation to, transnational capitalism.

21. Visweswaran, "Diaspora By Design," 5–29.

22. Vijay Mishra, *Bollywood Cinema*, 235.

23. Prashad, *The Karma of Brown Folk*, 74.

24. Jenny Sharpe, "Cartographies of Globalisation, Technologies of Gendered Subjectivities," forthcoming. I thank the author for permission to discuss her unpublished manuscript.

25. Some of the most influential works in the broad field of gender and nationalism in South Asia include the following: Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid, eds., *Recasting Women*; Zoya Hassan, ed., *Forging Identities*; Lata Mani, *Contentious Traditions*; Ritu Menon and Kamala Bhasin, eds., *Borders and Boundaries.*

26. Key exceptions include Ruth Vanita, ed. *Queering India*; Giti Thadani, *Sakhiyani*; Shohini Ghosh, "*Hum Aapke Hain Koun . . . !*"; Paola Baccheta, "When the (Hindu) Nation Exiles its Queers."

27. See Purnima Mankekar, "Brides Who Travel," for an examination of representations of diasporic women's sexuality in Hindi cinema.

28. Tejaswini Niranjana, "Left to the Imagination." See also Madhavi Kale, *Fragments of Empire*, for a discussion of Indian women's sexuality in the British Caribbean and discourses of both Indian and British nationalism.

29. See, for instance, Lisa Lowe's analysis of Asian immigrant women's labor in "Work, Immigration, Gender."

30. For collections that begin to map out this terrain, see Arnaldo Cruz Malavé and Martin Manalansan, eds., *Queer Globalizations*; Elizabeth Povinelli and George Chauncey, eds., *Thinking Sexuality Transnationally.*

31. Following from George Mosse's groundbreaking analysis of sexuality in Nazi Germany in *Nationalism and Sexuality*, an important body of work has emerged over the past decade that has unraveled the complex interrelation between discourses of sexuality and those of the nation. For a few key examples of this increasingly large and complex field, see Andrew Parker, ed., *Nationalisms and Sexualities*; M. Jacqui Alexander, "Erotic Autonomy as a Politics of Decolonization"; Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather*; and more recently Licia Fiol Matta, *A Queer Mother for the Nation.*

32. Some exemplary instances of this growing body of literature in U.S. ethnic

studies include the following: Martin Manalansan, *Global Divas*; José Muñoz, *Disidentifications*; Juana María Rodríguez, *Queer Latinidad*; Robert Reid Pharr, *Black Gay Man*; Philip Brian Harper, *Are We Not Men?*; David L. Eng, *Racial Castration*; Roderick Ferguson, *Aberrations in Black*; Nayan Shah, *Contagious Divides.*

33. See Martin Manalansan, "In the Shadow of Stonewall," for an important interrogation of contemporary gay transnational politics.

34. Lowe and Lloyd, *The Politics of Culture in the Shadow of Capital*, 1.

35. The imbrication of narratives of "progress," "modernity," and "visibility" is made obvious in what Alexander terms "prevalent metropolitan impulses that explain the absence of visible lesbian and gay movements [in non-Western locations] as a defect in political conciousness and maturity, using evidence of publicly organized lesbian and gay movements in the U.S. . . . as evidence of their orginary status (in the West) and superior political maturity." Alexander, "Erotic Autonomy as a Politics of Decolonization," 69.

36. Tejaswini Niranjana, *Siting Translation*, 3.

37. I thank Alys Weinbaum for her thoughtful feedback on the question of translation.

38. Antoinette Burton, *Dwelling in the Archive.*

39. Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments*, 133.

40. Biddy Martin and Chandra Talpade Mohanty, "Feminist Politics."

41. For an elaboration of the notion of "staying" for queer subjects, see Anne Marie Fortier, "Coming Home."

42. Burton, *Dwelling in the Archive*, 29.

43. As such, I trace the genealogy of this project back to the rich body of radical women of color scholarship of the late 1970s and 1980s that insistently situated lesbian sexuality within a feminist, antiracist, and anticolonial framework. Such work includes Audre Lorde's *Zami*; Cherrie Moraga, *Loving in the War Years*; Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa, eds., *This Bridge Called My Back*; Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera*; Barbara Smith, ed., *Home Girls.*

44. Queer Euro-American scholarship has done the crucial work of revealing the heteronormativity of dominant U.S. nationalism. Such work includes Gayle Rubin's groundbreaking essay "Thinking Sex"; Michael Warner, *The Trouble with Normal*; Lisa Duggan, *Sapphic Slashers* and *The Twilight of Equality?*

45. Paola Baccheta, "When the (Hindu) Nation Exiles its Queers."

46. For a discussion of how the "Indian immigrant bourgeoisie" constructs itself as unnamed and universal, see Annanya Bhattacharjee, "The Habit of Ex-Nomination."

47. Bhattacharjee, "The Public/Private Mirage."

48. Maira, *Desis in the House*, 49.

49. I thank Chandan Reddy for asking me to elaborate on the specificity of different modes of domination.

50. José Rabasa, "Of Zapatismo."

51. Ibid., 421.

52. Paul Gilroy, *Small Acts.*

53. See Appadurai and Breckenridge, "Public Modernity in India," for an explication of the term "public culture" in relation to South Asia. The authors use "public culture" in contradistinction to Habermas's notion of the "public sphere" as a depoliticized zone dominated by the mass media. Instead, the term "public culture" captures the sense of resistance, co-optation, critique, and agency with which subaltern groups interact with popular culture.

54. José Muñoz theorizes the ephemeral nature of queer cultural production in "Gesture, Ephemera, Queer Feeling," 433. For an extended discussion of queer archives and public cultures, see Ann Cvetkovich, 1–14.

55. Dipesh Chakravarty, *Provincializing Europe*, 66.

56. M. Jacqui Alexander, "Erotic Autonomy as a Politics of Decolonization," 86.

57. Monica Ali, *Brick Lane.*

58. Ismat Chughtai's recently translated and reprinted work includes *The Quilt and Other Stories*, *The Heart Breaks Free*, and *The Crooked Line.*

59. Shyam Selvadurai, *Funny Boy.*

60. Shani Mootoo, *Cereus Blooms at Night*.

61. See, for instance, the following: Nice Rodriguez, *Throw It to the River*; Ginu Kamani, *Junglee Girl*; Lorde, *Zami*; R. Zamora Linmark, *Rolling the R's*; *My Mother's House* (dir. Richard Fung, 1993); Achy Obejas, *Memory Mambo.*

2 Communities of Sound

1. I borrow this apt phrase from Josh Kun. For a trenchant critique of Madonna's penchant for cultural theft and tourism, see his article "Sayuri Ciccone."

2. Muñoz, *Disidentifications*, 12.

3. Muñoz understands "queer and Latino counterpublics" as "spheres that stand in opposition to the racism and homophobia of the dominant public sphere." *Disidentifications*, 143.

4. "Bombay, U.K., Yuba City."

5. Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, 16.

6. I elaborate on this relation between diaspora and nation that is effected by Bhangra music in "Bombay, U.K., Yuba City," 316–17.

7. While the Bhangra industry in the UK was, and continues to be, largely male-

dominated, there were important exceptions during the Bhangra boom of the 1980s. I ended my 1995 article by referencing the example of the 1991 song "Soho Road" by the popular Bhangra group Apna Sangeet. "Soho Road" is a duet between a male and a female vocalist that narrates diasporic movement through the travels of a female diasporic subject. As such, it works against the standard preoccupation with racialized masculinity or lost homelands that characterizes the lyrics of many Bhangra songs. See "Bombay, U.K., Yuba City," 317–18. My thanks to Rekha Malhotra for bringing this track to my attention. Virinder Kalra also cites the female Bhangra vocalist Mohinder K. Bhamra as one of the "founders of modern Bhangra." See Kalra's analysis of Bhangra lyrics from the 1970s to the 1990s in his article "*Vilayeti* Rhythms: Beyond Bhangra's Emblematic Status to a Translation of Lyrical Texts."

8. Recent work on South Asian American racial formation, for instance, shows how diasporic links to South Asia, both affective and financial, among South Asian American communities are used to support right-wing Hindu fundamentalist organizations in South Asia and in the diaspora. At the same time, organizations such as the New York–based Youth Solidarity Summer program are attempting to instill in South Asian American youth different visions of South Asian diasporic identity that are explicitly anticommunalist and progressive. See Vijay Prashad, *Karma of Brown Folk*, and Sunaina Maira, *Desis in the House*, for a historicization of South Asian American diasporic formations.

9. As Virinder Kalra notes, "it is the fact of dispersal, a sense of loss, a yearning for home and other themes concerned with migration which emerge from an analysis of Bhangra songs" of the 1970s and 1980s. The lyrics of many of the songs from this period betray a nostalgic evocation of rural Punjab, while also pointedly critiquing the racism that awaits Asian male migrants to the U.K. "*Vilayeti* Rhythms," 85–86.

10. Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," 245. The sheer pleasure and exuberance of this new articulation of racial and national identity effected through Bhangra music is the 1980s is wonderfully captured in Gurinder Chadha's 1989 documentary *I'm British but . . .* (BFI, 1989).

11. See Anna Marie Smith, *New Right Discourse on Race and Sexuality*, for an excellent analysis of the simultaneous demonization of the "homosexual" and the "black immigrant" under Thatcherism.

12. Kalra, "*Vilayeti* Rhythms," 87.

13. Ibid.

14. Kalra provides the following translation for some of the lyrics of Kalapreet's track "Us Pardes": "In this land your dignity lies torn to shreds./Even with your pockets full/You still wander the streets like a beggar/You are riding about on a horse/With no direction./And you came to England my friend/Abandoning your home, Punjab./

People here value you/By the color of your skin./All day long you toil with your hands . . . Your brothers were hung in the fight for freedom/Today you humbly ask/For slavery!" "*Vilayeti* Rhythms," 88.

15. See Gopinath, "Bombay, U.K., Yuba City," 314–15, for a gender critique of Apache Indian's concert performance in New Delhi in 1993.

16. Ibid., 306.

17. See Maira, *Desis in the House*, for a valuable ethnography of South Asian club culture in New York City. See also Ashley Dawson, "Desi Remix."

18. See Dawson, "Desi Remix" (section 20) for an analysis of Mutiny's production of a transatlantic, antiracist, and progressive South Asian political movement.

19. See Claire Alexander's insightful ethnography of working-class Bangladeshi young men in London in *The Asian Gang*, 243.

20. Ibid., 229.

21. As ADF puts it on their 1998 track "Hypocrite": "Beware, this is the digital underclass/Coming from places you've only seen from your car/Accountant, lawyer, financial advisor/PR consultant, journalist, advertiser/We know your game and you think we're playing it/When the bill comes through the door you're going to be paying it!" Asian Dub Foundation, "Hypocrite," *Rafi's Revenge*, London Records, 1998.

22. The problematic mainstreaming of British Asian music in the 1990s is more fully explored in New York–based director and deejay Vivek Renjen Bald's riveting documentary *Mutiny* (2003). Bald clearly shows how the brief moment of media attention did not lead to any lasting opportunities for most British Asian musicians. I regret that because I only had the chance to view Bald's film after the writing of this chapter, I was not able to more fully engage with it here.

23. Koushik Banerjea, "Sounds of Whose Underground?," 65.

24. Ibid.

25. Ibid., 67.

26. See Prashad, *Karma of Brown Folk*.

27. John Hutnyk and Sanjay Sharma, "Music and Politics," 59.

28. John Hutnyk, *Critique of Exotica*, 51.

29. Lisa Lowe and David Lloyd, "Introduction," 15.

30. Prashad, *Karma of Brown Folk*, 38.

31. George Lipsitz, *Dangerous Crossroads*, 72.

32. Ibid., 75.

33. It is significant that Cornershop's single "Brimful of Asha" only shot to the top of the charts after it was remixed by Norman Cook, a collaborator with Fatboy Slim. This illustrates the circuitous routes that South Asian diasporic popular culture must travel in order to be audible to the mainstream.

34. Rupa Huq, "Asian Kool?," 79.

35. Ian McCann, "Bhangramuffin," 18.

36. Hutnyk, *Critique of Exotica*, 134.

37. See Gopinath, "Bombay, U.K., Yuba City."

38. It is important to note here that ADF's linking of antiracist politics and anticolonial nationalist histories is not unique to this particular moment in British Asian music. Indeed, as Virinder Kalra has documented, a central thematic feature of early British Bhangra bands in the 1970s and 1980s was the evocation of anticolonial nationalist heroes such as Singh in order to critique contemporary anti-Asian racism in Britain. See "*Vilayeti* Rhythms," 89–93.

39. Seminar on Feminist Interventions in South Asia, UC Santa Cruz, May 2–3, 2002. I thank the participants for their useful comments and suggestions regarding an earlier version of this chapter.

40. Josh Kun, "Rock's *Reconquista*," 259.

41. Asian Dub Foundation, "Black White," *Rafi's Revenge*, London Records 1998.

42. See Hutnyk, *Critique of Exotica*, 87–113, for an extended critique of the "souveniring of sound and culture" effected by white bands such as Kula Shaker who pepper their music and self-presentation with decontextualized South Asian cultural markers.

43. Asian Dub Foundation, "Jericho," *Facts and Fictions*, Nation Records, 1995.

44. See "Bombay, U.K., Yuba City" for a discussion of how Bhangra musicians in the 1970s and early 1980s saw Bhangra as a solution to feeling "lost" within a racial landscape organized around black and white.

45. Ashley Dawson, "Dub Mentality."

46. K. Anthony Appiah usefully summarizes Sassen's notion of global cities in the following terms: "They are not, like the cities of the past, at the hearts of geographically bounded regions whose economies they center: rather, then connect remote points of production, consumption and finance . . . The global city can become increasingly isolated from—indeed actively antagonistic to—a regional culture or economy." "Foreword," in Saskia Sassen, *Globalization and Its Discontents*, xii.

47. Dawson, "Dub Mentality," 14.

48. As Swasti Mitter defines it, an "enterprise zone" in the "First World" is similar to the export processing zones of the "Third World" and is set up with similar incentives to attract capital, offering investors exemption from property taxes as well as "considerable freedom from health, safety and environmental regulations." *Common Fate Common Bond*, 81. Chrissie Stansfield's 1987 documentary *Bringing It All Back Home* details the beginning of this transformation of the Docklands from a depressed working-class enclave into a state-subsidized zone of high-end businesses, shops, and renovated loft spaces. Importantly, the documentary makes critical linkages between the increasing

mobility of British capital as it engages in offshore production, and the growth of "enterprise zones" within the UK itself. The documentary also points to the increasing use in the early 1980s of a casualized female work force in the UK predominantly made up of Asian immigrant women.

49. Dawson, "Dub Mentality," 13.

50. See Swasti Mitter, "The Capital Comes Home," for a detailed discussion of Asian immigrant women in homeworking and sweatshop industries in the UK in the 1970s and 1980s.

51. Naila Kabeer, *The Power to Choose*, 4.

52. Ibid., 14.

53. Ibid., 216.

54. Mitter, *Common Fate Common Bond*, 130–31.

55. Zuberi, *Sounds English*, 220.

56. Hutnyk, *Critique of Exotica*, 68.

57. Ibid., 7–8.

58. Zuberi, *Sounds English*, 212.

59. David Hesmondhalgh, "International Times," 286.

60. Clara Connelly and Pragna Patel, "Women Who Walk on Water."

61. Sassen, *Globalization and its Discontents*, xxi.

62. Ibid., xxv.

63. Mark Anthony Neal, *Soul Babies*, 6.

64. The perils of this masculinist rendering of diaspora are also apparent in recent attempts to document the history of the Asian Underground music scene. For instance, in his important documentary film *Mutiny* (2003), Vivek Renjen Bald carefully traces the political and historical context of antiracist organizing in British Asian communities from the 1960s to the 1990s, out of which many of the Asian Underground artists emerged. Yet the contribution of women as well as queers (both men and women) to the creation of this scene as well as to the history of antiracist struggle in the UK remains somewhat muted in the film.

65. See, for instance, Kalra, "*Vilayeti* Rhythms"; K. Banerjea and P. Banerjea, "Psyche and Soul"; Claire Alexander, *The Asian Gang*, 240–41.

66. Kalra, "*Vilayeti* Rhythms," 96.

67. Ibid., 93–96.

68. This is Kalra's own translation of the Punjabi lyrics. "*Vilayeti* Rhythms," 94–95.

69. Ibid., 95.

70. Ibid., 94.

71. Lisa Lowe, *Immigrant Acts*, 158.

72. Ibid., 164.

73. Mitter, *Common Fate Common Bond*, 123.

74. Aiwha Ong describes Taylorism or "scientific management" as "the essence of Fordist production." "The Gender and Labor Politics of Postmodernity," 71.

75. Kalra, "*Vilayeti* Rhythms," 95.

76. Mitter, *Common Fate Common Bond*, 123. Mitter defines the "ethnic sweatshop economy" as sweatshops run by (invariably male) racialized immigrant entrepreneurs that employ racialized immigrant women from their own community.

77. Ibid., 122.

78. Lowe, *Immigrant Acts*, 156.

79. Ibid.

80. Aiwha Ong, "The Gender and Labor Politics of Postmodernity," 86.

81. Dipesh Chakravarty, *Provincializing Europe*, 66.

82. Ibid., 67.

83. Ibid.

84. Chakravarty, *Provincializing Europe*, 64.

85. Mitter defines "homeworkers" as individuals (predominantly immigrant women) who supply contractors with very low-wage, machining work that is classified as "unskilled." These contractors in turn supply manufacturers and ultimately retailers. Mitter's research documents the shift in the 1980s as low-wage garment industry jobs in East London and the West Midlands were increasingly transferred from factories and sweatshops to homeworkers. Homeworkers provide manufacturers "access to a captive and disposable workforce [which] becomes an essential strategy for reducing unnecessary overhead costs." "Industrial Restructuring and Manufacturing Homework," 47.

86. *Bringing It All Back Home* (dir. Chrissie Stansfield, 1987).

87. Chakravarty, *Provincializing Europe*, 64.

88. Monica Ali, *Brick Lane.*

89. Kabeer, *The Power to Choose*, 8.

90. Falu Bakrania, "Roomful of Asha."

91. Falu Bakrania, e-mail communication, March 31, 2004. I thank Falu Bakrania for sharing her thoughts with me, and for her feedback on this chapter. See Bakrania, "Re-Fusing Identities."

92. José Muñoz, "Gesture, Ephemera, Queer Feeling," 433.

93. Ibid., 431.

94. For an analysis of a male homoerotic tradition in Sufi spiritualism, poetry, and music, see Saleem Kidwai, "Introduction."

95. Michael Warner, "Publics and Counterpublics." Warner distinguishes "publics" from "audiences" or "groups" through the following five characteristics. A public is (1) self-organized, (2) a relation among strangers, (3) addressed both personally and imper-

sonally, (4) constituted through mere attention on the part of the member of the public, (5) the social space created by the circulation of discourse. I thank Chandan Reddy for bringing this article to my attention.

96. Warner, "Publics and Counterpublics," 51.

97. See, for instance, the review of Parveen's music by Munmun Ghosh, "Abida Parveen," where he describes her voice as "rich, manly and wholesome."

98. See José Muñoz, for an explication of what he terms "queer counterpublics" in *Disidentifications*, 146.

99. José Quiroga, *Tropics of Desire*, 151.

100. Sassen, *Globalization and its Discontents*, xx–xxi.

3 Surviving Naipaul

1. Claire Alexander, "(Dis)Entangling the 'Asian Gang': Ethnicity, Identity and Masculinity," 128. Hanif Kureishi's *My Son the Fanatic* (dir. Udayan Prasad, 1997) interestingly reverses this standard narrative of "traditional" parents and assimilated offspring by positing the father as a secular first-generation Pakistani immigrant who is baffled by his British-born son's turn toward radical orthodox Islam.

2. I am grateful to Rosemary George for alerting me to the reference to *Pakeezah* in this scene.

3. Ayub Khan-Din, *East is East: A Screenplay.* My thanks to Beheroze Shroff for alerting me to this text.

4. I borrow this phrase from Lisa Lowe, *Immigrant Acts*, 158.

5. Rosemary George, *The Politics of Home*, 91–93.

6. Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 152–53.

7. Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema."

8. Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 151–52.

9. See Robert Reid-Pharr, *Black Gay Man*, 70–72, for an analysis of Fanon's scathing critique of Martinican woman writer Mayotte Capecia in *Black Skin, White Masks.*

10. Ella Shohat/Robert Stam, *Unthinking Eurocentrism*, 11.

11. José Muñoz, *Disidentifications*, 11.

12. Vijay Mishra, "The Diasporic Imaginary," 445.

13. For an analysis of Naipaul's reception in the so-called First and Third Worlds, see Rob Nixon, *London Calling.* See also Michael Gorra, *After Empire*; and Bruce King, *V. S. Naipaul.*

14. Michael Powell, *A Life in Movies*, quoted in Arthur Pais, "Sabu's Daughter Scripts the Second Coming of 'The Thief of Baghad.' "

15. My thanks to James Kyung Lee for initially suggesting the uses of the notion of a

"Brown Atlantic." For a critique of Gilroy's Black Atlantic framework in relation to South Asian diasporic cultural production, see Gayatri Gopinath, "Bombay, U.K., Yuba City."

16. Vijay Prashad, *The Karma of Brown Folk*, 28–30.

17. Naipaul, *A House for Mr. Biswas*, 210. See Rosemary George's discussion of masculine failure in the novels of Naipaul and Joseph Conrad in *The Politics of Home*, 91–93.

18. George, *The Politics of Home*, 93.

19. Naipaul, *A House for Mr. Biswas*, 218.

20. Ibid., 275.

21. Ibid., 134.

22. Ibid., 120.

23. Ibid., 92.

24. Salman Rushdie, *Midnight's Children*.

25. See Mrinalini Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity*.

26. George, *The Politics of Home*, 93.

27. V. S. Naipaul, *The Mimic Men*.

28. I borrow this phrase from E. Ann Kaplan, *Looking for the Other*, 222.

29. Eng, "Heterosexuality in the Face of Whiteness," 358.

30. Muñoz, *Disidentifications*, 11.

31. See Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 37.

32. Eng, "Heterosexuality in the Face of Whiteness," 363 n. 25.

33. Kobena Mercer, *Welcome to the Jungle*; Reid-Pharr, *Black Gay Man*; Philip Brian Harper, *Are We Not Men?*; David Eng, *Racial Castration*; Nayan Shah, *Contagious Divides*.

34. Reid-Pharr, *Black Gay Man*, 81.

35. Eng, *Racial Castration*, 223–24. See also Mark Chiang, "Coming Out into a Global System," 374–95, for an excellent reading of *The Wedding Banquet*.

36. Eng and Hom, *Q&A*, 1.

37. Eng, *Racial Castration*, 205.

38. Ibid., 16.

39. As Claire Alexander writes in her study of "Asian gangs" in the UK, "This 'between two cultures' identity crisis among Asian youth constitutes the dominant discourse" around Asian youth culture in mainstream media in the UK. "(Dis)Entangling the 'Asian Gang,'" 128.

40. Homi Bhabha, "Are You a Man or a Mouse?" 57–68.

41. Ibid., 58.

42. Anna Marie Smith, *New Right Discourse on Race and Sexuality*, 181.

43. Ibid., 23.

44. Harper, *Are We Not Men?*, x.

45. Bhabha, "Are You a Man or a Mouse?" 58.

46. Ibid., 63.

47. I am most grateful to Jody Greene for suggesting the connection between *East Is East* and *Mary Poppins*, and for pointing me toward Jon Simons's article.

48. Sumita Chakravarty, *National Identity and Indian Popular Cinema 1947–1987*, 270.

49. Ibid., 293.

50. Rachel Dwyer comments, "Many films, notably those of Meena Kumari and the courtesan genre, have been read as camp, and provide inspiration for drag performers, from Bombay's gay parties to London's Club Kali Chutney Queens." In *All You Want is Money, All You Need Is Love*, 52.

51. See Patricia Uberoi, "Dharma and Desire, Freedom and Destiny," 145–71, for an account of "podoerotics" in Hindi cinema.

52. As Sumita Chakravarty writes, "As an image of female oppression, of class oppression, and of psychic and moral ambivalence, the haunting figure of the prostitute can be a searing indictment of social hypocrisy and exploitation." *National Identity and Indian Popular Cinema*, 304.

53. See Jackie Stacey, *Star Gazing*, 80–125.

54. Stacey provides a sophisticated analysis of escapism that Hollywood movies represent for female viewers by situating it within the specific historical context of 1940s Britain. See *Star Gazing*, 80–125.

55. A. Sivanandan, *A Different Hunger*, 131–32.

56. Stuart Hall, "Racism and Reaction," 25. Quoted in Smith, *New Right Discourse on Race and Sexuality*, 132.

57. Jon Simons, "Spectre over London," 1.

58. Ibid., 4.

59. Smith, *New Right Discourse on Race and Sexuality*, 130.

60. This enactment of the reliance of metropole on periphery is also evident on a formal level: Mina's performance slyly reverses the presumed lines of influence that exist between First and Third world popular cultural forms. Rather than the Bollywood musical (*Pakeezah*) being seen as derivative or imitative of the Hollywood musical *(Mary Poppins*), we can read the latter to be dependent on the form and structure of the former. In a film such as the much-applauded musical *Moulin Rouge* (dir. Baz Luhrmann, 2001), for instance, Bollywood is explicitly referenced as the template of the Hollywood musical. Mina's performance thereby makes apparent the various effacements engendered by contemporary discourses of race, gender, and class in Britain.

61. *Tongues Untied* (dir. Marlon Riggs, 1989).

62. Anne Marie Fortier makes a similar and related argument in "Coming Home" when she critiques the construction of queer subjects as urban subjects within contemporary queer studies. Such a construction, she argues, elides the ways in which some queer subjects choose to be simultaneously "out" while "staying put," often in small towns and rural areas.

4 Bollywood/Hollywood

1. Ziauddin Sardar, "Dilip Kumar Made Me Do It," 21.

2. For a discussion of the reception of popular Indian cinema among non–South Asian international audiences in North Africa, the Middle East, China, and Eastern Europe, see Ravi Vasudevan, "Addressing the Spectator of a 'Third World' National Cinema."

3. My discussion of popular Indian cinema is limited to "Bollywood" cinema—that is, Hindi-language films emerging from the Bombay film industry—which constitutes the largest and most influential sector of Indian commercial cinema. The immense complexity of the different regional and linguistic cinemas that make up Indian commercial cinema more broadly is beyond the scope of this discussion.

4. Key exceptions include Brian Larkin, "Indian Films and Nigerian Lovers"; Mark Liechty, "Media, Markets and Modernization"; Minou Fuglesang, *Veils and Videos.*

5. Vijay Mishra, "The Diasporic Imaginary," 446.

6. Vijay Mishra, *Bollywood Cinema*, 237.

7. Janet Staiger, *Perverse Spectators*, 2.

8. Ibid., 37.

9. Valerie Traub, "The Ambiguities of 'Lesbian' Viewing Pleasure," 309.

10. Judith Mayne, "Paradoxes of Spectatorship"; Chris Straayer, *Deviant Eyes, Deviant Bodies*; Patricia White, *unInvited*; Jackie Stacey, *Star Gazing*; Jacqueline Bobo, *Black Women as Cultural Readers.*

11. Mayne, "Paradoxes of Spectatorship," 159.

12. Straayer, *Deviant Eyes, Deviant Bodies*, 53.

13. Traub, "The Ambiguities of 'Lesbian' Viewing Pleasure," 322.

14. White, *unInvited*, 32.

15. Ibid., 43.

16. Mayne, "Paradoxes of Spectatorship," 158.

17. White, *unInvited*, 197.

18. For recent influential studies of Indian popular cinema, see Ravi Vasudevan, ed., *Making Meaning in Indian Cinema*; Sumita Chakravarty, *National Identity and Indian Popular Cinema, 1947–1987*; Madhava Prasad, *Ideology of the Hindi Film*; Ashish Nandy, ed., *The Secret Politics of Our Desires.*

19. Lalitha Gopalan's *Cinema of Interruptions* signals a welcome and necessary shift within Indian film studies to a serious consideration of female spectatorship; her work takes to task conventional models of film studies that fail to "anticipat[e] audiences that also endow Indian popular cinema with meaning that exceeds its own intended horizon of address," 8.

20. Prasad, *Ideology of the Hindi Film*, 5 n. 14.

21. Ibid., 5 n. 5.

22. Ibid., 43.

23. Vasudevan, "Introduction," 10.

24. Ibid., 14.

25. Moinak Biswas, "The Couple and Their Spaces," 133.

26. Prasad, *Ideology of the Hindi Film*, 95.

27. Quoted in White, *unInvited*, 47.

28. White, *unInvited*, 47.

29. Prasad identifies the "feudal family romance" as "the dominant textual form of the popular Hindi cinema"; this form includes "a version of the romance narrative, an average of six songs per film, as well as a range of familiar character types"; *Ideology of the Hindi Film*, 30–31. Rachel Dwyer further elaborates on the song/dance sequence in Hindi movies: "A Hindi movie has a song every twenty minutes or so, with a total of between six and eight in a film. Songs are sung usually by the hero and heroine, possibly the vamp, but never by the villain. Songs fulfill several important functions, including advancing the narrative . . . They also allow things to be said which cannot be said elsewhere, often to admit love to the beloved, to reveal inner feelings, to make the hero/heroine realize that he/she is in love." In Dwyer, *All You Want Is Money, All You Need Is Love*, 113.

30. Vivek Dhareshwar and Tejaswini Niranjana, "*Kaadalan* and the Politics of Resignification," 191.

31. As cited in Prasad, *Ideology of the Hindi Film*, 88. Sumita Chakravarty also notes that the Indian censorship codes drew heavily on Hollywood's Hayes Production Code; *National Identity and Popular Indian Cinema*, 73.

32. Monika Mehta, "What Is Behind Film Censorship?"

33. Shohini Ghosh, "The Cult of Madhuri," 27.

34. Dwyer, *All You Want Is Money*, 113.

35. As Vijay Mishra writes, "the element of Bombay Cinema that circulates most readily is not the film as a complete commodity (which requires concentrated viewing for some three hours) but fragments from it," namely, in the song and dance sequences that are shown as discrete video clips and broadcast on cable television in the diaspora. Mishra, *Bollywood Cinema*, 261–62.

36. Lalitha Gopalan, however, cautions against labeling the song and dance sequence

as merely "extra-diegetic" and instead argues that it has a more complicated relation to the narrative. She argues that "song and dance sequences are not randomly strung together . . . but both block and propel the narrative in crucial ways." *Cinema of Interruptions*, 21. Nevertheless, the way in which song and dance sequences act as critical sites of narrative "interruption," to use Gopalan's term, allow them to function as spaces within the cinematic text that are particularly available to queer viewing strategies.

37. Chakravarty, *National Identity and Indian Popular Cinema*, 76.

38. Thomas Waugh, "Queer Bollywood, or 'I'm the player, you're the naïve one.' "

39. Prasad, *Ideology of the Hindi Film*, 83–84.

40. Staiger, *Perverse Spectators*, 32.

41. There is an established body of work on the relation between Indian national identity and popular cinema. See in particular Chakravarty, *National Identity and Indian Popular Cinema*, and Prasad, *Ideology of the Hindi Film*.

42. White, *unInvited*, 15.

43. Ibid., 14.

44. Sumita Chakravarty defines "parallel" cinema, also termed "new" cinema, as follows: "More generally, the new cinema has shared an interest in linear narrative 'realistic' mise-en-scène, psychological portrayal of character, the 'motivated' use of songs and dances (as and when required by the context of the film), explicit scenes of sexuality, and a disenchantment with the workings of the Indian political system." *National Identity and Indian Popular Cinema*, 267.

45. For a feminist analysis of the courtesan film genre, see Chakravarty, *National Identity and Indian Popular Cinema*, 269–305.

46. Ibid., 284.

47. My thanks to Juana María Rodríguez for suggesting this reading to me.

48. Veena Talwar Oldenburg, "Lifestyle as Resistance." Mary John and Janaki Nair have usefully critiqued such recuperative accounts of courtesanal cultures as positing an overly linear "golden age narrative" that traces the decline of sexual freedom with the advent of British colonialism. See *A Question of Silence?*, 12.

49. Rosemary M. George, *The Politics of Home*, 133.

50. The use of the English word to name female homoeroticism renders it implicitly alien and inauthentic to Indian national culture.

51. Antoinette Burton, *Dwelling in the Archives*, 66.

52. Malek Alloula, *The Colonial Harem*, 95–104.

53. Ibid.

54. The intertextuality of *Razia Sultan* and *Mughal-e-Azam* is underscored by the fact that the director of *Razia Sultan*, Kamal Amrohi, wrote the screenplay for *Mughal-e-Azam* some twenty-five years earlier. See Ashish Rajadhyaksha and Paul Willeman, *Encyclopaedia of Indian Cinema*, 42.

55. White, *unInvited*, 8.

56. Mehta, "What Is Behind Film Censorship?," section 30.

57. See Eve K. Sedgwick, *Between Men*, 21–27.

58. In one paradigmatic instance of the fate of female gender-crossing characters in Bollywood, *Mera Naam Joker* (My Name is Joker, dir. Raj Kapoor, 1970) featured the actress Padmini as a cross-dressing vagabond and circus performer named Minoo Master. Minoo Master's butch toughness, however, prefigures the inevitable revelation scene, where she is exposed as Mina, a curvaceous beauty who dons a sari, grows her hair, and eventually becomes the hero's wife. Minoo Master's domestication as Mina points to the ways in which masculine women in film are not allowed to exist more than momentarily and are inevitably feminized in order to be drawn back into heterosexuality.

59. White, *unInvited*, 47.

60. To cite just a few examples: *Moulin Rouge* (dir. Baz Luhrmann, 2001); British playwright Andrew Lloyd Weber's collaboration with Indian composer A.R. Rahman in the play *Bombay Dreams* (2003); *The Guru* (dir. Daisy Von Scherler Mayer, 2003).

61. The most visible examples are *Monsoon Wedding* (dir. Mira Nair, 2000), *Bollywood/Hollywood* (dir. Deepa Mehta, 2001), and *Bend It Like Beckham* (dir. Gurinder Chadha, 2002).

62. See Vijay Prashad, *The Karma of Brown Folk*, 11–20, for an explication of U.S. Orientalism.

63. This widespread misreading of *Monsoon Wedding* as a Bollywood film was usefully pointed out by Alexandra Schneider, "Bollywood." In a telling instance of this misreading, Michael Giardina comments in an otherwise excellent article that "in recent years Bollywood films such as *Monsoon Wedding* have become wildly popular commercial successes in Britain"; see "Bending It Like Beckham," 80, n. 10.

64. *Monsoon Wedding* production notes.

65. Waugh, "Queer Bollywood," 285.

66. Shohini Ghosh, "*Hum Aapke Hain Koun . . . !*," 84.

67. Patricia Uberoi, "Imagining the Family," 320.

68. *Monsoon Wedding* production notes.

69. Ibid.

70. Roger Ebert, "Monsoon Wedding."

71. See Tejaswini Ganti, "And Yet My Heart is Still Indian," for an account of how Bombay film producers indigenize Hollywood films and construct an "Indian audience" in the process.

72. See, for instance, Uberoi, "Imagining the Family," 309–52. See also Rustom Bharucha, "Utopia in Bollywood."

73. Arjun Appadurai and Carole Breckenridge, "Public Modernity in India."

74. Vijay Mishra, *Bollywood Cinema*, 218.

75. A significant exception is Shohini Ghosh's reading of the film in "*Hum Aapke Hain Koun . . . !*"

76. Ghosh, "*Hum Aapke Hain Koun . . . !*,"87.

77. Ibid.

78. Uberoi, "Imagining the Family," 319.

79. Ibid., 317.

80. Burton, *Dwelling in the Archive*, 7.

81. Ibid., 67.

82. Ibid., 14.

83. Ibid., 69.

84. *Monsoon Wedding* production notes. Nair's self-presentation as the quintessential elite cosmopolitan consumer subject is blatantly apparent in a full-page spread in the magazine *Travel and Leisure*. The piece, entitled "Business Class," features a profile of Nair and details the products that she uses (Prada shoes, Dell laptop, pashmina shawl, bouquets of flowers "in *Monsoon Wedding* colors") in order to make time on the road feel like "home." The copy reads: "Splitting her time among three continents–her production company is in Manhattan, her family lives in Uganda and New York, and she spends at least one month a year in Delhi–Mira Nair leads a dizzying jet-set life." The article renders transparent the class privilege required to traverse national border and cultural spaces with ease. Lucie Young, "Business Class," 102. My thanks to Valerie Larsen for bringing this article to my attention.

85. Tejaswini Niranjana, *Siting Translation*, 3.

86. Vishal Jugdeo, e-mail correspondence, November 11, 2002.

87. *Monsoon Wedding* production notes.

88. Ghosh, "*Hum Aapke Hain Koun . . . !*," 84.

89. Ibid.

90. White, *unInvited*, 141.

91. Karen Leonard, "Identity in the Diaspora."

92. Michael Giardina, "Bending It Like Beckham," 71.

93. Ibid., 78.

94. Ibid.

95. The success of *My Big Fat Greek Wedding* (dir. Nia Vardalos, 2002), or Chadha's own earlier film *What's Cooking* (2000), speaks to the unthreatening multicultural ethos and palatability of ethnic comedies that invariably mobilize a number of limited, recurring motifs, such as the family, generational conflict, weddings, and food.

96. Gurinder Chadha, production notes to *Bend It Like Beckham*.

97. My thanks to Tammy Ho for this insight.

98. The heavy-handed heteronormativity of *Bollywood/Hollywood* may speak to a

strategic decision on Mehta's part to avoid the controversy that greeted both *Fire* in 1998 and her next venture, *Water*, in 1999. The film shoot of *Water*, set in Varanasi and dealing with the question of Hindu widowhood, was successfully shut down by Hindu nationalists in 1999, whereupon Mehta returned to Toronto to begin shooting *Bollywood/Hollywood*. Aseem Chhabra, "*Bollywood/Hollywood* is not a Bollywood Film."

5 Local Sites/Global Contexts

1. Shohini Ghosh, "From the Frying Pan to the Fire," 16.

2. "Deepa Mehta's *Fire*."

3. Madhu Kishwar, "Naïve Outpourings of a Self-Hating Indian."

4. Shoma Chatterjee, "One Sita Steps Beyond the Lakshmanrekha." See Ismat Chughtai, *The Quilt and Other Stories*.

5. "Ismat Chughtai on *Lihaf*."

6. Geeta Patel, "Homely Housewives Run Amok," 10. I thank the author for sharing her unpublished manuscript with me.

7. Susie Tharu and K. Lalita, "Empire, Nation and the Literary Text," 214. For a critique of obscenity law in India, see Ratna Kapur, "The Profanity of Prudery."

8. Ratna Kapur, "Too Hot to Handle," 183–84.

9. Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid, "Introduction," in *Recasting Women,* 10. This collection sought to bring a gender analysis to bear on the Subaltern Studies Collective's project of renarrativizing Indian history "from below," that is, from the vantage point of peasant struggles and other movements that fell beneath the threshold of elite colonial, bourgeois, and nationalist histories. See the foundational work of Ranajit Guha, "On Some Aspects of the Historiography of Colonial India," and "The Prose of Counter-Insurgency."

10. As Lata Mani argues, the nineteenth-century debates on the status of Indian women among colonial officials, missionaries, and the indigenous elite "are in some sense not primarily about women but about what constitutes authentic cultural tradition." "Contentious Traditions," 90.

11. Sangari and Vaid, *Recasting Women*, 11.

12. Amrita Chhacchi, "Identity Politics, Secularism and Women," 82.

13. Chhachhi, "Identity Politics," 94.

14. Paola Baccheta, "Communal Property/Sexual Property," 194.

15. Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin, "Abducted Women, the State, and Questions of Honour."

16. Inderpal Grewal, *Home and Harem*, 7.

17. Other recent feminist collections to engage (to a limited extent) with the ques-

tion of sexuality include Rajeswari Sunder Rajan, ed., *Signposts*; Patricia Jeffery and Amrita Basu, eds., *Resisting the Sacred and the Secular*; Ratna Kapur, ed., *Feminist Terrains in Legal Domains.* Much of this scholarship, however, fails to fully explore the linkages between the production of heterosexuality and concomitant "perverse" or "abnormal" sexualities within colonial and nationalist frameworks.

18. See Mrinalini Sinha, "Nationalism and Respectable Sexuality in India." For an exemplary study of heterosexual masculinity and colonialism, see also Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity.*

19. Sinha, "Nationalism and Respectable Sexuality in India," 34.

20. Ibid., 44.

21. Ibid., 45. See Sinha, *Selections from Katherine Mayo's Mother India*, 277.

22. See Sinha, *Selections from Katherine Mayo's Mother India*, 277.

23. Ibid.

24. Sinha, "Nationalism and Respectable Sexuality in India," 45–46.

25. Ibid., 45.

26. Mary John and Janaki Nair, eds., *A Question of Silence?*

27. John and Nair, *A Question of Silence?*, 9.

28. Ibid., 19.

29. Ibid., 33.

30. Ibid., 36.

31. Mark Chiang, "Coming Out into the Global System," 375.

32. For example, one critic writes that "*Fire* is a plea for women's self-determination that . . . will probably strike viewers in this country as a bit obvious" (Walter Addeago, "*Fire* Cool to State of Marriage in India"). Similarly, other critics describe the film as taking place within the "suffocatingly masculine" and "pre-feminist" culture of contemporary India (see, e.g., Owen Gleiberman, "Take My Wife").

33. Roger Ebert, "*Fire* Strikes at Indian Repression."

34. See Margaret McGurk, "Tradition Broken in Indian Tale of Forbidden Love," and Bill Morrison, "Women on the Verge of a Cinematic Breakthrough."

35. Ashish Rajadhyaksha and Paul Willeman, *Encyclopaedia of Indian Cinema*, 180.

36. For further contextualization of Chughtai's work in relation to the Progressive Writers Association and Urdu literature more generally, see Ismat Chughtai, trans. M. Asaduddin, *Lifting the Veil*, xi–xxiv. See also Chughtai, trans. Tahira Naqvi, *My Friend, My Enemy*, vii–xi.

37. Chughtai, *The Crooked Line (Tehri Lakir).*

38. Like many writers involved in the Progressive Writers Association, Chughtai intermittently worked as a scenarist and producer in the Bombay film industry from the 1940s to the 1970s, where she further explored these questions of class, gender, and

familial relations in the context of post-Independence India. Her husband, Shahid Latif, was a well-known Bombay film director and producer. Rajadhyaksha and Willeman, *Encyclopaedia of Indian Cinema*, 80.

39. Chughtai, *My Friend, My Enemy,* 174.

40. Avtar Brah, *Cartographies of Diaspora*, 209.

41. See Chandra Mohanty's now-classic essay, "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses," for a critique of hegemonic discourses of Third World women's oppression, passivity, and victimization.

42. Eve K. Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet*, 71. Of course, Sedgwick very deliberately limits her field of inquiry to Euro-American texts and makes claims only about these. Nevertheless, her formulations of the closet and concurrent tropes of silence and invisibility have become totalizing narratives in theorizing queer existence. Little attention has been paid to the different tropes of spacialization at work among differently raced lesbian and gay subjects within, say, a U.S. context. Martin Manalansan, for instance, has argued that notions of coming out and the closet are inadequate in narrativizing queer identity among gay Filipino men both in New York City and in the Philippines, where sexuality is always refracted through experiences of immigration. See Manalansan, "In the Shadows of Stonewall."

43. Chughtai, "The Quilt," 7.

44. Ibid.

45. Ibid., 8.

46. Ibid.

47. Ibid., 9.

48. Ibid., 13.

49. Ibid., 19.

50. Ibid., 10.

51. For instance, the narrator comments, "I can say that if someone touched me continuously like this, I would certainly rot," and later, "imagining the friction caused by this prolonged rubbing made me slightly sick." Chughtai, "The Quilt," 11.

52. Chughtai, "The Quilt," 16.

53. See Susie Tharu and K. Lalitha, eds., *Women Writing in India, Vol. 2,* 135.

54. As Elizabeth Grosz and others have argued, psychoanalytic discourse as articulated by Freud and Lacan has seen "desire, like female sexuality itself, as an absence, lack, or hole, an abyss seeking to be engulfed, stuffed to satisfaction." See Grosz, "Refiguring Lesbian Desire," 71.

55. As Geeta Patel comments, "the women in ['The Quilt'] do not 'become' lesbians even though they engage in physical activities with each other. This form of not being a lesbian . . . raises the question about where (in what national/cultural/historical sites)

performance needs to be located in order for it to produce 'identity.'" See Patel, "Homely Housewives Run Amok," 10.

56. Chughtai, "The Quilt," 11.

57. Ibid., 16.

58. Ibid., 11.

59. See Valerie Traub, "Ambiguities of Lesbian Viewing Pleasure," 311.

60. A number of theorists have explored the linkages in Euro-American medico-moral and other discourses between various paradigmatic figures of female sexual transgression, such as the prostitute, the "lesbian" or female invert, and the working-class female. See, for example, Judith Walkowitz, *The City of Dreadful Delight*.

61. Chughtai, "The Quilt," 10. The way in which Chughtai's masculinization of desiring female subjects is informed by colonial-era Western sexological discourse on Indian female sexuality remains to be further examined. Havelock Ellis, for instance, noted that sex between women, which he deemed particularly prevalent in India, was practiced by women endowed with the penetrative power of enlarged clitorises. See Ellis, *Studies in the Psychology of Sex*, 208.

62. D. A. Miller, "Anal *Rope*," 130.

63. Chughtai, "The Quilt," 19.

64. "A certain naming" is Judith Butler's phrase in *Bodies That Matter*, 162.

65. "Ismat Chughtai on *Lihaf*."

66. See Ginu Kamani, "Interview with Deepa Mehta."

67. Kaushalya Bannerji, "No Apologies."

68. Outside the confines of the middle-class North Indian home depicted in *Fire*, female homoerotic desire may manifest itself in forms other than that of hyperbolic or queer femininity. As Geeta Patel has noted in her discussion of the controversy around the 1987 "marriage" of two policewomen in central India, the police barracks in which the two women lived constituted a site of complicated and explicitly gendered erotic relations between women. See Patel, "Homely Housewives Run Amok," 14–22.

69. See Judith Halberstam's *Female Masculinity* for a theorization of "masculinity without men."

70. Esther Newton, "The Mythic Mannish Lesbian."

71. See Newton, "The Mythic Mannish Lesbian," for a critique of nineteenth-century "romantic friendships" as proto-lesbian/feminist relationships.

72. Clearly, a Euro-American bourgeois space of "home" is not akin to the domestic space represented in *Fire*, given that the latter is marked by a history of British colonialism, anticolonial nationalism, and contemporary Indian (and Hindu) nationalist politics.

73. See Peter Stack, "Review of *Fire*."

74. Patel, "Homely Housewives Run Amok," 13–14. Partha Chatterjee, for instance, argues that the anticolonial nationalist elite of pre-Independence India created

an "inner" sphere as its hegemonic space, one that existed outside the workings of the colonial state. The figure of the woman came to embody this space of an essential, immovable Indian identity or tradition. See Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments*, 133. Patel holds that Chughtai's critique of the notion of women as desexualized and static markers of "tradition" had much to do with the charges of obscenity leveled against "The Quilt" upon its publication.

75. Patel, "Homely Housewives Run Amok," 7.

76. "Hindu Militants Stage Lesbian Film Attacks."

77. "Attacks on *Fire* Due to Lack of Vision, Says Sathyu." See also the Campaign for Lesbian Rights, *Lesbian Emergence*, 17–19, for an account of the progressive, leftist framing of the *Fire* controversy in terms of "freedom of expression" and not sexuality.

78. Premiere of *Earth* (dir. Deepa Mehta, 1998), Asia Society, New York, December 1998.

79. "Deepa Mehta on *Fire*."

80. "Thackeray's Terms." Radha and Sita, are, as noted, names drawn from Hindu mythology while Shabana and Saira function in Thackeray's statement as generic Muslim names as well as specific references to Shabana Azmi, the star of the film, and to Saira Banu, the wife of actor Dilip Kumar, who was vocal in his support of the film. Eventually, Mehta did agree to change "Sita" to "Neeta" in the Hindi version of the film.

81. BBC *News Online*, December 9, 1998. http://www.bbc.co.uk.

82. George Lipsitz, *Dangerous Crossroads*, 7.

83. Sukthankar, Ashwini, et al., eds., *Lesbian Emergence*, 24.

84. For a critique of the cultural essentialism inherent in CALERI's stance, see Ratna Kapur, "Too Hot to Handle."

85. South Asian Lesbian and Gay Association, "Take a Stand in Support of Secularism, Freedom of Expression and Lesbian Rights in India."

86. South Asian Lesbian and Gay Association, "*Fire* in New York," 34.

87. As Vinay Lal comments, "The Ram Janmabhoomi Movement, which led to the destruction of the . . . Babri Majid, received considerable support from Hindus settled overseas, and the funding of Hindu institutions, temples and other purportedly 'charitable' enterprises by diaspora Hindus, particularly those from the United States, can be established beyond doubt." "The Politics of History on the Internet," 150.

6 Nostalgia, Desire, Diaspora

1. See Jocelyne Guilbault, "Racial Projects and Musical Discourses in Trinidad," for an analysis that usefully situates the debates around chutney and chutney soca in the context of the particularities of racialization and national identity in Trinidad.

2. As quoted in Peter Manuel, *East Indian Music in the West Indies*, 184.

3. Manuel, *East Indian Music in the West Indies*, 186.

4. Ibid., 171.

5. Tejaswini Niranjana, "Left to the Imagination."

6. Ibid., 128.

7. "Wining" refers to an Afro-Caribbean dance move that stresses pelvic rotation. See Manuel, *East Indian Music in the West Indies*, 174.

8. Manuel, *East Indian Music in the West Indies*, 175.

9. Ibid., 171.

10. Ibid., 174.

11. Ibid., 175.

12. See Rob Nixon for a discussion of the different valences of various terms used to describe displacement, such as exile, emigrant, expatriate, and refugee, in *London Calling*, 17–28. See Rosemary George for a useful distinction between exile literature and "the immigrant genre" in *The Politics of Home*, 174–75.

13. George, *The Politics of Home*, 175.

14. Shyam Selvadurai, *Funny Boy.*

15. Selvadurai, *Funny Boy*, 5.

16. Shani Mootoo, *Cereus Blooms at Night.*

17. Avtar Brah, *Cartographies of Diaspora*, 181.

18. For an excellent account of the historical split between Asian and Asian American studies, see Sucheta Mazumdar, "Asian American Studies and Asian Studies."

19. Ibid., 41.

20. For recent work on South Asian American cultural politics, see, for instance, Vijay Prashad, *The Karma of Brown Folk*; Amitava Kumar, *Passport Photos*; Matthew and Prashad, *Satyagraha in America*; Sunaina Maira, *Desis in the House.*

21. Prashad, *The Karma of Brown Folk,* 183.

22. See Prashad, *The Karma of Brown Folk,* 185–204, for a discussion of progressive South Asian organizing in New York City.

23. Rajiv Shankar, "Foreword: South Asian Identity in Asian America," ix–x.

24. The critiques that feminist and queer Asian American scholars have leveled, over the past two decades, at the groundbreaking anthology *Aiiieeeee!*, edited by Frank Chin et al., come to mind. See, for instance, Elaine H. Kim, *Asian American Literature*; Sauling Cynthia Wong, *Reading Asian American Literature*; Russell Leong, "Introduction: Home Bodies and the Body Politic"; David L. Eng and Alice Y. Hom, eds., *Q&A;* David L. Eng, *Racial Castration.*

25. See, for instance, Bharati Mukherjee, *Jasmine*; Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, *Arranged Marriage.* For a critique of the racial and gender politics of *Jasmine*, see Susan Koshy, "The Geography of Female Subjectivity."

26. For an analysis of the creation of "inner" and "outer" spheres in anticolonial nationalist discourse in India, see Partha Chatterjee, "The Nationalist Resolution to the Woman's Question."

27. See Judith Halberstam, *The Drag King Book*, for a discussion of masculine non-performativity in the context of female drag king performances.

28. Selvadurai, *Funny Boy*, 19.

29. Ibid., 39.

30. Ibid., 262.

31. See Robert McRuer, "Boys' Own Stories and New Spellings of My Name," for a critique of the coming out narrative as "necessary for understanding one's (essential) gay identity"(267) and of Edmund White's novel in particular.

32. Selvadurai, *Funny Boy*, 5.

33. Dorinne Kondo suggests this formulation of "home" in her essay on Asian American negotiations of community and identity, "The Narrative Production of 'Home,' Community and Political Identity in Asian American Theater," 97.

34. Martin Manalansan, "Diasporic Deviants/Divas."

35. However, the flier's use of Hindi (rather than Tamil or Sinhala) even when referencing a Sri Lankan text points to the ways in which (North) Indian hegemony within South Asia may be replicated within queer South Asian spaces in the diaspora.

36. Selvadurai, *Funny Boy*, 302.

37. Ibid., 309–10.

38. Fredric Jameson, "Third World Literature in an Age of Multinational Capitalism."

39. Ibid., 69.

40. Aijaz Ahmad, *In Theory*, 95–122.

41. George, *The Politics of Home*, 91.

42. Madhavi Kale, *Fragments of Empire*, 5.

43. Indira Karamcheti, "The Shrinking Himalayas," 264.

44. Rhoda Reddock, "Freedom Denied."

45. M. Jacqui Alexander, "Erotic Autonomy as a Politics of Decolonization."

46. Patricia Mohammed, "Writing Gender into History."

47. Madhavi Kale, "Projecting Identities."

48. Prabhu Mohapatra, "Restoring the Family." Cited in Niranjana, "Left to the Imagination," 133.

49. Kale, *Fragments of Empire*, 174.

50. Ibid., 167.

51. Ibid., 36–37.

52. Ibid., 112.

53. George, *The Politics of Home*, 50.

54. Ibid., 51.

55. Mootoo, *Cereus Blooms at Night*, 51.

56. For a reading of how Mootoo's novel reframes questions of trauma and the incest narrative, see Ann Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings*, 140–55.

57. Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather*, 358.

7 Epilogue

1. Purnima Mankekar, "Brides Who Travel."

2. Indeed, in December 2003, the Indian congress passed a bill that was to smooth the way to dual citizenship for "Persons of Indian Origin" from particular nations in the West. A person holding this new form of "citizenship," however, would not be entitled to work or vote in India but could buy property and invest in its markets.

3. See the transnational Bollywood hit, *Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham* (dir. Karan Johar, 2001) for another, particularly egregious example of this new genre of Bollywood films set in the diaspora. The film similarly relies on the diasporic female as the embodiment of national tradition and culture, invariably figured as Hindu. Here the diasporic woman is always shown dressed in the markers of respectable Hindu femininity (in a sari, *bindi*, and *mangalsutra*, the gold chain worn by married Hindu women) and becomes the most ardent advocate for Indian identity and familial loyalty in the film.

4. Within the logic of the film, this success only comes at the expense of other communities of color: the Indian diner is only able to succeed when it lures customers away from the Chinese restaurant across the street. This narrative of Indian versus Chinese immigrant success betrays Indian nationalist anxieties over China's ascendance to world power status in the battle for regional hegemony in Asia.

5. Thomas Waugh, "Queer Bollywood," 285.

6. This genre was solidified in the 1970s with a series of films starring the Bollywood icon Amitabh Bhacchan partnered with a male sidekick. See Bhacchan's films from the 1970s and early 1980s celebrating male friendship, such as *Zanjeer* (dir. Prakash Mehra, 1973), *Sholay* (dir. Ramesh Sippy, 1975), and *Dostana* (dir. Raj Khosla, 1980).

7. Waugh, "Queer Bollywood," 286.

8. José Rabasa, "Of Zapatismo," 421.

9. Cherry Smyth, "Out of the Gaps," 110. I thank Cherry Smyth for bringing Sekhon's work to my attention, and for initially giving me the opportunity to write about it for *Diva Magazine*. I am most grateful to Parminder Sekhon for permission to discuss and reproduce her work.

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