



## Can You Caption These?

This is the first selection of pictures in our new series on places of historical or scenic interest, and monuments in India, which will run for three issues. The final instalment and a set of jumbled titles will appear in "The Illustrated Weekly of India", dated March 27, 1955. All you have to do is to put the correct captions with the photographs and forward them together to the Editor not later than April 15, 1955.

The reader sending an all-correct entry will receive Rs. 50, the second best Rs. 30, there will also be a consolation prize of Rs. 10. In case more than one reader sends in an all-correct entry, the prize money will be pooled and equally distributed.



## SECTION III

This section focuses on the transformation of image spectra, modes of representation and circuits of spectatorship

### SECTION III

## Aspiring to Home: Becoming South Asian in America

Bakirathi Mani

We are here to pervert – excuse me, to *preserve* – our culture.

TEJU PATEL, ADDRESSING THE MISS INDIA USA PAGEANT, 1999

As I walked into the Miss India USA pageant in San Jose, California, I momentarily felt out of place. Inside the hotel banquet room, speaker systems buzzed with static as emcees commandeered the microphone and audience members chattered loudly with their friends. Glancing through the programme booklet, I noticed that the preparation for the evening exceeded the actual events onstage. The pageant was not simply about who won the contest, but about the community itself. Threaded through the talent and fashion shows were stories about local immigrant entrepreneurs whose small businesses funded the contest; about parents who invested their time and money into the display of their daughters; and about the young women who aimed to win the crown. Throughout the evening, the pageant organizers, beauty queens and emcees appeared to represent an upwardly mobile immigrant group. Yet while the pageant promoted a singular narrative of ethnic and national community, those who gathered at the event came from diverse backgrounds. The contestants represented more than twenty states across the United States, and as many regions of origin within India. They were Hindu and Sikh, Muslim and Christian; they spoke Telugu, Hindi, Punjabi and Malayalam. The audience included first- and second-generation immigrants from India, as well as Fijians and East Africans of subcontinental origin.

Despite my initial hesitation, I was compelled by the spectacle of belonging generated at the pageant. As an Indian national from Japan, as an academic, and as a feminist who rejected the objectification of female bodies, I considered myself to be unlike the immigrants who attended and participated in this event. Yet like other audience members, I too became part of the powerful performance of community that was staged by the

contestants. Their efforts to win the crown represented an aspirational narrative of belonging, enunciated through popular music, fashion and dance.

Historically, beauty pageants have been occasions for Asian immigrants to proclaim their allegiance as Americans.<sup>1</sup> At Miss India USA, what struck me were the disparate claims to class and citizenship that were made by a heterogeneous group of immigrants. The pageant was nominally a charity fundraiser, but it required large investments of capital and labour on the part of contestants and organizers. The lavish setting of the hotel ballroom signalled the wealth of this immigrant group, but pageant sponsors included struggling small-business owners as well as white-collar professionals. Though the judges spoke eloquently about what it meant to be Indian, such singular notions of national identity were challenged by the diverse religious and linguistic backgrounds of the contestants. Moreover, the majority of the young women onstage identified as American citizens, claiming regional identities as Texans or Californians who proudly represented their states of residence.

The visible contradictions embodied by the pageant contestants, organizers and audience members came to a head at the end of the show. Just before the winners were announced, Teju Patel, an emcee for the evening, came onstage and proclaimed, ‘We are here to pervert – excuse me, to *preserve* – our culture.’ The audience reacted with shock and titters of disapproval as Patel struggled to regain his composure. Caught in the spotlight, Patel’s comment exemplifies the ways in which immigrants both preserve and pervert notions of belonging. For those immigrants who organized this public event, identity is staged as a coherent national and cultural construct. Cultural identities came to life through Bollywood songs and dances, a Hindu-centric iconography, and the colloquial use of Hindi. These acts of cultural preservation reproduced a homogeneous ideal of nationhood – that is, one constituted through dominant religious, ethnic and linguistic ideas of what it means to be “Indian”. Yet for the contestants as well as their supporters in the audience, the pageant perversely generated another notion of identity, one that enabled them to think of themselves as “Americans”. They viewed the pageant as a universal rite of passage that accounted for their racial difference and showcased a middle-class immigrant group. Perversely still, such claims to racialized citizenship were articulated through the gendered idiom of Indian popular culture.

Who won the pageant quickly became secondary to the question of what it meant to be Miss India USA. For the judges – a motley collection of Indian embassy officials and Hollywood casting agents – the title crown was reserved for those women who preserved an idea of India cast as Hindu and Hindi-speaking. For audience members from Fiji and Africa, and for those who belonged to religious and linguistic minorities in India, the notion of a single “Indian culture” was itself perverse. As for the contestants, who juggled multiple demands from the organizers and audience members, performing onstage illustrated their agency as diasporic subjects of the Indian state and as ethnic minorities in the United States. What drew together this disparate assemblage of immigrants was not a shared belief in “culture” or “tradition”, but a collective investment in producing community, one that sustained an upwardly mobile narrative of South Asians in the United States.

The contentious relationship between “preserving” and “perverting” culture at this public event brought to the foreground how the production of diasporic community is not simply a question of ethnic identity: instead, it is a problem of locality. Locality is the means through which first- and second-generation immigrants, of varying regional, religious, and linguistic backgrounds, come to experience what it means to *belong*. In critical race and ethnic studies, belonging is commonly articulated through claims to place that are characterized by generational divides. Within this framework, first-generation immigrants from India may readily identify as “Indian”, whereas their second-generation offspring claim to be “American”. The transition from one place to another is represented through narratives of ethnic adaptation and assimilation, or captured by the formation of new ethnic identities (such as *desi*, a Hindustani term meaning “of the homeland”/*des*). However, each of these constructs of ethnic identity reverts to a clearly demarcated geographical site, whether a “homeland” on the subcontinent or the United States. Such claims to place fail to capture the affective experience of creating trans-national communities across differences of generation, national origin, religion and language. Locality exceeds nationalist frameworks of belonging by exploring how the affective experience of migration produces new forms of race- and class-based community. For those diasporic subjects who come to understand themselves as immigrants and as middle class through the experience of living in the United States, locality engenders the production of South Asian communities.

## I. Locality and/as Belonging

Locality is a phenomenology of belonging that operates as a category of subjectivity as well as a means of establishing community. In *Modernity at Large*, the anthropologist Arjun Appadurai defines locality as a ‘structure of feeling, a property of social life, and an ideology of situated community’.<sup>2</sup> As a structure of feeling, locality is the practice of establishing relations of affinity with those seen as similar to oneself, often through a series of shared experiences and rituals. Locality is also embodied as a property of social life, one that is central to making identity and community visible and distinct. Because locality operates as an ideology of community, it does not specify the geographical boundaries of group identity. Instead, locality acquires a phenomenological quality that is ‘relational and contextual rather than scalar or spatial’.<sup>3</sup>

Moving away from quantitative assessments of immigrant groups in discrete geographic locales, locality signals a shift toward the affective nature of establishing identity in a diverse range of sites, including domestic, public and virtual spaces. For many immigrants, the production of locality is a means of transforming lived space into the place of home(land). However, the forms of belonging that emerge from the production of locality are distinct from claims to countries of origin. Immigrants identify as South Asian because of their experiences as racial minorities in the United States, rather than in relation to citizens of nation states in South Asia. The experience of being South Asian is fundamentally about localizing transnational ideologies of class and race, for immigrants who take on the project of producing locality find themselves struggling against the authority of the state and its requirement of national allegiance. Locality is therefore integral to processes of globalization, for it elucidates how communities are generated through the interplay between local racial formations and global movements of capital. Yet the fact that locality must be repetitively embodied, across multiple sites, makes it an ‘inherently fragile achievement’<sup>4</sup> that is liable to repetition, degeneration, or erasure.

For many subcontinental immigrants, locality is embodied through the production and consumption of popular culture: through reading literature and watching films made by other South Asians; performing at and attending cultural events; and participating in online forums. These everyday practices of identifying with other immigrants – a process that



requires negotiating differences of language, caste and region – lay the groundwork for formations of diasporic community. In this sense locality is distinct from theories of cultural citizenship that subject immigrants to the regime of the state.<sup>5</sup> Viewed through the parameters of citizenship, subcontinental immigrants are identified by (and identify primarily through) nation- and faith-based constructs of identity as Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi or Sri Lankan; as Muslim, Hindu, Christian, Buddhist or Sikh. By contrast, locality outlines the affective conditions through which immigrants create subjectivity and community based on a shared experience, in this case an experience of migration. These new forms of community require negotiating certain forms of difference (such as national origin, religious faith or language) and reproducing others (such as class). As such, the production of locality is also complicit in reinforcing class-based notions of nationhood. Immigrants come to identify as South Asian within domestic frameworks of race and ethnicity in the United States, as well as in relation to neoliberal formations of citizenship in South Asia. The troubling elisions incurred in the production of locality highlight how it can be a profoundly generative experience of belonging for some immigrants but not for others. These elisions also alert us to the ways in which locality can itself be “perverted”, often productively, by those who are otherwise excluded from dominant representations of what it means to be South Asian.

[...] I examine literary, visual and performative texts created by and about middle-class South Asians, whose educational achievements and material wealth are frequently glossed as the ‘solution’ to America’s racial problems.<sup>6</sup> Representations of middle-class immigrants circulate widely in mainstream US public culture in the works of writers such as Jhumpa Lahiri and filmmakers such as Mira Nair, at art festivals and Broadway shows, on television and in online communities. These upwardly mobile stories of scientists, entrepreneurs and engineers come to stand in for what it means to be South Asian despite the increasing numbers of working-class and undocumented immigrants from the subcontinent. Such popular cultural texts are frequently critiqued for their assimilationist representations of a heterogeneous immigrant group. These texts also contribute toward the erosion of working-class narratives of migration as well as the reification of patrilineal and masculinist notions of middle-class mobility. However, shifting our attention away from how these texts represent immigrant identity and toward questions of how such texts are consumed for the production of locality highlights the affective and material practices through

which immigrants become South Asian. The circulation and consumption of South Asian popular culture generate narratives of race and class that bind together a fragile coalition of immigrants who are otherwise divided by generation, national origin, religion and language.

Because these popular cultural texts are produced and consumed within a domestic racial framework, the experience of being middle class means that South Asians are simultaneously aware of their position as minorities in the United States while also complicit in embodying multicultural ideologies of nationhood. These public discourses of multiculturalism range from the well-worn paradigm of the “melting pot” or “salad bowl” that portrays immigration as a voluntary act, to more recent neoliberal formulations that produce highly differentiated ethnic, religious and sexual communities, coded as “colour-blind” or “post-racial”.<sup>7</sup> Both pluralist and neoliberal forms of multiculturalism are a means of managing racial and class difference within the state, even though the rhetoric of a “colour-blind” society purports to move beyond race. Across these diverse rhetorics of multiculturalism, the emphasis on individual “choice” is particularly appealing to immigrants who, as bourgeois subjects in their countries of origin, are familiar with the prospect of full citizenship. Such enabling fictions contrast with the heightened racial surveillance of immigrant groups, particularly Sikhs and Muslims, after 11 September 2001. Yet for middle-class South Asians, multiculturalism continues to be the principal framework through which to advance their claims to being American. Multiculturalism is experienced not as an abstract legal formation but as a rhetoric of subjecthood, one that remains compelling even as many subcontinental immigrants are deliberately and consistently excluded from visions of universal citizenship. The flexible operation of multiculturalism and its alliance with narratives of upward mobility reveal unexpected linkages between domestic ideologies of nationhood and transnational practices of citizenship. As Viet Thanh Nguyen writes, ‘Compliance and accommodation are flexible strategies that were and remain important political choices for Asian Americans that are overlooked by assumptions about Asian American identity as being inherently, or desirably, oppositional’ (emphasis in original).<sup>8</sup>

However, whereas Nguyen explores the ramifications of Asian American capital accumulation within the domestic paradigm of US race relations, I explore how the embodiment of class mobility by South Asians is intimately linked to postcolonial formations of citizenship in South

Asia. In the early twenty-first century, middle-class immigrants experience postcoloniality as an exceptional state of citizenship. More than a decade after the institution of market reforms on the subcontinent, the emergence of neoliberal ideologies of statehood in India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh has transformed what it means to be a citizen.<sup>9</sup> For elite diasporic subjects, access to state power in South Asia is established through modes of transnational capital accumulation and consumption. In turn, these same middle-class immigrants are routinely recruited into the expansive public sphere of the postcolonial state. Such “exceptional” immigrants can claim privileges (in terms of rights to property) that are not afforded to citizens on the subcontinent.<sup>10</sup> Many immigrants also deploy their capital investments to advocate for political change in their countries of origin. Such diasporic political movements fundamentally refashion the spatial and temporal distance between the postcolonial citizen and the immigrant.<sup>11</sup> Equally important, however, are the ways in which the circulation of neoliberal ideologies of citizenship transforms the formation of communities in diaspora. While subcontinental immigrants in the United States may retain regional- or faith-based categories of identity (as Tamil or Punjabi, Hindu or Muslim), the proliferation of market-based notions of individual autonomy also means that immigrants can identify with each other through a shared experience of class as South Asians. Class mobility thus becomes crucial to the production of locality, for it is through a gendered (primarily male and bourgeois) experience of class that immigrants negotiate the difference between postcolonial and multicultural citizenship.

Locality challenges the ways in which we think through racial identities in the United States. By moving away from the representational politics of ethnicity and toward the affective experience of class mobility, locality takes seriously the intimate and often vexed relationship between domestic racial formations and global structures of capital. It also highlights the compelling power of state-sponsored nationalisms, experienced as ideologies of multicultural belonging and as neoliberal constructs of postcolonial citizenship. Middle-class immigrants do not reject multiculturalism as a dominant ideology of subject formation (identifying as South Asian *instead* of as American). Rather, they identify as South Asian *because* they desire to be American. Such intense feelings of belonging are often misrecognized as narratives that codify South Asians into a “model minority”. What these experiences reveal, instead, are the ways in which diasporic identities and communities are produced in relation to nationalist ideologies of the state

inasmuch as they are embodied as a response or retaliation to state power. Understanding the production of locality demands that we consider not only the ways that immigrants embody racial difference within the state: more important, it requires that we also understand how diasporic subjects locate themselves within multicultural and postcolonial constructs of nationhood.

Examining South Asian localities thus necessitates an alternative method of analyzing diasporic subject formation, one that is equally attentive to the rhetoric of community formation and its embodied practice. Because South Asian identities and communities are forged through a diverse set of experiences, across differences of religion, gender and sexuality, I draw upon an equally diverse set of methodological tools. Drawing upon ethnographic practices of participant observation, I explore how becoming South Asian is an everyday practice of belonging among specific communities of immigrants: across first-generation professionals and second-generation political activists, on the East and West coasts, among queer and straight immigrants, as well as between Muslims, Sikhs and Hindus. Locality is expressed in the series of affinities that I generate between immigrant subjects, the popular culture that they create and consume, and my own intervention as participant and audience member at public events. But such affective relations of identity are also expressed through writing and performance, and so I also analyze literary texts as rhetorical acts of producing community. Drawing upon popular fiction and film made by South Asians, I examine how these texts are rendered as quintessentially “American” stories of ethnic assimilation. By historicizing these same narratives in relation to the politics of modern South Asia, I demonstrate how these fictional and cinematic works also tell stories about a diasporic community that is shaped by memories of the 1947 Partition of the subcontinent, recollections of nationalist movements for Bangladeshi independence, and participation in Hindu-Muslim communal riots.

[...]

## II. South Asians in Asian American Studies

Theorizing locality requires expanding the historical and geographical scope of Asian American studies, since the political history of South Asia and the class-based migrations of South Asians are uneasily situated within the epistemology of the field. Asian American studies is commonly narrated

as a community-based movement for racial equality that emerged out of decolonization in the third world (in particular, the war in Vietnam). Yet the impact of South Asian anticolonial nationalism on Asian American politics is rarely discussed, even though these same movements against British imperialism shaped the broader context of the US civil rights movement.<sup>12</sup>

The absence of subcontinental immigrants from this early history of the field is also central to the racial dissonance embodied by South Asians. Although more recent scholarship in the field represents first- and second-generation South Asians as examples of Asian American activism, these works remain oriented toward correcting an original absence. While studies of South Asian American literature and culture expand the representational claims of Asian American studies, they also retain an additive model of critical discourse.<sup>13</sup> Within this context, South Asians are represented as one more ethnic group that is “like” other Asian Americans, despite the divergent histories of race, class and empire that characterize immigrants from Asia.

Because such representational politics inadequately capture the specific processes of what it means to be South Asian, locality provides a more capacious means of attending to the phenomenology of racialized experience. As postcolonial subjects, South Asians embody a history of empire that remains outside the purview of Asian American studies, even as scholars increasingly attend to the expansive scale of the US empire in East Asia as well as in the Pacific Rim.<sup>14</sup> As ethnic minorities, the ways in which South Asians are gendered and racialized in the United States diverge from established perspectives on East and Southeast Asian immigrants.<sup>15</sup> Although scholars across the humanities and the social sciences have vigorously debated the relationship between the domestic and the diasporic as sites for the production of Asian American subjectivity, with few exceptions these debates have not taken into account the specificity of South Asian diasporic history, culture and politics.<sup>16</sup>

Reorienting the purview of Asian American studies westward toward the subcontinent requires thinking through the unexpected relation between frameworks of racial politics in the United States and formations of postcolonial nationhood in South Asia: a relationship that comes to the forefront in the localizing practices of South Asians. As racial minorities who also participate in neoliberal politics on the subcontinent, middle-class South Asians demonstrate the conflation and overlap between distinct narratives of nationhood. The ties that bind these two narratives

of belonging are not immediately visible, for unlike immigrants from Southeast and East Asia whose lives are directly impacted by US imperialism in the region, there is no visible history that tethers the United States to the subcontinent. Instead it is a complex narrative, one that is triangulated through the legacy of British colonialism on the subcontinent. As the historian Antoinette Burton suggests, the cultural practices of South Asian immigrants facilitate ‘American identification with and disavowal of the British imperial legacy’.<sup>17</sup> These real and imagined relationships between the United States and South Asia emerge in the domain of South Asian popular culture, which powerfully reshapes the topography of Asian America.

In *Immigrant Acts*, Lisa Lowe examines a series of Asian American aesthetic texts – literature, visual art, cultural festivals and theatre – that critically engage with US race and ethnic politics. Although Lowe focuses on cultural texts, her readings resist assimilation into the aesthetic of multiculturalism. Instead, she argues that Asian American popular culture functions as a site of ‘minority cultural production’ that produces ‘effects of dissonance, fragmentation, and irresolution’ within canonized forms of national culture.<sup>18</sup> By highlighting the legislative and material processes through which Asian immigrants are racialized by the US state, Lowe reveals the contradictions inherent in universal notions of US citizenship. Her readings of Asian American literature and performance leads her to contend that ‘the contradictory history of Asian Americans produces cultural forms that are materially and aesthetically at odds with the resolution of the citizen to the nation’.<sup>19</sup> The Asian immigrant, at once intrinsic to and excluded from the US state, emerges in Lowe’s readings as an oppositional figure who contests multicultural discourses of citizenship.

My reading of literary and ethnographic texts draws upon Lowe’s foundational work but differs in two important aspects. First, I argue that South Asians are racialized as minority subjects through their engagement with US as well as subcontinental nationalisms. Second, instead of operating as a site of critique, South Asian diasporic popular culture is aligned with dominant discourses of multicultural citizenship. Popular fiction and film created by South Asian immigrants almost invariably reproduce middle-class narratives of migration, despite the heterogeneous experiences that characterize subcontinental immigrants. Likewise, at the public events I attended, middle-class immigrants of diverse national and regional origins on the subcontinent collaborated to embody unitary notions of “tradition” and “culture”. South Asian communities emerge

through this erosion of national, religious and class difference, a process that is intensified by the assimilative tendencies of multiculturalism.

To propose that South Asian localities are shaped through the discourse of multiculturalism is also to acknowledge that resistance – so central to theorizing Asian American subjectivity – is an insufficient mode of understanding racial formation. For scholars in the field, “resistance” also operates as a powerful phenomenology of belonging, one that is central to the epistemic conditions of critical race and ethnic studies. Resistance frames the discursive claims made by Asian American studies within an antiracist and anticapitalist politics; it is also symptomatic of our collective commitment to theories of social justice. What this has meant in practice, however, is that Asian American popular culture is consistently framed as a site of oppositional politics.<sup>20</sup> Producing such narratives of opposition to the state constrains the ways in which we understand the dynamic production, consumption and circulation of popular culture, particularly when the state and its ideologies of race, gender and sexuality shape the form (if not the content) of these cultural texts.

These genealogies of racial resistance and models of ethnic community formation shape a number of works on South Asian immigrants in the United States. In their introduction to a special issue of *Amerasia Journal* titled ‘Satyagraha in America’, the editors Biju Mathew and Vijay Prashad advocate the critical perspectives afforded by South Asian immigrants, in particular by the ‘children of 1965’.<sup>21</sup> Framing domestic movements for racial equality in the spirit of Gandhi’s anti-imperialist call for satyagraha or “truth-force”, Prashad and Mathew view South Asian youth as racialized subjects and diasporic popular culture as a domain of progressive politics. More important, the volume established a model of activism for scholars of South Asian American studies.

In the decade since the publication of Mathew and Prashad’s volume, scholarship on South Asian Americans has evolved from an emergent field of research into an established domain of cultural criticism. However, in the humanities, research on South Asian diasporas continues to be defined by arguments for racial, gender and sexual subjectivities that reject, rather than reproduce, dominant formations of US citizenship. For example, in her book *Impossible Desires*, Gayatri Gopinath employs a queer diasporic reading of South Asian popular culture. By reading literature and film produced by South Asian immigrants as queer texts, Gopinath rejects the primacy of nationalism as an ideology of diasporic selfhood and community.<sup>22</sup> While I

share Gopinath’s concern with deconstructing the hierarchical relationship between nationstate and diaspora, our archives of popular culture are diametrically opposed. Instead of emphasizing queer diasporic cultural texts, I focus precisely on those bearers of heteronormative patriarchy who make it “impossible” to occupy minority subject-positions. This is the cultural archive of the US immigrant bourgeoisie, whose literary, cinematic and ethnographic texts consolidate representations of South Asians as an upwardly mobile, assimilated group. Working from the centre of popular culture rather than from its margins, I examine the ways in which middle-class immigrants re-embody dominant constructs of ethnicity and nationhood. One of my objectives is to understand how South Asian immigrants continue to circulate and consume heteronormative narratives of belonging, despite the visibility and centrality of queer diasporic cultural production.

In the social sciences, an oppositional politics of ethnicity likewise remains integral to research on South Asian immigration. Writing against quantitative studies of ethnic assimilation published in the 1970s and 1980s, recent scholarship has emphasized how South Asians are integral to movements for social change.<sup>23</sup> Focusing on youth cultures, working-class immigrants and minority religious groups, scholars such as Sunaina Maira, Shalini Shankar, and Nitasha Sharma have positioned South Asian immigrants as resistant subjects. Their ethnographic work highlights the unequal relations of power between working-class and undocumented immigrants, and middle- and upper-class professionals.<sup>24</sup> Together, these works also emphasize how new ethnic identities (such as *desi*) exceed pluralist narratives of multiculturalism. From this perspective, to be South Asian is to reject liberal ideologies of US nationhood, even though the stakes of refusing to participate in the nation have distinct consequences for different groups of South Asians.

Positioning South Asians in opposition to dominant modalities of citizenship limits the ways in which we can understand how ideologies of multiculturalism and neoliberal state formation shape practices of belonging. In literary criticism as well as in the social sciences, the turn away from popular narratives of multiculturalism has resulted in a narrowed scope for South Asian American studies. Despite the strength of its interdisciplinary interventions, over the past decade the field has been increasingly characterized by its reliance on “good” and “bad” subjects of immigration.<sup>25</sup> The “good” subjects (those who embody resistant

racial, gender, sexual or class subjectivities) are positioned against and in relation to “bad” subjects who conform to the status quo (male immigrant bourgeoisie, Hindu right-wing nationalists). South Asian American studies is defined by this binary logic, within which the “good” subjects of immigration operate as models of collective struggle against a neoliberal state. The forms of solidarity that are enunciated through this process generate a teleological narrative of progressive politics within which minority subjects resist assimilation to the United States.

By contrast, the immigrants that I interview and the literary and cinematic texts I study do not necessarily express a resistant ideology of race and citizenship. Nor does my analysis coalesce into a coherent narrative of struggle, one that culminates in the expression of a solidarity-based politics. Instead, the ways in which middle-class immigrants embody locality reveal how South Asian communities accede to hegemonic ideologies of belonging. Rather than distinguish between a “dissenting” citizenship and a “complicit” citizenship, I argue that the formation of South Asian communities is immersed in multicultural as well as neoliberal notions of nationhood.<sup>26</sup>

The production of locality requires that we engage with multivalent narratives of identity and community, some of which converge with dominant notions of what it means to be American. In this regard, “South Asian” is itself an interpellative term, one that brings into being the very communities that I study. For first- and second-generation immigrants who disidentify with pluralist narratives of multiculturalism, identifying as South Asian may engender an oppositional politics, creating forms of transnational community outside the domain of the state. Yet for those who identify strongly with the promise of full citizenship in America, such affective relations to place may engender partial identifications or misidentifications with regimes of ethnic pluralism. In both instances, disidentification does not operate as a form of disavowal, but rather as a re-engagement with dominant structures of race and citizenship.<sup>27</sup>

[...]

### III. Genealogies of Locality

The term “South Asian” has been widely used by students and academics since the 1990s to refer to immigrants from across the subcontinent: Bangladesh, India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, and to a lesser extent, Nepal

and Afghanistan. On university campuses across the United States, South Asian student associations aim to be pan-regional and pan-religious, and remain predominantly middle class. Importantly, these associations do not necessarily claim to be secular, for South Asian student associations tend to organize around Hindu religious festivities and cultural events. In a different political register, the term “South Asian” is frequently claimed by progressive activists who work to advance the legal status of subcontinental immigrants in the United States: these include antiracist coalitions, labour unions, domestic-violence prevention groups, and gay and lesbian social networks.<sup>28</sup> Many of these groups point to the broad geographical distribution of their membership in terms of national origin, as well as the services they provide for members from various linguistic backgrounds and religious faiths.

The activist Naheed Islam warns us, however, that identifying as South Asian in the United States elides differences between and within countries on the subcontinent. By focusing predominantly on the history, culture and politics of India, many South Asian groups marginalize Muslim communities within India, as well as the Islamic states of Pakistan and Bangladesh (and often ignore altogether minority Buddhist, Christian and Jain communities). Islam writes against universalizing experiences of immigration, for while migration can enable new political solidarities, it can also reinscribe hegemonic relations of power between individuals from the subcontinent.<sup>29</sup> The new solidarities that are forged through immigrant experience reveal how identifying as South Asian is not necessarily the same as identifying with South Asia, the region or its people. Becoming South Asian is a form of locality that is produced through ideologies of racial and class mobility in the United States. In contrast, South Asia is a geographical construct produced through the long history of colonial and postcolonial nationalist movements on the subcontinent, and an academic field of study that emerged in tandem with US foreign policy during the cold war.<sup>30</sup> Translating the uses of “South Asian” as a class-based experience of migration in relation to the geopolitical construct of the subcontinent highlights the limitations of transnational claims to citizenship.

Given the diverse regional, religious and national origins of immigrants, “South Asian” is one of many terms of ethnic identity that has circulated among subcontinental immigrants in the United States. The sociologist Monisha Das Gupta has persuasively argued that since the late nineteenth century, working-class and middle-class immigrants from India,



Pakistan and Bangladesh have struggled to occupy legible racial constructs and in turn produce ethnic identities for themselves. Whether as “Caucasian”, “Asian Indian”, “Asian American” or “Muslim”, racial categorization for South Asian immigrants has operated as a disciplinary apparatus of legality and as flexible constructs of identity. Moreover, these shifting constructs of race elucidate how different generations of South Asian immigrants understand their locality in the United States, as well as in relation to political movements in South Asia. From early twentieth-century Punjabi Sikh immigrants who were mistakenly labelled “Hindoo”, to middle-class professionals who petitioned to be categorized as “Asian Indian” in the 1980 census, to immigrants who are (mis)recognized as “Muslim” after 2001, the crooked lines of South Asian racialization generate a nonlinear narrative of locality. Delineating the ways in which subcontinental immigrants are incorporated into and ejected from legal formations of race-based citizenship demonstrates how notions of belonging are split across class, gender, sexuality, religion and national origin.

The popular history of South Asian immigration originates with Punjabi Sikhs, Hindus and Muslims who migrated as farmworkers to the West Coast in the early twentieth century. Many Punjabis married Mexican women (who were also racialized as “brown”), and their families became central to the growth of agricultural industries in northern and central California.<sup>31</sup> During this period, the landmark case of *United States v. Bhagat Singh Thind* (1923) legislated South Asian immigrants as non-white, thereby limiting property ownership and rights to citizenship for subcontinental migrants. Scholars of Asian American studies frequently cite *Thind* as an early example of Asian immigrant racialization by the US state.<sup>32</sup> However, the specific case of *Thind* is also compounded by the fact that Indian immigrants were colonial subjects of Britain for the first half of the twentieth century. Thus the claims to US citizenship made in *Thind* cannot be considered in isolation from simultaneous claims to British citizenship made by other South Asian immigrants to North America, in particular those Sikhs who migrated to Canada on the *Komagata Maru* in 1914. The *Komagata Maru* was a chartered ship that steamed from Punjab to Vancouver via Hong Kong and Japan, a voyage that directly challenged Canadian immigration policy, which required that immigrants make a “continuous journey” from their country of origin. The policy effectively barred migrants from the Indian subcontinent, even though Indians, like Canadians, were also British subjects. When

the *Komagata Maru* was banned from anchoring in Vancouver and its passengers were refused entry to Canada, the ship’s journey became testament to the unequal claims to citizenship embodied by imperial subjects. Upon its return to Calcutta, British police detained the *Komagata Maru* for fear of political violence. As a consequence of these events, many of the ship’s passengers later became leaders of the transnational Ghadar movement against colonial rule.<sup>33</sup> The *Komagata Maru* episode emphasizes how imperial discourses of racial difference intersect with race-based claims to citizenship. Viewed within a broader North American context, linking the history of the *Komagata Maru* to *Thind* reframes South Asians as simultaneously colonial subjects and racialized immigrants.

These early histories of migration feature prominently in contemporary South Asian popular culture. Films about the *Komagata Maru* as well as artwork depicting early Punjabi immigration to California cross over from art festivals in Canada to the United States, and then from the US East to West coasts. Such cultural texts are central to forging a common sense of South Asian locality between artists and audience members at the festival sites. However, the commodification of early South Asian immigrant histories through the exhibition of films and artwork also generates a homogeneous history of migration, one that is claimed at the festivals by second-generation South Asians of various religious, national and class backgrounds. Even as young immigrants collaborate with each other to produce a common history of South Asian ethnicity, their consumption of these aesthetic texts eclipses the structural differences between British imperial migration to North America, early twentieth-century Punjabi immigration to California, and the migration of professionals to the United States in the mid-to-late twentieth century.

In 1965 the reform of the Immigration and Nationality Act marked a break from earlier histories of South Asian migration and initiated the first wave of professionally trained immigrants from the subcontinent. Also known as the Hart-Celler Act, the Immigration and Nationality Act abolished quotas based on national origin. The Hart-Celler Act was central to the advancement of science and technology industries during the cold war, as the US state incorporated the knowledge and labour of South Asian doctors, engineers and scientists. Many middle-class immigrants struggled with identifying their place within US racial formations, for ‘in India they had been the beneficiaries of full citizenship on account of their class, caste, and in some cases, male privilege’.<sup>34</sup> Unlike immigrant activists in the

early twentieth century who advanced race-based claims to US citizenship, however, this new group of immigrants advocated for citizenship on the basis of ethnicity. Some groups of middle-class immigrants worked to redefine their racial categorization on the US census as non-white, or “Asian Indians” in order to gain civil rights provisions and full citizenship. At the same time, this wave of immigration established a popular narrative of South Asians as an upwardly mobile and assimilated ethnic group, whose educational and economic achievements made them a so-called model minority.<sup>35</sup>

Such representations of upwardly mobile male immigrants predominate in the works of Jhumpa Lahiri, which I discuss in my study. However, reading Lahiri’s fiction as merely a story of becoming American limits the ways in which we can understand how post-1965 immigrants continue to participate in nationalist movements on the subcontinent at the same time that they inhabit racialized notions of US citizenship. Even as Lahiri’s middle-class protagonists acclimate to living in America, that very notion of belonging is often shaped through their actual and remote participation in events such as the 1971 Bangladeshi War of Independence, which in turn invokes memories of the 1947 Partition of the subcontinent and the 1905 colonial partition of Bengal. Prioritizing political events in South Asia that mark the everyday lives of immigrants in America enables us to reconceptualize narratives of ethnic assimilation as a practice of localizing postcolonial history.

More recent waves of immigration from the subcontinent demand a different analytic perspective, one that is necessitated by the changing demographic of South Asian communities. Between 1990 and 2000 the population of South Asians (both foreign- and US-born) more than doubled, and certain communities, such as Bangladeshis, tripled in number. Indian Americans continue to be the largest group of immigrants from the subcontinent and constitute the third-largest Asian immigrant group in the United States, after Chinese Americans and Filipino Americans.<sup>36</sup> The class composition of South Asian communities also shifted significantly. Family reunification provisions and green card sponsorship, as well as the influx of undocumented immigrants, have created large working-class populations of South Asians in the service industry and manufacturing sectors. Immigration has been amplified by neoliberal economic policies in Bangladesh and India, which have created new job opportunities on the subcontinent and destroyed others.<sup>37</sup> These demographic shifts demonstrate

the difficulty of identifying as South Asian in the early twenty-first century, particularly across differences of religion, national origin, class and language. [...] I consider several documentary films such as *Knowing Her Place* (1990) and *Calcutta Calling* (2004) that demonstrate the irregular production of South Asian locality, especially when alternative constructs of community – such as being working class, Muslim or mixed race – take precedence.

Any contemporary examination of South Asian identity and community necessarily contends with the altered racial and political landscape of the United States after 11 September 2001, particularly in terms of its implications for Muslim South Asians, as well as those immigrants who are misrecognized as Arab or Muslim, including Hindus, Christians and Sikhs.<sup>38</sup> The legal scholar Muneer Ahmad argues, “The events of September 11 have proven the attempt of Arab and South Asian elites to escape the debasement of race by way of class to be the impossibility that those in the working class have always known it to be.”<sup>39</sup> As racial profiling impacts all classes of South Asian immigrants (though it does not affect all classes equally), Ahmad discusses how South Asians come to be identified as terrorists, informants and non-Americans. [In my study] I examine the difficult locality of Muslim, Sikh and queer immigrants through an ethnographic reading of the Broadway musical *Bombay Dreams* (2004). I discuss how the portrayal of a “secular” and “modern” India in the musical relies on the hypervisibility and subsequent invisibility of Muslim, Sikh and queer characters onstage, a narrative that is amplified by the concurrent erasure of Muslim Americans offstage. Because the musical was incorporated as entertainment programming for the 2004 Republican National Convention (RNC), I also discuss *Bombay Dreams* as a spectacular performance of US nationalism. *Bombay Dreams* was staged in New York City just one year after the institution of Special Registration procedures that mandated the surveillance of immigrant men from Pakistan and Afghanistan, among other countries. For those RNC attendees who supported Special Registration and other legislative acts to keep Americans “safe and secure”, the nationalist narrative that shaped *Bombay Dreams* was uncannily similar to their own representation of America.

The locality of Muslim immigrants demands our continued analysis as US imperialisms are renewed, even in a so-called post-racial age. [...] I situate 11 September 2001 as one nodal point in the broader historical framework of immigration from the subcontinent. The aftermath of the

attacks has had intensive legal ramifications for South Asians who are racially profiled, detained and deported, and for prospective immigrants who apply for travel, work and student visas, as well as permanent residency. To focus singularly on the ways in which this historical event reshapes racial and religious identities, however, limits our understanding of how multiculturalism works to incorporate and eclipse other forms of difference. This is particularly important in the current political moment, in which religious difference invites both intellectual consideration and social panic. In my ethnographic and literary readings I emphasize how locality is not contingent on a single historical event, but is produced in relation to a shifting set of political and social structures in the United States as well as on the subcontinent. Such a transnational perspective enables us to understand how immigrants creatively deploy neoliberal structures of class mobility in South Asia in order to inhabit their identities in the United States. That middle-class immigrants claim to be American even as working-class and Muslim immigrants are denied rights in the United States highlights how differential relations of power are reproduced and eclipsed within diasporic communities in the name of becoming “South Asian”.

#### IV. Sites of Production

The cultural texts at the core of this book were created by first- and second-generation South Asian immigrants between 1999 and 2009, a period marked by the rapid expansion of race-based claims to citizenship in the United States and class-based ideologies of citizenship in South Asia. Over the course of the decade, the imperialist claims made by US foreign policy in South Asia and the Middle East were manifest domestically through the violent rhetoric around immigrants from these regions, particularly working-class, non-English-speaking and undocumented immigrants. Yet even within this charged racial context, cultural commodities from South Asia such as music and fashion have garnered a wide following, and South Asian actors, including many Muslim South Asians, have gained prominence in the mass media.<sup>40</sup>

Such commoditized representations of South Asians as an upwardly mobile immigrant group are codified further in US political culture. The elections of Bobby Jindal and Nikki Haley, both second-generation Indian immigrants, as Republican governors of Louisiana (2008-2016) and South Carolina (2011-2017), respectively, demonstrated how the difference of race

continues to be absolved into universal ideologies of American citizenship. Whereas for Haley and Jindal their victories exemplified a “post-racial” moment in American politics, the very exceptionalism of their election demands our renewed attention to multiculturalism as a flexible discourse of nationhood that manages race, religious and class difference.

The primacy of class mobility as a vehicle for “universal” citizenship also resonates in South Asia during the same period. Economic and social “reforms” instituted in India and Bangladesh in the 1990s under the directive of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund generated neoliberal notions of citizenship, which in turn became central to the expansion of a middle-class consumer citizenry. The citizen-consumer has become the paradigmatic face of popular culture in South Asia, particularly in commercial Hindi (or Bollywood) films, as well as in music and television.<sup>41</sup> At the same time, in response to economic liberalization, a series of riots, protests and terrorist attacks in South Asia actively contested the relation between state sovereignty and minority ethnic, religious and linguistic groups. A major site of rupture between the Indian nationstate and its citizen-public was the Hindu-Muslim riots in Bombay in 1992 and Gujarat in 2002, both of which codified the dominance of Hindu nationalism in India despite its post-Independence secular constitution. Similarly in Pakistan, the 2008 terrorist attacks in Islamabad and sporadic assassinations of political figures reflect the rise of Islamist movements, but also highlight class divides between those who are the beneficiaries of global capital accumulation and those who are not. These contentious events are often interpreted as a threat to modernization in South Asia and operate as a pretext for more intimate relations of global capital (via foreign aid and weapons transfers agreements) that bind together South Asia with the United States. South Asian immigrant groups are central to this process, both for their remittance of funds toward state security and reconstruction and for their personal investments in reproducing ideologies of what it means to be secular and modern.

Situating contemporary South Asian popular culture within this broader geographical context illuminates how the ties that bind South Asia to the United States are triangulated through the legacy of British imperialism, the rising power of the US military, and the increasingly neoliberal orientations of the United States and nation states in South Asia. Such political convergences highlight the ways in which the postcolonial

history of the subcontinent is never far from the formation of South Asian identities and communities in America. As immigrants, South Asians become ethnic subjects through pluralist discourses of multiculturalism that codify their religious and racial difference. As diasporic subjects, South Asians participate in postcolonial constructs of nationhood on the subcontinent in ways that inflect their racialized and classed locations in the United States. Both these frameworks of national belonging are embedded in global movements of class and capital, and yet their claims to locality take distinct forms. The ways in which immigrants work to coherently embody these two distinct narrative frameworks – and when they fail to do so – constitute the process of becoming South Asian.

[...]

For those subcontinental immigrants who create and participate in these literary, visual and performative texts, South Asia comes ever closer to America. The convergence between postcolonial notions of nationhood and multicultural ideologies of race defines each of these sites of cultural production. Collectively these texts advance a popular narrative of South Asians as an upwardly mobile immigrant group. Unravelling these dominant representations of race and class thus requires attending to the phenomenological qualities of locality as an emplaced architecture of feeling, differentially embodied by a heterogenous group of immigrants. The work of producing locality illustrates the continued allure of multiculturalisms, which operates across these texts as a means of inhabiting race- and class-based claims to America.

While South Asians continue to invest in nationalist discourses of belonging, the promise of full citizenship remains elusive. Particularly for those immigrants who are minoritized by national origin, class, gender, sexuality and religious faith, the difficulty of identifying as South Asian elucidates how locality remains liable to repetition and failure. By opening out a range of cultural texts to an unconventional strategy of reading, one that prioritizes the relationship between filmmaker and viewer, between author and reader, and between performer and audience, my study shows how the uneven embodiment of locality by South Asians “preserves” and “perverts” normative frameworks of ethnicity in the United States.

[...] Yet the fact that I frequently feel out of place within the forms of community engendered by these popular texts demonstrates how being

“South Asian” can never be a universal experience. Instead, South Asian diasporic communities remain intimately linked to dominant ideologies of national origin and class, gender and sexuality. Untangling the relationship between narratives of racialization and experiences of identification requires not only that I disidentify with the communities that I study, but equally important, that I continue to position myself (contingently and somewhat unsuccessfully) within sites of South Asian cultural production. By delineating non-linear paths of belonging, I locate not only my own entry point into the world of South Asian diasporic popular cultures, but also the ways that readers, viewers and audience members enter these texts unexpectedly. □

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*This essay is excerpted from Bakirathi Mani, Aspiring to Home: South Asians in America (Stanford University Press, 2012), Introduction, pp. 1-29.*

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## Notes

1. On how Asian American beauty pageants promote idealized representations of immigrant communities, see Rebecca Chiyoko King-O’Riain, *Pure Beauty: Judging Race in Japanese American Beauty Pageants* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006).
2. Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: The Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 189.
3. *ibid.*, p. 178.
4. *ibid.*, p. 179.
5. Theories of cultural citizenship have had a widespread impact on ethnographic studies of race and ethnicity. See Aihwa Ong, ‘Cultural Citizenship as Subject-Making: Immigrants Negotiate Racial and Cultural Boundaries in the United States’ in *Cultural Anthropology*, Vol. 37, No. 5 (1996), pp. 737-62; Lok C.D. Siu, *Memories of a Future Home: Diasporic Citizenship of Chinese in Panama* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005); and Sunaina Marr Maira, *Missing: Youth Citizenship and Empire after 9/11* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009).
6. On how middle-class South Asians are represented as the “solution” to US race relations, particularly in relation to African Americans, see Vijay Prashad, *The Karma of Brown Folk* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000).
7. For arguments in favour of pluralist paradigms of multicultural diversity, see Will Kymlicka, *Citizenship: A Liberal Theory of Minority Rights* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995). Feminists of colour have rigorously critiqued essentialist notions of identity which undergird liberal multiculturalism: see Chandra Mohanty and M. Jacqui Alexander, *Feminist Genealogies, Colonial Legacies, Democratic Futures* (London: Routledge, 1997); and Gayatri Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Towards a History of the Vanishing Present* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999). Dinesh D’Souza anticipates the so-called “post-racial” moment in US politics in *The End of*



- Racism: A New Vision for a Multiracial Society* (New York: Free Press, 1995).
8. Viet Thanh Nguyen, *Race and Resistance: Literature and Politics in Asian America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 26.
  9. Aihwa Ong writes that neoliberal economic policy 'conceptually unsettles the notion of citizenship as a legal status rooted in a nation state, and in stark opposition to a condition of statelessness'. See Aihwa Wong, *Neoliberalism as Exception: Mutations in Citizenship and Sovereignty* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), p. 6.
  10. On the evolving political relationship between the Indian state and its diasporas, see Bakirathi Mani and Latha Varadarajan, "The Largest Gathering of the Global Indian Family": Neoliberalism, Nationalism and Diaspora at Pravasi Bharatiya Divas', *Diaspora*, Vol. 14, No. 1 (2005), pp. 45-74.
  11. On Tamil diasporic mobilization to effect regime change in Sri Lanka, see Qadri Ismail, *Abiding by Sri Lanka: On Peace, Place and Postcoloniality* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005); and Pradeep Jegannathan, 'eelam.com: Place, Nation and Imagination in Cyber-space', *Public Culture*, Vol. 10, No. 3 (1998), pp. 515-28. On Sikh immigrant advocacy for an independent state of Khalistan, see Brian Keith Axel, *The Nation's Tortured Body: Violence, Representation and the Formation of a Sikh "Diaspora"* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001). On Indian American support for right-wing Hindu nationalism in India, see Amit Rai, 'India On-line: Electronic Bulletin Boards and the Construction of a Diasporic Hindu Identity', *Diaspora*, Vol. 4, No. 1 (1995), pp. 31-57.
  12. On the relation between Asian American and African American civil rights movements, see Vijay Prashad, *Everybody Was Kung-Fu Fighting: Afro-Asian Connections and the Myth of Cultural Purity* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2001). Avtar Brah, in *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities* (London: Routledge, 1997), writes about participating in the ethnic studies movement at UC Berkeley during the 1970s. Brah's account is one of the few published references to South Asians who participated in movements for Asian American self-determination.
  13. For example, Lavina Dhingra Shankar and Rajini Srikanth, *A Part, Yet Apart: South Asians in Asian America* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998); Bandana Purkayastha, *Negotiating Ethnicity: Second Generation South Asians Traverse a Transnational World* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2006); and Khyati Joshi, *New Roots in America's Sacred Ground: Religion, Race and Ethnicity in Indian America* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2006).
  14. In *Asian/American: Historical Crossings of a Racial Frontier* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University press, 1999), David Palumbo-Liu explicates this transnational turn toward the study of the US-in-Asia by focusing on the Asia-Pacific as a zone of border crossings. Similarly, in *Imagine Otherwise: On Asian Americanist Critique* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), Kandice Chuh reframes Asian America as a site for political critique of the US empire in Southeast and East Asia, including Hawai'i, Korea and the Philippines.
  15. On gendered and sexualized representations of East and Southeast Asian Americans, see Celine Parreñas Shimizu, *The Hypersexuality of Race: Performing Asian/American Women on Screen and Scene* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007). On literary representations of Asian American masculinity, see Daniel Kim, *Writing Manhood in Black and Yellow: Ralph Ellison, Frank Chin and the Literary Politics of Identity* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005).
  16. The debate between Asian American studies as a primarily US-centered discourse of racial politics, and scholars who advocate for a diasporic and transnational perspective, has defined the field for nearly two decades. For an argument in favour of prioritizing the domestic sphere of racial production, see Cynthia Sau-Ling Wong, 'Denationalization Reconsidered: Asian American Cultural Criticism at a Theoretical Crossroads' in *Postcolonial Theory and the United States: Race, Ethnicity, Literature*, eds. Peter Schmidt and Amritjit Singh (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2000). On the analytical possibilities gained by a queer diasporic perspective, see David Eng, 'Out Here and Over There: Queerness and Diaspora in Asian American Studies', *Social Text*, Vol. 15, No. 3 (1997), pp. 31-52. Among the early scholarly works that situate South Asian Americans within a domestic racial framework and considers their transnational political affiliations is Susan Koshy's essay 'Category Crisis: South Asian Americans and Questions of Race and Ethnicity', *Diaspora*, Vol. 7, No. 3 (1998), pp. 285-320.
  17. Antoinette Burton, *The Postcolonial Careers of Santha Rama Rau* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), p. 147.
  18. Lisa Lowe, *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics* (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 1996), p. 81.
  19. *ibid.*, p. 30.
  20. The phenomenology of resistance is integral to early volumes on South Asian Americans, including (ed.) Women of South Asian Descent Collective, *Our Feet Walk the Sky* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1993); Shamita Das Dasgupta, *Patchwork Shawl: Chronicles of South Asian Women in America* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1998); *A Part, Yet Apart: South Asians in Asian America*, eds. Lavina Dhingra Shankar and Rajini Srikanth (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998); and *Contours of the Heart: South Asians Map North America*, eds. Rajini Srikanth and Sunaina Maira (New York: Asian American Writers Workshop, 1996). Each of these volumes also aims to incorporate a diversity of South Asian immigrant experience, across national origin, class, gender and sexuality.
  21. Biju Mathew and Vijay Prashad, Introduction, 'Satyagraha in America: The Political Culture of South Asian Americans', eds. Biju Mathew and Vijay Prashad, *Amerasia Journal* 25 (special issue, 1999/2000), pp. x-xv, at p. xii.
  22. Gayatri Gopinath, *Impossible Desires: Queer Diasporas and South Asian Public Cultures* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005).
  23. Early quantitative sociological surveys of Indian Americans that fostered representations of South Asians as an assimilated immigrant group include Parmatma Saran, *Asian Indian Experience* (Cambridge, MA: Schenkman, 1985), and *New Ethnicities: Asian Indians in the United States*, eds. Parmatma Saran and Edwin Eames (New York: Praeger, 1980).
  24. On South Asians as resistant ethnic subjects, see Vijay Prashad, *The Karma of Brown Folk*, *op. cit.*; Monisha Das Gupta, *Unruly Immigrants: Rights, Activism and Transnational South Asian Politics in the United States* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006); Sunaina Marr Maira, *Desis in the House: Indian American Youth Culture in New York City* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2002); Shalini Shankar, *Desi Land: Teen*

*Culture, Class and Success in Silicon Valley* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008); and Nitasha Tamar Sharma, *Hip Hop Desis: South Asian Americans, Blackness and a Global Race Consciousness* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010).

25. For instance, Nguyen also makes the case for “good” and “bad” subjects of Asian American studies. Our arguments overlap insofar as we both contend that our fields are shaped by a bifurcated response to Asian American identity formation: namely, resistance or accommodation. See Viet Thanh Nguyen, *Race and Resistance*, op. cit., pp. 143-72.
26. On the implications of “dissenting citizenship”, see Sunaina Marr Maira, *Missing*, op. cit.
27. On the performative possibilities offered by disidentification, see José Esteban Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).
28. Self-identified progressive South Asian groups include South Asian Lesbian and Gay Association (SALGA), Desis Rising Up and Moving (DRUM), South Asian Women’s Creative Collective (SAWCC), Narika and Trikone.
29. For a critique of the term “South Asian” and its association with multicultural identity politics, see Naheed Islam, ‘In the Belly of the Multicultural Beast: I Am Named South Asian’ in *Our Feet Walk the Sky*, op. cit., pp. 242-45.
30. On how “South Asia” emerged as a construct of area studies in the aftermath of World War II, see Bernard Cohn, *Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge: The British Rule in India* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), pp. 13-14. In his archival investigation of regional area studies programmes, Cohn establishes historical links between what he calls the ‘investigative modalities’ of

the British colonial administration in India and the creation of the Human Relations Area File (HRAF) in the United States. The HRAF was tasked with creating a ‘taxonomy of cultures’, South Asia being one among many world regions under investigation.

31. On early-twentieth-century Punjabi migration to California and the “Mexican Hindu” families created through marriage, see Karen Leonard, *Making Ethnic Choices: California’s Punjabi Mexican Americans* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992).
32. On the implications of *United States v. Bhagat Singh Thind* for South Asian racialization, see Susan Koshy, ‘Category Crisis: South Asian Americans and Questions of Race and Ethnicity’, *Diaspora*, Vol. 7, No. 3 (1998), pp. 285-320; and Sucheta Mazumdar, ‘The Politics of Religion and National Origin: Rediscovering Hindu Indian Identity in the United States’ in *Antinomies of Modernity: Essays on Race, Orient, Nation*, eds. Vasanth Kaiwar and Sucheta Mazumdar (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), pp. 223-60.
33. On the *Komagata Maru* incident, see Joan M. Jensen, *Passage from India: Asian Immigrants in North America* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1988).
34. Monisha Das Gupta, *Unruly Immigrants*, op. cit., p. 29.
35. For the historical conditions of the model minority thesis, see David Palumbo-Liu, *Asian/American*, op. cit. On changing visual representations of Asian Americans from “yellow peril” to “model minority”, see Robert G. Lee, *Orientalism: Asian Americans in Popular Culture* (Philadelphia: Temple University press, 1999).
36. The 2000 US Census report lists 2,195,569 people who identify as part of one or more South Asian immigrant group. South Asian countries specified in the census include India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri

Lanka, Nepal, Bhutan and the Maldives. Respondents include both “foreign-born” South Asians as well as people of South Asian origin born in the United States. Pakistanis, Bangladeshis and Sri Lankans are chronically undercounted in the census, in part because the census form makes no provision for their nationalities, which must be written down under the category “Other”. See Jessica S. Burnes and Claudette E. Bennet, ‘The Asian Population 2000: Census 2000 Brief’, US Department of Commerce, February 2002. Available at [www.census.gov/prod/2002pubs/c2kbr01-16.pdf](http://www.census.gov/prod/2002pubs/c2kbr01-16.pdf) (accessed 20 April 2006).

37. On the relationship between neoliberal economic policies in India and the emigration of workers overseas, particularly to the Persian Gulf region, see Ritty Lukose, *Liberalization’s Children: Gender, Youth and Consumer Citizenship in Globalizing India* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009).
38. For a discussion of the overlapping racial and religious histories that produce the figure of “the Muslim” in the United States, see Junaid Rana, *Terrifying Muslim: Race and Labor in the South Asian Diaspora* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), where the author argues that in the aftermath of 9/11, “Muslim” emerged as a category of race that was policed

through narratives of migration, diaspora, criminality, and terror’ (p. 66). On the consequences of reading working-class South Asians as “Muslims” and “terrorists”, see Amitava Kumar, *A Foreigner Carrying in the Crook of His Arm a Tiny Bomb* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010).

39. Muneer Ahmad, ‘Homeland Insecurities: Racial Violence the Day after September 11’, *Social Text*, Vol. 20, No. 3 (2002), pp 101-15, at p. 111.
40. South Asian actors who currently have recurring roles on cable and network television programs include Aasif Mandvi, Kal Penn, Aziz Ansari, Padma Lakshmi and Archie Punjabi.
41. On the prominence of Indian middle-class subjects in the national media, see Purnima Mankekar, *Screening Culture, Viewing Politics: An Ethnography of Television, Womanhood and the Nation in Postcolonial India* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999); Ravi Vasudevan, ‘Bombay and Its Public’, *Journal of Arts and Ideas*, Vol. 29 (1996), pp. 44-65; and Tejaswini Niranjana, ‘Nationalism Refigured: Contemporary South India Cinema and the Subject of Feminism’, *Subaltern Studies XI*, eds. Partha Chatterjee and Pradeep Jeganathan (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), pp. 138-66.