

Perverse Modernities

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and Lisa Lowe



IMPOSSIBLE DESIRES

Queer Diasporas and South Asian Public Cultures

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IMPOSSIBLE DESIRES

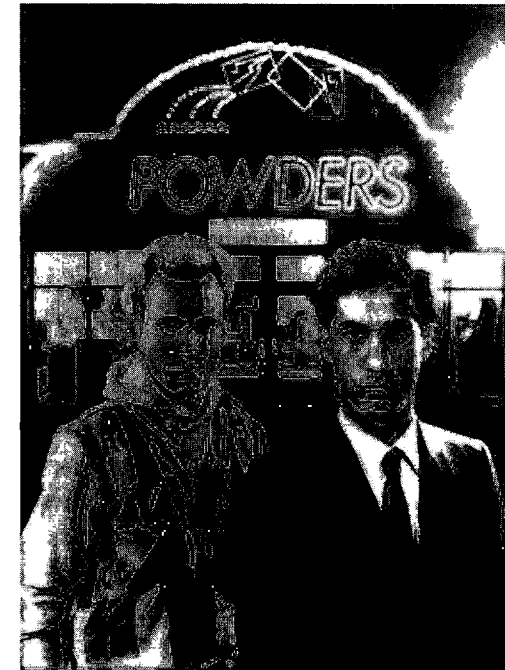
An Introduction

☉ In a particularly memorable scene in *My Beautiful Laundrette* (dir. Stephen Frears, 1985), British Pakistani screenwriter Hanif Kureishi's groundbreaking film about queer interracial desire in Thatcherite Britain, the white, working-class gay boy Johnny moves to unbutton the shirt of his lover, the upwardly mobile, Pakistan-born Omar. Omar initially acquiesces to Johnny's caresses, but then abruptly puts a halt to the seduction. He turns his back to his lover and recalls a boyhood scene of standing with his immigrant father and seeing Johnny march in a fascist parade through their South London neighborhood: "It was bricks and bottles, immigrants out, kill us. People we knew . . . And it was you. We *saw* you," Omar says bitterly. Johnny initially recoils in shame as Omar brings into the present this damning image from the past of his younger self as a hate-filled skinhead. But then, as Omar continues speaking, he slowly reaches out to draw Omar to him and embraces Omar from behind. The final shot frames Omar's face as he lets his head fall back onto Johnny's chest and he closes his eyes.

The scene eloquently speaks to how the queer racialized body becomes a historical archive for both individuals and communities, one that is excavated through the very act of desiring the racial Other. For Omar, desiring Johnny is irrevocably intertwined with the legacies of British colonialism in South Asia

and the more immediate history of Powellian racism in 1960s Britain.¹ In his memory of having seen Johnny march (“we *saw* you”), Omar in a sense reverses the historical availability of brown bodies to a white imperial gaze by turning the gaze back onto Johnny’s own racist past. The scene’s ambiguous ending—where Omar closes his eyes and succumbs to Johnny’s caresses—may suggest that Omar gives in to the historical amnesia that wipes out the legacies of Britain’s racist past. Yet the meaning and function of queer desire in the scene are far more complicated than such a reading would allow. If for Johnny sex with Omar is a way of both tacitly acknowledging and erasing that racist past, for Omar, queer desire is precisely what allows him to remember. Indeed, the barely submerged histories of colonialism and racism erupt into the present at the very moment when queer sexuality is being articulated. Queer desire does not transcend or remain peripheral to these histories but instead it becomes central to their telling and remembering: there is no queer desire without these histories, nor can these histories be told or remembered without simultaneously revealing an erotics of power.

Upon its release in 1985, *My Beautiful Laundrette* engendered heated controversy within South Asian communities in the UK, some of whose members took exception to Kureishi’s matter-of-fact depiction of queer interracial desire between white and brown men, and more generally to his refusal to produce “positive images” of British Asian lives.² The controversy surrounding its release prefigured the at times violent debates around queer sexuality and dominant notions of communal identity that took place both in South Asia and in the diaspora over the following decade.³ In New York City, for instance, the South Asian Lesbian and Gay Association waged an ongoing battle throughout the 1990s over the right to march in the annual India Day Parade, a controversy I will return to later in this chapter. And in several Indian cities in December 1998, as I discuss in detail in chapter 5, Indian-Canadian director Deepa Mehta’s film *Fire* was vociferously attacked by right-wing Hindu nationalists outraged by its depiction of “lesbian” sexuality. These various battles in disparate national locations speak to the ways in which queer desires, bodies, and subjectivities become dense sites of meaning in the production and reproduction of notions of “culture,” “tradition,” and communal belonging both in South Asia and in the diaspora. They also signal the conflation of “perverse” sexualities and diasporic affiliations within a nationalist imaginary, and it is this mapping of queerness onto diaspora that is the subject of this book.



Johnny (Daniel Day-Lewis) and Omar (Gordon Warnecke) in *My Beautiful Laundrette* (dir. Stephen Frears, 1985).

Twenty years later, Kureishi’s film remains a remarkably powerful rendering of queer racialized desire and its relation to memory and history, and acts as a touchstone and precursor to much of the queer South Asian diasporic cultural production that I discuss in *Impossible Desires*.⁴ The texts I consider in this book, following Kureishi’s lead, allow us to dissect the ways in which discourses of sexuality are inextricable from prior and continuing histories of colonialism, nationalism, racism, and migration. In Kureishi’s film, as in the other queer diasporic texts I examine in this book, queer desire reorients the traditionally backward-looking glance of diaspora. Stuart Hall has elegantly articulated the peculiar relation to the past that characterizes a conservative diasporic imaginary. This relation is one where the experience of displacement “gives rise to a certain imaginary plenitude, recreating the endless desire to return to ‘lost origins,’ to be one again with the mother, to go back to the beginning.”⁵

If conventional diasporic discourse is marked by this backward glance, this “overwhelming nostalgia for lost origins, for ‘times past,’”⁶ a queer diaspora mobilizes questions of the past, memory, and nostalgia for radically different purposes. Rather than evoking an imaginary homeland frozen in an idyllic moment outside history, what is remembered through queer diasporic desire and the queer diasporic body is a past time and place riven with contradictions and the violences of multiple uprootings, displacements, and exiles. Joseph Roach, in his study of Atlantic-rim performance cultures, uses the suggestive phrase “forgotten but not gone” to name that which produces the conditions for the present but is actively forgotten within dominant historiography.⁷ Queer diasporic cultural forms and practices point to submerged histories of racist and colonialist violence that continue to resonate in the present and that make themselves felt through bodily desire. It is through the queer diasporic body that these histories are brought into the present; it is also through the queer diasporic body that their legacies are imaginatively contested and transformed. Queer diasporic cultural forms thus enact what Roach terms “clandestine countermemories” that bring into the present those pasts that are deliberately forgotten within conventional nationalist or diasporic scripts.⁸ If, as Roach notes, “the relentless search for the purity of origins is a voyage not of discovery but of erasure,”⁹ queer diasporic cultural forms work against the violent effacements that produce the fictions of purity that lie at the heart of dominant nationalist and diasporic ideologies.

Significantly, however, Kureishi’s excavation of the legacies of colonialism and racism as they are mapped onto queer (male) bodies crucially depends on a particular fixing of female diasporic subjectivity. The film’s female diasporic character Tania, in fact, functions in a classic homosocial triangle as the conduit and foil to the desire between Johnny and Omar, and she quite literally disappears at the film’s end. We last see her standing on a train platform, suitcase in hand, having left behind the space of the immigrant home in order to seek a presumably freer elsewhere. Our gaze is aligned with that of her father as he glimpses her through an open window; the train rushes by, she vanishes. It is unclear where she has gone, whether she has disappeared under the train tracks or is safely within the train compartment en route to a different life. She thus marks the horizon of Kureishi’s filmic universe and gestures to another narrative of female diasporic subjectivity that functions quite literally as the film’s vanishing point. Kureishi’s framing of the female diasporic figure makes

clear the ways in which even ostensibly progressive, gay male articulations of diaspora run the risk of stabilizing sexual and gender hierarchies.

My Beautiful Laundrette presents a useful point of departure in addressing many of the questions that concern me throughout this book. As the film makes apparent, all too often diasporas are narrativized through the bonds of relationality between men. Indeed, the oedipal relation between fathers and sons serves as a central and recurring feature within diasporic narratives and becomes a metaphor for the contradictions of sameness and difference that, as Stuart Hall has shown, characterize competing definitions of diasporic subjectivity.¹⁰ For Freud, the oedipal drama explains the consolidation of proper gender identification and heterosexual object choice in little boys, as masculine identification with the father is made while feminine identification with the mother is refused. In his 1952 work *Black Skin, White Masks*, Frantz Fanon resituates the oedipal scenario in the colonial context and shows how, for racialized male subjects, the process whereby the little boy learns to identify with the father and desire the mother is disrupted and disturbed by the (black) father’s lack of access to social power.¹¹ Fanon’s analysis, which I engage with more fully in chapter 3, makes evident the inadequacy of the Oedipus complex in explaining the construction of gendered subjectivity within colonial and postcolonial regimes of power. While I am interested in identifying how queer diasporic texts follow Fanon in reworking the notion of oedipality in relation to racialized masculinities, I also ask what alternative narratives emerge when this story of oedipality is jettisoned altogether. For even when the male-male or father-son narrative is mined for its queer valences (as in *Laundrette* or in other gay male diasporic texts I consider here), the centrality of this narrative as the primary trope in imagining diaspora invariably displaces and elides female diasporic subjects. The patriarchal and heteronormative underpinnings of the term “diaspora” are evident in Stefan Helmreich’s exploration of its etymological roots:

The original meaning of diaspora summons up the image of scattered seeds and . . . in Judeo-Christian . . . cosmology, seeds are metaphorical for the male “substance” that is traced in genealogical histories. The word “sperm” is metaphorically linked to diaspora. It comes from the same stem [in Greek meaning to sow or scatter] and is defined by the OED as “the generative substance or seed of male animals.” Diaspora, in its traditional sense, thus refers us to a system of kinship reckoned through men and suggests the questions of legitimacy in paternity that patriarchy generates.¹²

These etymological traces of the term are apparent in Kureishi's vision of queer diasporic subjectivity that centralizes male-male relations and sidelines female subjectivity. This book, then, begins where Kureishi's text leaves off. *Impossible Desires* examines a range of South Asian diasporic literature, film, and music in order to ask if we can imagine diaspora differently, apart from the biological, reproductive, oedipal logic that invariably forms the core of conventional formulations of diaspora. It does so by paying special attention to *queer female subjectivity in the diaspora*, as it is this particular positionality that forms a constitutive absence in both dominant nationalist and diasporic discourses. More surprisingly perhaps, and therefore worth interrogating closely, is the elision of queer female subjectivity within seemingly radical cultural and political diasporic projects that center a gay male or heterosexual feminist diasporic subject. *Impossible Desires* refuses to accede to the splitting of queerness from feminism that marks such projects. By making female subjectivity central to a queer diasporic project, it begins instead to conceptualize diaspora in ways that do not invariably replicate heteronormative and patriarchal structures of kinship and community. In what follows I lay out more precisely the various terms I use to frame the texts I consider—*queer diasporas*, *impossibility*, and *South Asian public cultures*—as they are hardly self-evident and require greater elaboration and contextualization.

Queer Diasporas

In an overview of recent trends in diaspora studies, Jana Evans Braziel and Anita Mannur suggest that the value of diaspora—a term which at its most literal describes the dispersal and movement of populations from one particular national or geographic location to other disparate sites—lies in its critique of the nation form on the one hand, and its contestation of the hegemonic forces of globalization on the other.¹³ Nationalism and globalization do indeed constitute the two broad rubrics within which we must view diasporas and diasporic cultural production. However, the concept of diaspora may not be as resistant or contestatory to the forces of nationalism or globalization as it may first appear. Clearly, as Braziel and Mannur indicate, diaspora has proved a remarkably fruitful analytic for scholars of nationalism, cultural identity, race, and migration over the past decade. Theories of diaspora that emerged out of Black British cultural studies in the 1980s and 1990s, particularly those of Paul

Gilroy and Stuart Hall, powerfully move the concept of diaspora away from its traditional orientation toward homeland, exile, and return and instead use the term to reference what Hall calls “a conception of ‘identity’ which lives with and through, not despite, difference; by hybridity.”¹⁴ This tradition of cultural studies, to which my project is deeply indebted, embraces diaspora as a concept for its potential to foreground notions of impurity and inauthenticity that resoundingly reject the ethnic and religious absolutism at the center of nationalist projects. Viewing the (home) nation through the analytical frame of diaspora allows for a reconsideration of the traditionally hierarchical relation between nation and diaspora, where the former is seen as merely an impoverished imitation of an originary national culture.¹⁵ Yet the antiessentialist notion of cultural identity that is at the core of this revised framing of diaspora functions simultaneously alongside what Hall terms a “backward-looking conception of diaspora,”¹⁶ one that adheres to precisely those same myths of purity and origin that seamlessly lend themselves to nationalist projects. Indeed while the diaspora within nationalist discourse is often positioned as the abjected and disavowed Other to the nation, the nation also simultaneously recruits the diaspora into its absolutist logic. The policies of the Hindu nationalist government in India in the mid- to late 1990s to court overseas “NRI” (non-resident Indian) capital¹⁷ is but one example of how diaspora and nation can function together in the interests of corporate capital and globalization.¹⁸ Hindu nationalist organizations in India are able to effectively mobilize and harness diasporic longing for authenticity and “tradition” and convert this longing into material linkages between the diaspora and (home) nation.¹⁹ Thus diasporas can undercut and reify various forms of ethnic, religious, and state nationalisms simultaneously. Various scholars have pointed out the complicity not only between diasporic formations and different nationalisms but also between diaspora and processes of transnational capitalism and globalization.²⁰ The intimate connection between diaspora, nationalism, and globalization is particularly clear in the South Asian context, as the example of NRI capital underwriting Hindu nationalist projects in India makes all too apparent.

Vijay Mishra importantly distinguishes between two historical moments of South Asian diasporic formation: the first produced by colonial capitalism and the migration of Indian indentured labor to British colonies such as Fiji, Trinidad, and Guyana in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; and the second a result of the workings of “late modern capital” in the mid- to

late twentieth century. Significantly, in addition to producing labor diasporas, colonial capitalism also produced what Kamala Visweswaran terms a "middleman minority" that served the interests of the colonial power and acted as a conduit between British colonial administrators and the indigenous populations in East Africa and other locations in the British Empire.²¹ The legacies of this initial phase of South Asian diasporic formation in the nineteenth century are apparent in the second phase of migration engendered by globalization in the mid- to late twentieth century. Mishra defines this diaspora of "late modern capital" as "largely a post-1960s phenomenon distinguished by the movement of economic migrants (but also refugees) into the metropolitan centers of the former empire as well as the 'New World' and Australia."²² While South Asian migrants in the 1960s were allowed entry into the UK primarily as low-wage labor, the class demographic and racialization of South Asians in the United States was strikingly different. Vijay Prashad has pointed out how the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act, which shifted the criteria for U.S. citizenship from a quota system to "family reunification," encouraged the immigration of large numbers of Indian professionals, primarily doctors and scientists; this demographic was particularly appealing to the U.S. government in that it was seen as a way to bolster U.S. cold war technological supremacy.²³ Visweswaran argues that this professional technocratic elite in the United States functions in effect as a latter-day middleman minority, working in collusion with dominant national interests in both the United States and in India. Mishra, Prashad, and Visweswaran thus point to the ways in which South Asian diasporic formations engendered by colonial capitalism (in the form of labor diasporas) and those engendered by globalization and transnational capitalism (in the form of a bourgeois professional class) function in tandem with different national agendas.

Clearly, then, the cultural texts that emerge from these different historical moments in South Asian diasporic formation must be seen as inextricable not only from the ongoing legacies of colonialism and multiple nationalisms but also from the workings of globalization. Indeed theories of diasporic cultural production that do not address the imbrication of diaspora with transnational capitalism shore up the dominance of the latter by making its mechanisms invisible. In an astute critique of Paul Gilroy's influential formulation of black diasporic culture in *The Black Atlantic*, Jenny Sharpe argues that globalization provides the unacknowledged terrain upon which the diasporic cultural pro-

ductions that Gilroy celebrates take shape. Sharpe notes that the transnational cultural practices that Gilroy draws on are rooted in urban spaces in the First World: "to consider London and New York as global city centers is to recognize the degree to which Gilroy's mapping of the black Atlantic follows a cartography of globalization."²⁴ Sharpe's analysis is a particularly useful caution against a celebratory embrace of diasporic cultural forms that may obscure the ways in which they are produced on the terrain of corporate globalization. Thus just as diaspora may function in collusion with nationalist interests, so too must we be attentive to the ways in which diasporic cultural forms are produced in and through transnational capitalist processes.

The imbrication of diaspora and diasporic cultural forms with dominant nationalism on the one hand, and corporate globalization on the other, takes place through discourses that are simultaneously gendered and sexualized. Feminist scholars of nationalism in South Asia have long pointed to the particular rendering of "woman" within nationalist discourse as the grounds upon which male nationalist ideologies take shape.²⁵ Such scholarship has been instructive in demonstrating how female sexuality under nationalism is a crucial site of surveillance, as it is through women's bodies that the borders and boundaries of communal identities are formed. But as I argue in chapter 5, this body of work has been less successful in fully addressing the ways in which dominant nationalism institutes heterosexuality as a key disciplinary regime. Feminist scholarship on South Asia has also, for the most part, remained curiously silent about how alternative sexualities may constitute a powerful challenge to patriarchal nationalism.²⁶ Nor has there been much sustained attention paid to the ways in which nationalist framings of women's sexuality are translated into the diaspora, and how these renderings of diasporic women's sexuality are in turn central to the production of nationalism in the home nation.²⁷ In an article on Indian indentured migration to Trinidad, Tejaswini Niranjana begins this necessary work by observing that anticolonial nationalists in India in the early twentieth century used the figure of the amoral, sexually impure Indian woman abroad as a way of producing the chaste, virtuous Indian woman at "home" as emblematic of a new "nationalist morality."²⁸ The consolidation of a gendered bourgeois nationalist subject in India through a configuration of its disavowed Other in the diaspora underscores the necessity of conceptualizing the diaspora and the nation as mutually constituted formations. However, as I elaborate in chapter 6, Niranjana's article still presumes the

heterosexuality of the female diasporic and female nationalist subject rather than recognizing institutionalized heterosexuality as a primary structure of both British colonialism and incipient Indian nationalism. The failure of feminist scholars of South Asia and the South Asian diaspora to fully interrogate heterosexuality as a structuring mechanism of both state and diasporic nationalisms makes clear the indispensability of a queer critique. A queer diasporic framework insists on the imbrication of nation and diaspora through the production of hetero- and homosexuality, particularly as they are mapped onto the bodies of women.

Just as discourses of female sexuality are central to the mutual constitution of diaspora and nation, so too is the relation between diasporic culture and globalization one that is mediated through dominant gender and sexual ideologies. Feminist theorists have astutely observed that globalization profoundly shapes, transforms, and exploits the gendered arrangements of seemingly "private" zones in the diaspora such as the "immigrant home."²⁹ But while much scholarship focuses on how global processes function through the differentiation of the labor market along gendered, racial, and national lines, how discourses of sexuality in the diaspora intersect with, and are in turn shaped by, globalization is only beginning to be explored.³⁰ Furthermore, the impact of globalization on particular diasporic locations produces various forms of oppositional diasporic cultural practices that may both reinscribe and disrupt the gender and sexual ideologies on which globalization depends.

The critical framework of a specifically *queer* diaspora, then, may begin to unsettle the ways in which the diaspora shores up the gender and sexual ideologies of dominant nationalism on the one hand, and processes of globalization on the other. Such a framework enables the concept of diaspora to fulfill the double-pronged critique of the nation and of globalization that Braziel and Mannur suggest is its most useful intervention. This framework "queers" the concept of diaspora by unmasking and undercutting its dependence on a genealogical, implicitly heteronormative reproductive logic. Indeed, while the Bharatiya Janata Party-led Hindu nationalist government in India acknowledged the diaspora solely in the form of the prosperous, Hindu, heterosexual NRI businessman, there exists a different embodiment of diaspora that remains unthinkable within this Hindu nationalist imaginary. The category of "queer" in my project works to name this alternative rendering of diaspora and to dislodge diaspora from its adherence and loyalty to nationalist ideologies that

are fully aligned with the interests of transnational capitalism. Suturing "queer" to "diaspora" thus recuperates those desires, practices, and subjectivities that are rendered impossible and unimaginable within conventional diasporic and nationalist imaginaries. A consideration of queerness, in other words, becomes a way to challenge nationalist ideologies by restoring the impure, inauthentic, nonreproductive potential of the notion of diaspora. Indeed, the urgent need to trouble and denaturalize the close relationship between nationalism and heterosexuality is precisely what makes the notion of a queer diaspora so compelling.³¹ A queer diasporic framework productively exploits the analogous relation between nation and diaspora on the one hand, and between heterosexuality and queerness on the other: in other words, queerness is to heterosexuality as the diaspora is to the nation. If within heteronormative logic the queer is seen as the debased and inadequate copy of the heterosexual, so too is diaspora within nationalist logic positioned as the queer Other of the nation, its inauthentic imitation. The concept of a queer diaspora enables a simultaneous critique of heterosexuality and the nation form while exploding the binary oppositions between nation and diaspora, heterosexuality and homosexuality, original and copy.

If "diaspora" needs "queerness" in order to rescue it from its genealogical implications, "queerness" also needs "diaspora" in order to make it more supple in relation to questions of race, colonialism, migration, and globalization. An emerging body of queer of color scholarship has taken to task the "homonormativity" of certain strands of Euro-American queer studies that center white gay male subjectivity, while simultaneously fixing the queer, nonwhite racialized, and/or immigrant subject as insufficiently politicized and "modern."³² My articulation of a queer diasporic framework is part of this collective project of decentering whiteness and dominant Euro-American paradigms in theorizing sexuality both locally and transnationally. On the most simple level, I use "queer" to refer to a range of dissident and non-heteronormative practices and desires that may very well be incommensurate with the identity categories of "gay" and "lesbian." A queer diasporic formation works in contradistinction to the globalization of "gay" identity that replicates a colonial narrative of development and progress that judges all "other" sexual cultures, communities, and practices against a model of Euro-American sexual identity.³³ Many of the diasporic cultural forms I discuss in this book do indeed map a "cartography of globalization," in Sharpe's terms, in that they emerge out of queer communities

in First World global cities such as London, New York, and Toronto. Yet we must also remember, as Lisa Lowe and David Lloyd point out, that “transnational or *neo-colonial* capitalism, like colonialist capitalism before it, continues to produce sites of contradiction that are effects of its always uneven expansion but that cannot be subsumed by the logic of commodification itself.”³⁴ In other words, while queer diasporic cultural forms are produced in and through the workings of transnational capitalism, they also provide the means by which to critique the logic of global capital itself. The cartography of a queer diaspora tells a different story of how global capitalism impacts local sites by articulating other forms of subjectivity, culture, affect, kinship, and community that may not be visible or audible within standard mappings of nation, diaspora, or globalization. What emerges within this alternative cartography are subjects, communities, and practices that bear little resemblance to the universalized “gay” identity imagined within a Eurocentric gay imaginary.

Reading various cultural forms and practices as both constituting and constituted by a queer South Asian diaspora resituates the conventions by which homosexuality has traditionally been encoded in a Euro-American context. Queer sexualities as articulated by the texts I consider here reference familiar tropes and signifiers of Euro-American homosexuality—such as the coming-out narrative and its attendant markers of secrecy and disclosure, as well as gender inversion and cross-dressing—while investing them with radically different and distinct significations. It is through a particular engagement with South Asian public culture, and popular culture in particular, that this defamiliarization of conventional markers of homosexuality takes place, and that alternative strategies through which to signify non-heteronormative desire are subsequently produced. These alternative strategies suggest a mode of reading and “seeing” same-sex eroticism that challenges modern epistemologies of visibility, revelation, and sexual subjectivity. As such, the notion of a queer South Asian diaspora can be understood as a conceptual apparatus that poses a critique of modernity and its various narratives of progress and development.³⁵ A queer South Asian diasporic geography of desire and pleasure stages this critique by rewriting colonial constructions of “Third World” sexualities as anterior, pre-modern, and in need of Western political development—constructions that are recirculated by contemporary gay and lesbian transnational politics. It simultaneously interrogates different South Asian nationalist narratives that imagine and consolidate the nation in terms of organic heterosexuality.

The concept of a queer South Asian diaspora, then, functions on multiple levels throughout this book. First, it situates the formation of sexual subjectivity within transnational flows of culture, capital, bodies, desire, and labor. Second, queer diaspora contests the logic that situates the terms “queer” and “diaspora” as dependent on the originality of “heterosexuality” and “nation.” Finally, it disorganizes the dominant categories within the United States for sexual variance, namely “gay and lesbian,” and it marks a different economy of desire that escapes legibility within both normative South Asian contexts and homonormative Euro-American contexts.

The radical disruption of the hierarchies between nation and diaspora, heterosexuality and homosexuality, original and copy, that queer diasporic texts enact hinges on the question of translation. Many of the texts I consider here can be understood as diasporic translations of “original” national texts: for instance, in chapter 5 I read Deepa Mehta’s *Fire* against Urdu writer Ismat Chughtai’s 1941 short story on which Mehta’s film is loosely based. Similarly, in chapter 4, I situate Indian American director Mira Nair’s 2001 film *Monsoon Wedding* alongside its earlier manifestation as the Bollywood, Hindi language hit *Hum Aapke Hain Koun . . . !* (Who Am I to You?, dir. Sooraj Barjatya, 1994). In most popular and critical discussions of *Fire* or *Monsoon Wedding*, both within and outside India, the earlier, “indigenous” blueprints of each film are conveniently forgotten and effaced. In restoring the prior text as central to the discussion of the contemporary text, and in tracing the ways in which representations of queerness shift from “original” to “remake,” I ask what is both lost and gained in this process of translation. Reading diasporic texts as translations may seem to run the risk of reifying the binary between copy and original; it risks stabilizing the “nation” as the original locus that diaspora merely attempts to replicate. Just as the nation and the diaspora are mutually constitutive categories, by extension so too do the “original” national text and its diasporic translation gain meaning only in relation to one another. Tejaswini Niranjana, in her study of translation as a strategy of colonial subjection, observes that translation functions within an idiom of fidelity, betrayal, and authenticity and appears “as a transparent representation of something that already exists, although the ‘original’ is actually brought into being through translation.”³⁶ In the juxtaposition of texts that I engage in, the queerness of either text can only be made intelligible when read against the other.³⁷ Furthermore, reading contemporary queer representations (such as Mehta’s

Fire) through their “originals” (such as Chughtai’s short story) militates against a developmental, progress narrative of “gay” identity formation that posits the diaspora as a space of sexual freedom over and against the (home) nation as a space of sexual oppression. Rather, I am interested in how the erotic economies of the prior text are mapped differently within a diasporic context. Translation here cannot be seen as a mimetic reflection of a prior text but rather as a productive activity that instantiates new regimes of sexual subjectivity even as it effaces earlier erotic arrangements.

Finally, in its most important intervention into dominant nationalist and diasporic formations, the framework of a queer diaspora radically resituates questions of home, dwelling, and the domestic space that have long concerned feminist, queer, and postcolonial scholarship. Historians of colonialism and anticolonial nationalism in India have examined in detail the ways in which home and housing were crucial to the production of both a British colonial and Indian anticolonial nationalist gendered subjectivity in the nineteenth century.³⁸ Partha Chatterjee argues that in late-colonial India, “the battle for the new idea of womanhood in the era of nationalism was waged in the home . . . it was the home that became the principal site of the struggle through which the hegemonic construct of the new nationalist patriarchy had to be normalized.”³⁹ Contemporary nationalist and diasporic discourses clearly bear the marks of these colonial and anticolonial nationalist legacies of “home” as a primary arena within which to imagine “otherness” in racial, religious, national, and gendered terms. The “home” within both discourses is a sacrosanct space of purity, tradition, and authenticity, embodied by the figure of the “woman” who is enshrined at its center, and marked by patriarchal gender and sexual arrangements. It is hardly surprising, then, that the home emerges as a particularly fraught site of contestation within the queer diasporic texts I discuss in this book.

Just as the home has been a major site of inquiry within feminist postcolonial scholarship, queer studies has also been particularly attuned to the home as a primary site of gender and sexual oppression for queer and female subjects.⁴⁰ Yet while many lesbian and gay texts imagine “home” as a place to be left behind, to be escaped in order to emerge into another, more liberatory space, the queer South Asian diasporic texts I consider here are more concerned with remaking the space of home from within. For queer racialized migrant subjects, “staying put” becomes a way of remaining within the oppressive struc-

tures of the home—as domestic space, racialized community space, and national space—while imaginatively working to dislodge its heteronormative logic.⁴¹ From the two sisters-in-law who are also lovers in Deepa Mehta’s film *Fire*, to a British Asian gay son’s grappling with his immigrant father in Ian Rashid’s short film *Surviving Sabu*, to the queer and transgendered protagonists of Shani Mootoo’s and Shyam Selvadurai’s novels, home is a vexed location where queer subjects whose very desires and subjectivities are formed by its logic simultaneously labor to transform it.

Historian Antoinette Burton writes of how, in the memoirs of elite women writers in late-colonial India, the “home” itself becomes an archive, “a dwelling-place of a critical history rather than the falsely safe space of the past.”⁴² Similarly, the queer diasporic texts I discuss throughout this book provide a minute detailing and excavation of the various forms of violence and, conversely, possibility and promise that are enshrined within “home” space. These queer diasporic texts evoke “home” spaces that are permanently and already ruptured, rent by colliding discourses around class, sexuality, and ethnic identity. They lay claim to both the space of “home” and the nation by making both the site of desire and pleasure in a nostalgic diasporic imaginary. The heteronormative home, in these texts, unwittingly generates homoeroticism. This resignification of “home” within a queer diasporic imaginary makes three crucial interventions: first, it forcefully repudiates the elision of queer subjects from national and diasporic memory; second, it denies their function as threat to family/community/nation; and third, it refuses to position queer subjects as alien, inauthentic, and perennially outside the confines of these entities.

Impossibility

Because the figure of “woman” as a pure and unsullied sexual being is so central to dominant articulations of nation and diaspora, the radical disruption of “home” that queer diasporic texts enact is particularly apparent in their representation of queer female subjectivity. I use the notion of “impossibility” as a way of signaling the unthinkability of a queer female subject position within various mappings of nation and diaspora. My foregrounding of queer female diasporic subjectivity throughout the book is not simply an attempt to merely bring into visibility or recognition a heretofore invisible subject. In-

deed, as I have suggested, many of the texts I consider run counter to standard “lesbian” and “gay” narratives of the closet and coming out that are organized exclusively around a logic of recognition and visibility. Instead, I scrutinize the deep investment of dominant diasporic and nationalist ideologies in producing this particular subject position as impossible and unimaginable. Given the illegibility and unrepresentability of a non-heteronormative female subject within patriarchal and heterosexual configurations of both nation and diaspora, the project of locating a “queer South Asian diasporic subject”—and a queer female subject in particular—may begin to challenge the dominance of such configurations. Revealing the mechanisms by which a queer female diasporic positionality is rendered impossible strikes at the very foundation of these ideological structures. Thus, while this project is very much situated within the emergent body of queer of color work that I referenced earlier, it also parts ways with much of this scholarship by making a queer female subject the crucial point of departure in theorizing a queer diaspora. In so doing, *Impossible Desires* is located squarely at the intersection of queer and feminist scholarship and therefore challenges the notion that these fields of inquiry are necessarily distinct, separate, and incommensurate.⁴³ Instead, the book brings together the insights of postcolonial feminist scholarship on the gendering of colonialism, nationalism, and globalization, with a queer critique of the heteronormativity of cultural and state nationalist formations.⁴⁴

The impossibility of imagining a queer female diasporic subject within dominant diasporic and nationalist logics was made all too apparent in the battle in New York City between the South Asian Lesbian and Gay Association (SALGA) and a group of Indian immigrant businessmen known as the National Federation of Indian Associations (NFIA), over SALGA’s inclusion in the NFIA-sponsored annual India Day Parade. The India Day Parade—which runs down the length of Madison Avenue and is an ostensible celebration of India’s independence from the British in 1947—is an elaborate performance of Indian diasporic identity, and a primary site of contestation over the borders and boundaries of what constitutes “Indianness” in the diaspora. In 1992 the newly formed SALGA applied for the right to march in the parade only to be brusquely turned down by the NFIA. Later that same year, right-wing Hindu extremists demolished the Babri Masjid, a Muslim shrine in Ayodhya, India, setting off a frenzy of anti-Muslim violence. These two events—the destruction of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya, and the resistance on the part of the NFIA to SALGA’s

inclusion in the parade in New York City—are not as unrelated as they may initially appear. Paola Bacchetta has argued that one of the central tenets of Hindu nationalist ideology is the assignation of deviant sexualities and genders to all those who do not inhabit the boundaries of the Hindu nation, particularly Indian Muslims.⁴⁵ Thus, while these two events are certainly not comparable in terms of scale or the level of violence, together they mark the ways in which terrifyingly exclusivist definitions of communal belonging are relayed and translated between nation and diaspora within the realm of public culture, through intersecting discourses of gender, sexuality, nationality, and religion. The literal erasure of Muslims from the space of the (Hindu) nation coincides with the symbolic effacement of queer subjects from a “home” space nostalgically reimagined from the vantage point of the diaspora. Indeed the battle between SALGA and the NFIA that continued throughout the 1990s makes explicit how an Indian immigrant male bourgeoisie (embodied by the NFIA) reconstitutes Hindu nationalist discourses of communal belonging in India by interpellating “India” as Hindu, patriarchal, middle class, and free of homosexuals.⁴⁶ This Hindu nationalist vision of home and homeland was powerfully contested by SALGA at the 1995 parade, where once again the group was literally positioned at the sidelines of the official spectacle of national reconstitution. One SALGA activist, Faraz Ahmed (aka Nina Chiffon), stood at the edge of the parade in stunning, Bollywood-inspired drag, holding up a banner that proclaimed, “Long Live Queer India!” The banner, alongside Ahmed’s performance of the hyperbolic femininity of Bollywood film divas, interpellated not a utopic future space of national belonging but rather an already existing queer diasporic space of insurgent sexualities and gender identities.

That same year, the NFIA attempted to specify its criteria for exclusion by denying both SALGA and Sakhi for South Asian Women (an anti-domestic violence women’s group) the right to march on the grounds that both groups were, in essence, “antinational.” The official grounds for denying Sakhi and SALGA the right to march was ostensibly that both groups called themselves not “Indian” but “South Asian.” The possibility of Pakistanis, Bangladeshis, or Sri Lankans marching in an “Indian” parade was seen by NFIA members as an unacceptable redefinition of what constituted the so-called Indian community in New York City. In 1996, however, the NFIA allowed Sakhi to participate while continuing to deny SALGA the right to march. The NFIA, as self-styled arbiter of communal and national belonging, thus deemed it appropriate for women

to march as "Indian women," even perhaps as "feminist Indian women," but could not envision women marching as "Indian queers" or "Indian lesbians"; clearly the probability that there may indeed exist "lesbians" within Sakhi was not allowed for by the NFIA.

The controversy surrounding the India Day Parade highlights how hegemonic nationalist discourses, produced and reproduced in the diaspora, position "woman" and "lesbian" as mutually exclusive categories to be disciplined in different ways. Anannya Bhattacharjee's work on domestic violence within Indian immigrant communities in the United States, for instance, demonstrates how immigrant women are positioned by an immigrant male bourgeoisie as repositories of an essential "Indianness." Thus any form of transgression on the part of women may result in their literal and symbolic exclusion from the multiple "homes" which they as immigrant women inhabit: the patriarchal, heterosexual household, the extended "family" made up of an immigrant community, and the national spaces of both India and the United States.⁴⁷ Sunaina Maira's ethnography of South Asian youth culture in New York City further documents the ways in which notions of chastity and sexual purity in relation to second-generation daughters are "emblematic not just of the family's reputation but also, in the context of the diaspora, of the purity of tradition and ethnic identity, a defense against the promiscuity of 'American influences.'"⁴⁸ Both Bhattacharjee and Maira valuably point to the complex ways in which the gendered constructions of South Asian nationalism are reproduced in the diaspora through the figure of the "woman" as the boundary marker of ethnic/racial community in the "host" nation. The "woman" also bears the brunt of being the embodied signifier of the "past" of the diaspora, that is, the homeland that is left behind and continuously evoked. But what remains to be fully articulated in much feminist scholarship on the South Asian diaspora are the particularly disastrous consequences that the symbolic freight attached to diasporic women's bodies has for non-heteronormative female subjects. Within the patriarchal logic of an Indian immigrant bourgeoisie, a "nonheterosexual Indian woman" occupies a space of impossibility, in that she is not only excluded from the various "home" spaces that the "woman" is enjoined to inhabit and symbolize but, quite literally, simply cannot be imagined. Within patriarchal diasporic and nationalist logic, the "lesbian" can only exist outside the "home" as household, community, and nation of origin, whereas the "woman" can only exist within it. Indeed the "lesbian" is seen as

"foreign," as a product of being too long in the West, and therefore is annexed to the "host" nation where she may be further elided—particularly if undocumented—as a nonwhite immigrant within both a mainstream (white) lesbian and gay movement and the larger body of the nation-state.

The parade controversy makes clear how the unthinkability of a queer female diasporic subject is inextricable from the nationalist overvaluation of the heterosexual female body; but it also functions in tandem with the simultaneous subordination of gay male subjectivity. Thus throughout this book, I pay close attention to the highly specific but intimately related modes of domination by which various racialized, gendered, classed, and sexualized bodies are disciplined and contained by normative notions of communal identity. The rendering of queer female diasporic subjectivity as "impossible" is a very particular ideological structure: it is quite distinct from, but deeply connected to, the fetishization of heterosexual female bodies and the subordination of gay male bodies within dominant diasporic and nationalist discourses.⁴⁹ *Impossible Desires* attempts to track the mutual dependency and intersections between these different modes of domination, as well as the particular forms of accommodation and resistance to which they give rise. Indeed, as my brief discussion of *My Beautiful Laundrette* suggested, and as I elaborate in the following chapters, queer female diasporic subjectivity remains unimaginable and unthinkable not only within dominant nationalist and diasporic discourses but also within some gay male, as well as liberal feminist, rearticulations of diaspora. Thus, in their elision of queer female diasporic subjectivity, gay male and liberal feminist frameworks may be complicit with dominant nationalist and diasporic discourses.

While the phrase "impossible desires" refers specifically to the elision of queer female diasporic sexuality and subjectivity, I also use it to more generally evoke what José Rabasa, in his analysis of the Zapatista rebellion in Chiapas, Mexico, calls "a utopian horizon of alternative rationalities to those dominant in the West."⁵⁰ Noting that one of the rallying cries of the movement is "Exigíd lo imposible!" (Demand the impossible!), Rabasa understands the Zapatistas' evocation of pre-Columbian myths combined with a pointed critique of the North American Free Trade Agreement and former president Raúl Salinas's economic reforms as articulating a particular vision of time, history, and national collectivity that runs counter to that of dominant Mexican nationalism. The "impossibility" of the Zapatistas' subaltern narrative, argues Rabasa, lies in

its incompatibility with the "modern" narratives of dominant nationalism that relegate indigenous people to the realm of the pre-political and the premodern. The power of the Zapatistas thus "resides in the new world they call forth—a sense of justice, democracy, and liberty that the government *cannot* understand because it calls for its demise."⁵¹ It may initially appear incongruous to begin a study of gender, sexuality, and migration in the South Asian diaspora with an evocation of an indigenous peasant struggle in southern Mexico. However I find the notion of "the impossible," as articulated by Rabasa's reading of Zapatismo, to have a remarkable resonance with the project engaged in throughout this book. The phrase "Exigíd lo imposible!" in relation to a queer South Asian diaspora, suggests the range of oppositional practices, subjectivities, and alternative visions of collectivity that fall outside the developmental narratives of colonialism, bourgeois nationalism, mainstream liberal feminism, and mainstream gay and lesbian politics and theory. "Demanding the impossible" points to the failure of the nation to live up to its promises of democratic egalitarianism, and dares to envision other possibilities of existence exterior to dominant systems of logic.

South Asian Public Cultures

Throughout this book, I attempt to read the traces of "impossible subjects" as they travel within and away from "home" as domestic, communal, and national space. In so doing, I ask how we can identify the multitude of "small acts," as Paul Gilroy phrases it, that fall beneath the threshold of hegemonic nationalist and diasporic discourses.⁵² This project of mapping the spaces of impossibility within multiple discourses necessitates an engagement with particular cultural forms and practices that are at the margins of what are considered legitimate sites of resistance or the "proper objects" of scholarly inquiry. The term "South Asian public cultures," in my project, functions to name the myriad cultural forms and practices through which queer subjects articulate new modes of collectivity and kinship that reject the ethnic and religious absolutism of multiple nationalisms, while simultaneously resisting Euro-American, homonormative models of sexual alterity. My understanding of the term builds on Arjun Appadurai and Carole Breckenridge's definition of "public culture" as a "zone of cultural debate" where "tensions and contradictions between national sites and transnational cultural processes" play out.⁵³ It

is within the realm of diasporic public culture that competing notions of community, belonging, and authenticity are brought into stark relief. Such an understanding of public culture reveals the intimate connections between seemingly unrelated events such as the India Day Parade controversy and the destruction of the Babri Masjid that I just described. The queer diasporic public culture that is the focus of this book takes the form of easily "recognizable" cultural texts such as musical genres, films, videos, and novels that have a specifically transnational address even as they are deeply rooted in the politics of the local. But because queer diasporic lives and communities often leave traces that resist textualization, they allow us to rethink what constitutes a viable archive of South Asian diasporic cultural production in the first place.⁵⁴ Thus the archive of queer public culture that I track here also encompasses cultural interventions that are much harder to document, such as queer spectatorial practices, and the mercurial performances and more informal forms of sociality (both on stage and on the dance floor) that occur at queer night clubs, festivals, and other community events. This queer diasporic archive is one that runs against the grain of conventional diasporic or nationalist archives, in that it documents how diasporic and nationalist subjectivities are produced through the deliberate forgetting and violent expulsion, subordination, and criminalization of particular bodies, practices, and identities. This archive is the storing house for those "clandestine counter-memories," to once again use Joseph Roach's phrase, through which sexually and racially marginalized communities reimagine their relation to the past and the present. By narrating a different history of South Asian diasporic formation, a queer diasporic archive allows us to memorialize the violences of the past while also imagining "other ways of being in the world,"⁵⁵ as Dipesh Chakravarty phrases it, that extend beyond the horizon of dominant nationalisms.

This different mode of conceptualizing the archive necessitates different reading strategies by which to render queer diasporic subjects intelligible and to mark the presence of what M. Jacqui Alexander terms an "insurgent sexuality" that works within and against hegemonic nationalist and diasporic logic.⁵⁶ Indeed, the representations of non-heteronormative desire within the texts I consider throughout the book call for an alternative set of reading practices, a queer diasporic reading that juxtaposes what appear to be disparate texts and that traces the cross-pollination between the various sites of non-normative desires that emerge within them. On the one hand, such a reading

renders intelligible the particularities of same-sex desiring relations within spaces of homosociality and presumed heterosexuality; on the other hand, it deliberately wrenches particular scenes and moments out of context and extends them further than they would want to go. It exploits the tension in the texts between the staging of female homoerotic desire as simply a supplement to a totalizing heterosexuality and the potential they raise for a different logic and organization of female desire. Because it is consistently under erasure from dominant historical narratives, the archive of a queer diaspora is one that is necessarily fractured and fragmented. I therefore employ a kind of scavenger methodology that finds evidence of queer diasporic lives and cultures, and the oppositional strategies they enact, in the most unlikely of places—the “home” being one such key location. As we see in relation to “home,” often what looks like a capitulation to dominant ideologies of nation and diaspora may in fact have effects that dislodge these ideologies; conversely what may initially appear as a radically oppositional stance may simply reinscribe existing power relations. In my reading of the British film *East Is East* (dir. Damien O’Donnell, 2000) in chapter 3, for instance, I suggest that it may not be the gay British Asian son who leaves the home, but rather the seemingly straight daughter who remains, who most troubles the gender and sexual ideologies of “home” in all its valences. The daughter is able to effect the disruption of home space through the performance of the hyperbolic femininity embodied by the heroines of Bollywood, as popular Hindi cinema is known. It is this practice of citationality, where the daughter evokes different genealogies of racialized femininity, that marks her as “queer.” Queerness in this case references an alternative hermeneutic, the particular interpretive strategies that are available to those who are deemed “impossible” within hegemonic nationalist and diasporic discourses. The category of queer, in other words, names the reading and citational practice that I engage in throughout the book, and that I also identify within the texts themselves.

I employ this queer reading practice in chapter 2, where I consider the ways in which popular music functions as one of the primary manifestations and locations of transnational public culture in the South Asian diaspora. I read the music of British Asian bands of the 1990s through a queer diasporic frame by situating it alongside alternative media and cultural practices that allow us to hear different stories about South Asian diasporic formation in the context of globalization. The valorization by critics and audiences of the recognizably

oppositional class and race politics of the predominantly male “Asian Underground” music scene allows for a complex picture of racialized masculinities in postcolonial Britain to emerge. Yet it misses the more nuanced contestations of gender, sexuality, race, and nation by queer and female subjects that take place at the margins of this scene and in spaces (such as the home) that may not initially appear as crucial locations where globalization makes itself felt. I therefore counterpose my discussion of the “Asian Underground” with an evocation of other musical, cinematic, and literary representations that provide complex renderings of gendered labor and “home” space in the context of globalization. In her 2003 novel *Brick Lane*, for instance, the British Bangladeshi writer Monica Ali maps the contours of these marginal spaces through the story of Nazneen, a Bangladeshi immigrant woman garment worker who lives and works in a Tower Hamlets housing project in London’s East End.⁵⁷ Ali traces in minute detail the domestic landscape of Nazneen’s cramped flat that she shares with her husband and two daughters, and that also functions as a work space where she does piecemeal work for a local garment sweatshop. The novel makes evident the way in which the seemingly “private” domestic space functions as a key site of globalization, one that is intimately connected to other national locations where goods are produced by women workers for transnational corporations. The careful attention that Ali pays to the domestic and urban spaces of immigrant London maps an alternative geography to that evoked by the militant, antiracist politics of Asian Dub Foundation (ADF) or Fun’Da’Mental, two of the best known British Asian bands of the 1990s. While Ali situates her novel in the same social landscape of London’s East End out of which a band like ADF emerged in the early 1990s, the music is unable to access the domestic geography of gendered labor that Ali so carefully details. Indeed, understanding the interrelation between diaspora and globalization through very particular forms of British Asian music, as various cultural critics have tended to do, rather than through the other musical forms and cultural practices that emerge out of the racialized and gendered spaces mapped by a text such as Ali’s, risks replicating a dominant model of diaspora that recenters a heterosexual masculine subject. The chapters that follow attempt to think diaspora outside of this masculinist, heteronormative paradigm.

Chapter 3 elaborates on the interrelations between racialized postcolonial masculinities, South Asian diasporic women’s labor, and queer articulations of diaspora as they emerge in the home. I read the configuration of queer

postcolonial masculinity in the Indian Canadian filmmaker Ian Rashid's 1996 short film, *Surviving Sabu*, which is set in contemporary London, through and against the depiction of masculine failure in V. S. Naipaul's classic 1961 novel of diasporic displacement, *A House for Mr. Biswas*, set in Trinidad. By juxtaposing these two very different texts, I work against a logic of oedipality that would position Naipaul's modernist fable as emblematic of an "older" diasporic model that is invariably superseded by the "new" understanding of diaspora articulated by Rashid's film. Instead I argue that Naipaul's novel provides a brutally accurate diagnosis of the impact of colonialism on racialized masculinity that is productively taken up and reworked through the queer diasporic imaginary of Rashid's text. Yet Rashid's gay male articulation of diaspora, as in Kureishi's *My Beautiful Laundrette*, is dependent on the erasure of the female diasporic subjectivity and therefore has more in common with Naipaul's text than may initially appear. The splitting of a queer project from a feminist one that we see in *Surviving Sabu* raises the larger question of how to theorize diaspora within both a queer and feminist framework. I therefore end the chapter with a consideration of how female diasporic subjectivity—as it emerges in the 2001 British film *East Is East*—intervenes into the masculinist frameworks of both Rashid and Naipaul and provides an alternative ordering of "home" space. *East Is East* is set in Manchester in the early 1970s and follows the trials and tribulations of George Khan, a working-class Pakistani immigrant, his white English wife, and their biracial children. While the film's dominant narrative centers on George's relation to his sons and figures diasporic displacement primarily through the trope of damaged, wounded postcolonial masculinity, I employ a queer reading practice to instead draw attention to the seemingly tangential, excessive moment in the film where George's sole daughter engages in a Bollywood-style song-and-dance sequence. This scene offers a much more complex understanding of gendered diasporic subjectivity and Asian women's labor in the "home" than does the rest of the film, or Rashid and Naipaul's texts. As such, my reading of *East Is East* allows us to resist the troubling conflation of queerness as male and femaleness as straight that even progressive gay male texts such as Rashid's inadvertently enact.

Chapter 4 further explores this splitting of "queer" from "female," and "feminist," as it plays out within the realm of Bollywood cinema and the diasporic routes it travels. I begin by reflecting on the ways in which queer diasporic audiences reterritorialize "home" and homeland through their re-

ception of popular Indian cinema. These audiences exploit the tensions and slippages within the Bollywood text, and particularly the song-and-dance sequence, in order to articulate a specifically queer diasporic positionality, one that recognizes both the text and the viewer in motion. As such, a consideration of queer diasporic engagements with Bollywood forces us to extend and challenge notions of spectatorship and cinematic representation that have emerged out of both Indian film studies and Euro-American queer and feminist film studies. Throughout the chapter, I pay particular attention to representations of women's sexuality in Bollywood cinema, in order to gauge what it means for queer female desire to signify onscreen, given Bollywood cinema's intimate connection with Indian nationalism and the intense investment of nationalist discourse in regulating women's bodies. How does queer female desire trouble dominant notions of national and communal identity that emerge within the heteropatriarchal narratives of Bollywood cinema? Interestingly, it is often in moments of what appears to be extreme gender conformity, and in spaces that seem particularly fortified against queer incursions—such as the domestic arena—that queer female desire emerges in ways that are most disruptive of dominant masculinist scripts of community and nation. Indeed the most enabling and nuanced instances of queer female desire on the Bollywood screen transpire not through the representation of explicitly queer coded, visible "lesbian" characters but rather through evoking the latent homoeroticism of female homosocial space.

The second half of chapter 4 traces the ways in which the idiom of Bollywood cinema and its strategies of queer representation have been translated, transformed, and rendered intelligible for an international market by South Asian diasporic feminist filmmakers such as Mira Nair, Gurinder Chadha, and Deepa Mehta. I focus in particular on Mira Nair's film *Monsoon Wedding* (2001), which received tremendous international acclaim, and which I read as a diasporic translation of the hugely popular Bollywood hit *Hum Aapke Hain Koun . . . !* (Who Am I to You?, dir. Sooraj Barjatya, 1994). Surprisingly, I find that in Nair's ostensibly feminist, diasporic rescripting of the neoconservative, nationalist politics of the earlier film, the queerness of female homosocial space that *Hum Aapke Hain Koun . . . !* renders so distinctly is effaced. By substituting queer male characters for queer female space, *Monsoon Wedding* and other feminist diasporic translations of Bollywood such as Chadha's *Bend It Like Beckham* (2002) and Mehta's *Bollywood/Hollywood* (2002), ultimately evacuate

the possibility of queer female representation by splitting apart a queer project from a feminist one. Like Rashid's *Surviving Sabu*, they thus reinforce the impossibility of queer female desire and subjectivity that is at the heart of dominant nationalist and diasporic ideologies.

Chapter 5 turns to Deepa Mehta's earlier, controversial 1996 film *Fire*, in order to examine a diasporic representation of queer female desire and pleasure that does indeed signify on screen. The film and the fractious debates it generated provide a remarkably fruitful case study of the fraught relation between representations of queer female desire and discourses of diaspora and nation. I employ a queer diasporic reading practice that traces the multiple and contradictory meanings of Mehta's film as it travels between different national locations. Just as Nair's *Monsoon Wedding* can be read as a diasporic translation of the Bollywood hit *Hum Aapke Hain Koun . . . !*, so too can *Fire* be productively read as the diasporic translation of another earlier, "national" text, namely the 1941 short story that inspired it, Ismat Chughtai's "The Quilt."⁵⁸ Although Chughtai's story was only briefly mentioned, if at all, in the ensuing debates surrounding *Fire*, I reinstate it as a crucial intertext to Mehta's film. Both texts situate queer female pleasure and desire firmly within the confines of the middle-class home, thereby powerfully disrupting dominant gender and sexual constructions of communal and national identity in South Asia, as well as dominant Euro-American narratives of an "out," visible "lesbian" identity. Situating Mehta's film in relation to Chughtai's story critiques the film's apparent intelligibility to a non-South Asian viewing public through developmental, neocolonial constructions of "tradition" and "modernity." Instead it underscores the ways in which both texts produce complex models of female homoerotic desire that challenge a Euro-American "lesbian" epistemology that relies on notions of visibility and legibility. Furthermore, both texts put forth a narrative of marriage and the domestic space that interrogate colonial and nationalist discursive framings of female sexuality in general and female homoeroticism in particular. I place my readings of *Fire* and "The Quilt" within the context of South Asian feminist scholarship on gender and nationalism that, I argue, fails to adequately address alternative sexualities when considering the formation of Indian nationalism or the Hindu right. The *Fire* controversy makes all too apparent the necessity of theorizing alternative sexualities as central to the critique of religious and state nationalisms.

My final chapter examines contemporary queer South Asian diasporic liter-

ature that theorizes sexual subjectivity through processes of transnationalism and gendered labor migrations, as well as through the complicated negotiations of state regulatory practices and multiple national sites undertaken by queer diasporic subjects. As such, this literature interrogates our understandings of nostalgia, "home," and desire in a transnational frame. I argue that the Sri Lankan Canadian writer Shyam Selvadurai's 1994 novel *Funny Boy*,⁵⁹ and the Trinidadian Canadian Shani Mootoo's 1996 novel *Cereus Blooms at Night*,⁶⁰ make a timely intervention into the emerging field of South Asian American studies in that they place sexuality firmly at the center of analyses of racialization, colonialism, and migration. I look closely at how both texts rethink the category of "home" through the deployment of what I would call an enabling nostalgia, one that stands in marked contrast to the conventionally nostalgic structures of "home" and tradition called forth by contemporary state and diasporic nationalisms. Within the novels of Selvadurai and Mootoo, as in Chughtai's text, sexuality functions not as an autonomous narrative but instead as enmeshed and immersed within multiple discourses. In its recreation of "home" space, queer diasporic literature refuses to subsume sexuality within a larger narrative of ethnic, class, or national identity, or to subsume these other conflicting trajectories within an overarching narrative of "gay" sexuality. The novels of Mootoo and Selvadurai, like the other queer diasporic texts I consider throughout the book, do not allow for a purely redemptive recuperation of same-sex desire, conscribed and implicated as it is within racial, class, religious, and gender hierarchies. Indeed, as is so apparent in the scene from *My Beautiful Laundrette* with which I began this chapter, it is precisely from the friction between these various competing discourses that queer pleasure and desire emerge.

The framework of a queer South Asian diaspora provides a conceptual space from which to level a powerful critique at the discourses of purity and "tradition" that undergird dominant nationalist and diasporic ideologies; but it also works to reveal and challenge the presumed whiteness of queer theory and the compulsory heterosexuality of South Asian feminisms. While my book limits itself to the analysis of queer South Asian and queer South Asian diasporic texts, I hope that the insights produced here on the illegibility and indeed impossibility of certain queer subjects and desires also allow for a richer understanding of a whole range of texts that have stood outside of dominant lesbian-gay and national canons. Through the lens of a queer diaspora, various writ-

ers and visual artists such as Nice Rodriguez, Ginu Kamani, Audre Lorde, R. Zamora Linmark, Richard Fung, and Achy Obejas (to name just a few)⁶¹ can now be deciphered and read simultaneously into multiple queer and national genealogies. Many of the objects of inquiry in *Impossible Desires* appear to be excessive, tangential, or marginal to recognized traditions; often they are but recalcitrant moments within larger narratives which are deeply invested in conventional gender, sexual, and nationalist ideologies. It is precisely at the margins, however, and in relation to sexuality and desire, that the most powerful and indispensable critiques of dominant formulations of nation and diaspora are taking place. My contention here is that the various regimes of colonialism, nationalism, racial and religious absolutism are violently consolidated through the body and its regulation. When queer subjects register their refusal to abide by the demands placed on bodies to conform to sexual (as well as gendered and racial) norms, they contest the logic and dominance of these regimes. Thus theorists of sexuality, as well as of race and postcoloniality, ignore the interventions of queer diasporic subjects at their own peril.

2

COMMUNITIES OF SOUND

Queering South Asian Popular Music in the Diaspora

At a 1999 performance of queer South Asian art and culture in New York City, the high point of the show came as the stage went dark and the audience heard not the familiar strains of Bollywood songstresses Asha Bhosle or Lata Mangeshkar over the loudspeakers, as one might expect in such a venue, but rather the chilly electronic beat of Madonna's 1998 Hinduism-inspired CD *Ray of Light*. As the lights went on, a spotlight bathed the three South Asian drag queens who appeared center stage in a golden glow. The performers were replete with the henna tattoos, gold bangles, and the upper-caste facial markings popularized by Madonna during her brief bout of Indophilia in the late 1990s. As the largely queer South Asian crowd erupted in enthusiastic applause, the performers launched into a sexy and hilarious rendition of Madonna's faux-Sanskrit techno dance track "Shanti/Ashtangi." How can we read this scene of criss-crossing influences, appropriations, and translations, of South Asian diasporic queers performing Madonna at the height of her "millennial orientalist" phase?¹ This performance and its interpellation of a queer diasporic public culture functions as an ironic commentary on Madonna's penchant for cultural theft and tourism, particularly her appropriation of the cultural forms of queer and racialized subcultures. Furthermore, it reverses the standard circuits of commodification and appropriation whereby

subcultural forms are absorbed into mainstream culture. But by returning Madonna's performance of exotic otherness to its roots, so to speak, the drag performers are not making a cultural nationalist claim to authenticity or cultural ownership. Rather, they can be understood as what José Muñoz terms "disidentificatory subjects, who tactically and simultaneously work on, with and against a dominant cultural form."² Queer diasporic cultural practices challenge "millennial orientalism" not through an outright rejection of dominant cultural forms but through a highly pleasurable refashioning of them; such practices thus open up a queer counterpublic space that both references and resists the simultaneous absorption and elision of subcultural forms within the dominant public sphere.³ Crucially, they do so without resorting to the conventional articulations of masculine potency that are apparent in other musical expressions of South Asian diasporic culture.

This drag performance at a small nightclub in New York City offers a glimpse of how queer diasporic cultural practices, as brief and fleeting as they may be, produce a space of public culture that powerfully critiques the racism of dominant U.S. culture and the heteronormativity of hegemonic diasporic and nationalist formations. While performances such as this do not fit easily into analyses of South Asian diasporic music, their double-edged critique provides a critical point of reference for considering the production, performance, and consumption of popular music in the South Asian diaspora. As the critical scholarship and popular attention to South Asian diasporic music has grown over the past decade, the focus has for the most part been on two musical movements: Bhangra, a form of popular music originally from the Punjab in North India that became the basis of a diasporic South Asian youth culture in both Britain and the United States in the late 1980s and early 1990s; and more recently, the post-Bhangra, UK-based "Asian Underground" or "New Asian Dance Music" scene of the late 1990s. The exclusive focus on these particular forms of South Asian diasporic musical production, I will suggest, invariably replicates a notion of diaspora that depends on dominant gender and sexual ideologies, in that it tracks forms of "radical" cultural politics only insofar as they circulate between men and pass literally and metaphorically from fathers to sons. In other words, tracing the contours of South Asian diasporic subjectivities through the soundscapes of only one particular music culture tells only one story of diaspora and its relation to both economic globalization and the nation form.

Conversely, my analysis of contemporary South Asian diasporic music cultures in the United States and the United Kingdom seeks to reconceptualize diaspora outside its conventionally masculinist and heterosexist parameters by paying attention to those cultural practices (such as the drag performance of "Shanti/Ashtangi") that are deemed to be tangential or marginal to the more audible forms of diasporic popular music. We can name these eccentric cultural practices as "feminist" and "queer," and together they constitute a different archive of South Asian diasporic culture that forces us to place gender and sexuality at the very center of our understandings of diaspora, nation, and globalization. This is not simply a call for the inclusion of "other" voices within the critical frameworks that define South Asian musical production. Rather, I am suggesting that ignoring the alternative narratives of gendered and sexual subjectivities that emerge from the margins of dominant cultural forms inevitably results in misreading the complex relation between diaspora, the nation, and the processes of globalization as they impact local sites.

Fathers and Sons:

Bhangra Music and the Engendering of Diaspora

In 1995 I wrote an article on Bhangra music and how its production, circulation, and consumption across national borders created a sonic landscape that mapped imaginary lines of connection from rural Punjab, to the industrial cities of the English Midlands, to the urban centers of London and New York.⁴ I argued that a second generation of British Asian musicians that emerged in the late 1980s—exemplified by the Birmingham-reared British-Punjabi artist Apache Indian's musical mix of Bhangra with reggae and dancehall—offered a powerful critique of claims to cultural authenticity by drawing on a wide array of black and Asian diasporic musical influences. In so doing, these artists reversed what I called "the hierarchical relation of the nation to diaspora," where the diaspora is seen in some sense as the bastard child of the nation: disavowed, illegitimate, and inauthentic. In the music of Apache Indian—with its referencing of multiple diasporic locations including the Caribbean, India, the UK, and the United States—the "nation" was displaced from its privileged position as the locus of originary or pure cultural identity and became merely one out of many diasporic locations. The web of "affiliation and affect" (to use Paul Gilroy's influential phrase)⁵ that Bhangra produced between these dis-

parate sites in the South Asian diaspora resulted in the nation becoming part of the diaspora just as the diaspora became part of the nation.⁶ In other words, a consideration of the way Bhangra traveled and continues to travel across national borders radically shifts the way in which diaspora is traditionally conceived as always and forever being oriented toward a phantasmatic lost homeland; rather, this homeland is revealed to be just as dependent on the diaspora as the diaspora is on the homeland.

This analysis of Bhangra music in Britain—a genre largely performed and produced by men—allowed me to consider both the uses and limits of diaspora as a theoretical framework through which to understand gendered and racial subjectivities in migration.⁷ It became clear, in the music of first-generation Bhangra musicians in the 1970s, as well as in the work of later artists such as Apache Indian and the deejay Bally Sagoo in the 1980s and 1990s, that discourses of diaspora may challenge racial and ethnic essentialisms while at the same time being deeply invested in notions of dominant masculinity, genealogical descent, and reproduction. The concept of diaspora, after all, is neither purely disruptive of normative notions of culture and community, nor is it purely “regressive” and conservative. Rather the affective ties of diaspora can be mobilized for competing and contradictory interests simultaneously.⁸ In the case of Bhangra, many first-generation musicians rooted in the working-class Asian immigrant communities of Southall in London or the depressed industrial cities in the Midlands articulated a “closed” notion of diaspora, as Stuart Hall defines it, one marked by a sense of exile, displacement, and longing for lost homelands.⁹ Second-generation Bhangra musicians, on the other hand, for the most part eschewed notions of redemptive return and instead redefine their relation to questions of home, exile, and origin in an exuberant articulation of what Hall calls an “open” diaspora, one where immigrant subjects “remak[e] themselves and fashion new kinds of cultural identity by drawing on more than one cultural repertoire.”¹⁰ Of course, claiming that Hall’s model of “closed” versus “open” diasporas maps neatly onto the music of first- versus second-generation Bhangra musicians runs the risk of being overly reductive. Nevertheless, I would argue that one of the defining features of the music of second-generation British Bhangra artists was the challenge they posed to the ethnic absolutism and concomitant longing for lost homelands of conventional diasporic ideologies, as expressed in some of the music of an earlier generation of Bhangra musicians. Their music also challenged the ethnic absolutism and

dominant notions of English national identity articulated by “New Right” nationalist discourse under Thatcher.¹¹

Interestingly, questions of patrilineal descent, inheritance, and generational conflict were mobilized at various levels: within the lyrics of Bhangra songs, in the relation between first- and second-generation Bhangra musicians, and in the actual form of the music itself. The lyrical content of many early Bhangra songs detailed the hardships of working-class immigrant male existence in a racist, xenophobic Britain, while also commenting on the social rifts that migration produced between fathers and sons. The oedipal dynamics between father and son that were the focus of many early Bhangra songs were played out and negotiated musically by second-generation Bhangra artists in the 1990s in their remixes of first-generation Bhangra classics from the 1970s. For instance the 1974 track by Shaukat Ali titled “Why Did I Come to *Vilayet* [England]?” with its piano, accordion, and tabla instrumentation, dramatized the tense but also humorous dialogue between a father in Punjab and his wayward immigrant son in the UK. Twenty years later, Ali’s song was remixed by the deejay Johnny Zee by adding a drum kit, sound effects, synthesizers, tabla, and dholak to the original track.¹² Virinder S. Kalra notes that both the 1974 and 1994 versions of this track, as well as other first-generation Bhangra songs, fit easily into the dominant narrative of “culture clash” and generational conflict that characterizes the “ethnicizing project” of the majority of ethnographic accounts of minorities in Britain.¹³ Yet the musical dialogue between first- and second-generation Bhangra musicians, as seen in the dynamic of sampling and remixing, may also point to a more complex representation of immigrant existence than that which is produced within a conventional narrative of generational conflict. Bhangra songs of the 1970s through the 1990s seem to mobilize the recurring motif of generational divides between fathers and sons in order to articulate a pointed critique of the pressures brought to bear on working-class immigrant masculinities in the UK. For instance, one of the best-known Bhangra hits of the 1980s, Kalapreet’s “*Us Pardes Kee Vasna Yaaran?*” (What Is It to Live in This Place/Abroad?), details the loss of dignity and self-determination that male migrant workers experience in the face of white racism, having left Punjab for *vilayet* (England).¹⁴ Indeed, in the thematic focus of its lyrics, in the contrapuntal relation between first- and second-generation musicians, and in the aesthetics of the remix, Bhangra music can be seen to represent an extended meditation on racialized immigrant masculinity in the diaspora.

The concern with masculinity that is apparent in Bhangra music, however, is often predictably predicated on dominant gender and sexual ideologies. An analysis of Bhangra makes clear that both the “closed” and “open” models of diasporic identity as articulated by first- and second-generation British Bhangra musicians were invariably organized around patrilineality and organic heterosexuality. Although Bhangra music allowed for a reversal of the nation-diaspora hierarchy in critical ways, I argued in my earlier piece that it also intersected with anticolonial and Hindu nationalist discourses in its deployment of the figure of “woman” and in its ultimate adherence to a particularly masculinist, heterosexual genealogy of diaspora. In first-generation Bhangra songs, for instance, the nostalgic evocation of homeland was mobilized through the fixed, static figure of the female, the emblem of tradition and (sexual and moral) purity. Female agency was again foreclosed in the music of later British Asian artists such as Apache Indian, whose concert performances staged a fluid, syncretic, de-essentialized notion of “Indian” identity only through the ritualized enactment of heterosexual descent and inheritance between father and son.¹⁵

If my early analysis of Bhangra music made clear the “dangers of positing certain notions of genealogy and patrilineality as the underlying logic of diaspora,”¹⁶ in this chapter I want to ask if we can restore the impure, inauthentic, nonreproductive potential of the notion of diaspora by placing queer and feminist diasporic cultural practices at the center of our analysis. What alternative narratives emerge when we displace those of “generational conflict” and oedipal relations between fathers and sons through which much Bhangra music is structured both thematically and musically? By “queering” a discussion of South Asian popular music in the diaspora, I work against the tendency toward patrilineality, biology, and blood-based affiliation that lies embedded within the term “diaspora” and that is enacted by some South Asian diasporic popular music cultures and the cultural criticism about these cultures. In other words, queering the soundscapes of the South Asian diaspora means highlighting those feminist and queer diasporic cultural practices that give us a way of imagining and hearing diaspora differently, outside heteronormative paradigms of biological inheritance, oedipality, and blood-based affiliation.

Nostalgia, Nationalism, and Masculinity in Post-Bhangra British Asian Music

By the late 1990s, Bhangra was firmly entrenched as a central aspect of South Asian youth culture in both Britain and the United States.¹⁷ But the diasporic South Asian music scene that was once dominated by Bhangra had also proliferated and taken flight in exciting new directions as well, with British Asian bands and artists such as Cornershop, Fun'da'mental, Asian Dub Foundation, the Kaliphz, Hustlers HC, Echobelly, Talvin Singh, and Nitin Sawhney encompassing musical idioms as diverse as punk, reggae, drum 'n' bass, alternative rock, hip-hop, techno, and electronica. These British bands also produced transatlantic linkages between the UK and the United States through venues such as Mutiny, a nightclub in New York City run by deejay and filmmaker Vivek Renjen Bald and dedicated to featuring the music of many new British Asian artists alongside that of local talent.¹⁸ By examining three of the most visible and highly publicized British Asian bands of the late 1990s—Cornershop, the Asian Dub Foundation (ADF), and Fun'da'mental—I ask how this constellation of British Asian musicians, deejays, and consumers (alternately dubbed the “Asian Underground” or “New Asian Dance Music”) replicates or reconceptualizes the masculinist paradigms of diaspora, nation, history, and memory as they were produced during an earlier moment of British Asian music. The trenchant commentary on racialized immigrant masculinities apparent in earlier forms of British Asian music are also evident in the music of newer Asian Underground bands. These new sounds explicitly challenge the pathologization of British Asian masculinity within discourses that position young Asian, particularly Muslim, men as “the ‘new’ threat to British society, the latest incarnation of the black folk devil.”¹⁹ As Claire Alexander notes, the newly discovered Asian Other in 1990s Britain is “best captured in the image of ‘the Underclass,’ ‘the Fundamentalist,’ and of course, ‘the Gang.’”²⁰ In the tracks of ADF, mass media representations of an unassimilable racialized underclass are transformed into the image of what the band calls the “digital underclass,” an imagined revolutionary coalition of sound that unites those outside of white male middle-class normativity.²¹ Similarly, in naming themselves as they do, the indie rock band Cornershop and the hip-hop-influenced Fun'da'mental ironically inhabit dominant representations of Asian men as mild and meek owners of local grocery stores or, conversely, as dangerous fundamentalists/

terrorists. Yet, as I will discuss, as with an earlier generation of British Asian music, this powerful and necessary critique of dominant representations of British Asian masculinity also runs the risk of replicating conventional gender and sexual hierarchies.

In the mid 1990s, this conglomeration of musical sounds was heralded by the mainstream media as the coming of age of "The New Asian Kool," a marketing category that signaled the "acceptability" of South Asian diasporic popular culture within mainstream popular culture in Britain. The term "Asian Underground" first came into wide usage in 1997, with the release of Talvin Singh's album *Soundz of the Asian Underground*, which included the various British Asian artists featured at his London nightclub Anokha. Yet many of the bands deemed by the press to be at the forefront of the Asian Underground music scene rejected the label as merely a convenient term used by the mainstream media to package and ghettoize British Asian musicians. Pratibha Parmar's documentary *Brimful of Asia* (1998) turns a critical eye on this politics of labeling and the increasing visibility in general of British Asian sounds, arts, and fashion in 1990s Britain. Parmar's video, while largely a celebratory account of the newfound visibility of British Asian cultural production in the late 1990s, nevertheless reveals a troubling tension between the way in which British Asian artists understood the work that they were doing, and the way their work was incorporated into the mainstream. The British Asian artists interviewed by Parmar very explicitly countered narratives of "culture clash" and "between two cultures" that dominated popular and ethnographic accounts of British Asian communities. Instead they embraced a more complicated aesthetic that they understood to be remaking British national identity through a claiming of diasporic and transnational affiliations. While Parmar's film stops short of fully exploring the contradictions it raises, it becomes evident in the film that the complexities of British Asian self-representations were flattened out when they entered the mainstream. Indeed, the film makes clear how these representations were transformed into dehistoricized markers of otherness and exotica, exemplified by the "millennial orientalism" of Madonna's 1998 album *Ray of Light*.²²

This new audibility of South Asian diasporic culture, as well as its new visibility in the form of ubiquitous citations of Bollywood cinema in mainstream Euro-American popular culture (which are discussed in greater detail in chapter 4), prompted fierce debate and criticism among popular music scholars

in the 1990s. Koushik Banerjea forcefully argued that the embrace of the term "Asian Underground" by the mainstream media points to the insidious effects of "an insatiable and . . . uncritical appetite for multiculturalism and its richly syncretic produce."²³ Banerjea notes that while newly dubbed "Asian Underground" artists enjoy their fleeting fifteen minutes of fame, the harsh material realities of British Asian immigrant existence remain unchanged: "Eulogizing Talvin Singh on a Sunday afternoon at his club in Brick Lane [a largely Bangladeshi neighborhood in East London] does little to hide white distaste for the large Asian community which actually lives there."²⁴ Banerjea alludes here to the shifting class demographics of South Asian club culture, as the largely working-class audiences and practitioners of Bhangra music in the towns and cities of the Midlands gave way to hip, multiracial, middle-class urban audiences in London. The new class affiliation of the Asian music scene rendered it more palatable to both middle-class Asian and non-Asian audiences alike. Banerjea goes on to argue that the contemporary dynamics between the Asian Underground and the culture "above ground," so to speak, is marked by the legacies of Orientalism: "Even if Empire has subsided, fascination with 'otherness' has persisted, except that this time round neo-Orientalists need travel no further than Hoxton for their masala mudpie."²⁵ Similarly, on the other side of the Atlantic, Vijay Prashad documented the ways in which all things South Asian are refracted through "U.S. Orientalism" in the context of U.S. popular culture, so that markers of a mythic, spiritual, dehistoricized, and implicitly Hindu India take the place of more radical subaltern histories of transnational alliances and affiliations between South Asia and the United States.²⁶ Popular music scholars such as John Hutnyk and Sanjay Sharma echo Banerjea's concerns when they plaintively ask, "In Britain the album *Soundz of the Asian Underground* was so rapidly sucked up into the mainstream, while so much more 'difficult' matter was left aside, that we are left wondering what spaces remain for subaltern cultural creativity and production to flourish and 'succeed' without becoming instant vacant fodder for the style magazines?"²⁷ In his book-length study of British Asian music, Hutnyk specifies what he means by this "more difficult matter" that remains resistant to the voracious appetite of capitalist commodification: it is the music and uncompromising antiracist politics of the hip-hop bands such as Fun'da'mental and Kaliphz, "not characterized as Asian Kool."²⁸

While these critiques by Hutnyk, Sharma, and Banerjea usefully point to the

legacies of Orientalism in the new moment of visibility and audibility of South Asian diasporic culture, they also tend to reduce the dynamic relation between racialized immigrant subcultures and dominant culture into a simple story of unrelenting appropriation and commodification. As such, they run the risk of replicating conventional Marxist narratives, "whose tendency," as Lisa Lowe and David Lloyd remind us, "is to totalize the world system, to view capitalist penetration as complete and pervasive, so that the site of intervention is restricted to commodification; or, more insidiously, with the result that all manifestations of difference appear as just further signs of commodification."²⁹ As my example of South Asian drag queens "doing" Madonna attests to, laments about the inevitable co-optation of subcultural production tend to flatten out the complexities of the routes that culture travels. Within such a framework, it is impossible to account for the different meanings and effects of "appropriation" depending on both context and audience. For instance, Vijay Prashad documents the way in which African Americans in the early to mid-twentieth century participated in a dominant "U.S. Orientalism" that fetishized a spiritual India; yet he argues that the meanings of this fetishization were radically different than they were in "the world of white America." For black Americans, Prashad notes, "the strategic deployment of India was far more nuanced, particularly because it was used as a means to undercut racist authority."³⁰ George Lipsitz traces a similar dynamic of strategic subaltern appropriation in his analysis of the performance of (Native American) "Indianness" by working-class black men during the Mardi Gras celebration in New Orleans. While these enactments by black men of the figure of the Indian "display all the orientalism, primitivism and exoticism that plague so much of popular culture's representations of aggrieved groups,"³¹ Lipsitz goes on to show how "the politics emanating from Indian imagery to affirm Black nationalism lead logically to a pan-ethnic anti-racism that moves beyond essentialism."³² These complicated forms of appropriation that Prashad and Lipsitz document have no place within the framework of inevitable, totalizing corporate commodification that Hutnyk and others map out. The following discussions of Cornershop, ADF, and Fun'da'mental in relation to queer and feminist cultural practices suggest that the dynamics of appropriation and the dialectic between the mainstream and minoritarian popular cultures may be more messy and unpredictable than such an analysis can account for. Moreover, it becomes particularly evident when considering queer diasporic cultural practices such

as the drag performance I described at the beginning of this chapter that minoritarian cultures respond to their own fetishization and commodification in strategic and imaginative ways.

The contradictory meanings and effects of South Asian diasporic popular culture's entry into mainstream consciousness were sharply delineated in 1997 when Cornershop, fronted by the British Punjabi singer Tjinder Singh, scored a surprise hit on both U.S. and UK charts with their single "Brimful of Asha." The track remained on Britain's Top of the Pops for the entire year, and the album on which it appeared was named the best new album of 1997 by *Spin* magazine.³³ Cornershop's transatlantic success marked a turning point for British Asian music, which had remained largely inaudible on mainstream music charts despite the Bhangra boom of the 1980s and early 1990s. Bearing in mind the cautions of critics such as Hutnyk, Banerjea, and Sharma, I would nevertheless argue that Cornershop's success intervenes into what constitutes both "Asian diasporic" and "British" national culture and national memory in important ways. Indeed Cornershop deploys nostalgia not to evoke lost homelands or a fantasied imperial past but rather to offer a different vision of history, collectivity, and cultural genealogy. Nostalgia in their music functions not to reify the nation, as it does in the work of early Bhangra musicians in the 1970s as well as in the Thatcherite evocation of Britain's "golden age" of empire. Rather nostalgia destabilizes notions of "Britishness" espoused by New Right ideology, while also calling into question the status of South Asia as the locus of an originary, redemptive cultural identity.

An obvious point of departure in discussing new British Asian music's interventionist remembering of national history is Cornershop's rendition of the 1965 Beatles classic "Norwegian Wood." The original Beatles song, with its sitar melody line, marked one of the first times Indian instrumentals were used in mainstream pop. Thus, like the reinvention of Madonna's "Shanti/Ashtangi" by South Asian drag queens, Cornershop's translation of the Beatles track into Punjabi enacts a neat reversal of musical influences and appropriations. In their remaking of "Norwegian Wood," Cornershop also seems to comment quite explicitly on the wave of nostalgia for a whitewashed British past, evident in the tremendous popularity of "Britpop" bands like Oasis and Blur in the mid 1990s. As Rupa Huq argues, "Britpop bleaches away all traces of black influences in music in a mythical imagined past of Olde England as it never was, whereas [post-Bhangra musics] are rooted in the urban realities of

today's Britain."³⁴ Significantly, members of Cornershop have resisted attempts to read their cover of "Norwegian Wood" as solely an act of protest against cultural appropriation; rather, they insist, the song was meant as homage to the enduring musical influence of the Beatles on their own music. By singing the lyrics in Punjabi but otherwise playing a fairly straightforward cover version of the song, Cornershop manages to pay tribute to the legacy of the Beatles—referencing them as part of their musical genealogy alongside Asian artists and influences—while simultaneously challenging the "Britpop" phenomenon's elision of nonwhite musical traditions and histories.

Indeed Cornershop strategically redeploys nostalgia not to evoke an all-white Britain but rather to recall the histories and cultural imaginary of Asian immigrant communities in the diaspora. The eponymous "Asha" in Cornershop's hit single "Brimful of Asha," for instance, is the legendary Bollywood playback singer Asha Bhosle. While "Norwegian Wood" is Cornershop's tribute to the Beatles, "Brimful of Asha" functions as a tribute to Asha Bhosle, as well as to Lata Mangeshkar and Mohammed Rafi, the two other giants of Bollywood music who are referenced in the lyrics. All three singers dominated the Bollywood music industry from the 1950s to well into the 1980s, but were at the height of their popularity in the 1960s and 1970s. The voices of Asha, Lata, and Mohammed Rafi constitute, in a sense, the soundtrack to the lives of first-generation working-class South Asian immigrants to Britain who worked in the factories in the West Midlands and created ethnic enclaves for themselves in London's Southall and Brick Lane. Apache Indian, for instance, has spoken of hearing Bhosle's songs on his Punjabi parents' turntable while growing up in Handsworth, Birmingham.³⁵ By evoking these Bollywood legends and other iconic figures and symbols of sixties and seventies India, Cornershop gestures to the alternative genealogy of popular culture that constitutes South Asian diasporic subjectivity and that challenges notions of an "authentic" Englishness.

The spectacle of Cornershop performing "Brimful of Asha" on BBC's *Top of the Pops*, as hundreds of white British youth sing along to lyrics that celebrate the icons of Bollywood music, makes clear the ways in which Cornershop forces South Asian popular cultural referents into the mainstream of British national culture. John Hutnyk cautions that any celebration of this new visibility of South Asian culture in the mainstream—emblemized by the successes of Cornershop, Apache Indian, or Bally Sagoo—must be tempered with

an awareness of the workings of corporate capital as it turns "progressive sounds in one place [into] the agents of capitalism in another."³⁶ This, however, may be too limited a model of popular music and its effects. Indeed, Cornershop calls forth a new relation between immigrant subcultures and the dominant culture, one that resists being read as merely another instance of the unstoppable effects of corporate hegemony and a rapacious capitalist culture industry. Rather than South Asian cultural signifiers being inserted into mainstream popular culture as dehistoricized fetish objects, as Hutnyk fears, we can also read Cornershop's success as actually forcing a mainstream British audience to be literate in the cultural referents of Asian immigrant communities, and to acknowledge that Asian cultural forms are already an intrinsic part of the cultural landscape of the UK. Cornershop offers a playful yet powerful counterdiscourse to the nostalgic rewriting of sixties Britain as all-white, free of race riots and the rise of the British National Party. In other words, Cornershop demands that South Asian cultural forms be recognized by mainstream culture in ways that do not quite so easily resolve into mere absorption or appropriation. Rather, their music stages an intervention of South Asian diasporic public culture into the national public sphere. Thus Cornershop enacts precisely the nation/diaspora reversal apparent within an earlier generation of British Asian music: as I have argued elsewhere, second-generation interpreters of Bhangra music in the 1980s and 1990s, such as Bally Sagoo and Apache Indian, drew the nation (both the UK and India) into a sonic diaspora, so that it no longer provided the anchor for notions of diasporic return, authenticity, and purity.³⁷ In a similar move, Cornershop's reworking of "Norwegian Wood," as well as its evocation of alternative immigrant knowledges and psychic landscapes in "Brimful of Asia," resituate both "India" and "England" as equivalent sites within the band's diasporic map. But Cornershop also makes clear that the culture of diasporic immigrants is central to British national identity: thus the diaspora, through their music, is revealed to be intrinsically a part of the (British) nation.

If Cornershop memorializes British culture by drawing on the popular cultural markers of both post-Independence India and post-imperial Britain, the punk/dub/rock band Asian Dub Foundation offers an even more explicit commentary on questions of nation, nostalgia, history, and historiography. ADF's potent mix of punk, ska, reggae, and jungle with snatches of Qawaali, Bollywood soundtracks, and classical Hindustani instrumentals documents the

intersection of multiple immigrant and diasporic communities in London. ADF's lyrics consistently espouse an antiracist politics that draws its inspiration from the anticolonial nationalist struggle and other radical social movements in India. Their track "Assassin," for example, celebrates the Indian nationalist hero Udham Singh, who in 1940 assassinated Michael O'Dwyer, the British colonial official responsible for the infamous Amritsar massacre of 1919.³⁸ By drawing on an anticolonial nationalist past in India to create an antiracist present in the UK, ADF brings to the surface the continuities between the British state's colonial aggression in India and its current racist practices against communities of color in Britain today. The zone of public culture that their music produces thereby functions both transnationally and cross-historically. Similarly, on a track titled "Naxalite," the left-wing peasant insurgency in Bengal in the late sixties serves as an antecedent for the fight against police brutality in the UK in the 1990s. The Naxalite movement remains one of the touchstones of the left in India; its evocation by a diasporic, East London-based band like ADF opens the band to charges of romanticizing a complicated, historically situated movement. Indeed when I presented an early version of this chapter to an audience primarily made up of South Asianists, a debate erupted over the accuracy of ADF's portrayal of the Naxalite movement.³⁹

Clearly, what is significant for my purposes here is not so much whether ADF "gets it right" but rather what happens in the always inaccurate process of translation as the memory of this particular movement travels from the West Bengali village of Naxalbari, the birthplace of the movement, to East London, where ADF originated. In their evocation of the Naxalite movement in "Assassin," ADF does not attempt to provide British Asians some sort of unmediated access to South Asian history; rather the track, and the music of ADF in general, can be seen to produce what Josh Kun suggestively calls "audiotopias." Drawing from Michel Foucault's notion of heterotopias, Kun defines audiotopias as "sonic spaces of affective utopian longings where several sites normally deemed incompatible are brought together not only in the space of a particular piece of music itself, but in the production of social space and mapping of geographical space that music makes possible."⁴⁰ The "audiotopic map," as Kun terms it, conjured up by ADF's music brings into discursive proximity disparate geographic spaces and temporalities: ADF's "community of sound" (to borrow a phrase from one of their own songs)⁴¹ encompasses London's East End as easily as it does Naxalbari. This new geography of

diasporic public culture also enacts a temporal collapse of past histories of social struggle in South Asia, and contemporary realities of race and class in the UK. In so doing, the question of cultural origins is mobilized in a radically different way from the standard evocations of "homeland" and exile that characterize conventional diasporic ideologies. Like Cornershop's rewriting of the history of 1960s Britain, ADF's imagined sonic community mobilizes an interventionist nostalgia where "India" signifies a history of radical organizing rather than a site of pure, unsullied cultural identity. Furthermore, ADF's evocation of "India" as a site of radical movements for social change directly challenges the "millennial Orientalism" evident in mainstream popular culture, where random Indian cultural markers stand in for a vaguely defined, depoliticized "Eastern" spirituality.⁴² Offering a trenchant critique of liberal multiculturalism, ADF rants on their track "Jericho": "We ain't ethnic, exotic or eclectic/ The only 'e' we use is electric/ With your liberal minds/ You patronize our culture/ Scanning the surface like vultures/ with your tourist mentality/ we're still the natives/ You're multicultural/ We're anti-racist."⁴³ ADF's redeployment of "India" as the locus not of a lost originary identity or of a transcendent spirituality but of a rich history of anticolonial and antistate resistance is echoed in the names of the nightclubs in the United States and Britain that showcase new British Asian music, such as *Swaraj* (self-rule) in London, *Mutiny* in New York, and *Azaad* (freedom) in San Francisco. These instances reveal the ways in which auditory cultural forms and practices powerfully mobilize affective loyalties across time and space. ADF's notion of a "community of sound" is therefore suggestive of ways of organizing collectivity that bypass the realm of the visible. For an earlier generation of British Asian musicians, Bhangra was a powerful means of asserting a specifically "Asian" identity within an obliterating scopic economy organized around a black-white binary.⁴⁴ For ADF and other British Asian bands in the 1990s, producing affiliation through sound can be seen as a way of critiquing a logic of the visual, where British Asians are rendered either invisible or hypervisible (as stereotype) within the dominant racial landscape of the UK.

Ashley Dawson's careful and nuanced discussion of ADF provides the local context for the band's transnational address by situating the band's politics within the social and economic conditions of London's East End in the 1980s and 1990s, specifically the area known as the Docklands.⁴⁵ Drawing on Saskia Sassen's notion of "global cities,"⁴⁶ Dawson observes that the emer-

gence of London as one such global city has been particularly devastating for working-class Asians: "Overwhelmingly concentrated in industries and skill levels which have been on the decline, and living in urban areas hardest hit by the restructuring of the global economy, Asians have been the first to suffer from Britain's economic woes and have yet to reap the rewards of the nation's halting economic revitalization during the 1990s."⁴⁷ Dawson provides an invaluable historicization of the increasing impoverishment of white and Asian working-class communities in the Docklands and demonstrates that the concomitant rise in racial violence by long-time white residents against newer Bangladeshi immigrants was a direct result of state policies that effectively converted the Docklands into an "enterprise zone" in the late 1980s.⁴⁸ ADF's militant antiracist politics, in Dawson's reading, emerges in response to this explosive nexus of white racism, working-class frustration, and the brutal exigencies of global capital. ADF evokes global antiracist, anticolonial struggles as a way of addressing the very local context of race and class inequalities set in motion and exacerbated by the state policies that facilitate the transformation of London into a global city. Thus, for Dawson, the significance of ADF and other militant hip-hop Asian bands lies in the way their music signals a critique of state racism as well as a "resistance to the inequalities often generated by the globalization of the economy."⁴⁹

It is also crucial to remember, however, that these inequalities generated by globalization are produced along gendered divisions rather than solely along the racial and class lines that Dawson discusses. The same dynamics of globalization that resulted in massive unemployment among young working-class black men in the UK in the 1980s produced a large segment of casualized homeworkers that was overwhelmingly made up of Asian women immigrants.⁵⁰ Naila Kabeer, in her comparative study of Bangladeshi women workers in London and Dhaka, notes that the international restructuring of the garment industry in the 1970s and 1980s led to firms subcontracting parts of the production process to low-wage labor in the global south, while also utilizing "domestic outworkers in the 'hidden' economy of the depressed inner city areas of Britain."⁵¹ Bangladeshi immigrant women in the East End of London engaged in home-based piecework became the primary source of low-wage labor in the UK garment industry. Kabeer turns a critical gaze onto "the high visibility of Bangladeshi women workers . . . on their way to and from work on the streets of Dhaka, and the near-invisibility of the Bangladeshi women who

worked as domestic outworkers for the [garment] industry in London."⁵² Kabeer argues that this invisibility of Asian women homeworkers in the UK was compounded by the silence on the part of the British labor movement to address their needs, and spoke to the dominant view of homeworking as "a logical cultural choice for 'Asian' Muslim women and hence not necessarily a matter for public concern."⁵³ Swasti Mitter's research on immigrant women workers has further demonstrated that Asian women's labor in the UK only registers in the general public consciousness when a horrific accident (such as the death of workers due to the burning down of an illegal sweatshop, for instance) makes occasional front-page news.⁵⁴ Ironically, this literal invisibility of Asian women's labor is discursively replicated in analyses of popular music and globalization that fail to account for the gendering effects of the global economy on local sites such as the East End. Asian women's labor, because it takes place in the seemingly "private" space of the home, is not recognized as a critical component of South Asian diasporic public culture. Thus, while it is clearly necessary to contextualize a band like ADF through an analysis of "the political economy of racism," as Dawson does so thoroughly, the failure to recognize the gendered logic of this economy means that men are once again the tacit subjects and objects of analysis.

Popular music critics such as Dawson, John Hutnyk, and Nabeel Zuberi, all of whom have written extensively on the Asian Underground, are cognizant that the black nationalist politics of Asian Underground bands may valorize a militant, tough Asian masculinity at the expense of female agency. As Zuberi comments, in much militant British Asian hip-hop, "the politics . . . are primarily about young men, defined by the homosociality of Asian lads on the street."⁵⁵ Similarly, Dawson is careful to note that the black nationalist politics of ADF may indeed marginalize women, but he also usefully resists reductively labeling the band's gender politics as simply regressive or sexist. Instead, he argues that a track like ADF's "*Tu Meri*," while seeming to buttress conventional gender relations, also implicitly responds to the challenges leveled by feminist and queer artists, activists, and academics to gender conventions within the South Asian community. Dawson's insistence on the multiple meanings and effects of the music is well taken, yet other critical commentaries on the gendering of the Asian Underground are not quite so nuanced. In a telling example that is indicative of much of the existing critical commentary on gender in the British Asian music scene, John Hutnyk discusses the rap group

the Kaliphz in the following terms: "The Kaliphz often seem caught up in a version of macho Gangsta rapping that is testosterone-fuelled and boyz-in-the-hood aggressive, yet their record in opposition to British fascist groups is considerable."⁵⁶ For Hutnyk, here, the music is radical *despite* the sometimes unfortunate conservatism of its gender and sexual ideologies. By simultaneously acknowledging and disavowing the limits of masculinist militancy, Hutnyk in effect subordinates gender as a terrain of struggle to the seemingly more urgent political project of antiracist organizing. One of Hutnyk's main arguments is that the new visibility of particular, easily consumable forms of South Asian culture in the United States and Britain comes at the expense of a more radical politics espoused by bands like Fun'da'mental.⁵⁷ But in celebrating the "hard" politics of ADF, Fun'da'mental, and the Kaliphz over the "soft" politics of more mainstream acts that make it on the charts such as Bally Şagoo, Apache Indian, or the Coventry-born rapper Panjabi MC, Hutnyk implicitly valorizes a particular version of "radical" politics over all others. Such a dichotomy—of good versus bad music, good versus bad politics—obscures the pleasures, disruptions, and challenges posed by South Asian diasporic cultural forms and practices that may not announce themselves as "radical" or "oppositional" in ways that are quite so obvious.

The dangers of privileging antiracism as a singular political project that in effect relies on conventional articulations of gendered and sexual subjectivity are particularly apparent when considering the music and politics of the hip-hop-influenced Fun'da'mental. The band's music samples everything from Bollywood dialogue and the Sufi devotional music of Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan to the speeches of revolutionary male leaders such as Louis Farrakhan, Malcolm X, and Gandhi. As such, like ADF, Fun'da'mental works against a conventional diasporic evocation of India as a site of origination or redemptive return. The music conjures forth a militant, male pan-Islamicist identity that rails against the "U.K. Islamophobia," as Nabeel Zuberi phrases it, that followed the controversy over the publication of Salman Rushdie's novel *The Satanic Verses* in 1992 and that emerged with renewed fervor after the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks in New York and Washington.⁵⁸ David Hesmondalgh notes that Fun'da'mental's first single, "Righteous Preacher," contained lyrics which supported the Ayatollah Khomeini's *fatwa* against Rushdie. In an interview in *Melody Maker* that caused great controversy at the time of the single's release, the band member Goldfinger made the following statement: "Even though

I'm Sikh, I agree with my Muslim brothers that Rushdie has to face the consequences of what he has done . . . Until you understand the importance of religion in our culture, you will not understand how much this man has hurt us."⁵⁹ Hesmondalgh takes this statement as a deliberately provocative attempt on the part of the band to challenge assumptions of an easily consumable "multiculturalism" held by the white press. While this may be true, Goldfinger's statement is deeply problematic in its couching of South Asian collective identity, "culture," and "religion" as unitary and homogenous. During the Rushdie controversy, it was precisely against both the multicultural rhetoric of the white liberal press, as well as the claims to a singular cultural identity made by self-appointed male British Muslim community "leaders," that a multi-racial feminist alliance such as Women Against Fundamentalism (WAF) was formed. As Clara Connelly and Pragna Patel have documented, WAF used the Rushdie affair as an occasion to level a powerful multipronged critique of state-sponsored racism and the gendered politics of patriarchal fundamentalism in immigrant communities.⁶⁰ The valorization and visibility of the pan-Islamist black nationalist political stance held by bands like Fun'da'mental invariably elides these more nuanced negotiations of gender, race, religion, and multiple nationalisms undertaken by feminist critics, activists, and cultural producers.

"Other Ways of Being in the World":

Alternative Narratives of Globalization and Diaspora

My point here is not only to decry the marginalization of non-male, non-heteronormative subjects in much of the critical scholarship on the British Asian music scene, much less to simply dismiss the music and bands themselves as sexist. Rather, I am suggesting that the invisibility of "other" subjects and forms of cultural insurgence in the critical discourses of British Asian music are an inevitable result of the misrecognition, on the part of scholars and critics, of the new mappings of space, race, gender, and sexuality effected by globalization. Saskia Sassen notes that "the global city is a strategic site for disempowered actors because it enables them to gain presence, to emerge as subjects, even when they do not gain direct power."⁶¹ Within Sassen's framework, the global city is a site of contestation between global capital and the vast pool of low-wage labor that sustains it. Sassen forces us to pay attention to the new actors that globalization produces—such as working-class women, immigrants,

and people of color—who are invisible within a top-down narrative of globalization that can only see members of the new transnational professional work force as viable global agents. Thus, while Dawson is dependent on Sassen's model of global cities to make his argument about ADF's remapping of urban space, what remains curiously absent within his framework is the migrant female work force that Sassen demonstrates is so central to the workings of the global city. Within the new cartography that globalization produces, much of this gendered labor occurs not only in the "public" spaces of the factory and sweatshop but also, as the works of Naila Kabeer and Swasti Mitter document, in the "private" space of the immigrant home. Hence the "street" (implicitly codified as male) can no longer be held up as the privileged and singular site of contestation, as it tends to be by both the music and its critics. Rather, less visible sites such as the "home" must also be theorized as key locations in the production of diasporic public cultures and in what Sassen calls "a worldwide grid of strategic places" where global processes materialize.⁶² To use a band like ADF as the grounds for an analysis of the impact of globalization on local sites is to inadvertently replicate in discursive terms the historical invisibility of Asian immigrant women's labor and subjectivity.

The difficulty of making visible and audible the "other" subjects, spaces, and modes of contestation within British Asian landscapes through an analysis of the Asian Underground music scene may point to the need to redefine the very archives that are being identified by this current scholarship on South Asian diasporic public culture. In other words, the black nationalist and antiracist politics and self-presentation of some UK British Asian bands may not necessarily be the most fruitful places to look for alternative renderings of diaspora and globalization. If anticolonial and black nationalist movements provide the inspiration for much of the more explicitly politicized British Asian music being produced today, it is worth asking if this particular remembering of history also inadvertently tends to replicate some of the subordinating tendencies of the very movements it evokes. Critics of black nationalist ideologies in the United States have long argued that the militant masculinity upheld by the movement comes at the expense of all those outside of heterosexist, patriarchal ideals. As Mark Anthony Neal notes, "during the 1960s this violence [of black nationalism], rhetorical or otherwise, at best trivialized various expressions that were not in sync with nationalist desires to unify black identity and culture under a common rubric that would ideally best survive the bombardment of

white supremacist discourses and practices."⁶³ While the music of bands like ADF or Fun'da'mental clearly works against the ethnic essentialism of conventional diasporic and nationalist ideologies, it nevertheless imagines a male, masculine, militant diasporic subject at the center of its antiracist politics. While the lyrics seldom tip into overt homophobia or misogyny, the militant masculinity asserted by ADF and Fun'da'mental nevertheless forecloses the transformative possibilities initially suggested by their music.⁶⁴

This necessity of rethinking the archives of British Asian cultural production in order to make audible "other" diasporic voices becomes apparent when we consider the ways in which a singular focus on one form of diasporic popular music throws others in shadow. Several critics have argued that the privileging of Bhangra as *the* primary signifier of British Asian youth culture in the 1980s by both the mainstream media and cultural critics meant that other musical cultures in the diaspora were rendered inaudible.⁶⁵ For example Giddha, the female equivalent of Bhangra that is sung and performed within all-women's spaces such as weddings and religious ceremonies, never received the same kind of scholarly or popular attention as did Bhangra. Virinder Kalra observes that the live performances of Giddha take place in female homosocial spaces that lie outside the circuits of "written, manufactured and mechanical reproduction" of the male-dominated Bhangra industry.⁶⁶ Thus male Bhangra producers have been able, in effect, to "cannibalize" the form by using Giddha lyrics and melodies without acknowledging the Asian immigrant women's culture from which they come.⁶⁷ Consequently the pointed, complex reflections on the intersections of class, race, gender, and sexual ideologies that emerge in the lyrics of many Giddha songs remain inaudible to most critics and consumers of British Asian music. Furthermore, what also remains unthinkable within standard approaches to South Asian diasporic music is the way in which a Giddha performance itself, in its production of female homosocial space, may very well allow for forms of female diasporic intimacy that exceed the heteronormative—a question I return to in chapter 4 in my analysis of the Giddha sequence in Mira Nair's *Monsoon Wedding* (2001).

Some of the alternative gendered configurations that Giddha evokes are evident in the music of Mohinder Kaur Bhamra, a renowned female vocalist and one of the few female presences in the largely male dominated Bhangra industry. The lyrics to Mohinder's 1980 track, "*Aiyee Naa Vilayet Kurie*" (Don't Come to England Girlfriend), are worth quoting at length as it is a pointed

critique of the regime of racialized gendered labor both in the home and in the factory that awaits female immigrants:

My *mehndi* (henna) was still on my hands
 When my mother-in-law brusquely said
 Let's put the new daughter-in-law to work.
 Chorus: Don't come to England girlfriend
 If you wish for a life of ease, don't come to England girlfriend . . .
 All lost in the factory life.
 My back doesn't straighten, every day I have to clock,
 All my hopes lost in the depths of my heart.
 Don't come to England girlfriend.
 Intense cold strikes my chest
 When I wake up, On Time, in the morning.
 Like lightning I have to finish the housework
 Put the children in the pram
 Drop them off at strangers, on the way to work.
 Working on the shifts has stripped my good looks
 There's no one to give me any consolation
 I wash my face with tears, who should I cry to?
 [The man] who married me and brought me here on a lie?
 Don't come to England girlfriend.⁶⁸

Significantly, the lyrics of the song were written not by Mohinder herself but by Manjit Khaira, a male Punjabi immigrant who spent years working alongside Punjabi women in factories in the West Midlands in the 1970s.⁶⁹ While Virinder Kalra briefly discusses the song as reflecting "the multiple facets of migrant working women's experiences,"⁷⁰ he only hints at the complexities of its representation of racialized and gendered labor migration. I would argue that the song can be read as a remarkably astute analysis of what Lisa Lowe terms the "racialized feminization of labor in the global restructuring of capitalism."⁷¹ Lowe reminds us that "the particular location of racialized working women at the intersection where the contradictions of racism, patriarchy and capitalism converge produces a subject that cannot be determined along a single axis of power or by a single apparatus, on the one hand, or contained within a single narrative of oppositional political formation, on the other."⁷² Structured as a warning to an unseen and unheard female friend who remains

in Punjab, the song conjures forth a "community of sound" that in a sense lies beyond the realm of audibility of ADF's or Fun'da'mental's singular narratives of militant antiracist, anticolonialist politics. The oppositional political formations so powerfully expressed by these bands cannot contain the multiple and intersecting axes of domination articulated by "*Aiyee Naa Vilayet Kurie*." The particular "feminist audiotopia" imagined by the singer is brought into being through transnational affective bonds that exist between women. As such the song produces an alternative zone of public culture that connects geographic and discursive sites as seemingly disparate as rural Punjab and the West Midlands, the factory and the home, "private" and "public" space.

That the song is a cautionary tale that enacts a diasporic intimacy between women in different geographic locales is particularly significant given that many Asian women in the UK are recruited into factory and sweatshop work through friends and relatives.⁷³ The song thus performs and signals a refusal to participate in the informal networks that perpetuate the exploitation of racialized gendered labor. The emphasis on time, shifts, and the clock in the lyrics point to the ways in which time itself is a disciplinary mechanism that regulates the rhythms of the female worker's embodied existence. The singer articulates her struggle to adhere to Aiwaha Ong's definition of Taylorism, the disciplinary apparatus underlying Fordist production that is "based on 'time-motion' techniques that dictate precisely how each task is to be performed in order to obtain the highest level of productivity within a strict time economy."⁷⁴ Indeed Kalra notes that the song is sung "at a breakneck pace, almost as if Mohinder, like the woman in the song, does not have enough time to sing the song before her next shift begins."⁷⁵ The song in a sense then registers a rejection of the mechanistic efficiency, the demand to be punctual and "On Time," that is required of the singer's body as it is transformed into an instrument of wage labor. Significantly, the song represents the home as a site that is just as regulated and disciplined by the clock as is the factory: waking up "On Time" in order to finish the housework, the singer experiences the space of the home not as a private space of leisure but rather as one that becomes yet another site of labor within the global economy. The familial relations that the song maps out between husbands and wives, mothers and children, daughters-in-law and mothers-in-law are irrevocably marked and defined by the exigencies of transnational capital and the labor migrations that it precipitates: affective bonds between family members are superseded by the demands of home

and factory work. Swasti Mitter, in her research on Asian women workers in the West Midlands garment industry in the 1970s and 1980s, observes that for many women who work in what she terms the ethnic sweatshop economy, "the working conditions at the factory are seen as an extension of home life."⁷⁶ Mitter notes that the dominant gender ideologies within diasporic communities "create a unique dependency relationship between the women and their ethnic [male] employers, from whom they are often compelled to accept exploitative wage rates, ethnic ties notwithstanding."⁷⁷ In other words, as women remain dependent on male employers for payment, job security, and immigration status, the particular hierarchical gendered arrangements of the familial space are replicated on the factory floor. Indeed, in "*Aiyee Naa Vilayet Kurie*" the hierarchies of the domestic space—between husband and wife, mother-in-law and daughter-in-law—are seen as coextensive with the disciplinary regime that governs the factory space.

Interestingly, Mohinder's song bears a startling resemblance to the 1993 testimony of Fu Lee, a Chinese female immigrant garment factory worker in San Francisco, that Lisa Lowe cites in her analysis of Fae Myenne Ng's 1993 novel *Bone*. Lowe reads Fu Lee's testimony as revealing "the manner in which the factory extracted surplus value not only through her 'labor' as an abstract form, but from using and manipulating her body itself."⁷⁸ Fu Lee's testimony, according to Lowe, evokes "her conscious, embodied relation to work, [while] it also refuses the isolation of each part as a separate site to be instrumentally exploited."⁷⁹ Similarly, in the Giddha song, the female body becomes the primary site on which the different disciplinary regimes of gender, class, sexuality, and race are mapped: the *mehndi* on the singer's hands, which initially marks her as wife, is overlaid with the bodily labor she does in the household as well as in the factory. The cataloguing of body parts—hands, back, chest, face—speaks to the bodily fragmentation that the singer experiences in the process of laboring in both "public" and "private" space. In her naming of herself as daughter-in-law, mother, wife, migrant, and worker, she resists this fragmented, instrumentalized sense of self that is required by the regime of racialized gendered labor and instead insists on the simultaneity of these subject positions. That we can hear the echoes of "*Aiyee Naa Vilayet Kurie*"—released in 1980 and detailing the experiences of Punjabi women workers in factories in the West Midlands—in the 1993 testimony of a Chinese garment worker in San Francisco is not coincidental. Rather, it speaks to the lines of commonality between the expe-

periences of racialized immigrant women workers in various "First World" nations, as transnational corporations shift their primary labor source from export processing zones in developing countries to the vast pools of low-wage immigrant labor in metropolitan locations.⁸⁰

Dipesh Chakravarty's analysis of the way history informs Marx's notion of capital is useful in further unpacking the complicated critique of racialized gendered labor enacted by Mohinder's song. Chakravarty argues that two ideas of history underlie Marx's understanding of capital. The first notion of history, which Chakravarty designates in shorthand as History 1, is "the past that is internal to the structure of capital" and that capital posits as the precondition of its own existence. But, according to Chakravarty, there is another idea of history (or histories) that mobilizes Marx's critique of capital. These pasts, which Chakravarty calls History 2, "do not belong to the 'life process' of capital. They enable the human bearer of labor power to enact *other ways of being in the world*—other than, that is, being the bearer of labor power."⁸¹ As Chakravarty writes, "the idea of History 2 suggests that even in the very abstract and abstracting space of the factory that capital creates, ways of being human will be acted out in manners that do not lend themselves to the reproduction of the logic of capital."⁸² The song articulates the "other kinds of pasts" and "other ways of being in the world" embodied by the singer that exceed her instrumental status as merely a bearer of labor power. These other pasts and other histories that "interrupt the totalizing thrusts of History 1," as Chakravarty phrases it, are referenced in the song by the singer's affective relation to a female friend left behind in Punjab. Female friendship, here, is the signifier of those allegiances, desires, yearnings, and memories that literally and metaphorically exceed the boundaries of the factory floor. They bring into the space of the factory life histories and experiences that disrupt capital's demand that the singer/worker be simply "living labor, a bundle of muscles and nerves and consciousness, but devoid of any memory except the memory of the skills the work needs."⁸³ Chakravarty reminds us, however, that "History 2s are . . . not pasts separate from capital; they inhere in capital and yet interrupt and punctuate the run of capital's own logic."⁸⁴

The way in which these "other kinds of pasts" are not outside the logic of capital but rather are embedded within it is made clear in the depiction of Asian immigrant women workers in the documentary *Bringing It All Back Home* (dir. Chrissie Stansfield, 1987). The documentary, which details the local effects of

the global restructuring of capital on working-class communities in the UK in the 1980s, features an interview with a South Asian immigrant woman home-worker in the West Midlands doing piecemeal garment work for London retailers in her home.⁸⁵ Here, as in "*Aiyee Naa Vilayet Kurie*," the bodily and psychic demands that the factory makes on the worker are transported to the home space. The camera focuses not on the woman's face, which remains invisible throughout the scene, but on her hands as they move continuously from the sewing machine to the pile of garments by her feet. The woman's baby daughter sits watching her mother intently from a sofa and mimics her mother's hand movements, an image that again speaks to the ways in which affective ties between family members are cross-cut and overdetermined by laboring relations. The woman, speaking in an English that retains Punjabi intonations barely beneath its surface, poignantly describes the experience of homeworking as "worse than being in a factory; it is like a jail." She continues:

When you go in the factory, you meet different sorts of people. You get to know about different ideas of people and you talk with them and you feel less depressed. (Voice rising) I feel so isolated and confined in the house. When I'm very busy on the machine I'm gone so deep in thoughts, you know, of my past time, when I used to go to school and college, of my good friends in India. It is really totally different, in the house.⁸⁶

Ironically, the factory is imagined by the woman worker as the site of interaction and sociability that is unthinkable within her current location in the house. Indeed, she conflates remembered forms of sociability and female homosocial space (the all-girls schools and colleges that she attended in India) with the imagined space of the factory floor. The woman's words reveal the psychic costs of migration and give voice to the deep despair and anguish that the lived experience of racialized gendered regimes of labor produces. Echoing Mohinder's song, the migrant woman worker brings to her current experience of homeworking memories of "past time" and affective ties with other women in other locations. The bringing of these pasts into the present experience of laboring in a sense both interrupts the current experience of work (she is no longer simply an abstract embodiment of "living labor") while simultaneously enabling her to continue with it (conjuring up the past makes her current work more bearable), thus underscoring Chakravarty's caveat that these pasts are not separate from capital but rather inhere within it.⁸⁷

Both "*Aiyee Naa Vilayet Kurie*" and this brief scene from Stansfield's documentary speak to the collapse of "public" and "private" space as the global economy is instantiated in the home and factory through the very body of the female worker. Similarly, Monica Ali's 2003 novel *Brick Lane*,⁸⁸ set in the predominantly Bangladeshi borough of Tower Hamlets in London's East End, is inspired by Naila Kabeer's research on Bangladeshi women homeworkers in the garment industry and provides a fictionalized account of their lives. Kabeer's empirical study stresses the need to move beyond generalized stereotypes of "Asian women workers" in popular and academic discourse that imagine such women as simply an undifferentiated and homogenous mass. Instead, Kabeer stresses Bangladeshi women's agency in making labor market decisions and argues that "women workers do not only exist as artifacts of employers' strategies nor is the quality of their lives fully determined by their experiences in the work place."⁸⁹ Ali takes up Kabeer's call to illuminate the motivations and decision-making processes of the women themselves by providing us with a finely drawn portrait of Nazneen, the protagonist of the novel who works as a home-based machinist while living in a housing estate in Tower Hamlets. While the Bangladeshi neighborhood of Brick Lane provides the backdrop of the novel, Nazneen's imagined geography extends far beyond its groceries and restaurants to the densely packed streets of Dhaka and the open landscapes of rural Bangladesh. Indeed, Nazneen's narrative of life in working-class, immigrant London is shadowed by that of her sister Haseena in Bangladesh who, having migrated from the country to the city, becomes a worker in one of the numerous garment factories in Dhaka that are sub-contracted by transnational corporations. Nazneen and Haseena are thus part of an interconnected labor market of migrant, low-wage, female workers that exists in the cities and free trade zones of the global south as well as in the immigrant enclaves of the advanced industrialized countries of the north. The incorporation of Nazneen and Haseena into the two opposing ends of the international garment industry makes apparent the ways in which both locations are intimately connected through the gendered exigencies of transnational capital. The epistolary, transcontinental relationship between the two sisters evokes the same sense of female diasporic intimacy that animates the Giddha song discussed previously, and acts as a powerful reminder of those "other ways of being in the world" that resist the reduction of complex lives and histories to "living labor." The novel ends with Nazneen's husband return-