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Race and the South Asian Diaspora

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BINOY BHUSHAN AGARWAL, HANSRAJ COLLEGE, INDIA
Making India Their Home? Imperial Impulses and Social Conquests in *White Mughals: Love and Betrayal in Eighteenth Century India*

In the modern age of increasing migration and globalization when identity is and cannot be limited to an either/or category and multiple hyphenated identities are becoming an increasing phenomenon, one needs to take into account the cultural amalgamation that constantly infiltrates our consciousness, shapes our outlook and exhibits itself in our sartorial choices, multiple cuisines and bi/multilingual abilities and so on. However, this feature of acculturation and fusion is not new and exclusive to our own modern times but has been integral to the early moments of colonial encounter. William Dalrymple’s narrative history, *White Mughals* in particular belongs to the revisionist histories being written on colonial India. Keeping in mind our rising engagement with the West and other nations, *White Mughals* looks at the cultural amalgamation and negotiation that took place between the East and the West in the context of early colonial India. It calls for a reassessment of the simplistic dichotomy of the colonizer and the colonized that defines much of our past relation between the British and challenges us to look into other ignored histories and narratives besides the traditionally known ones. In this paper I argue how the period of the eighteenth century that he celebrates with so much nostalgia and longing, is problematic for its conspicuous silence on the “scandal” that was festering in that very period. By paying close attention to the intentions and motives of the “White Mughals,” I aim to demonstrate how the practices of “going native” was limited and gendered as well as underwritten with strategies of power politics. Other significant questions being: What is the nostalgia for? How is the hybridity achieved and its implications? Further, I argue how in his reformulation of 18th century East-West relations through a strategic use of the seductive concept of hybridity, Dalrymple recuperates the colonial British; what is more problematic is his evading the politics of gender as constitutive of colonial relations, and a simplistic use of interracial romance and family models as apolitical sites harnessed in the creation of a happy hybrid British India of 18th Century.

UMME AL-WAZEDI, AUGUSTANA COLLEGE, ILLINOIS
The Face of Radical Islam in a Feminist Space

In the US after 9/11 the publication of such popular novels as Don DeLillo’s *Falling Man* (2007), Jonathan Safran Foer’s *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* (2005; now a critically acclaimed motion picture) and John Updike’s *Terrorist* (2006) send out mixed feelings about 9/11, radical Islam and terrorism – some are written from the viewpoint of the western “‘victim’ of terrorism”
while others, such as Updike’s *Terrorist*, as suggested by Hartnell, attempt to pull away from “the Orientalist depictions of Islam particularly prevalent in the public spheres of the US and Britain” (478). Updike’s *Terrorist*, although arguably trying to portray Islam in a sympathetic way, still ends up creating a white, wealthy, western, heterosexual hegemonic male identity and the Muslim is portrayed as radical and the “Other.” On the other hand such diasporic writers as Mohsin Hamid doesn’t satisfy us either as he ends up creating Changez, a James Bond like character, who is being pursued by the American CIA possibly to be assassinated in his *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. However, Zarqa Nawaz has a totally different view of Islam and Muslim men in her sitcom *Little Mosque on the Prairie*. There are two central male characters who represent masculinities in two different ways – her hero, Amaar, is a young Imam who believes in interfaith, and Baber is a patriarch, a radical who believes in advocating the Islamic way of life. This paper argues that Nawaz creates a “feminine space” with her masculine characters where similarities between Christianity and Islam are emphasized and seen as important aspects for consideration while living in the diaspora. The “feminine space” creates more possibilities for further dialogue to shorten the distance between ‘them’ and ‘us,’ whereas the “masculine space” only alienates and reinforces the notion of radical Islam.

WASEEM ANWAR, FORMAN CHRISTIAN COLLEGE, LAHORE, PAKISTAN

**Darkly Hilarious: A Study of “Internal” Racism in Mohammad Hanif’s *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti***

Race, whatever else it might connote in terms of West-and-the-rest, or its color-based binary divide of “whites versus non-white races,” and its theocentric versus biological and anthropological or Anglo-Saxon or scientific-Darwinian amalgam, has today continued to be a preoccupation for our postcolonial literary study. Read further through its literary history, race, also from its psychoanalytic “other” dynamic, from the division within the individual consciousness of the “self” versus all else it alienates, has moved into the dense demographic domain of dominant versus mute or centered versus decentered, or what Terry Eagleton interprets: “no longer merely a theoretical concept but groups and peoples written out of history” based on “narrow fixation on difference” (*Literary Theory* 205). In the backdrop of such complex racial identifications and their effect on the majority-minority theorization within an urbanized setting of contemporary Pakistani big-city Karachi, this paper explores the possibility of forms of hybridities incarnate “New Humanistic Paradigm[s]” in Mohammad Hanif’s “darkly hilarious” yet romantically-outburst novel *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti* where race, religion and gender outsource the simple physiological to ingrain the deeper psychological for being a female “Catholic-choohra [shit-cleaner].” One definitely poses questions if race, religion and gender, and not just caste or working-class professionalism, has to do a lot with the color-conscious-intra-minority prejudice? Complicated though it may sound, but the novel also raises concerns regarding perspectives on the diasporic spread that redefines Pakistan, asking if the term “Paki” has furthered the “illiberal aims” of “internal” racism and its discriminatory practices (Etienne Balibar quoted in *Beginning Postcolonialism* 103 and 11-112) within a nation that proudly self-acclaims through its very name to be a land of the pure.

ANUPAMA ARORA, UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS-DARTMOUTH

**The Seductive Swami***

This paper examines the varied responses generated by Swami Vivekananda’s visit to the 1893 Columbian Exposition in Chicago. The frantic discounting of the Swami – as charlatan, trickster, and the fad of the hour – pointed to domestic anxieties at a time of economic depression, large-
scale immigration of non-Protestant Christian peoples, emerging woman’s movement, and growing national expansionist sentiment (which coexisted with evangelical expansionism). The response that his travels generated in the U.S. provides a fascinating insight into the ways in which a range of fears – regarding gender, race, religion, nation, and social class – crystallized around the figure of Swami Vivekananda.

SANDEEP BANERJEE, SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY
The Indian Diaspora and the Racialization of Nationalist Affect
The film Loins of Punjab Presents (Dir: Acharya, 2007) presents an insight to the life of the upper and middle class Indian diaspora in the United States of America. Centered around a singing competition in New Jersey to choose an ‘Indian Idol’ the film documents the intersecting lives of several members of the Indian diaspora in North America in addition to sensitively parodying several regional and cultural stereotypes (Gujaratis, Bengalis, and, not least, foreign-born people of Indian origin). Among the finalists of the competition are, significantly, two Muslim characters Sania Rehman, and Saddam Hussein; as well as an American, Josh Cohen. Drawing on the treatment of the characters of Hussein, Rehman, and Cohen in Loins of Punjab Presents, this paper examines the how race and affect play a critical role in producing the idea of the ‘Indian’ in contemporary diasporic contexts, especially in North America. It examines how certain identities are racialized as ‘others’ to the ‘Indian’; how certain racial ‘others’ are welcomed into the category of ‘Indian.’ It therefore queries what it means to be a ‘Indian,’ and how this identity is produced in the context of the contemporary Indian diaspora. For this, the paper engages with how the notions of race and affect inflect the idea of nationalism in our contemporary moment. Most crucially, by situating race, and affect in relation to the Indian diaspora, it interrogates the idea of nationalism in the contemporary context of globalization. In so doing, it provides another instance that illuminates what Dipesh Chakrabarty (2000) has succinctly labeled “diverse ways of inhabiting our world.”

NANDI BHATIA, UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN ONTARIO, LONDON
What has “Home” got to do with “Race” in Multicultural Canada?: South Asian Voices in Canadian Drama
Critical analyses of literatures of the Indian diaspora discuss the “home” of origin as a subtext and a site to which diasporas aspire to return even though it remains an unachievable ideal that is refracted through nostalgic retellings of a space that remains at best “imaginary” (Mishra 2007). Alternatively, some critics, as Roger Waldinger and David Fitzgerald point out, view diasporas’ relationship with the homeland in terms of “loyalty,” obscuring in the process the antagonisms that may arise depending upon one’s circumstances, antagonisms that produce “interactions” between homes of residence and those of origin (2012). In South Asian drama in Canada, many of the concerns regarding race, multiculturalism, job discrimination and violence against women and other marginalized groups, concerns that constitute the subject of plays by Rahul Varma, Rana Bose, Ajmer Rode, Sadhu Binning, and Uma Parmeswaran, Surjit kalsey, Anosh Irani, and Anusree Roy, among others, are propelled by their links to the playwrights’ “home” of origin. With attention to selected plays, this paper will analyze how the networks between home and spaces of residence in multicultural Canada come alive on theatre stages through visual motifs, actors, props, and photographic collages, which confront the different trajectories of “home” that resurface in these plays. Through live scenes of imagination that speak to spectators, several plays under discussion in this essay expose how, while providing emotional sustenance for some, the baggage of “home” may also pose challenges in the home of residence. So the questions that I
raise are: How does home appear? To what end? And what does returning “home” teach us about the inequalities and injustices underlying the current global order?

ANIRBAN BHATTACHARJEE, JADHAVPUR UNIVERSITY, KOLKATTA

Spotlighting the Quicksand: Question of Race, Caste, & Religion in Gayatri Chakraborty Spivak’s “Indian” Readings

This paper re-thinks the textual politics underlying Gayatri Chakraborty Spivak’s diacritical reading of “Hegel” (the name is a world-historical metonym here), who telescopes 2,500 years to argue that Indians cannot move history. In the Hegelian chronograph, the Geist’s (spirit’s) normative aesthetic/epistemic movement toward self-knowledge is stalled in stasis as far as ‘India’ is concerned. In contrast, Spivak’s critique of Hegel’s “Indian” readings, particularly the famous Visvārupadarsanā (vision of the universal form) in the Śrīmadbhagavadgītā, dramatizes her thesis that Time graphed as Law manipulates history as timing in the interest of cultural political explanations, both in the Hegelian and high Hindu contexts. Addressing the problematic, this paper probes the ethico-politics of Spivak’s taking-up of the debates on the notion of Varna-dharma (caste) in the Śrīmadbhagavadgītā, which tracks how the proper name of the caste stands as a mark to cover over the transition from a tribal society of lineage to something more like a state where one’s loyalties are categories for self-reference for the abstracter. Spivak analyses how “Hegel” is refracted into the colonial subject, and thus shows how, within the contradictory pull of Hindu nationalist ideology, caste is re-inscribed as the secret of freedom in keeping with Marx’s famous line: “Man makes his own history but not of his own free will. The overall goal of this paper, then, is to locate Spivak’s reading of the competing ideologies promoting the construction of a middle-class Hinduism that significantly affected the racialization of religion, underlining its structural complicity with caste-segregation, within the broad spectrum of the religio-political debates sponsored by some ideologues in colonial Calcutta. Informed by this complex history, this paper asks how the category of ‘caste’ in its conceptual conflation with wider discourses of ‘race’ has come to serve as key metaphors of socio-political struggle, illuminating one-another and emerging as potent rhetorical strategies of social critique, particularly in India but increasingly also in more global contexts. The paper also attempts to presentize the Spivakian edge-play on the question of the dynamic double-pull of Indic monism that establishes itself only by sheltering the invaginated radical other within its episteme, an interruptive irony so typical of rule-bound high Hinduism.

NIKHIL BILWAKESH, UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA

W.D. Fard and the Charlatan Swamis

This paper examines the founder of the Nation of Islam in the context of “charlatan swami” figures between 1893 and World War II. By analyzing literary and cinematic representations of South Asians in the United States during this period, including the conflation of Hindu and Muslim stereotypes, I hope to uncover the threats and possibilities posed by South Asians’ racial ambiguity in the United States. The racial background of W.D. Fard, the elusive founder the Lost-Found Nation of Islam in the Wilderness of North America, has been a subject of speculation for decades. Studies using problematic FBI and Nation of Islam resources, suggest that he was the son of an Indian Ahmadiyya Muslim father and a British mother, and that he immigrated to the United States in 1913. Upon his arrival, he self-defined as white, ten years before the Supreme Court would decide that South Asians, despite some racial theories grouping them with Europeans as “Caucasian,” could not legally claim to be “white,” and were therefore ineligible for U.S. naturalization. Sometime in the 1920s, Fard moved to San Francisco, where he
worked with the Bengali Theosophical mystic, Mohini Chaterjee, joined Marcus Garvey’s United Negro Improvement Association, and developed a distinctive anti-white rhetoric that would form the cosmogony of the organization he would found in Detroit to restore the “Asiatic black man” to spiritual, financial, moral, and political sanity. During the lifetime of Fard, the United States also saw a proliferation of swamis in the United States, following in the wake of Swami Vivekananda’s reception at the Parliament of Religions in 1893, and the establishment of Vedanta Centers in many American cities. Skepticism accompanied the more welcoming approach to the swamis, and many pre-war films and books depict this figure, often a conflation of Hindu and Muslim tropes and nomenclature, as a racially ambiguous threat to white domesticity, especially in the films of Gloria Swanson. No study of Fard has looked at what I claim to be an illuminating literary and cinematic racial context.

CHANDRIMA CHAKRABORTY, MCMASTER UNIVERSITY, HAMILTON

The Unfinished Past: Komagata Maru to Air India Flight 182

Examining Anita Rau Badami’s Can You Hear the Nightbird Call? (2006) along with Canadian government discourses on Komagata Maru and the Air India bombings, this paper directs attention to how personal and collective memories travel across national and generational borders affecting self/other relationships in the present. Badami’s intricate portrayal of Sikh males as victims and terrorists illustrates the significance of remembering Komagata Maru (1914) and the Air India bombing (1985) in relation to each other in the context of the Canadian government’s endeavors to obscure the central role systemic racism has played throughout the history of the Air India case. The novel begins with memories of Komagata Maru, “a voyage that ended in nothing” (11), and ends with the bombing of Air India Flight 182. By linking Komagata Maru to Air India 182, the novel historicizes Canada’s (past and continuing) racism against peoples of South Asian origin. Analyzing the men in Bibi-ji’s life – her father, her husband, and her foster son – as perpetrators, victims, and survivors of violence, my paper will delineate Badami’s emphasis on the “unfinishedness” of the past (Veena Das) as well as the ability of past traumas to shore up particular identities during moments of crises. I argue that by urging readers to develop “a critical historical consciousness” (Angela Faillier, Roger I. Simon), the novel troubles the very notion of the Air India tragedy as a fixed “event”, calls for a more nuanced understanding of brown “terrorist” bodies and “terrorist” populations, and interrogates the Canadian government’s reframing of the Air India bombing from a non-Canadian tragedy involving non-Canadian citizens to a “terrorist attack” post-9/11.

ANNA CHENG, UNIVERSITY OF CONNECTICUT

The Commodification of Bodies: International Organ Trafficking in Manjula Padmanabhan’s Harvest (1997)

The issue of international organ trafficking has been recognized as one of the contradictory contemporary conflicts of modern capitalist society. Due to the uneven development between the Global North and the Global South, bodies from the Global South are colonized and commodified as tools of laboring; moreover, their living human tissues are marketed for Global North consumers. The paid organ donors of the Global South have been victimized by both technological dehumanization and the commodification of the twenty-first century. This paper looks at the “hidden side” of globalization by focusing on Manjula Padmanabhan’s play Harvest (1997). This Indian play provides a new understanding of the ideological and political identity of the body. The theoretical framework used for this study includes the following aspects: the role
of globalization in the Global South; the notion of “bare life” proposed by Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben; and the technological dehumanization and the commodification of bodies found in India. Through this analysis, it seeks to draw awareness of how bodies and organs are commodified by the Global North. Additional questions which will be addressed include: how economic considerations orchestrate exchange of human tissues between the Global North and the Global South; how modern technologies provide incentive for illegal organ trafficking on a material level and on an ideological level; how globalization defines the disparity of power economically and politically; and, finally, how that affects the value and identities of the human body. 

Harvest offers a new insight to understand how the human body is colonized, not only as a political and social object, but also an economic resource on the global market, ultimately promoting critical thinking about elements which define a body – gender, class, race and ethnicity.

MAYURI DEKA, SILIGURI, INDIA

**Emotions of Stereotyping: Changing Faulty Assumptions in the Multi-Ethnic Literature Classroom**

The continuing racializing of the South-Asian body is intricately connected to the flawed perceptions about the socio-economic and cultural realities within which it is entrenched. The general assumption is that this distorted and damaging appraisal and judgment is sourced from stereotypes. However, research by Sheri Levy and others show that stereotypes are not at the root of these assumptions. Rather, the essential cause is faulty “knowledge” or beliefs about human nature. These form not only the basis of negative group stereotypes (eg. “Hindoos,” “Pakis,” “wogs”) but also can function separately from stereotypes. Further, this information about Others exists not just in propositional form (which can be refuted by argumentation, reason, and evidence) but also in numerous other forms such as imagery, figurative concepts (eg. South-Asians as nerds), prototypic figures (eg. dirty coolies) and ideal/cautionary relational narratives. Indeed rather than propositional forms, it is these other knowledge cores which are so difficult to eradicate. As Diana Meyers points out, “it is not possible to refute [faulty knowledge about Others] with counterexamples or statistics … [because] empirically grounded arguments attacking propositional paraphrases of these figurations fail to make contact with their emotional underpinnings” (*Subjection and Subjectivity*, 55-56). Any attempts at changing these flawed meta-cognitions must involve changing the emotional basis of the non-propositional forms of knowledge as well. The multi-ethnic literature classroom is well-suited to create this new form of assessing, evaluating, and judging the Other to lead toward pro-social change. As George Lakoff points out, the persuasive power of language comes not from reason but from “frames, prototypes, metaphors, narratives, images, and emotions” it engages (“The Political Mind,” 15). And, literature by its very nature comprises of these narratives and images. Instructors within the classroom can, therefore, appeal not only to the student’s logic but also reveal the flaws in their knowledge of the Other in emotionally compelling ways. By using exercises such as mirroring, journaling, counter-positioning etc. instructors can encourage the students to see perspectives alternate to their own. Further, the content in multi-ethnic literature provides ample material and opportunities to read experiences/identities which reflect collective concerns/beliefs and alternatives to them. A pedagogy, therefore, which focuses not only on changing stereotypes through the use of logic and evidence but also on changing non-propositional knowledge within the multi-ethnic literature classroom could lead to pro-social thinking and action.

KARIM DHARAMSI, MOUNT ROYAL UNIVERSITY, CANADA
Strauss, Rorty and the End of Race
In this paper I argue that Leo Strauss’s notorious conservatism and Richard Rorty’s defense of liberal cosmopolitanism seem to present competing accounts of the just society. Strauss’s defense of noble untruths and an arguably narrow reading of Plato can seem, on first blush, to be at odds with Rorty’s liberal transparency and defense of solidarity. I argue that the differences are mainly cosmetic and that the consequence of accepting either position amounts to an accepting of a tyranny of sameness, a social order inoculated against ethnic identity, cultural diversity and race. While Strauss’s status as the political thinker and architect of a peculiar form of esoteric revisionism of the philosophic canon is well established, Rorty is often characterized as being a hero of post-analytic philosophy. I argue that at this moment in history, we stand at only what appears to be an impasse. I maintain that the two options express differences without differences. A rethinking of our philosophic pedigree and our pluralistic possibilities is defended.

RAJNISH DHAWAN, UNIVERSITY OF THE FRASER VALLEY, ABBOTSFORD, CANADA
Spatializing Cultural Hybridity in Canada: A Study of Race Relations in Rajni Mala Khelawan’s The End of the Dark and Stormy Night
“If postmodern hybridity emphasises not fusion, but multiple and mobile positionings created by the performative transgressions of national grand narratives – what Homi Bhabha has referred to as ‘shreds and patches’ of many and diverse national voices,” then is there a possibility in the contemporary hybrid literature to provide a unifying centralized fabric where these ‘shreds and patches’ can be turned into a homogenous collage where every patch keeps its identity while being a part of the unified whole? Canadian multiculturalism thrives upon the concrete identification of these ‘shreds and patches,’ viewing them as an essential part of a heterogeneous fabric, often searching in them for the lure of the exotic – be it the first nations, the Indo-Canadians, the African-Canadians or the Chinese-Canadians. The essentialization of the hyphen has been the hallmark of Canadian multiculturalism and the hyphen has been strengthened by denying or shying away from the discomfort associated with the inter-racial discourse. Rajni Mala Khelawan’s debut novel The End of the Dark and Stormy Night tries to redefine the hyphen by embracing the discomfort, and by using humor as her primary medium of inter-racial discourse she tries to move towards the comfort zone where inter-racial relations could afford to laugh with each other rather than laughing at each other. This paper will focus on the study of the use of humor in the depiction of inter-racial relationships in the novel and the novel’s attempts at diluting the hyphen despite strong voices within the text advocating its retention.

JANA FEDTKE, ASIAN UNIVERSITY FOR WOMEN, CHITTAGONG, BANGLADESH
Bangladesh Meets the US on AsianEuro.com: Racialized Dating Practices and the Marked Other in Nell Freudenberger’s The Newlyweds
This paper presents a close look at Nell Freudenberger’s 2012 novel The Newlyweds. It argues that the text inserts one of its main characters, Amina Mazid from Dhaka, into post-9/11 suburban America as a racialized Other that fulfills a variety of functions in her new environment. Marked by her foreign accent, clothes, and skin color, Amina is represented as the sexualized bride from Bangladesh, the visibly different family member in suburban Rochester, NY, and the racialized colleague in the workplace. While Amina tries to adapt and assimilate to a version of the American lifestyle and in her marriage to George Stillman, whom she met on the racialized dating website AsianEuro.com, she is confronted with issues of cultural, religious, diasporic, and national identities that continue to mark her as the Other no matter how hard she
might wish to conform. In this process of attempted conformism, Amina is positioned as the Other both by the people around her at work as well as at home and by herself in her attempt to compare her “old” Bangladeshi self to her “new” American self. Neither version of Amina can escape her status as a racialized entity in her suburban existence because the hierarchies ascribed to skin color and cultural and religious difference are still – or once again – ever-present in, and constitutive of, the South Asian diasporic experience in post-9/11 America. With the representation of Amina’s sister-in-law Kim as an equally racialized foil to Amina in the Indian context, the novel shows, however, that similar practices of racialization and Othering are also at work on the Subcontinent.

ROBIN FIELD, KING’S COLLEGE

Dismantling Racial Markers in Gautam Malkani’s Londonstani
Gautam Malkani’s debut novel, Londonstani, was released in 2006 in the U.K. The novel’s success seemed assured: Malkani had received an advance from his publisher of over half a million dollars for his first two books; critics in the U.K. and at the Frankfurt Book Fair had reviewed the book positively; and the subject matter – South Asian “rude boys” living in Hounslow – appeared timely in the wake of the 2007 London bombings. The writing style, an “imaginative mix of English, Punjabi, Urdu, profanity, gangsta rap and mobile-phone texting” according to a Time magazine critic, is engaging and the plot is compelling right until the shocking, final twist. Yet Malkani’s novel suffered disappointingly low sales, to the point where, according to the Guardian, the term “Londonstani effect” was coined by publishers to reference a much-hyped novel that does not sell as well as expected. Malkani uses certain “markers” of race – such as language, dress, behavior, and group affiliation – to create his protagonist and first-person narrator, Jas. Ostensibly Londonstani involves Jas’s negotiations of identity as a South Asian in Britain; he says, “First we was rudeboys, then we be Indian niggas, then rajamuffins, then raggastanis, Britasians, fuckin Indobrits . . . These days we try an use our own word for homeboy an so we just call ourselves desis.” The novel traces his shift from a studious, college-bound teenager to a pseudo-gangster involved first in minor crime and then in more dangerous circumstances. Jas’s personal insecurities are highlighted: Is he desi enough or just another “coconut”? Should he date that gorgeous Muslim girl despite his Hindu and Sikh friends’ objections? Ultimately, these questions are abandoned by the author because of the concluding plot twist: Jas is not South Asian, but white. This plot twist demonstrates the fallacy of “racial markers” as Jason (not “Jaswinder” as we once assumed) has successfully performed a desi identity, misleading us readers until he describes looking at himself in a mirror. In this paper, I argue that Malkani’s plot twist and its resultant challenge to racial markers led to the poor sales of the novel and the frustration of certain literary critics and the reading public. Malkani demolishes the traditional plot of many second- and third-generation South Asian diasporic writers who use racial and cultural markers to assert South Asian identity. Londonstani reconsiders the importance of race in the creation and performance of identity, ideas that the general reader and even some literary critics may yet be unwilling to accept.

CRISTINA M. GAMEZ-FERNANDEZ, UNIVERSITY OF CORDOBA, SPAIN

Jhumpa Lahiri’s Unaccustomed Earth; or Striking New Roots in Transnational Bengali Homes
Jhumpa Lahiri opens her 2008 volume Unaccustomed Earth with a quotation from Nathaniel Hawthorne’s “The Custom-House,” written as an introduction to The Scarlet Letter. Susan Koshy believes that the quotation “affirms the regenerative power of diasporic movement through the
naturalistic metaphor of transplantation,” but points out that Lahiri’s use of it is ironic, as she disrupts Hawthorne forward route in order to “show transplantation to be uncertain, wayward process yielding unanticipated prospects and setbacks” (2011: 599). Lahiri engages in a dialogue with this idea. Besides, the attraction confessed by Hawthorne’s character to the hometown is also paramount in Lahiri, since her writing displays the treaded on Hindu Bengalis’ routes which merge in unexpected ways the inherited Indian culture in American soil. The aim of this paper is to ponder on the special meaning of laying the foundations of new homes in this narrative, by looking into the differences and concomitances between first and second generation South Asian immigrants’ homes and relationships. Bidisha Banerjee states that “migration is tied to an originary moment” that cannot be accessed by second-generation immigrants (2010: 446). Vijay Mishra’s work on mourning, which he defines as “an idealization of absence” (2007: 8), resonates deeply in the story since Ruma and her father, the protagonists, keep trying to cope with the unexpected death of her mother and wife respectively. Thus, the examination of the inner dialogue Ruma engages with, of her father’s independence and of the haunting presence of her mother in their father-daughter relationship will cast new light in the final configuration of homes and identities as Bengalis. The story is about “re-creating another world in the new; . . . lost in nostalgia for a lost world and about children born elsewhere who cannot totally connect with the unchanging world views of their parents” (Mishra 193).

MARÍA-DOLORES GARCÍA-BORRÓN, INDEPENDENT SCHOLAR FROM SPAIN

Cosmopolitanism and Cosmos in the Novels of Rafael Lorente

Rafael Lorente Martínez-Pontrémuli (Madrid, 1924–1990) was a poet, writer, lawyer and diplomat who served -as a vice-consul or consul- at the Spanish Embassies in Delhi and Paris. Among other literary work, he authored many short stories and novels in which he depicts different characters he meets in his travels (mainly in Europe, Asia, Africa), and especially during his stay in India as a diplomat in the early sixties. “Usha”, “La Condesa Báltica”, “La Parsi”, “Sankar”, “Kali”, “El Embajador”, “El Peregrino”, “El Tigre Blanco”, “Malabar”, etc. – included in his volumes Allá en la India (1978), El Hombre Boscoso (1979), and Dioses y Amantes, India (1985), are some of his short novels we will speak of in this article, together with some of his travel- and expatriation-related poetry. We will compare them (but not so often) to those of Indian Diaspora writers (of either first or second generation) like Raja Rao, G. V. Desani, Balachandra Rajan, Ved Mehta, J. P. Narayan, or V. S. Naipaul, Salman Rushdie, Bharati Mukerjee, Shashi Taroor, Vikram Seth, Rohinton Mistry (a Parsi), Amitav Ghosh, Anita Desai, Amit Chaudhuri, Hari Kunzru, etc. Although he, too, contributes to the field of the literature of expatriates and exiles, Lorente’s views and style are often rather personal; besides, he writes on no stereotypes, but on very distinct persons; and, after all, although most of his novels and other written documents deal on India, he is not a native Indian writer. Anyway, some of his worries fit perfectly with those of authors in either generation of Indian Diaspora. In his novels – where only seldom find we a flavor of exoticized eroticism, he also demonstrates a profound knowledge and penetration with many aspects of Indian reality and history; especially, in what refers to hindu religion, and Indian politics and society of his time. Rafael Lorente, a friend of Pandit Nehru, Albert Camus, Julio Cortázar, Vicente Fatone, Benedetto Croce, Tierno Galván, Dominique Aubier or Lanza del Vasto – among many other relevant figures of his time, although a military and a diplomat of the Franco era in Spain, he is also called “El Cónsul Rojo” (“Red Consul”) because of his socialist ideas and his endeavors and compromise with democracy in the historical periods called “Nacionalcatolicismo” (1944-1961), “Apertura” (“Opening” 1962-1968), “Crisis of Late-Franquism” (1969-1975), “First years of Democracy” (1975-1982) and “First
Socialist Period” (1982-1992). Himself a self-exile – in search of “otherness”, and of the metaphysical – he explores displacement and rootlessness, and the struggle for self-fashioning and both individual and social freedom, in a world of intercultural relationships which meet at the European Club, or at the Oriental Club, or the like. His work, which sometimes predates that of some of the second generation of Indian Diaspora writers, comes again to demonstrate that the inner needs of humans are just the same. A fighter against old myths and absurd, outdated social routines, Lorente dislikes moral as a pretext or a prejudice, and that emptiness that comes into lives when moral bankruptcy is there as a lack of compromise with oneself. Against these aggressions, he proposes as ways of self-defense, the corresponding opposites of those aggressions: new mythologies in a life without restrictions, a moral in which Good and Instinct coincide, and the defense of those who chose freedom as a compromise with our species and cosmos amidst transnationalism and globalization.

AMRITA GHOSH, SETON HALL UNIVERSITY
A ‘Passage to India’ in the era of Global Capital: Orientalism Redux in Oprah’s India: The Next Chapter and Darjeeling Limited

In her new book, An Aesthetic Education in an Era of Globalization, Gayatri Spivak begins by stating, “Globalization takes place only in capital and data” (1). My paper studies Oprah’s recent India series and Wes Anderson’s film Darjeeling Limited (2007) in the framework of global capital and argues that, in Fatima Tobing Rony’s words, these films become ‘ethnographic spectacles.’ To be sure, Oprah is an epitome of a global enterprise that reinscribes certain codes of consumption and production, highlighting how the era of global capital intersects with socio-cultural processes. In this paper, I investigate the production of a certain kind of “data” to construct a benevolent new order orientalism under the global capitalist hegemony that creates a essentialized ‘third world subject.’ In the two films, the ‘third world self’ is couched within a discourse of spirituality that exists in a space of radical alterity – most importantly, such a construct also negates class, history and agency and what remains is the ‘other’ that helps in the discovery of the Western “self.” In Darjeeling Limited, India and its people recede into the background as a therapeutic setting to highlight the three Whitman brothers’ spiritual sojourn to India. Ironically, Anderson’s benign filmic vision (with Satyajit Ray as its primary influence) is still replete with exoticized natives, erotic Indian women and most disturbingly, spiritual understanding of the brothers can be reached through the death of a native boy. In the case of Oprah, the representation of India is even more complicated as I explore what kind of gaze is invoked through Oprah’s “experiencing the calm and silence” amidst India’s “chaos” (India, The Next Chapter) and her problematic fetishization of poverty within a narrative of primitivity. Thus, I investigate these films as ‘ethnographic spectacles’ that reiterate – “Orientalism is dead, Long Live Orientalism!”

B. P. GIRI, DARTMOUTH COLLEGE
Racialized Subjectivities in the South Asian Diaspora

Historical and theoretical accounts of South Asian diasporas have elided the question of race in favor of ethnic, national, religious, and spatial categories. Instead, these accounts suggest the ubiquity of ethnic, national, and religious differences as a basis for diasporic identity-formation. Examples include Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Nepali, and Tibetan diasporas; Hindu, Muslim, and Sikh diasporas; and Tamil, Sinhala, Sindhi, Panjabi, Bengali, and Gujarati diasporas. While none of these terms and descriptions is racially marked at their point of enunciation, race has
remained a disturbing and uneasy presence in the literary and popular accounts of the South Asians in diaspora. Thus the South Asians living in Britain have found themselves being identified as “blacks.” While the term has found some acceptance among activists, the communities themselves have resisted the racialization of their identity for obvious reasons. Similarly, the color-coding of South Asian immigrants is a fact of life in North America. While national, religious, and spatial nomenclature dominates the language of personal and group identities, racial difference remains a powerful force of self/other differentiation at the popular level. This paper examines a few minor instances of racial discourse in three literary and filmic texts (Rushdie’s *The Satanic Verses*; Mira Nair’s *Mississippi Masala*; Hanif Kureishi’s *Black Album*) to comment on the racialization of South Asian immigrants and its aftereffects. In these instances, racially-marked description of individuals and groups works mainly as a force of interpellation, which leaves the diasporic subject with a limited set of options for action: recognize oneself into this language, reject the racialized language of self and identity altogether, or appropriate and revise this language for other ends.

NAVEEN GIRN, YORK UNIVERSITY

**“Hindoos,” “Gadharites,” and “Martyrs”: Imaginings of the Komagata Maru in Textual, Visual and Online Worlds**

The Komagata Maru “incident” of 1914 in which 376 Sikh, Hindu, and Muslim Indian passengers attempted to immigrate from Hong Kong to Vancouver has proved to be a fertile resource for re-imagining one of Canada’s historic moments as well as fueling the multifaceted symbols for rich narrative “universes.” Recent discoveries in familial archives have ruptured the scope, discourses, and interpretive lenses that accompanied earlier racist narratives that helped to codify, reassure, and “white wash” preconceived hegemonic and heteronormative value judgments and worldviews. Newly unearthed texts from the North American Gadhar movement for Indian Independence speak to the appropriation and re-articulation of the Komagata Maru symbol along socialist trajectories. *The Diary of Arjan Singh Chand* (2011) - which is the only known contemporary Canadian Sikh response to the Komagata Maru’s arrival - is one such text that through contemporaneous recordings of international events and private, personal community moments illuminates the motivations and agencies of early South Asian pioneers. While Government documents that speak to the transgressive sexuality of “Hindoos” move beyond Orientalist constructions and speak to layers of perceived stigma that Ali Kazimi has tried to excavate in his films *Rexv. Singh, Continuous Journey* and recently in *Undesireables: White Canada and the Komagata Maru* (2011). These visual re-imaginings have been accompanied by recent historical digitization initiatives and online exhibitions. While these endeavors wrap themselves in the technological determinism of unlimited storage space and “exhaustive” collections, these websites also contain within them seeds of replicated colonial archives. Indeed as the 100th Anniversary of the Komagata Maru’s arrival draws near, “how” we should remember becomes equally paramount to “who” and “what” is being remembered.

ATREYEE GOHAIN, OHIO UNIVERSITY

**Meena Alexander and Jhumpa Lahiri: Racing America**

For South Asians in the United States, race has been an important factor in the construction of their diasporic and ethnic identity. While most South Asians do not acknowledge the influence of race in their daily lives, many Indian American writers have been powerfully drawn to the subject
of race, showing how the challenges of assimilation for the immigrant are complicated by the presence of race. In my paper I address the divergent treatment of race in the work of two prominent Indian American writers – Jhumpa Lahiri and Meena Alexander. Critics have commented on Lahiri’s understated treatment of this volatile issue, showing how she approaches it with kid gloves on, while Alexander’s approach is more candid and shows a nuanced global understanding of how race operates in American life. I explore Lahiri and Alexander through the prism of postcolonial and feminist scholar Sara Ahmed’s theory of “stranger encounters.” According to Ahmed, the “stranger” is a construct of convenience, allowing the “native” not only to shore up his/her identity but also providing a space for the displacement of his/her deepest anxieties and fears. My presentation will examine select stories from Lahiri’s Interpreter of Maladies and Unaccustomed Earth, and Meena Alexander’s memoirs Fault Lines and The Shock of Arrival to demonstrate their differing literary responses to the idea of race and its complex influence on the personal and social lives of South Asians in North America.

POONKULALY GUNASEELAN, KING’S COLLEGE, LONDON

“Little Walking Prisons”: Interplays of Race and Gender in My Son the Fanatic

Due to the influx of immigrants to the West, London is often celebrated as one of the most diverse cities in the world. This great South Asian migration to London was fuelled by the hope of freedom, independence and most importantly, financial security. London therefore transformed into the second global melting pot, for which South Asians believed they were able to achieve something of the – “London Dream” – earning money to send to their birth country, consequently never breaking the ties to their home country. It was therefore inevitable that such diversity lead to the breeding of racism and ‘Othering’, something which the said immigrants were not prepared for. This paper will focus primarily on and compare Hanif Kureishi’s multiple versions of My Son the Fanatic. First written as a short story in 1994, the plot was expanded into a screenplay and later produced into a film. Literary criticism surrounding My Son the Fanatic focuses on the fundamentalist theme within the storyline; however, I shall be examining an area that has received limited critical attention – the interplay between race and gender. In particular, I will analyse the protagonist of the novel, Parvez, and explore the difference in his relationships with his Pakistani wife Minoo, and his lover, the Caucasian sex worker Bettina. I argue that as well as his inferior racial position affecting his relationship with Bettina, he also internalizes such values which lead to the ruination of his marriage. I shall explore the notion that in his marital relationship, Parvez takes on the role of the white racist, and to this end, enforces not only a hegemonic gender relationship onto his wife, but also racial oppression.

NEERA GUPTA-CASALE, KEAN UNIVERSITY

Race And Resistance In Karan Johar’s My Name Is Khan: A New Diaspora Within Popular South Asian Cinema?

The migrant diaspora and the diasporic experience of the postcolonial cosmopolitan in the UK has produced commercially successful cinema which explores the politics of interraciality across gender, class and national lines – My Beautiful Launderette, Sammy and Rosie Get Laid, Bhaji on the Beach, and the film adaptations of the novels, Brick Lane and White Teeth – to name only a few of the most memorable of the last two decades. By contrast, there has been, except for Mira Nair’s 1991 film, Mississippi Masala, a noticeable absence of explorations of interraciality, a resistance, as it were, to engage in the very real politics of interracial tensions and alliances that constitute the diasporic experience in the US. The predominant trope in these America-based films has been that of the idealized nationalism of the expatriate South Asian subject set against
the broad East/West divide of culture and religion – either the nostalgia for values and traditions of the homeland or the rejection of the East for adoption and assimilation into the West, as seen in megahits such as *Pardes* and *Swadesh*, and the less commercially successful, *Namesake*. In the last two decades, an exponential increase in global migrancy generated by technology, transglobal economies and cosmopolitanism has resulted in newer modules of the diasporic experience for South Asians in the US. It is characterized by converging cultural alliances and shifting allegiances, and interaction with the increasing number of second and third generations of immigrants racially identified as Asian Americans, as well as greater interpellation into the interracial politics of the adopted land. But instead of increased and more nuanced depictions of dominant/subordinate or transgressive/transformative interractivity becoming the cinematic touchstone for diaspora, the new trope which has been introduced into South Asian cinema, post 9/11, is the specter of international terrorism and the migrant South Asian as suspect, as can be seen in the spate of recent films, *Kurbaan*, (2009), *My Name is Khan*, (2010) and the most recent, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (not yet publically released). My paper will examine ways in which this trope becomes a marker for the new diaspora, and the ways in which experiences of interracial relationships are still elided, erased, or idealized, through an overview of a number of contemporary films dealing with diaspora, but with special emphasis on Karan Johar’s *My Name is Khan*, in which these two themes converge. *My Name is Khan* dramatizes the heightened racial tensions experienced by the South Asian community in the US in the post 9/11 era, through the story of Rizwan Khan, a Forest Gump like gentle and kindhearted soul with Asperger’s syndrome, who embarks on an iconic journey across the American continent in a quest to redeem Muslim identity from its association with terrorism, through a personal assertion to the President of the United States that “[his] name [was] Khan” and that he “was not a terrorist.” In the course of that transcontinental journey Rizwan Khan arrives at Wilhemina, Georgia, where he befriends the African American, Mama Jenny and her son Joel, and later where he along with other members of the South Asian Muslim community, come heroically to the rescue of the African American community during a hurricane. I am particularly interested in Johar’s interrogation of a new South Asian identity, one which insists on a transcendent humanity above the transnational or national patriotism of *Pardes*, *Swadesh* or *The Namesake*. I would assert that the film succeeds in transcending the trope of migrant and postcolonial nostalgia, as well as “resolving” the post 9/11 dilemma of the racialized and resented South Asian terrorist suspect, through representation of interractivity, with the hero befriending the African American community of the rural small town American South, and by thus doing so, positing an ideal of the more politically and civicly integrated diasporic subject. Yet still problematic is the fact that the representative integration of the South Asian identity with the American is still constructed along racial lines – Rizvan Khan, after all, finally aligns himself with the black America, which is still, unfortunately, often figured as the subaltern Other.

NISHAT HAIDER, LUCKNOW UNIVERSITY, INDIA

**Representing Race, Trauma and History in Post-9/11 Fiction: A Study of Mohsin Hamid’s The Reluctant Fundamentalist**

In his meditation on September 11, 2001—when Islamist insurgents hijacked four commercial airliners on September 11 2001 and crashed them into the World Trade Center in New York and the Pentagon in Washington, DC, killing almost 3,000 people—David Simpson argues that commemorative sites are topoi at which the contradictions of the age are performed. Though numerous key theorists including Jean Baudrillard, Slavoj Zizek, Paul Virilio, Noam Chomsky, Jurgen Habermas and Jacques Derrida have examined the overarching geopolitical consequences
of terrorism and the United States’s reaction to the complex event now evoked with the reified and Americanized metonymic shorthand “9/11,” it is left to the novelists to re-construct the counter-narrative. Literature, as it intersects with history, has the opportunity to bear witness and testify, as well as to interrogate the tensions and attempt to bridge the gaps between memory and history, as well as, representation and remembrance. Mohsin Hamid’s novel, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize in 2007), as a ‘counterhistory’ to post-9/11 Islamophobia not only memorializes the trauma, but also engages with the complex issues of fundamentalism, anti-Muslim racism in the United States and America’s ‘war on terror.’ In the evolving lexicon of American racism, brown has become the new black (Dabashi, 2011). In this paper, through an analysis of Hamid’s novel as a post-9/11 “trauma fiction” (Whitehead, 2004), I will explore how trauma (as exemplified in the writings of Langer, 1991; Caruth, 1996; Felman and Laub, 1992; Gilmore, 2001; Tal, 1995; and LaCapra, 1998, 2001), imbricated in the practice of ‘bearing witness,’ impacts on the inscription, comprehension and claiming of individual and/collective memories as history. Generally, in my usage throughout this study, the trauma of 9/11 refers not (only) to the physical and psychical injuries of the victims of the attacks, but to a specific cultural and/racial encoding of the historical event, or, in LaCapra's words "sociopolitical uses and constructions of trauma" (2004: 95). Appropriating Judith Butler’s post-positivist ideas to political critique and action, I will examine how Mohsin Hamid turns the post-9/11 novel on its head by creating a “different order of responsibility in which we comprehend the forms of global power from the perspective of the ‘other’” (2004: xii). Using Schmitt’s theories as a diagnostic tool to understand what some critics, like Alain Badiou and Talal Asad, see as a globalized state of emergency, it will be my endeavour to argue that Hamid’s narrative gives an evocative portrayal of the extension and generalization of the “state of exception” operative in post-9/11 America. Applying Arjun Appadurai’s argument that ethnonationalist positions are rooted in classical liberal thought which is ill-equipped to deal with the of ‘small numbers’, or social, racial, ethnic and political ‘minorities’ (like Pakistanis and Arabs) in a nation-state (like America), an attempt will be made to explore how the novel enables us to think through and beyond the acts of violent and hyperbolic rhetoric associated with terrorism.

MARYSE JAYASURIYA, UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO

**Race, Culture and Long-distance Nationalism in V. V. Ganeshananthan’s Love Marriage**

V.V. Ganeshananthan’s *Love Marriage* presents its readers with an alternative view of race and diaspora to those which focus primarily on the racial politics of the hostland. In this novel it is not so much that the second-generation diasporic protagonist is affected by racism in North America as that she is affected and changed by the racism and racialization in her parents’ homeland of Sri Lanka. The narrator, Yalini, finds her life in North America to be shaped by the ways in which Tamils in Sri Lanka have faced discrimination and in turn have shaped their own identity as a people. As a second-generation Tamil immigrant living in the United States, Yalini’s life is shaped by racialization on multiple levels. Even Yalini’s name is a reminder of what her parents left behind and yet cling to in that it is directly associated with their original hometown. Her parents have thus emphasized the Tamil identity of their daughter, thus making racialization as specifically Sri Lankan Tamil an affirmative aspect of her identity. This affirmation of Yalini’s Tamil identity is brought into tension with her immigrant status when her uncle, who was part of the LTTE, an organization banned as a terrorist group by the United States government, comes to Canada. Yalini’s growing relationship with him after her temporary relocation to Canada leads her to interrogate her own ethical and moral position with regard to the Sri Lankan conflict as well as her identity as a hyphenated American. This plot line highlights the differing
racializations of Tamil diasporics in the U.S. and Canada, as Yalini gets to know diasporics living in Toronto, where the conflict in Sri Lanka shapes daily life in a more immediate way than she herself has previously experienced. Yalini thus embodies the ways in which homeland identities, racialized and otherwise, can shape and re-shape life in the hostland, and her story demonstrates how the politics of human rights, international terrorism, and national security shape the interaction between homeland and hostland racializations.

ASHA JEFFERS, YORK UNIVERSITY

“South Asian”: The Problem of Race versus Region in Double Diaspora

According to Statistics Canada, “South Asian” is the largest visible minority group in Canada. However, Canada has a significant number of citizens whose ethnic and national identities do not fall easily into line with the categories made available by the census and other means of classifying the population. Ramabai Espinet’s *The Swinging Bridge* and MG Vassanji’s *When She Was Queen* are both texts that speak to the experiences that make the acceptance of official categories fraught. An uncomplicated acceptance of a “South Asian” identity can elide the historical realities and lived experiences of members of the Indian diaspora who find their way to Canada after long, complex histories in the Caribbean and East Africa. Not only are members of these communities marginalized in relation to the mainstream, white Canadian population, they are also in a position of having to rework their relationship to both the other strands of their diasporic identity, particularly those who are arriving directly from the ancestral homeland, and the other ethnic or racial groups who have migrated from their former home. The trips from being Indian in Trinidad to Indo-Caribbean in Canada and being Indian in East Africa to Indo-African in Canada are markedly different from each other for a number of historical and political reasons, but both are examples of how being a part of a “double diaspora” is a unique subject position that challenges mainstream understandings of ethnic identity and ethnic communities. In my paper I will outline some of the differences between the Indo-Caribbean experience and the Indo-African experience. The three main aspects of their historical trajectories that created these differences are the circumstances under which they migrated, their place in the racial and social hierarchy in the new land, and the way that they maintained, adapted, or discarded religious and cultural traditions. I will then discuss how these disparate roots/routes affect how these two communities engage with the Canadian context. Interestingly, although there are many differences between how members of the two communities recreate themselves in Canada, there are also similarities due to the experience of being members of double diasporas. Because Canada also received a great deal of immigration directly from South Asia, Canada (and Toronto especially) has become a space where streams of the diaspora converge. I argue that this convergence means that Indo-Caribbean and Indo-East African people move from being considered authentically Indian in the Caribbean and East Africa to having their diasporic nature foregrounded in the face of a more “authentic” population. With this paper I hope to offer an example of thinking through South Asian Canadianness in terms that recognize the diversity of the Indian diaspora and that question whether a regional identity such as South Asian is a useful category for members of that diaspora.

SMITA JHA, IIT, ROORKEE, INDIA

**Linguistic and Cognitive Paradigms in Manhattan Music**

Meena Alexander is a poet, writer who explores the inner as well as the outer voyage of her character in a very vivid manner. In the novel entitled *Manhattan Music* Sandhya Rosenblum, an Indian immigrant married to an American Jewish man, tries to make sense of her life in a time of turbulence. Being a poet Alexander knows very well to operate at lyrical level which really gives
the feel of the situation. In this metropolis novel set in Manhattan and India, Alexander lyrically and poignantly examines the feeling and pain of crossing borders, the Indian diaspora, fanaticism, ethnic intolerance, interracial affairs and marriages, and what it means to be an American. The process of self-creation for Alexander has numerous facets: creating an identity despite a patchwork past; fighting against definitions demanded by greater society; and, also, fighting against traditions and definitions enforced within the community. It is through the power of words that she could be able to express herself and could be made her female characters to express. Sandhya raises her voice against her parents and the Indian tradition of arranged marriage and marries Stephen Rosenblum, an American Jew. It is only after moving to New York City and having a child, she realized that still she is an alien in a world where she comes leaving her homeland to find meaning in her life. Alienated from both her native and adopted countries and from her counterpart, she becomes familiar with an Indian-African performance artist who introduces her to an Egyptian man with whom she has an affair. At times, the narrative is presented from the perspectives of Sandhya's friends, which can create a flaw. It is against this background that I propose to explore the linguistics as well as the cognitive aspect of the prose in *Manhattan Music*.

FAZEELA JIWA, CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY, MONTREAL, CANADA

**Strategic Interventions: Fictocriticism as Feminist Writing Beyond Autoethnography**

Evolving critical discourse about autoethnographic cultural productions represents an academic preoccupation with complicity, in the context of a global commodification of marginality. Though some critics have considered autoethnographic expression an emancipatory response to essentialist representations of ethnicity, others have noted that it risks further entrenching the racist binary of self and Other. This comes at the expense of a view of ethnic identity that is not based solely on race; that is not static, but evolves based on the multiple aspects of subjectivity that bear upon it. This paper examines a shift beyond the preoccupation with race-based identity in Asian Canadian diasporic writing, with particular attention to women’s resistance to racialized and gendered claims about their subjectivity. Yasmin Ladha’s writing departs from the patriarchal discourse of the diaspora in both subject and form. Her short story collection, *Lion's Granddaughter*, examines the particular ways in which the experiences of immigration affect women, underlining the brutal intersection of racism and sexism. Ladha uses the experimental, self-reflexive and genre-blending mode of fictocriticism as a strategic aesthetic device to interrupt methods of postcolonial discourse that normalize the experiences of those who are dominant within the diaspora. However, Ladha’s more recent novel, *Blue Sunflower Startle*, reads as a much more conventional autoethnography. Though the uninterrupted narrative and gentler critiques of nationalism and patriarchy are surprising considering her previous polemic, I argue that Ladha’s novel is still a strategic fictocritical intervention. By mitigating the challenge of her experimental fictocritical form, Ladha engages in a tactical compromise within the context of an uncritical Canadian multiculturalism. The novel’s subtle dissidence lies in disrupting a patriarchal version of the immigrant experience, while making this version of writing beyond autoethnography more accessible to a Canadian audience.

RAJENDEKAUR, WILLIAM PATTERSON UNIVERSITY

**Documents of Dissent: Reading Race and Resistance in Slave and Lascar Petitions of Colonial America**

While recent studies by Karen Leonard, Vijay Prashad, Harry Gould, and Vinay Lal, and Vivek Bald, most notably among others have contributed much to filling up the lacuna in the
scholarship on South Asian American presence before 1965, their analysis, nevertheless, has concentrated overwhelmingly on the early twentieth century, when Sikh soldiers returning from the celebration of Queen Victoria’s golden jubilee, settled in Vancouver and then dispersed along the Pacific coast of North America. My paper traces South Asian presence to colonial America when they accompanied English settlers as servants as early as the 1620s and, as lascars working on ships that formed part of the lucrative Yankee clipper trade from the 1780s to 1850s. New research on the colonial period facilitated by the digitization of archival materials such as newspapers, parish records, court records of petitions and rulings, and papers of the Continental Congress, among others, reveals an American landscape sprinkled quite significantly with people of South Asian origin. Known then as “East Indians” or Asian Indians in contradistinction to native Americans who were called “Indians,” their presence in early colonial America is linked directly to the British East India company and its functionaries who brought back servants from India to England, and thence to America, for either personal use or profit as early as 1622. Careful research reveals an astonishing archive of advertisements for runaway “East Indians” slaves and servants. Even more remarkable is the existence of several petitions for freedom filed by these East Indian servants and slaves protesting their illegal and unjust enslavement dating back as early as 1705 and 1706. In this presentation I perform a symptomatic reading of some of these advertisements and petitions to uncover the disjunctive discourses of race, empire, and resistance that came to define the formative contours of early South Asian America.

SOBIA KHAN, UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT DALLAS

Face of the Muslim Woman: De-facement and Re-construction of Identity in Saving Face.

Muslim women have been the subject of interrogation and questioning both in the Muslim world and in the non-Muslim world. The ‘face’ of the Muslim woman stares back at the onlooker from the covers of magazines, from orientalized and romanticized visions to that of women suppressed by patriarchy and illiteracy. This paper then aims to explore the visual narrative in the documentary Saving Face of the silenced, excluded, and marginalized Muslim women who still cannot tell their own story, construct or reconstruct their identity, speak beyond the confines of the ‘Other’, and negotiate their identity in a globalized and imperial world. Saving Face (2011) directed by Daniel Junge and Sharmeen Obaid Chinoy chronicles the face-saving and life-saving journey of acid attacks victims in Pakistan. Relying on theorists such as Helena Cixous, Edward Said, Juliana Spahr, Emmanuel Levinas and Jacques Derrida, this paper problematizes and questions the documentary’s intention of enlightening the world and educating the Pakistanis/‘natives’ about their self destruction. This paper claims that the stories of the silenced women are told from an ‘imperial/post-colonial’ position. I am interested in exploring the consequences of such a project that designates the Muslim Pakistani woman as a victim being rescued with a ‘missionary’ enthusiasm where her ‘role,’ ‘subjectivity,’ and ‘identity’ is constructed by others. This post-colonial, foreign versus native, coming face-to-face with an Other paradigm proves insufficient for the well intentioned project, more so, as a few weeks after the documentary won the Oscar award, the ‘face’ of acid attack victims, Fakhra Younus committed suicide in Rome where she was receiving treatment. Ultimately, this paper wants to illustrate the insufficiency and question the ethics of a narrative where the women are denied the power to frame their own story and to construct and reconstruct their identity in their own homes and in the world after de-facement.
ASHMITA KHASNABISH, MIT

**Bleak Realism and the Diasporic Construct in Amitav Ghosh’s Sea of Poppies**

In my previous monograph *Humanitarian Identity and the Political Sublime: Intervention of a Postcolonial Feminist* I discussed Amartya Sen’s concept of “pluralistic identity” in the context of both communitarian and global identity. This paper strives to configure his theory of “justice and capability” and also uses the theory as a tool to read diasporic literature. This pluralistic identity is a reflection of what our modern Indian religious and secular philosophy propagated by Rama Krishna preaches in terms of philosophy. It is also at the root of ancient Indian philosophy – because the concept of Brahman is one and many. According to ancient Indian philosophy, Brahman is manifest or could be manifest in every single object on the earth. In other words, the notion of multiplicity embedded in the notion of Brahman, we perceive nuanced in Sen’s notion of “pluralistic identity.” Sen asserts boldly, “Equity considerations lose their applicability in this framework” (279). This bleak realism is almost personified in the modern Bengali novelist Amitav Ghosh’s English novel *Sea of Poppies*. It is excruciatingly bleak to perceive the affliction the protagonist of the novel, Neel Ratan Haldar, goes through by falling down from the status of a zamindar to an indentured laborer in the ship Ibis along with other natives who were turned into underdogs. Pain of colonization and torture is rendered in the language in Joycean style expressing the revolt of the novelist.

SAIYEDA KHATUN, JOHNSON AND WALES UNIVERSITY

**Approaches to Teaching Anita Desai’s “Studies in the Park” and Jhumpa Lahiri’s “A Temporary Matter” to First-Year Students**

One of the persistent issues in the context of teaching multicultural literature has been the problem of otherness, involving the following question: How do we teach literature from the third world without marginalizing the third world, as we may have to focus on social and traditional customs of societies that are repressive or just different? While teaching, “Studies in the Park” to “mainstream” students, I focus on cultural moments (for example, asking questions like what makes “Studies in the Park” an Indian text?), simultaneously as I identify and highlight spaces where a particular text transcends differences and speaks to readers from all backgrounds. This approach invigorates discussion and dialog involving a large number of students. A South Asian or immigrant text might seem too unfamiliar to an uninitiated first-year student, but pointing out the “universal elements” or “moments of sameness” creates the format for launching off a productive discussion. These strategies counter and/or minimize tendencies to “inferiorize” texts from other cultures. I also use the strategy of pairing; for example, teaching Jhumpa Lahiri’s “A Temporary Matter” alongside Hemingway’s canonical short story “Hills Like White Elephants.” In Lahiri’s story, Shoba gives birth to a stillborn child, and in “Hills Like White Elephant”, the man wants the girl to get an abortion. We compare the two very different styles of Lahiri and Hemingway, and students share their insights and ideas on both stories with confidence and enthusiasm.

SAILAJA KRISHNAMURTI, YORK UNIVERSITY

**Popular Media, Hinduism, and the Discourse of Civil Rights in the South Asian Diaspora**

This paper begins to map the range of positions articulated by diasporic South Asians in response to the perceived ‘defamation’ of Hindus in popular culture and media. I refer here to the stereotypical, or satirical depiction of Hindu deities, customs, or icons in advertising, as in the recent controversy over the inclusion of several Hindu deities as playable characters in the video game “Smite.” The outcry in response to such images tends to be dominated by two distinct
voices: one, a liberal anti-racist voice, and the other, a conservative Hindu nationalist one. Interestingly, both ideological positions invoke the language of civil rights violations, racism, and defamation, a discourse with deep and complex historical roots in the North American public sphere. The paper examines this language by looking at range of online responses and public activism, from conservative groups like the Hindu American Foundation, American Hindus against Defamation, and Canadian Hindu Advocacy; to the on-line communities around blogs like Racialicious and the now defunct Sepia Mutiny. I am particularly interested in how these groups and communities may construct their own limited concepts of racialized identity while overlooking other forms of social difference like caste, religion, and gender. The paper asks: What elements of an ‘anti-defamation’ agenda are shared by activists in different positions on the political spectrum, and what contradictions are thus exposed? How are these elements ideologically constructed, and such relationships reconciled? What kinds of political solidarities are produced, implied, or negated by this utilization of civil rights discourse?

NAVNEET KUMAR, MEDICINE HAT COLLEGE, ALBERTA, CANADA

Race and Religion
The recent killing of Mohamed Merah by the French authorities is for many ardent admirers of the “clash of civilizations” thesis yet another reminder of the incompatible cultural space between the Western and the Islamic civilizations. Samuel Huntington in “The Clash of Civilizations?” had originally proposed the thesis more than a decade and a half ago, and he would be happy knowing that his prognostication of the clash between Islam and the West has not much abated in the past. Huntington’s student, Francis Fukuyama in “Identity, Immigration and Liberal Democracy” had concurred with the clash of civilization thesis and had in fact argued for the turn to radical Islam by ardent Muslims in the West to be an outcome of the growing alienation such Muslims feel in Western societies. While there may be some merit in the claims put forward by both Huntington and Fukuyama, I contest that such an analysis borders on oversimplification of issues rather than actually looking at Merah and other people like him in a fuller perspective where the state and its actions can also be seen as suspect. With this in mind I propose to analyze Merah’s killings of innocent civilians and his own subsequent killing by the French authorities as actions that essentially bring into perspective the role of the state in fostering, privileging and promoting certain liberal values such as the autonomous neo-liberal subject and secularism at the cost of berating certain other values. In further bringing such ideas to further scrutiny, I propose that the category of "deranged individuals" to describe people like Merah is to miss the point entirely about the role that state can play in regulating our behaviors and even responses to events such as Merah’s killing. I argue therefore, invoking Talal Asad and Sherene Razack, that secularism becomes a litmus test of our allegiance to the country of adoption where if we move outside than what the state deems fit, then the threat that we can fall outside the normative categories is so strong that it acts like a tugging rope which reins us in every time our thoughts veer away. If the French think that the matter ends with Merah’s death, then they might be in the wrong, as it is not hard to comprehend that even though Merah’s acts are undeniably monstrous, the French do not have it right either.

Cynthia A. Leenerts, East Stroudsburg University

Black Water, Cleansing Water: Oceanic Irruptions and Interruptions of Race and Class in Shani Mootoo’s He Drown She in the Sea
Drawing upon ecocriticism and upon multicultural studies by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, Diana Brydon, Patricia Saunders, and others, this essay explores the roles that the ocean plays in the development of racism and its allied classism in Shani Mootoo’s novel He Drown She in the Sea (2003). The Kala Pani, the Black Water upon which British ships transported Indian indentured servants to the Caribbean in the nineteenth century in the wake of the abolition of the African slave trade, initially opened the way to a deeper racial strife in the Caribbean (now not only between British colonizers and their African subjects, but between Indo- and Afro-Caribbeans). Among Indo-Caribbeans, by the mid-twentieth century, a classism (merchants against laborers) every bit as virulent as the racism of white colonizers against black colonized (and smacking of racism’s discourses) established itself. Into this environment, Harry St George is born, growing up with the subversive and affirming words of his mother, “All of we cross Black Water. [ … ] They not better than we.” Mootoo turns the tide and writes the ocean as a force that in Harry’s life interrupts racism and class conflict. I examine her development of the landscape and seascape, as well as the social environment, the immigrant community of western Canada, as sites of refuge, arguing that the natural world and the social “multitudes” heal Harry in stages, but only as long as he remains in exile: his fulfillment and freedom come at great cost, for the healing ocean must still protect him by separating him from his Canadian home and from all but one of those he loves from Guanagaspar.

Surbhi Malik, University of Illinois, Chicago

Inscriptions of Race in Metaphors of Space: Diaspora and Homelessness in The Inheritance of Loss

This paper discusses spatial representations of home and homelessness in Kiran Desai’s The Inheritance of Loss (2006) as a way of mapping structures of racialization and class divisions in South Asian diaspora. Desai denaturalizes New York as the city of the skyscraper by presenting a horizontal configuration of the city through the space of basements in which Biju, a South Asian undocumented immigrant, works and lives. Using Henri Lefebvre’s concept of architectonics, I suggest that this spatial striation of the city that confines impoverished Biju to the space of basements reveals the extent to which history of colonial racial difference underpins structures of American multiculturalism. The spatial logic of the novel, which indexes processes of racial exclusion and class subordination, dismantles the fiction of America as an exceptional space for the South Asian diasporic subject. But the text does not represent Biju’s poverty as merely a refutation of the “model minority” stereotype. Instead it demonstrates that the model minority status of South Asian elites, which is both predicated on and reflected in their home ownership, depends on their power to exploit workers like Biju and relegate them to spaces associated with homelessness, such as basements and servant quarters. The text’s delineation of class and racial hierarchies that literalize the metaphor of homelessness reveals that the naturalization of this metaphor in contemporary discourse to represent all diasporic experience creates a false equivalence between South Asian elites and the impoverished, and fuels the inaccurate notion of a racially cohesive South Asian community. The novel refuses to romanticize Biju’s poverty and homelessness as a diasporic state of freedom, and suggests that there is no deterritorialized figment of memory and imagination that can assuage Biju’s pain of being denied the physical place of home.

J. EDWARD MALLOT, ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY

Causing Offense: Riots and Rebuttals in Gurpreet Kaur Bhatti’s Behud
In December 2004 several hundred protesters stormed Birmingham Repertory Theatre, vandalizing the building and forcing the cancellation of Gurpreet Kaur Bhatti’s play Behzti (Dishonour). Bhatti’s work takes place within a gurdwara, and features scenes involving homosexuality, rape and murder – primarily involving Sikh religious leaders. Bhatti, who received death threats during the controversy, has explained that “I certainly did not write Behzti to offend. It is a sincere piece of work in which I wanted to explore how human frailties can lead people into a prison of hypocrisy …. It is only a shame that others have not had the chance to see it and judge for themselves.” This response, while reasserting an artist’s generally assumed right to uninhibited expression, did nothing to resolve the questions raised by the affair: what are the limits – if any – of free speech? How does a work like Behzti actually impact intercommunity relations, given its reliance on both stereotype and shock? Is it necessary, in light of Bhatti’s rebuttal, to experience a work firsthand in order to be affected by its content? This project seeks to contextualize the Behzti controversy within the increasingly complicated terrain of British identity politics and artistic endeavor, focusing in particular on Bhatti’s follow-up, Behud (Beyond Belief). This later work provides Bhatti’s extended reply to the Behzti affair, its plot centering on a Sikh playwright’s struggle to see her new, incendiary play brought to the stage. Here, Bhatti offers provocative commentary on the potential, and potential trappings, of writers caught in such controversies; in particular, her stand-in protagonist’s persistent difficulties in controlling not only the reception of the play, but its presentation and even its content, add new layers to still-unresolved dilemmas facing artists expected to “represent.”

ROGER MCNAMARA, UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS, SPRINGFIELD

The Vision of Cedric Dover: Hybrid Communities and a New International Order

This paper examines the contribution made by Cedric Dover, an Anglo-Indian/Eurasian anthropologist and political activist, who studied hybridity and fought for the rights of inter-racial peoples. Dover was born in India in 1904, completed his further studies in Anthropology in the United Kingdom, after which he worked in Asia, Europe, and North America. He was closely associated with African American activists, like W. E. B. Dubois and Paul Robeson, and towards the end of his career he lectured at a number of African American Universities, including Howard and Fisk. Dover promoted the rights of inter-racial and marginalized peoples in several books and political tracts that he wrote between the 1920s-1960s, including Cimmeri or Anglo-Indians and their Future (1929), Half-Caste (1937), Brown Phoenix (1950), and American Negro Art (1960). In this paper I examine the relationship between racial hybridity and international politics that Dover explores in his seminal work, Half-Caste. Published in 1937, against the backdrop of the politicization of eugenics and rise of the Nazis in Germany, this text proves that inter-racial communities are victimized because of economic, political, and social factors, not because of inherent weak biological traits. More precisely, Dover argues that it is the inter-linking of capitalism and nationalism that leads to the marginalization of inter-racial communities. His solution is a socialist world, for only a world order based on economic equality and international co-operation can create racial equality.

AMRITA MEHTA, UNIVERSITY OF DELHI, INDIA

Representation and Self-Presentation: Diasporic Indian English Women Poets

Diasporic Indian English women poets creatively encode the South Asian diasporic woman’s experience of racism in the public sphere and re-iteration and reproduction of native culture and ethnicity in the private sphere of familial and social relations. The poets conjure through memory and nostalgia a vivid cultural heritage of rituals, festivals and food that women discover to be
both a gendered burden yet a source of succor and solace in the host nation. The process of assimilation demands a negotiation with the cultural codes of both host and home nation. The poetic perceptions however vary across the first and second generation diasporic poets. How do the women poets carve an identity for the South Asian woman at the cusp of divergent races? Does race or class and ethnicity assume greater significance and what do the poets visualize for the woman of mixed racial heritage, marked by multiple migrations? This paper will attempt to read the poetry of diasporic Indian women poets—Meena Alexander, Sujata Bhatt, Imtiaz Dharker, Suniti Namjoshi, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Uma Parmeswaran and others to examine the different ways in which women’s transcontinental experiences at the intersection of race and gender are encoded in the poetry of South Asian diasporic women.

RAJIV MENON, NEW YORK UNIVERSITY

The Reluctant Model Minority: American Muslims and the Cultural Politics of Race

This paper seeks to identify the ways that questions of Islam, American empire, and national security shift and transform the politics of race in the United States. I argue that despite many assumptions, the attempt to establish a stable category of “Muslim” through the various policies, discourses, and practices that make up the concept of “national security” is not simply about identifying potential terrorists, but also in shaping Muslims as self-sacrificing patriots who put the security of the many over the rights of the few. I suggest that, like the “bad” Muslim, the “good” Muslim is a subject formation that is produced through engagement with the complex structures of national security rather than an inherent, stable identity. Thinking about the ways that this type of unwilling model minority politics mediates—but does not erase—the suspicion facing Muslims allows us to place these recent processes of racial formation within larger discussions of institutionalized racism within the United States. Focusing specifically on the cultural politics of race for South Asian American Muslims by synthesizing existent writing on model minority politics with more recent critical discussions of Islamophobia, I turn to Amy Waldman’s The Submission (2011). Waldman’s novel, which depicts an imagined public scandal over the selection of an Indian American Muslim as the designer for a memorial dedicated to the victims of a terrorist attack, theorizes and critiques these processes of subject formation. As I will suggest, the production of the model minority Muslim is necessary to justify uneven terms of citizenship, which has larger implications for minority communities in the United States.

INDRANIS MITRA, MOUNT ST. MARY’S UNIVERSITY

Diaspora and Nation in Qurratulain Hyder’s River of Fire

Examining this year’s conference theme, not many would consider Qurratulain Hyder’s novel an obvious or easy fit. Yet the novel, with its dual incarnations, participates in a critical way in the shaping of diaspora theory in the present time. The classic diaspora theory derives from the Jewish experience and assumes the following key characteristics: separation from an original homeland; a collective memory that idealizes the past in the homeland; marginalization in the host culture; and a hope of return. However, as Michele Reis, among others, has argued, “the victim diaspora” narrative is but one strand in a complex story of human movements from ancient Greece to the post-colonial, globalized contemporary world. Humans travel for many reasons, not always forced by trauma, and they leave their mark on the “host” societies in which they make their temporary or permanent homes. Hyder’s novel, which spans an epic sweep from ancient India to the post-colonial period of partition of the subcontinent, is replete with images of travel. Her characters travel is search of knowledge and self-understanding; in pursuit of economic opportunities; or forced by war and conflict. The ultimate and ironic moment of
“scattering” of course is the partition when those that never left home suddenly find themselves displaced as post-colonial nation states draw their contested boundaries. The focus of my paper, however, is NOT on the scattering from the subcontinent; it is rather on the subcontinent as the “host” culture, shaping and shaped in each epoch by the waves of migrants from distant places. The novel calls into question the nationalist myth of a homogenous and seamless national past even as it enacts the slow evolution of a national culture – Urdu is its linguistic sign – through the interweaving of many contributory strands.

SARAH B. MOHLER, TRUMAN STATE UNIVERSITY

Ageism, Racism, And British Tourism In Helen Simonson's Major Pettigrew's Last Stand And Deborah Moggach's These Foolish Things

According to data from the 2011 census, 17% of the population (roughly 9.5 million people) in England and Wales were 65 or older, an increase of 1.3% since the 2001 census. Likewise, the number of individuals who identify themselves as being Asian in ethnicity grew from 4.37% in 2001 to 5.87% (approximately 3.1 million people) in 2011. The growth in both these demographics has been reflected in two recent popular British novels that forge a link between ageism and racism as it affects men and women in contemporary British society: Helen Simonson’s 2010 novel Major Pettigrew’s Last Stand and Deborah Moggach’s 2004 novel These Foolish Things, which has recently been adapted into the movie The Exotic Marigold Hotel (2012). Both novels feature British retirees who forge friendships across cultural and racial boundaries, because of their increasing sense of their own marginalization in British society, due to their age and infirmities. Whereas Major Pettigrew’s Last Stand features a romance between a “proper” English gentleman and the widow of a Pakistani grocer, deemed inappropriate by their friends and relatives, These Foolish Things and its film adaptation, The Exotic Marigold Hotel, are tales of revitalization that focus on travelers who form bonds while on extended holiday at a hotel for the elderly in Jaipur. Moggach’s novel and its adaptation harken back to English classic novels such as Forster’s A Room with a View (1908) and Von Arnim’s Enchanted April (1922), with one significant change: the picturesque and revitalizing locale is not Italy, but modern India. This paper will explore and critique the possibility these works pose that it is the older, not the younger, generation of white British citizens who will prove more willing to set aside prejudices and dismantle cultural barriers that separate them from their Asian neighbors.

HOLLY MORGAN, WWU MÜNSTER, MARIE CURIE ITN RESEARCHER

Mothering, Culture Keeping, and Racial Difference in Shilpi Somaya Gowda’s Secret Daughter

In Imagining Adoption, Marianne Novy asserts that “[a]doption makes ambiguous the definition of parenthood and such other important terms as family, kinship, and identity, as well as father and mother” (1). These definitions are further complicated when adoptions occur across borders and adoptive parents and children do not share common race or nationality. In Gowda’s Secret Daughter, an infant named Asha is adopted from India by an Indian/American couple. Asha’s adoptive father Krishnan seeks to instill in her a sense of cultural pride and belonging. Conversely, her mother Somer, a “thoroughly American” (75) white woman, wants to keep her from her Indian heritage out of fear that she will want to seek out her birth parents (162). I draw on Heather Jacobson’s Culture Keeping for examples of common culture-keeping practices and the implications of these practices for adoptive families as I examine the ways that Somer attempts to keep culture from, rather than for, her daughter. Jacobson argues that “[c]ulture keeping … is largely an attempt to negotiate race and
ethnicity and to normalize international adoptive families within a white, middle-class social milieu that characterizes them as different” (166), and I consider Somer’s rejection of these practices in Gowda’s novel in relation to the racial diversity within her family and community. What does it mean for Somer to harbor feelings of superiority towards the country from which both her husband and her daughter come? In light of these feelings, how can the final resolution - a family yoga retreat to Mysore- be read? Drawing on Novy and Jacobson’s works, as well as Homi Bhabha’s theories of nation and culture, this paper examines how racial and cultural hierarchies are constructed within Gowda’s novel and seeks to understand the significance of these hierarchies in transnational adoptive situations.

ILYSE R. MORGENSTEIN FUERST, UNIVERSITY OF VERMONT

South Asian Muslim Belonging: Orientalism, Race, Citizenship, and Shari’ah

As of February 2011, thirteen US states had introduced bills that would ban the use of, juridical reference to, or state’s implementation of shari’ah, Islamic law. In any of these cases, what is interesting is not whether these bills become laws, but rather the framing of shari’ah as a threat to the state, citizens, and legal code. This paper examines the rhetorics employed by Americans – in the language of the bills as well as in opinion pieces, television broadcasts, and other mainstream news sources – that frame Islamic law and Muslims as threats to civic codes. This paper also connects these ideas, comments, and legal crusades to those present within British India. By examining the discourse about Muslims, citizenship, race and secular law present in America and British India, I argue that there exists a deeply held, historically pervasive construction of a Muslim citizen as necessarily outside the bounds of state law due to shari’ah. I explore those roots by way of contending with Sir W. W. Hunter’s infamous book The Indian Musalmans: Are They Bound in Conscience to Rebel Against the Queen? (1871) Then, I compare contemporary writings in the American context to that of Hunter; these include the 2011 House Homeland Security Committee’s hearings on the so-called radicalization of American Muslims, spearheaded by Representative Peter King of New York. I analyze the ways in which attempted bans on Muslim law signal the following: first, the imagination of South Asia as a location for Muslim terrorists and separatists; second, a deeply-rooted, historically pervasive construction of Muslims as racially distinct; and third, the related construction of Muslims as necessarily foreign, unable to be trusted to abide by state law because of the existence of religious law.

APARNA MUJUMDAR, NORTHEASTERN UNIVERSITY

The Indian Creole and the “Racial Colonial System” of the Caribbean: V.S. Naipaul's The Enigma of Arrival and the Limits of Creolization

Creolization, conventionally defined as the process of racial and cultural internmixing to generate new identities and possibilities of expression, is commonly associated with descendants of African slaves in the Caribbean. Its writers have variously depicted creolized subjects, often in ways that suggest the creative and regenerative energies afforded by the mediations of different cultural and social paradigms in the Caribbean, where most people have been displaced from other spaces. Scholars address how creolization affords the appropriation of antiessentialist stances, especially in the face of imperialist regimes that emphasize the supremacy of western modes of being and homogenous, Eurocentric identities over other ways of being. It promotes negotiation of diverse subject positions rather than singularity of being. For all its subversive and creative energies, creolization is rarely associated with the Indian diaspora, which has experienced acculturation and creolization over the years since the 1830s when the first ships arrived across the islands with indentured laborers from India. Using, among others, Edouard
Glissant and Simon During’s discussions of creolization, I will explore how Indian subjects variously experienced and resisted creolization in the attempts to survive economic depravity and cultural disjunction in the Caribbean. In particular, this essay examines V.S. Naipaul’s *The Enigma of Arrival*, a semi-autobiographical work, to understand the ways in which Indian descendants of indentured migrants mediate creole identities. While Naipaul’s narrator does not explicitly acknowledge his creole identity, he is conscious of being cut off from India and transplanted to the Caribbean, where he negotiates the multiple influences, British, African, and Indian, of colonial Trinidad. Both there, and later in England, he is also conscious of his racial identity and his skin-color, given his upbringing in colonial Trinidad where racial difference was used as the primary excuse for imperialism and the supremacy of the colonial state. In an attempt to overcome the negative associations of his race, he absorbs colonial, Eurocentric discourses, but continues to feel the pulls of multiple cultural affiliations. This mediation of varied cultural, linguistic and political paradigms ultimately impacts his literary style and oeuvre.

ANIRUDDHA MUKHOPADHYAY, UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA

The “Jewish Question” in the South Asian Diaspora: Reading the Marrano as Metaphor in Amitav Ghosh’s *The Glass Palace* and K. S. Maniam’s *In a Far Country*

In her book *Marrano as Metaphor*, Elaine Marks looks at the “Jewish question and presence” in French literature. Through insightful readings of various French texts, primarily focusing on twentieth century French writing (and critical responses to those texts) before and after the Second World War, Marks argues that a French literary identity is marked by the “presence and absence” of French/European Jews as the racial “other.” In my paper, I start with the term “diaspora” in its deployment in the South Asian context whose etymological roots in the “Jewish condition” have been noted by many critics. However, while we are aware of the term’s Jewish Biblical origins (Deuteronomy 28:25), we need to interrogate the specific racial charge that the word “diaspora” carries over from its European discursive context into post-colonial South Asian critical discourse. I explore this racial charge through the figure of “marrano as metaphor” as proposed by Marks – from the crypto-Jew who converted to Catholicism in fifteenth century Portugal and Spain to avoid persecution but “secretly” stayed loyal to his or her Jewish heritage – drawing upon, beside other critical work, Jacques Derrida’s use of the marrano to explore the “textual” margins of identity constitution. So in agreement with this conference’s theme of the constitutive role of race in the South Asian diasporic experience, I trace this racialization of diasporic identity to the textual-critical deployment of the term “diaspora” to define immigrant experience. Through careful readings of Amitav Ghosh’s *The Glass Palace* and K. S. Maniam’s *In a Far Country*, I argue that the term diaspora necessitates not just an interrogation of the racialization of immigrant-marginal identity in dominant discourse, but evokes the immigrant’s own struggle with self-racialization and othering in minor/minority literature. I also argue that the metaphor of the marrano is an important point of entry into the diasporic’s negotiation of assimilation and, what Gayatri Chakravorti Spivak has identified as, the synecdochic gesture of self-constitution as citizen-subject in the host country.

GAURA NARAYAN, PURCHASE COLLEGE–SUNY

*Sons and Daughters of Ham in Vilayet*

This paper discusses three moments in the narrative of South Asians in Vilayet in order to make a larger point about the simultaneous growth of the consciousness of racial difference and also similitude. The first of these occurred in 1765 when Mirza Sheikh I’tesamuddin went to England as a representative of the Mughal Emperor and recorded his experiences. The second occurred in 1821 in De Quincey’s
Confessions of an English Opium Eater which records a shift in perspective from the South Asian visitor to the Englishman. The third moment brings us to our own time via Monica Ali’s Brick Lane which tells of a Bangladeshi family in London just prior to and immediately following 9/11. These three moments knit together a narrative of difference which is variously complicated in each telling via the simultaneously dissolving and consistently reified boundary between the European and the South Asian. Mirza Sheikh writes of the English with admiration which devolves into identification as he adopts the European view of Africa and its inhabitants. In his most sustained statement on race, however, he reinstates difference from the English as he situates himself as a son of Ham along with the Chinese and the Negroes. Mirza Sheikh seems to partially escape the tragic knowledge of racialized colonial difference with regard to himself because of his historical placement at the dawn of the British Empire in India. The next two moments, however, are symptomatic of this tragic knowledge which consistently combines with the unseemly intimacy that derives from the British ownership of the identity of the native in London.

PRABJHOT PARMAR, UNIVERSITY OF THE FRASER VALLEY, CANADA

“An Imperial Necessity”: Indian Soldiers in England during the First World War

At the start of the First World War, a large number of Indian soldiers were transported from the colonial setting to the very middle of the imperial turf in France, exposing them not only to the extraordinary experiences of war but also to the local Europeans, especially women. This exposure was more widespread in various locations in England where the wounded Indians were sent to different hospitals. Archival documents of the War Office and the India Office reveal that the sudden proximity to European/English women led to many officials fearing social contact between white women and the Indian soldiers. The anxiety and fear of miscegenation and contamination of English women led to a rigid disciplining of the wounded Indian soldiers in several hospitals. To examine the regulatory practices put in place for controlling Indian soldiers in France and in England, this paper extricates the lived experiences of Indian soldiers from their letters and from the literary responses to the Great War that focus on the Indian Expeditionary Force. I explore military and civil administration documents to locate the discriminatory practices implemented for their intense surveillance. In so doing, I argue that by conflating discipline and confinement, some of the hospitals were transformed into carceral spaces. The strategies of containment reveal the imperial politics of race, class, and sexuality that otherwise were veiled under the granting of military citations and newspaper reports praising the bravery of the “Dark-Skinned Warriors” of the Empire.

SUMMER PERVEZ, KWANTLEN POLYTECHNIC UNIVERSITY, CANADA AND ISSAC OOMMEN, SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY

Literary and Cinematic Representations of the “Indo-Canadian Gang Problem” in Vancouver’s South Asian Diaspora

Since 1995, there have been over 100 deaths of South Asian Canadian males in Vancouver and its suburbs, associated with what has been labeled the “Indo-Canadian gang problem” in the Lower Mainland. The problem is so large that millions of dollars have been granted to several organizations committed to finding a solution, such as the special Integrated Gang Task Force of the RCMP, headed by Tom McCluskie, and to a research team of academics (called actingtogether.ca) at Kwantlen Polytechnic University. Contemporary fiction (Ranj Dhaliwal’s Daaku series, 2008--) and film (Baljit Sangra’s 2008 Warrior Boyz; Mani Amar’s 2008 A Warrior’s Religion and 2011 Footsteps into Gangland) addressing the issue represent it as such, and target chiefly (1) the popular appeal of gangsters in the media, (2) bad parenting (Sikh-Canadian), and/or (3) the pathology of the Sikh (“warrior”) male as the chief cause(s) of the
issue. Despite the existence of such texts (or perhaps unaware of them), when asked for a cause -- by community members – at a recent anti-gang violence forum (The Chris Mohan Memorial Youth Forum at Kwantlen campus), Vancouver Sun reporter Kim Bolan declared the issue a “head-scratcher.” In our paper, we aim to dismantle the mythology around the issue of the “Indo-Canadian gang problem,” revealing it to be not just a local problem, but part of larger national issues and concerns. When considered within the larger context/history of “ethnic gangs” in Vancouver and the GVRD (for example, the RCMP report "three huge Asian gangs" with 1200 members as the center of the "gang problem" in Richmond) and their media representation, the social creation of the word “gang” itself is called in question. In addition, the impact of histories of colonization, immigration, and racism must be considered, as these ideologies – along with patriarchy and capitalism – are inherent to very formation and sustained existence of gangs themselves. Our research reveals that the actual root causes of the “Indo-Canadian gang problem” are not actually “Indo-Canadian,” Sikh, or South Asian at all; literary and cinematic representations of the problem, while noble and innovative at having raised awareness, have neither been able to accurately document its chief causes, nor suggest any real solutions.

MOUMIN QUAZI, TARLETON STATE UNIVERSITY
Midnight’s Children: A Case Study of Diaspora Art
In my past scholarship, I have observed that Salman Rushdie’s Midnight’s Children’s organizational structure is, not only a nod to the 18th-century novel structure, but also an intertextual reflection of Rushdie’s debt to the influence of cinema on his writing. My article in the South Asian Review (2006 Regular Issue) detailed the cinematic nuances of the novel, as well as detailing the issues regarding adapting the novel to the stage, television, and big-screen. I interpreted Midnight’s Children as a parody of filmic language, structure, and themes, emblematic of a version of hybrid postcolonial identities. In this paper, I build further on my comments at last year’s Conference, by comparing the original novel to its Vintage screenplay version (1999), its 2003 stage play (adapted for the theatre by Rushdie, Simon Reade, and Tim Supple), and the latest adaptation, a film screenplay by Rushdie and Deepa Mehta (to debut in the autumn before this SALA Conference). Using reception, postcolonial, and genre theory to the four versions, I comment on the effect of Deepa Mehta’s contribution to the screenplay and, of course, film that she directed. Applying Rick Altman’s groundbreaking theoretical work on film and genre, as argued in Film/Genre (BFI, 1999), I apply a syntactic/syntagmatic/pragmatic approach to the process and product of Midnight’s Children (especially the film version), while commenting on the role of “diaspora” in almost every aspect of this decades-long project, including comments on the multivalent and diverse authorship, publication, adaptation, and reception by audiences that are multivalent and diverse, themselves.

RASHMI RAMAUL, DHARAMSHALA, INDIA
“Redefining Culture in Political Exile”: Appreciating Tibetan Protest Poetry
Politically uprooted, displaced, homeless and marginalized are the Tibetan refugees settled in India and elsewhere. Citizens of nowhere, the Tibetan diaspora live with the trauma and torture of loss of family ties, land, clan identity and cultural definition. They everyday undergo a severe test of communal fortitude. Displacement fosters a sense of unity by emphasizing similarity above uniqueness, and thus the Tibetan Community finds it necessary to actively work to reaffirm themselves. Their struggle is at multiple levels - political, economic, social, cultural, religious and psychological – because political exile upsets the relational continuity between and across generations. For the Tibetans wearing their traditional clothes or eating Tibetan food or speaking
their native language is not an identity marker alone but is a part of the so-called ‘White Wednesday’ that mirrors a parallel movement of passive resistance in Tibetan areas under Chinese control. Tibetan writing in English is very recent and an upcoming stream of diasporic writings. But here creativity through poetry, prose or counted novels is a voice of protest, resistance and struggle. There aren’t many Tibetan poets and yet they play a strong role in articulating and unifying the Tibetan voice of rebellion. These poets are trying to chain their words in to a desperate call for Rangzen or freedom The recurrent theme in almost all the poems composed by exiled poets like Buchong D. Sonam, Lhasang Tsering, Tenzin Tsundue, K. Dhondup and others are of longing, belonging, suffering, homeland, freedom and pain and anguish of exile. These poets use poetry as a literary device to deal with their identity crisis and activism. This activism is social consciousness that refuses to be cowed down under the weight of injustice and apathy and the conscience of Tibetan poets forbids them to remain a silent witness and suffer through generations. The aim of the paper is to focus on these Tibetan poet-activists who are using poetry to underline Tibetan political struggle, physical dislocation and cultural heritage.

SOHOMJIT RAY, KENT STATE UNIVERSITY

_Coolitude and the Construction of Race in Nathacha Appanah’s Les Rochers de Poudre d’Or_

While the négritude movement gave voice to the forcibly displaced populations from Africa and attempted to fashion a notion of black identity that would reclaim ‘Africanness’ from racist and colonial discourses, some critics have pointed out that it does not take into account the ethnic diversity of post-abolition societies that developed in the Caribbean and the Indian Ocean. For example, the _kala pani_ narratives that depict the passage of the indentured laborers to some of these places from India during the nineteenth century can be better understood when read with the Mauritian poet Khal Torabully’s concept of *coolitude* in mind. Torabully defines _coolitude_ as “an aesthetic blend, a kind of mix of a complex culture, bringing to the imaginaire a part of the other. It calls to attention “Indianness” in relation with “Otherness” as a premise which leads to a transcultural awareness.” Torabully’s concept of _coolitude_ provides a very useful theoretical framework to analyze the construction of race in the Mauritian novelist Nathacha Appanah’s _kala pani_ narrative _Les Rochers de Poudre d’Or_ (2003). Appanah always constructs race in conjunction to the racialized Other. For example, in the first part of the novel, the narrative voice is given over to an English doctor whose journal constructs, quite chillingly, what it means to be an Indian indentured laborer under a racist colonial economy. In the second part, the race of the Indian indentured laborers is constructed with reference to not just the white owners of the plantation economy, but also in contradistinction to and in dialogue with the race of the black ex-slaves. I will argue that Appanah’s construction of race of the indentured laborers through such a dialogic process is an effective antiracist ploy that prevents according normativity to one particular race, and hopes to inculcate what Torabully has termed a “transcultural awareness” that places hybridity and _métissage_ at the center of the narrative.

AMBER RIAZ, FANSHAWE COLLEGE, CANADA

_Race and Islam: Muslim “types” in Hollywood, Bollywood and Lollywood_

The proposed paper will begin with a working definition of “race” and racialization in the diaspora in order to launch a reading of specific Muslim character types that have emerged in three cinematic traditions – Hollywood, Bollywood and Lollywood. I will focus on three films: Hollywood’s *Rules of Engagement* (2000), Bollywood’s *Anwar* (2007) and Lollywood’s *Khuda Kay Liye* (2007) to illustrate the stereotypical portrayal of Muslims on film as terrorists and
extremists, a portrayal that underlines the post 9/11 fear of the radical (Arab) Muslim terrorist, represented in stereotypical clothes, touting guns and bombs, spouting anti-American slogans. I argue that these representations of Muslims as “types” have contributed to, even constructed, a category “Muslim terrorist” that has racialized, and then “othered” an entire faith-based community. Television shows like TLC’s *American Muslim* (which was cancelled after airing 3 episodes) sought to challenge these stereotypes, but the fact that no South Asian family was represented, and that the show spent an inordinate amount of time on women’s dress (how a hijab is tied, why some women do not veil themselves) only highlighted the prevailing view of Muslim as Other in North American media. Manisha Koirala’s *Anwar* presents a picture of a “misunderstood” Other, as does GeoTV’s *Khuda Kay Liye*, but both films begin with the establishment of a Muslim as different from, separate from the “mainstream” culture. My paper proposes that these representations have created a new racial, orientalized, category: Muslim, one that erases geographical and historical specificities.

JOYLETTE WILLIAMS SAMUELS, NASSAU COMMUNITY COLLEGE–SUNY

A Right, Not a Privilege: Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization

Throughout her collection of essays, Gayatri Spivak refers to the significance of students in the globalized era having a background in the classics as a means of liberation. This idea rings true especially within regions throughout the Middle East and North Africa that have recently experienced major governmental reform and political unrest. The need for an aesthetic education, and the knowledge of how to interrogate it from as many angles as possible, can here be viewed as a catalyst for social change and justice. I attempt to interrogate Spivak’s thesis that “aesthetic education is the last available instrument for implementing global justice and democracy” while supporting her concept of education as a human right. I also argue that educational reform is key in sustaining governments in the Middle East, like Egypt, which are beginning to experience some form of democracy and for the first time holding democratic elections. The analytical tools necessary to maintaining the integrity of a governmental structure that truly holds the human and civil rights of its people as a priority can only be developed through knowledge of the philosophies on which human rights are built and on which Spivak proposes is essential. This paper will geographically place her concerns in the historical context of the Arab Spring while also conjecturing on what the outcomes of this can be for race and gender, and will end by asking what path forward we can be forged in respect to an aesthetic education in this era of globalization that, as Spivak eloquently argues, cannot colonize a human’s will or seize control or “the sensory equipment of the experiencing being” (2).

PARAMA SARKAR, UNIVERSITY OF TOLEDO

Trading Ethnicity: Race and Commodification in the Works of Dean Mahomed

This paper, by looking at South Asian diasporic literature at a specific historical moment, illustrates how fetishism and phobia of the East fundamentally shaped colonial-metropolitan interactions and British Asian cultural production in the first half of the nineteenth century. In the absence of a solidly defined discourse of scientific racism, reaction to the growing number of Indian bodies on British soil manifested itself through blatant objectification, an attitude that climaxed in the Great Exhibition of 1851. Surprisingly, early immigrants and travelers to Britain did very little to resist such objectification; in fact, the first Indian writer in English, Dean Mahomed, actively promoted the exotic nature of his “shampooing” techniques in order to gain economic and social stability. But at the same time, immigrant narratives like that of Mahomed
are characterized by a peculiar resistance to unquestionably accepting British social and cultural hegemony. More specifically, this paper first examines Mahomed’s *Shampooing, or Benefits Resulting From the Use of The Indian Medicated Vapour Bath, As Introduced Into This Country, by S.D. Mahomed (A Native of India)*, and argues that in order to counter a possible charge of what I call “ethno-pornography,” Mahomed’s text inverts the dominant binary of the corrupt East/pristine West to portray a diseased British body politic, weakened by imperial economic expansion in need of Eastern healing to be made whole again. While “Indian-ness” is certainly commodified in the text, Mahomed’s deft narrative replete with testimonials from satisfied patrons and accounts of the purported advantage of Indian medical techniques over British practices effectively argues for a legitimate immigrant presence in Britain.

MAYA SHARMA, CUNY–EUGENIO MARIA DE HOSTOS COMMUNITY COLLEGE

**Globalization and Diaspora in Amitav Ghosh’s Sea of Poppies**

*The Sea of Poppies*, the first novel of a projected trilogy on the voyage or voyages of the former slave ship Ibis, carrying opium and indentured coolie (*kuli*) emigrants, is a product of and incitement to reflection on the history of the South Asian diaspora in the context of the globalization of the economy in the age of the British Empire. In this paper I shall carry that reflection forward. The previous stage was the occupation of new territory by the European powers, the displacement or extermination of native peoples, the expropriation of agricultural land and its conversion to sugar as a cash crop for export as a refined or distilled product, and the enslavement and importation of African and Irish labor to work the land. The end of slavery brought about a labor shortage met by the importation of indentured labor from South Asia, by people displaced by the expropriation of agricultural land and its conversion to a cash crop, poppies, for export to China in the form of opium. (Fewer hands were needed to grow and process opium than to grow food.) The result was a war on drugs conducted by the Manchu rulers of China, who found that the availability of opium impaired their ability to extract more or less unfree labor from their native subjects, the Han Chinese. In this war, the Opium War or Wars, the British Empire took the side of the drugs, invoking the doctrine of *laissez faire*, which of course was intended to restrain rulers from the economic regulation of their own subjects, not to empower them to compel foreign rulers to permit their subjects to consume British products. I shall be discussing characters, incidents, and language patterns of *A Sea of Poppies* as they shed light on the early South Asian diaspora, especially as we see it in North America.

SANDHYA SHETTY, UNIVERSITY OF NEW HAMPSHIRE, DURHAM

**South Asian American Physician Writers: Connecting Literature and Medicine**

Recent research on South Asian physicians in the U.S. underlines the need to complicate perceptions of their social class agency and economic privilege by exploring race and ethnicity in the medical profession. Using this work as a point of departure, my paper identifies a specific subcategory of medical professionals – South Asian *physician writers* – that further complicates the question of social class. Thanks to recent pedagogical shifts, the value of literature has been reasserted within a biomedical paradigm originally responsible for severing medicine from humanist disciplines. This paper links South Asian Diaspora studies to the Medical Humanities which have given literature and ethics a new purchase within medicine. A group of physicians of Indian origin famed for their literary-intellectual prowess provides a rich opportunity to forge such a link. Their combined significance can be gauged from major awards garnered, best-selling books published, and high-profile positions occupied in academia, journalism, and public policy. These physician writers teach medicine and creative writing; they advise Presidents and write
regularly for *The New Yorker* and *Granta*. Doctors Abraham Verghese, Siddhartha Mukherjee, Atul Gawande, Sayantani DasGupta and Sanjay Gupta are among the more prominent of the writer physicians whose writings I explore. While Verghese’s memoir has received some commentary, little sustained attention has been forthcoming with regard to the general problematic of the physician writer whose acquisition of literary-cultural capital sets him/her apart from the typical Indian American physician thoroughly assimilated into the non-literary ethos of bioscience. What makes these physicians responsive to the concern for narrative in American biomedicine? Has their association with elite institutions shaped them differently from other immigrant and second-generation Indians who have received medical training elsewhere? What personal stories – marked by ethnicity or gender – shape their public reflections? Does their admired entanglement in literary high culture signify the professional coming-of-age of South Asian physicians in the “new” diaspora?

JAYSHREE SINGH, BHUPAL NOBLES POST GRADUATE GIRLS COLLEGE, UDAIPUR, INDIA

**Ramabai Espinet: Reading Race, Empire and Indo-Caribbean History**

Ramabai Espinet is an Indo-Canadian and Indo-Caribbean contemporary writer, who with her intellect and education breaks the ideological positioning of racial purity and ritual purity. She reminds the genteel class of readers (who are also radical racialist) to understand the ideological interpolation in the whites’ literature, and at the same time she argues the social and historical account of the Indo-Caribbean spirituals in order to establish a new nationalist paradigm in Canadian Literature. Due to her consciousness for collective history, racial diversity and human purpose, she is credited with aesthetic creations in writing such as *The Swinging Bridge* etc. The writings of the author propose erasure of class, race and colonial mindset and suggest reconstruction and reading of race and to understand the problem of race and its implications in the cultural identity and cultural unification of Canadian cosmopolitan and comparative background. This paper attempts to understand the larger subject of race in the context of modernity, unity, education and colonialism in the works of the writer Ramabai Espinet; secondly it would follow-up Ramabai’s approach to encounter apocalyptic literature that read by the white bourgeois reader and written by biased white elites Europe, Canada and America that attempts to spread the evils of racism, slavery-trade, segregation and subjugation.

ALIA SOMANI, WESTERN UNIVERSITY, CANADA

**Mythologizing Histories, Re-inviting Pasts: The 1914 Komagata Maru Incident**

Hayden White has famously argued that history is not a natural discourse but rather a kind of fiction in which the plotting of events imbues them with meaning and significance. “[H]istories gain part of their explanatory effect by their success in making stories out of mere chronicles” (83), White writes. In India, what the British called the Sepoy Mutiny was renamed as the First War of Independence by Indian nationalists who were themselves doing what their colonial rulers had done: mythologizing history and mobilizing it to suit their own political purposes. In this paper, I want to shift the debate to Canada, and to think about how the once forgotten histories of racial minorities have become sites of struggle between competing groups. One such history is the Komagata Maru incident, an event that took place in 1914 when all but twenty-four of the 376 British subjects of South Asian origin aboard a Japanese ship – the *Komagata Maru* – were denied entry into Canada and forced to return to India. In the past ten years, the *Komagata Maru* incident has surfaced in the public realm with proliferating force in the form of museum exhibits, apologies, inquiries, imaginative fictions, websites, illustrated books, and so on. This very
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proliferation, I argue, suggests that earlier concerns – concerns about the erasure or writing out of minority histories from the public record – are perhaps becoming less important than the question of how history is “used and abused” by members of the hegemonic and the minority community. In my own experience as a researcher, I have in some cases been denied the legitimacy to speak on the Komagata Maru incident, and in other cases, censored and told to produce a sanitized version of the past. Thus, this paper will explore some of those personal experiences in order to raise broader theoretical questions about how the radical historian negotiates the politics of history and historical re-telling.

DEBORA STEFANI, GEORGIA STATE UNIVERSITY
Neutralizing a Threat to Racial and National Identity via Citizenship: A Reading of Thrity Umrigar’s If Today Be Sweet

In his essay, “A Borderless World: Literature, Nation, and Transnation,” Bill Ashcroft asks “What will become of us without asylum seekers to threaten our borders?” Tehmina Sethna, the protagonist of Thrity Umrigar’s If Today Be Sweet, did not come to the United States because her country is at war. She is a Parsi Indian widow of sixty-six who came to visit her son and see if she likes Ohio enough to leave behind her middle-class life in Bombay. However, to the American eye, she is yet another of those “brown immigrants who never lose their funny accent” and, therefore, always remain Indian. Ironically, though, it is because of her race and her non-Americanness that she is “granted” citizenship. In a white suburban area of Cleveland, Tehmina has what most other Caucasian American neighbors seem to lack: civic responsibility. She saves two white young children from an abusive mother. The local and national media proclaim her a national hero. Had Tehmina been white, the story would have hardly made it to the local newspaper. Tehmina can claim America without suffering through the stages of assimilation. Moreover, she is no longer seen as a burden that America must accommodate. (In truth, America cannot offer her freedom, happiness, or opportunities because she doesn’t need them. In this, Umrigar’s protagonist is unlike other first-generation Asian characters in Asian American novels.) Nonetheless, by being classified as a “national hero,” Tehmina is turned from immigrant, from stranger, into a subject of the nation-state, and, thus, her threat to America has been neutralized. Furthermore, even though by “stubbornly hold[ing] on to her Indianness,” this Parsi woman manages to disrupt the strict link between racism and national identity, in the end, she involuntarily participates in reinforcing the binary relationship citizen/good vs. foreigner/evil.

MIROSH THOMAS, UNIVERSITY OF ARKANSAS
Ambivalence in the Postcolonial Desire: Patterns of Assimilation and Migration in The God of Small Things

The strategies of cultural colonization in British India helped the British to promote their culture and civilization as the supreme one to be emulated by others. The love for the English culture and civilization among the middle and upper class is comparatively strong in Postcolonial India and works as the triggering force behind migrating to English speaking countries. While the middle and the upper class that usually come in contact with the British cultivate an interest in moving to the English speaking Countries, the less fortunate, often the uneducated and unskilled laborers, desiring social mobility in the complex hierarchical class/caste structure migrates to the Gulf countries as guest workers. Arundhati Roy’s The God of Small Things illustrates this migratory desire in different classes in postcolonial India. The major characters of the novel, the upper class Ipe family members are the main anglophile characters in this novel. Through their hybridity the Ipe family occupied a better position in the class hierarchy established by the British. Their
hybridity, however, becomes the crux of the problem in the novel, since they live in the penumbral shadows between the two worlds – East and the West. Living in the liminal space creates what Homi Bhabha called “ambivalence” in the postcolonial and racial desire and works as a subversive force against both the world – the anglophile as well as traditional Indian society. The migratory desire was not limited to the middle class alone: many lower class people migrated to gulf countries during the time of the oil boom in the Middle East. The Gulf migrants who left India sent money home and raised their family’s financial position and consequently their class position. In this paper, I argue that the ambivalence in the racial desire in the middle and upper-class as well as the migratory desire of the lower stratum of the society work as a subversive force in the social and economic hierarchy of the mother country, India.

JOYA URAIZEE, ST. LOUIS UNIVERSITY

South Asian Teenagers at War: Niromi de Soyza’s Tamil Tigress

How does one describe war without using what Dinaw Mengestu once described as “body counts and haunting images”? What makes a South Asian teenage girl’s first-hand representation of war particularly compelling? In this paper, I will analyze a memoir written by a former teenage combatant, namely, Niromi de Soyza’s Tamil Tigress (2011). The narrative focuses on the actual combat experiences of a former teenage soldier in Sri Lanka, yet it has also been critiqued as a falsified account of the Sri Lankan Civil War (1983-2009). I will examine these charges of falsification of the facts, the politics and economics surrounding the publication of the memoir, and how these factors influenced readers’ responses in both Sri Lanka and the West. I will describe how de Soyza’s story, which focuses on events in 1987, is structured somewhat like an action adventure with killings, daring escapes, and adolescent love. There are also some scenes that depict graphic violence. However, the memoir was not universally well received. While Australian/Western reviewers were fairly positive about it, several Sri Lankan writers argued that the story was riddled with factual errors. Some journalists went so far as to suggest that the entire story was fabricated with an eye to making a commercial bestseller. In light of this controversy, I will examine the issue of narrative value. How credible is de Soyza’s claim that she wrote it because she was deeply troubled by the adverse publicity surrounding Tamil asylum-seekers arriving in Australia from 2009 onwards? Does the fact that it was written and published after she had emigrated to Australia make it less authentic? Do her factual errors detract from her depictions of human rights violations and atrocities? Finally, what role does dissociative or “false” memory play in the supposed fabrications of truth?

STEPHANIE YORKE, UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

“It’s a shame when cousins marry”: Discourses of Inbreeding and Racial Otherness in South Asian Cultural Criticism

In 2011, while researching a paper on Rohinton Mistry, I came across a variety of sources that make direct reference, or covert allusion, to so-called Parsi inbreeding; I was surprised at how very many critics premised cultural or literary interpretations on crude understandings of human genetics, and how often those understandings were based in implicit discourses of race. One finds that cultural critics who explicitly reject theological, neocolonial, and other constructions of race often reiterate pseudoscientific racial discourses, and that genetic anxieties infuse debates surrounding cultural constructions of race. In my presentation, I will give an overview of some common iterations of the discourse of inbreeding, and examples of these iterations from a breadth of cultural and academic criticism. I will draw on scientific papers to elucidate the difference between the genetic bases of inbreeding, and its construction in racial discourse, having prepared
my presentation in consultation with an Oxford geneticist. I will consider ways in which critics have absorbed narratives of inbreeding which are apparently anti-racist, but may actually affirm constructions of race, and how racialized genetic anxieties may be projected upon discourses of inbreeding. This paper will be by nature a survey, and I will contextualize my discussion of South Asian genetic anxieties within the context of international discourses of inbreeding more generally. In general, this presentation contains good news as regards close-knit communities, and I hope to infuse it with perspective and humour via disclosures regarding my own rural North American background.

ABDOLLAH ZAHIRI, SENECA COLLEGE, TORONTO

South Asian Race-Based Subjectivity in *Mississippi Masala*

This paper attempts to engage with the racial subjectivity of the South Asian Indian diaspora against African Americans in the South. This is the first time perhaps that Hollywood embarked on an investigation of the inter-rivalry between two diasporas at the time when South Asians, pursuing the American dream, were carving a niche in the South in terms of business and settlement. *Mississippi Masala* is the cinematic site for this engagement that marks the confrontation of two diasporas where ironically the younger diaspora harbours resentment against the older one that had gone through far worse conditions in terms of centuries of dislocation, slavery, segregation. The paper also engages with the racist underpinnings of a twice-diaporized subject catapulted from Idi Amin’s Uganda to the South. This paper also attempts to delve into the reverse racism that a marginal subject would enact against another ethno-racial minority whose involuntary presence in the South is far longer than the voluntary migration of the South Asian subject to the South. Furthermore, the paper probes into how a subjectivity that once considered Africa (Uganda) home now has diametrically shifted to detest Africans in the American South who had no role in their deterritorialization. Therefore, the thrust of this paper pivots on how a racially marginal subject would be antagonistic toward another marginal subject instead of further unification and empathy toward each other in the face of a common oppressor.

BONNIE ZARE, UNIVERSITY OF WYOMING

**Barometers of Shiny Indifference: Dostana and My Name is Khan**

Tarun Mansukhani’s *Dostana* (2008) and Karan Johar’s *My Name is Khan* (2010) reached a huge international audience. Like many contemporary Bollywood hits, both masterfully served up spectacle, fantasy, gorgeous actors, and throbbing landscapes. Each film seeks to embody a certain zeitgeist by considering a pressing contemporary topic: sincere romantic love between men is raised in *Dostana*, and anti-Muslim discrimination, American violence and racial profiling drives the plot of *My Name is Khan*. Clearly, the films operate in different registers, with song-and-dance-and-physical-humor filled *Dostana* contrasting with the serious *My Name is Khan* (*MNIK*), which features an autistic main character and which was made, in Johar’s words, from the desire to “correct the world’s misconceptions about Islam.” As mass commodities, both scripts are written from a particular center and direct themselves to an audience precisely from that point of view, claiming access to a set of core “liberal” values that promote freedom and broad-mindedness. *Dostana* promises us a perspective from two men who are perceived as gay, and *MNIK* is narrated by a high-functioning autistic man who is marginalized because of his cognitive impairment and because he is Muslim. Admittedly, even surface coverage of a topic invites dialogue and is to be commended, but are these films akin to dressed up dolls who look shiny but can never escape their origins in plastic, a cheap, commonplace material? Drawing on Judith Butler’s explanation of how society relegates homosexual attachment to a realm of
unthinkability and ungrievability and on David L Eng and Shinhee Han’s discussion of a needed Asian-American engagement with mourning and melancholia, this essay argues that each film script inadvertently highlights divisive in-group behavior. These flawed works ultimately cheat the viewer because they distance us from the complex personhood each filmic premise had the potential to make known.

AFRIN ZEENAT, UNIVERSITY OF ARKANSAS

Home Away From Home: Nazneen’s Identity Formation in Monica Ali’s Brick Lane

In her novel, Brick Lane, Monica Ali juxtaposes the lives of two sisters to emphasize the different trajectories of their lives. The two sisters, Nazneen and Hasina, are presented as victims of a stifling patriarchal order, very common in South Asian Muslim households. Separated geographically from each other, Hasina’s letters to Nazneen become poignant reminders of the harsh male dominated society at home and the cruel methods it employs to suppress women. These letters also dispel the myth of home as an ideal and secure realm where one yearns to return. Unable to help her sister, Nazneen decides to help herself and her daughters from the shackles of patriarchy. Ali traces Nazneen’s journey from “voicelessness to speech (Katrac 231),” which corresponds to her hybridization and subsequent attaining of selfhood or identity. Hasina’s letters and her husband’s [Nazneen’s husband, Chanu] false pretenses of his greatness spur her to the realization that her personal woman identity should trump patriarchal insistence on women as a mere extension of the male. In her journey to acquire her personal identity, Nazneen is willing to forego homogeneity. Living away from home doesn’t become a negative experience for a South Asian Muslim woman as it is to her counterpart, the South Asian Muslim male. Foreign shores become conducive in helping South Asian Muslim women attain selfhood, albeit hybrid and fragmentated. The space created by Nazneen is foreign yet secure and the identity it creates promises a freedom never before envisioned.