Nasmeem Farhin Akhtar, Dibrugarh University

Personalising the Public: Reading Jhumpa Lahiri’s *The Lowland*

This paper attempts at exploring the cultural nuances and the political upheavals which contribute towards the representation of the public sphere in Jhumpa Lahiri’s novel, *The Lowland* (2013). Set against the backdrop of a 1967 radical left movement in Bengal called Naxalism, the novel traces the destinies of two brothers, Udayan and Subhash, who, consequent upon the political conflicts of the times, walk different paths. This is presented by way of intertwining of politics and sexuality, geography and generation and the repetition of personalities and places.

In this contemporary moment of globalisation, the relation between the global and the local deserves extensive interrogation; in fact, it is the result of such research that literary studies today has become an eclectic mix of cultural studies, cross-disciplinary studies and the familiar literary analysis informed by the social concerns to do with gender, sexuality, ecology and bio-ethics. Considering such an engagement in literary texts, while referring to the theoretical implications of the public sphere as discussed by Habermas, Stuart Hall and Arjun Appadurai, this paper seeks to examine the apparent social sites and arenas, and all those aspects in *The Lowland* that are related to the public sphere, where meanings are articulated, distributed and negotiated. As the narrative moves back and forth through time and across points of view, the author acknowledges the concentration of pertinent issues in the modern day context such as the diaspora, environment and politics, ultimately contending that the public, or the political, is always personal.

*Nasmeem Akhtar* is an Assistant Professor of English at Dibrugarh University in Assam, India.

Umme Al-Wazedi, Augustana College

Marvel’s *No Normal*, Religion, and the Public Sphere

Drawing on Jurgen Habermas’ notion of the role of religion in the public sphere and Binita Mehta and Pia Mukherji’s arguments on the new comic-book culture in the postcolony, this paper analyses the new Ms. Marvel series in which a Muslim (Pakistani-) American teenager Kamala Khan makes her appearance. This paper argues that by linking “the forms of the popular to the problematics of the public sphere,” Marvel’s *No Normal* questions “specific
Euro American master narratives” of civil society and uncovers “zones of contestation, incorporations and exclusions,” as well as “sites of resistance, contested cultural assumptions, and subversive political possibilities” (qtd. in Mehta and Mukherji 4).

**Umme Al-wazedi** is Associate Professor of Postcolonial literature in the Department of English and Co-Program Director of Women’s and Gender Studies at Augustana College, Rock Island, IL. Her research interest encompasses (Muslim) women writers of South Asia and South Asian Diaspora, Standpoint Feminist Theory, Muslim and Third World Feminism, and Postcolonial disability studies. She has published in *South Asian Review, South Asian History and Culture, Sycamore Review, The Clearing House and Research Journal* (Bangladesh). Currently, she is working on two co-edited book projects titled *Whose City? Urban Outcasts in South Asian Literature*.

**Waseem Anwar, Forman Christian College University**

**Literary Public Sphere/s and the History of Pakistani Literature in English**

In his article “Ethos, Poetics, and the Literary Sphere,” David Randall declares that “[i]n Habermasism theory, the bourgeois public sphere was preceded by a literary public sphere whose favored genres revealed the interiority of the self and emphasized an audience-oriented subjectivity.” Given the promising precedence for aesthetic, literary and democratic humanization in relation to blooming public spheres, this paper first offers a commentary on the one and only compilation of its kind in Pakistan, Tariq Rahman’s *A History of Pakistani Literature in English 1947-1988* (published 1991 and 2015), whose author asserts at the very outset that “the best art … transcends national boundaries, both geographical and ideological.” The paper then explores the dire need for a more critical, theoretical and “intellectual” history of Pakistani literature in English and its cultural ethos so as to survey the growth of its public sphere/s and space/s, its “interiority of the self” and its “audience-oriented subjectivity” amid its manifold muddled issues of identity and representation. This includes complexities connected to native and diasporic reconfiguration as well as transnational interconnectivity in making through the spatiotemporal or techno-active exchanges that shape a different global future for Pakistani English literature in the backdrop of its South Asian geopolitical penetrance and expressivity.

**Waseem Anwar** is Dean of Humanities and Professor of English at Forman Christian College University in Lahore, Pakistan. He is recipient of Fulbright award twice at Indiana University of Pennsylvania (1995) and as Visiting Scholar at Duke (2007). Member of various academic, advisory and editorial boards, he is a Gale Group *American Scholar* bestowed with the Pakistan Higher Education Commission’s “Best Teacher Award – 2003.” He is also the author of “**Black** Women’s Dramatic Discourse” (2009), and guest editor of the 2010 *South Asian Review*’s special issue on Pakistani creative writing in English (31:3).

**Yubraj Aryal, University of Montreal**

**A Strange Encounter of Aesthetics with an Imperial Public Sphere in Alex Strick van Linschoten and Felix Kuehn’s Poetry of the Taliban**

This paper offers an analysis of encounter of Taliban aesthetics with an imperial public sphere through the post-World War II critical lens of Adorno’s cultural criticism and Benjamin’s critique of the "cultural documents." More importantly, it examines the
relevance of Adorno’s and Benjamin's critiques of culture/public sphere for our time: 21st-century America/West, in other words, as the imperial incarnation of nightmare of the "positive" with a critical analysis of the Western aesthetic traditions that Adorno, Benjamin et al. reject, and a more thorough application of that cultural logic to the Taliban poetry itself.

Yubraj Aryal is a Postdoctoral Candidate at the University of Montreal who obtained his Ph.D. from Purdue University. He has published articles and interviewed Brain Massumi, Marjorie Perloff, Robert J Young, Kwame Anthony Appiah, and a number of others.

Muhammad Waqar Azeem, Binghamton University-State University of New York
Drone-Zone as a Camp: A New Public Space in Pakistan

Employing Giorgio Agamben’s definition of camp in his “What is a Camp?” (1994) and Jurgen Habermas’ notion of “public sphere” in The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere (1989), I contend that in the wake of 9/11, a drone-zone replicates a camp whose inhabitants represent a biopolitical, naked life of the homo sacer where they are deprived of a democratic space to negotiate their human rights – including their right to live. By analyzing Robert Greenwald’s depiction of drone-hit North Waziristan (Pakistan) in his documentary, Unmanned: America’s Drone Wars (2013) and a contemporary painter Mahwish Chishty’s drone paintings (http://mahachishty.com/Paintings.aspx), I argue that after George W. Bush’s executive order to launch drone attacks, the drone-zone formed in Pakistan can be studied as a public space where “life-world” (Habermas’ term for individuals’ communicative space that resists “system imperatives”) ceases to function in the face of omniscient surveillance in the face of ever impending fear of drone strikes remote-controlled by inaccessible and unknowable enemy. Agamben’s notion that in a camp “power confronts nothing other than pure biological life without any mediation” is an apt description of the drone-zone where the binary space of drone vs human rejects the intervention of any juridical, dialogic or political process. Conceptualizing drone-zone as an extension of the post 9/11 “state of exception” and interpreting this zone as an “aterritorial or extraterritorial space” (Agamben), this research facilitates the emergence of a “public sphere” to negotiate US-Pakistan relationship beyond the paradigm of war-on-terrorism.

Muhammad Waqar Azeem is a Fulbright awardee, currently working towards his PhD in English from the State University of New York at Binghamton. He also teaches at Forman Christian College (FCC) University and GC University in Lahore, Pakistan. His areas of interest include literary theory and the cultural and aesthetic representation of violence in post-9/11 art and literature.

Amit Rahul Baishya, University of Oklahoma
Dawn of the Living Dead: South Asian Zombie Films and Social Critique

This paper focuses on two South Asian zombie films—Zibahkhana (2007, Pakistan) and Go, Goa, Gone (2013, India). In Zibahkhana, the zombie functions as a critique of the invisibility of the poor, who remain outside the range of vision of a group of urban youngsters who embark on a road trip. One character says that Pakistan is a strange amalgam of modernity and time frozen in the “stone ages,” yet it is precisely these zombies stuck in frozen time that return to feast on the supposedly living. Moreover, these zombies are “mutants” who
become the living dead because of the deleterious effects of pollution. Thus, the zombie here is a figure that is denied coevalness, but returns to haunt the structures of the “modern” present. In contrast, the poor are conspicuous by their absence in Go, Goa, Gone. The spaces represented are either those of immaterial labor in a neoliberal megapolis like Mumbai or glitzy consumerist locales like Goa. The first half seems to be a celebration of neoliberal capitalism and the spaces of pleasure it has created; however, this seeming celebration of neoliberalism soon turns against itself as a trio of male friends sneak into a party in an island off the coast of Goa dominated by the Russian mafia. Interestingly, the phenomenon of neoliberal globalization and its associated flow of commodities introduces the unknown “global” plague of zombification into “Indian” space. The spectacles of consumption, both pleasurable and gory, expose a wry critique of neoliberal flows turned against itself.

Amit R. Baishya specializes in postcolonial literature and cultural studies. He teaches courses on postcolonial literature/theory, world literature, cinema, comic books, and popular culture (including courses on zombie cultures and mutants). He is currently completing a book manuscript on violence, terror, and survival in post-1980 fictions from northeast India. He also translates short stories and novels from Assamese to English. Planned future projects include a book on cultural memories of the Japanese invasion during World War II in northeast India. He has published in Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies, Himal Southasian, Postcolonial Studies and other journals.

Anustup Basu, University of Illinois
Fathers and Sons: Amitabh Bachchan, Shahrukh Khan and the Bombay Melodrama in the Age of Neoliberalism

This paper is a critical study of the dynastic film figures of Amitabh Bachchan and Shahrukh Khan (SRK), situated within in the particular dispensation of the post-globalization Hindi melodrama. The schizoid screen energy of the latter was initially mobilized in the form of emblematic screen villains in films like Baazigar and Darr, and the pathology of Weberian charisma here pertained to a new covenant that new age sons/orphans were poised to demand from old Nehruvian fathers. It was a melodramatic staging of an unbridled desire for money, consumption, and women hitherto proscribed by a protectionist, ‘license-permit’ patriarchy. The schizophrenic, ‘stammering’ lovers played by SRK in his early films were thus a free-marketing of passions that could not yet be articulated into statements of ethics and law. Towards the middle period of his stardom, when he shifted to rich North-Indian caste Hindu lover boy roles in neo-traditional romances like Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge, Khan’s nervous energies are deployed for an isometric purpose: the maniacal upholding of a citadel of neo-tradition that he has now inherited. He not only has to protect and affirm this upgraded caste Hindu patriarchal order from the shocks and welters of the world at large, but also make it prosper in the age of techno-Hindutva and the Hindu-bomb.

Similarly, Amitabh Bachchan’s iconic ‘angry young’ screen persona underwent a radical transformation in the nineties in the Indian moment of financialization, technocratic management, and media. The mantle of the new patriarch he assumed was starkly different from the larger than life feudal and Nehruvian fathers played by Dilip Kumar, Raj Kumar or Sunil Dutt during the seventies and eighties. The new father had to assert his Brahminical self, but only after a necessary embroilment in the profane, irreverent global playground of
desires and lures. The new patriarchy had to bravely transcode the institutions of the world (the British public school in *Mohabbatein*, the Booker Prize in *Bagbaan*); it could no longer be defined by a Gandhian ascetic ideal (the business magnets in *Kabhi Khushi Kabhi Gham* or *Ek Rishtaa* generate money as capitalist surplus rather than money as feudal tribute). Further, on certain occasions, it also had to actively navigate new lures of hipsterism and ‘coolness’ before affirming an abiding Indian self in the end (the dirty old man who sleeps with white women in *Kabhi Alvida Na Kehna*).

**Anustup Basu** teaches film and postcolonial studies at the University of Illinois. He is the author of *Bollywood in the Age of New Media: The Geo-televisual Aesthetic* (Edinburgh University Press, 2010) and *Figurations in Indian Film*, co-edited with Meheli Sen (Palgrave Macmillan, 2013). His articles have appeared in *South Asian History and Culture, boundary 2, Journal of Human Rights*, and *PostModern Culture*. Basu is currently working on a book manuscript tentatively titled *The Phenomenology of Information*.

**Manisha Basu, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign**

**The Millennial Indian Woman and an After-life of the Public Sphere**

This paper considers a series of journalistic columns penned by Chetan Bhagat, a best-selling English-language novelist in the current Indian context. On the heels of his glittering success as a novelist, Bhagat has increasingly gone on to fashion himself as a public intellectual and national youth icon who can speak on all manner of issues ranging from gender roles to political sovereignty. For instance, in the aftermath of the fatal gang rape of a twenty-three year old physiotherapy intern who was traveling with her male friend on a public bus in New Delhi on the night of December 16, 2012, Bhagat began to publish a number of articles celebrating the emancipated Indian woman and addressing the matter of how she may be able to vanquish the sexist attitudes in her context. What is interesting about these writings is their claim that women should concentrate on their individual lives rather than on a broader public domain in order to affect change on gender-related matters. In other words, the ‘free woman’ as she appears in Bhagat’s work operates as a cipher for a quickly liberalizing national space in which what used to be a modern public sphere; this has made way for a kind of society in which the very conceptualization of ‘a public’ is endangered. It is from this observation that I argue that Chetan Bhagat belongs to that strange ilk of self-styled raconteurs who hope to function as public intellectuals by (paradoxically) actively denying the significance of the traditional spaces of the public sphere.

**Manisha Basu** is Assistant Professor of English at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. Her research and teaching interests are in postcolonial studies, South Asian literatures and cultures, Anglophone African literatures, and critical and literary theory. Her book, *The Rhetoric of Hindu India* has been contracted to Cambridge University Press and her essays have appeared in venues like *boundary 2, Comparative Literature, Ariel*, and *The Journal of Postcolonial Cultures and Societies* amongst others. She is at present working on an edited collection of essays entitled *The Aesthetics and Politics of Global Hunger*.

**Gautam Basu Thakur, Boise State University**

**The Accidental Selfie: Queen and the Indian Metropolar Public Sphere**
What explains the immense popularity of the 2014 low-budget Bollywood film *Queen* amongst India’s metropolitan (male) audiences? The commonplace answer is that the film’s story about the transformation of a demure, middle-class Rajouri girl, Rani (Kangana Ranaut), to an independent global woman who succeeds by dint of her entrepreneurial labor while remaining a vigilant manager of affective identitarian boundaries appealed to India’s neoliberal audiences who, at the time of the film’s release, were struggling with the opprobrium of rising incidents of violence against women (ie. the *Nirbhaya* case). I wish to argue, however, that the film’s real ideological fulcrum is not found in the narrative of Rani’s agency, but rather in the moment where she most lacks it. This happens when Rani accidentally sends a “selfie” in “western clothes” to her estranged fiancé (Rajkumar). This “accidental selfie” pivots the film’s true ideological function – to veil and naturalize a view of women that is the polar opposite of what the film appears to project, which I contend accounts for the (unconscious) enjoyment of Indian male audiences. While such accidental “posts” are common in this age of new media and digital technology, this moment of contingency braids the surface narrative of women’s empowerment into a latent narrative satisfying the economy of urban neoliberal male fantasy.

**Gautam Basu Thakur** teaches courses in critical theory, British literature of the empire, and postcolonial studies. His publications appear or are forthcoming in *Victorian Studies*, *Victorian Literature & Culture*, *Slavic Review*, *Psychoanalysis, Culture, & Society*, *New Cinemas*, RaVon, and in the anthologies *Figurations in Indian Film*, *The Literary Lacan*, and *Bollywood and Globalization*, and his first monograph, *Postcolonial Theory and Avatar* is scheduled to be published with Bloomsbury this November. He is currently preparing the manuscript for his second book project *The Nonhuman Empire* and researching his third monograph *The Empire of Cricket: On the Question of Civility*.

**Kanika Batra, Texas Tech University**

**Locational Counterpublics, Human Rights, and Sexuality in India**

In the last quarter of the twentieth century, when the movement for gay and lesbian rights in India was almost non-existent, independent journals such as *Manushi* articulated gender and sexuality through participatory modes such as fiction, poetry, letters, citizen-journalist reports, and articles to further the Indian Women’s Movement (IWM) from the 1980s to the 1990s. My central argument is that by placing women’s sexuality at the forefront of national concerns through a rights discourse, *Manushi* inadvertently furthered (though it did not initiate or continue) a discussion of non-normative sexual choices for women, despite a conscious steering away from such issues within the IWM and its publications in the period under discussion.

Thinking of the autonomous IWM as a “counterpublic” or a “parallel discursive arena” allows an exploration of the strategic use of publications such as *Manushi* to create national awareness of gender concerns from the 1970s onwards. Nancy Fraser’s important theorization of “alternative publics,” constituted by members of subordinated social groups such as “women, workers, peoples of color, and gays and lesbians” as “subaltern counterpublics,” demands qualification when applied to the Indian context. While Fraser’s examples of a late twentieth-century “feminist subaltern counterpublic” with its “journals, bookstores, publishing companies, film and video distribution networks” seem to be directly applicable to the second and third wave of the IWM, any categorization of these networks as
“subaltern,” and even “feminist,” requires several qualifications. I explicate the circumstances that facilitated the emergence of publications meant primarily for women, consider the possible impact of these publications on changing conceptions of gender and sexuality, and modify Fraser’s ideas to present print as a locational counterpublic.

Kanika Batra is Associate Professor of English, Director of Graduate Studies in English and Interdisciplinary Studies in Comparative Literature at Texas Tech University. Her research interests and publications are in contemporary drama from India, Jamaica, and Nigeria, postcolonial feminism, and postcolonial queer studies.

Sourit Bhattacharya, University of Warwick
The Murder of the Author: Censorship and Indian Public Sphere

Censorship on cultural and scholarly productions is not very new in Indian or South Asian public sphere. Names such as MF Hussain, A K Ramanujam, Salman Rushdie, V S Naipaul, Taslima Nasrin, Robert Spencer promptly come to mind. A particular aspect however has been prominent in the recent practice of ban culture in India: that of the assumed or literal murdering of the author. A few months ago, after several death threats and malicious campaigns by extremist groups against the portrayal of Hindu religion and dominant castes in his work, Tamil writer Perumal Murugan declared he was giving up on writing; Murugan essentially announced the “death” of his authorial self. A few weeks ago, renowned scholar in Vachana philosophy, M M Kalburgi was shot dead by a group of young men because his work had been raising questions in the cultural politics of Lingayat community. These cases not only bring back the old debate of aesthetic autonomy vs. social-moral obligation, but also call for a rethinking of the principles of democracy and secularism. If the death of the author was championed in the recent past as the celebratory moment for the birth and interpretational power of the reader, these cases suggest that the readers’ interpretive ideology, in conjunction with the dominant sectarian sentiment, could lead to a “murdering” of the author, both in spirit and in body. Further, it asks us to contemplate if this practice of annihilating the nonconforming author, which reminds us of the secret killing of writers in totalitarian regimes, is integral to the condition of being of democracy. If the ruling powers in a democratic nation could announce the state of emergency in the name of better governance, how far are these cases of murdering and annihilation exceptional and anomalous in a democracy?

Sourit Bhattacharya is a doctoral candidate in English and Comparative Literary Studies at the University of Warwick. He studies historical crisis in post-independent India in the novelistic representations and is currently drafting a chapter on Naxalite literature and films. His work is either forthcoming or has appeared in journals such as ARIEL, South Asian History and Culture, Rupkatha, Muse India and others, and in edited book, and he also o-edits Sanglap: Journal of Literary and Cultural Inquiry, which will publish an issue on ‘censorship and literature’ this winter. At the SALA Conference, she is also speaking on the Presidential Roundtable on “Intolerance and Challenges to Free Speech in the Indian Public Sphere.”
Debojoy Chanda, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
The Neo-Intimate Hindu Sphere: Sexual ‘Purity’ in the Neo-metropolitan Indian City

This paper examines a right-wing genre of Bangla novels written immediately after the decolonization of India, to mark the Hindu wife’s position in Indian civil society; the genre includes Narendranath Mitra’s Abataranika Descent (1949) and Tarashankar Bandyopadhyay’s Saptapadi Seven Steps (1958). In these novels, as I show, the authors claim that the upper-caste Hindu wife’s place is not in the public sphere of the Indian city; she has to be sexually ‘pure,’ and therefore has to be incarcerated in the Hindu household’s inner sanctum or the andarmahal. If she steps outside the andarmahal, she is stigmatized as a prostitute because she can no longer be considered ‘pure’ and can thus, almost tautologically, no longer be ‘Hindu/Indian enough.’

I argue that this stigmatization has assumed an altered today configuration. According to this configuration, the andarmahal extends its shadow through the entire expanse of the neometropolitan Indian city. This neo-andarmahal shrilly proclaims that by exposing themselves to the city’s unprotected vastness, both Hindu and non-Hindu women deliberately make themselves susceptible to rape. This configuration prominently manifested itself in the right-wing response to the rape of Suzette Jordan in Kolkata in 2012. That Jordan was Christian, of European descent, and divorced consolidated her vilifiers’ belief that she had called rape upon herself because she was not Hindu/Indian enough by blood or religion, and supposedly lacked in the discipline of the andarmahal. Jordan died in March 2015, while this ideology lives on in the streets of the neometropolitan Indian city.

Debojoy Chanda is a Ph.D. student in the English Department of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. He is writing his dissertation on how perceptions of a normative Hindu identity in India have, since decolonization, been mediated (and haunted) by the figure of the Anglo-Indian i.e. the Indian of European racial and/or cultural heritage.

Sarika Chandra, Wayne State University
Rural/Urban Imagination

An exploration of the rural/urban division is an important feature of Indian literary/cultural production. Historically, novels, poetry, film, and other forms of cultural production have often conceptualized this division by interrogating the conflicts between small farmers trying to save their farms and moneylenders, capitalist developers, and the urban bourgeoisie in general. Recent literature (such as the work by Sadanand Deshmukh and Maitreyi Pushpa) tells its stories of agrarian society post economic liberalization. These writers register a rural life rapidly unraveling any marginal gains made by the most limited land reforms during the early years of formal decolonization. In this literature, characters are not so much committed to saving their farms and farm life but instead are forcibly tied to it. This paper historicizes and analyzes the shape of this contemporary urban/rural imagination in relationship to broader questions of global capitalism. It addresses the ideological function of such an imagination in a context where land grabs and the commodification of the commons continues to intensify.
Sarika Chandra is Associate Professor of English at Wayne State University. She teaches in the areas of globalization studies, American studies, cultural studies, race and ethnic studies. She is the author of Dislocalism: The Crisis of Globalization and the Remobilizing of Americanism. Her current research concerns itself with the questions of food and agriculture, imperialism, and capitalism.

Hema Chari, California State University, Los Angeles
Disinherited Migrant Refugees: Neither the Past, the Present nor the Future Belongs to the Silenced Lives of the Tide Country

Amitav Ghosh’s The Hungry Tide provides a historical account of colonial and postcolonial settlement in the Sundarban tide country. I suggest that the region’s perpetually shifting topography highlights concepts central to theories of public space. The novel delves into the private crevices of the eked out personal lives of migrant refugees whose survival is repeatedly pitted against the harsh environment of the tide country, against the politically discursive public space of indigenous governmental ideologies, and against the growing ethics of global environmental activism, sustainability, and ecology. This paper explores how activism and representations of the interstitial spaces of the Sunderbans silence the human refugee migrants who are caught in the politics of both local and global public spheres while their bodies continue to be precariously tossed onto local and global borders.

My main premise builds on Habermas’s theories on the negotiation of public space, and on Appadurai, Fraser as well as ecocritics Anand, Mukherjee and Weik. While these theorists examine how public spheres affect globalization processes and global ecology, my departure from these theorists is to highlight subaltern migrant voices to account the ways in which refugee migrants are sacrificed to preserve the status quo of local governments and global activism when the habitation of both human and non-human beings are challenged by the endemic conflict over access to environmental resources. In conclusion, I raise the following question: can we mutually prioritize the human and the animal both symbiotically codependent and part of the geo-species environment without sacrificing either?

Hema Chari is a Professor in the Department of English at California State University in Los Angeles. Her research interests include Modern and Contemporary British Literature, Postcolonial Theory and Literature, Film and Gender Studies.

Diviani Chaudhuri, State University of New York at Binghamton
The Courtyard House and the City: Private and Public Spatial Consciousness in South Asian Muslim Women’s Literary Self-Representation

In The Location of Culture, Homi Bhabha asserts that in a colonial situation, the “recesses of domestic space become sites for history’s most intricate invasions.” While these intimate incursions can be studied in the ways in which the colonial spatial imagination strives to effect the alignment of colonial public space as well as vernacular domestic architecture along the ideals of a modern urbanity outlined at the imperial center, literary representations of public and domestic spatial practices also participate in the ordering of colonial modernity. In Imagining the Turkish House, Carel Bertram shows how a particular type of vernacular residential dwelling underwent a process of “conceptual monumentalisation” to become an iconic repository of the past invested with meanings that
developed unevenly over time and can thus tell the story of negotiations between a historical past and its revival and strategic revision through memory-work. While the Ottoman-period house type had accrued symbolic value through sustained scholarly work, and “its use as an icon of [Turkish architectural past] was encouraged and rewarded,” no such sustained and widely disseminated studies have been undertaken for the traditional introverted courtyard houses of the Islamicate cities of the Indian subcontinent, and no special incentives existed for the material reproduction of these outmoded houses.

This paper investigates the public memorialization and conceptual monumentalization of the introverted courtyard house and the Islamicate palimpsest city in South Asian Muslim women’s life-writing and novels. Drawing on authors such as Shaista Suhrawardy Ikramullah, Iqbalunnisa Hussain, Mumtaz Shah Nawaz, Zeenuth Futehally and Attia Hosain, this paper argues that the introverted courtyard house was an endemic feature and formally constitutive of South Asian Muslim women’s self-representation in literature. Through Muslim women’s literature and life-writing, this paper also examines claims on and affective attachments to cities like Lahore, Delhi, Lucknow and Hyderabad.

Diviani Chaudhuri is a doctoral candidate in the department of Comparative Literature at SUNY Binghamton, currently completing her dissertation, “Home and City in Indo-Muslim Women’s Early Anglophone Novels: Bourgeois Self-fashioning in the Zenana and Beyond.” She envisions her dissertation as part of a wider research project undertaking the comparative study of the memorialization of traditional dwelling types, domestic interiors, material culture, and urban life in twentieth century women’s life-writing and novels across MENASA.

Devaleena Das, University of Wisconsin Madison
The Cultural Manifestation of Surpanakha and Her Necessary Promiscuity

Blaming the “fall of man” on women is common in patriarchal mythologies, and women’s responsibility for the “fall” is a major theme in the Asian epic, The Ramayana. Surpanakha, a key character and sister of Ravana, the monstrous king of Lanka, is widely considered to have sparked the war between Ravana and the “divine” prince Rama. In the original text by Valmiki, Surpanakha is an unsightly fiend lacking in sexual feminine charm who serves as a foil to Sita, Rama’s virtuous, self-sacrificing wife. Significantly, Surpanakha is absent for most of the epic except for a brief appearance in which she attempts to seduce Rama, whose rejection prompts her to persuade her brother, Ravana, to launch a losing war against Lanka. Contemporizing Simone de Beauvoir’s contention in “Helen of Troy: A Symbol of Greek Culture,” I argue that Surpanakha’s figure has served as a cultural anchorage point exemplifying the fallen woman trope in South Asian cultures: she is engraved in history as a sinful, anti-redemptive, failed seductress and as such constitutes a psychological prototype of flawed femininity whose purpose is to justify patriarchal control of women if not cultural misogyny. My paper interrogates how the Surpanakha myth operates in relation to the “storyteller” and the “audience” and how it problematizes a paradoxical relationship between censorship and desire of representations of female sexuality grapple with and responds to an increasingly censorious socio-political environment.
Devaleena Das is an Associate Lecturer at University of Wisconsin Whitewater, an Honorary Fellow at University of Wisconsin Madison, and former Assistant Professor of English at University of Delhi. She is currently working on her book project *Female Body: The Cartography of Desire* and has published articles on race, gender and sexuality in various international refereed journals. Some of her published books include a critical study of Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter*, *Fallen Women in the East*, and *Claiming Space: Australian Women Writers and Alice Walker’s The Color Purple*.

Mayuri Deka, College of the Bahamas

Egocentric Monitoring within the Public Sphere: Imagining the South Asian Body

The bias and prejudice of humans against one another, evident in the public sphere, continues to underlie the violence in the pluralistic world today. The South Asian body is one such site of prejudice and stereotype. In *Prisoners of Hate*, Aaron Beck points out that the resultant sense of social isolation felt by individuals from such bias, especially in the public sphere, is embedded in our desire for survival and is closely connected to egocentric monitoring of events and people to judge our significance as a being that matters in the world. The continuous acts of self-promotion and self-protection are especially evident in situations where the individual is interacting with an Other. Gurjinder Basran’s *Everything Was Good-bye* traces Meena’s life as she attempts to navigate the racial and ethnic expectations of being a Punjabi girl in Canada. The constant surveillance that she undertakes against the White Other is reflective of the egocentric monitoring of events. This act is also evident in the people who continue to stereotype her throughout the novel. While crucial for our survival, this monitoring become dangerous in the social sphere when it is not balanced with other social characteristics like love, empathy, humanity and so on. Meena’s acceptance of multiple cultures as inherent to her being at the end of the novel reflects a similar process of balancing her egocentric monitoring with characteristics promoting social justice. Thus, a reading of the novel focusing on the underlying motives of the characters’ behaviors could lead to a better understanding of the prejudices underlining the relations of the Self-Other in the public sphere.

Mayuri Deka is an Assistant Professor and B.A. Coordinator of the School of English Studies at the College of the Bahamas. She has published and presented numerous papers on the areas of Asian American, Transnational, Postcolonial literatures, and pedagogy along with multi-cultural pedagogy. She is in the process of writing her book on pro-social pedagogy and social justice, and also serves on the Editorial Board for *Lucayos*.

Nandini Dhar, Florida International University

Indian Women Food Bloggers: Creating Contradictory Knowledge of “Home,” Domestic Labor and Culinary Creativity

With the emergence of a culinary digital public sphere, food blogs have come to occupy a critical cultural space. Such food blogs can allow "non-expert" food writers to dabble with recipe writing and devising, while situating these recipes within their own personal and family histories, thus moving beyond the constraints of the cookbook publishing industry and formal culinary training. Women food bloggers are especially interesting, because they must strike a balance between performing the digital identity of a liberated woman, and the identity of the responsible wife and mother. This contradiction is not surprising given that
food production and cooking has been considered to be a traditionally feminine form of labor. In this context, these food bloggers and their blogs participate in the work of creating new knowledge about twenty-first century professional middle class cultures of domesticity. In this paper, I will focus on Indian women food bloggers. Located in metropolitan cities in India or abroad, these bloggers often deploy a liberal feminist rhetoric of choice when it comes to their participation in domestic labor. Food preparation and cooking, long identified by feminists as sites of unpaid domestic labor, are described by such bloggers as "creativity", rather than as "work", "chores" or "labor." In this paper, I argue that by keeping a food blog, these women negotiate between the more institutional expectations of normative domestic gender roles and more personal understandings of creativity, self-fulfillment and public presence in ways that mesh seamlessly with neoliberal understandings of femininity and new domesticity.

Nandini Dhar is an Assistant Professor of English at Florida International University, Miami. She teaches Global Anglophone Literature, Postcolonial Feminist Studies, and Comparative South Asian literatures, with a special emphasis on Bengali and Hindi. At present, she is working on two monographs, focused on class in South Asian literature and cultures of neoliberal culinary consumption.

Rajnish Dhawan, University of the Fraser Valley

Sitthani—Verbal Porn Performed in the Public Sphere during a Pious Ceremony

This paper will explore the role played by Sitthani, a Punjabi folk tradition, in melting the boundary between the private and the public spheres. In cultures around the world, marriage is a public performance of a private affair and is accompanied by performance rituals that include singing and dancing. In the context of Punjab, these performance rituals include singing of a variety of songs that are sung during different stages of the ceremony. The songs for different ceremonies are composed in a metre and vocabulary that is specific to that particular ceremony; for instance, the vocabulary and metre used in a Ghorī is different from those used in a Suḥaag, the former being a song composed for the groom elevating him temporarily to the status of a prince and the latter a song for the bride wishing for her glorious future as a married woman. Sitthani, however, deals with nothing that is moral or acceptable in the normal social fabric. This form employs a vocabulary that involves everything that is immoral, vulgar, and taboo in the society. It involves blatant shaming of the opposite party (the bride’s or the groom’s) using lewd and explicit language and talks about situations and affairs that are rarely expressed even in a private sphere. Yet, Sitthani is a performance that takes place in the public sphere during a very sacred ceremony. This paper will explore the issues of migration, gender and sexuality in the text of Sitthani and will try to understand the socio-psychological reasons for the acceptance of this ritual in the public sphere.

Rajnish Dhawan teaches Classical Literature, Drama and Creative Writing in the Department of English at the University of the Fraser Valley in Abbotsford, Canada. His research interests include classical Greek and Sanskrit literature, folk performances, modern drama, Bollywood, and sitcoms. He has scripted four full length plays (three in English and one in Hindi) and four sitcoms (three in Punjabi and one in Hindi), and has also written and directed several documentaries on subjects like the archaeological sites of the Punjab, Preetnagar, and travelling in Dalhousie, an erstwhile British cantonment in India.
Recent Hindi arthouse films *Queen* (2014) and *English Vinglish* (2013) provide a contemporary exploration and deconstruction of patriarchal norms that undergird cultural beliefs and practices in the South Asian public sphere. Wedding tropes loom large in the initial frames of each film, and the heteropatriarchal framework they suggest are responsible for stringent limitations on the female protagonists, Rani (*Queen*) and Shashi (*English Vinglish*). However, as Rani and Shashi develop, they begin to manifest not only modes of feminist agency, but also a consequential cosmopolitan sensibility in their acceptance of a variety of ‘world’ characters through their global positions within an ESL classroom in New York (*English Vinglish*) or a youth hostel in Amsterdam (*Queen*). These cross-cultural feminist and cosmopolitan bonds powerfully move the protagonists beyond national borders—physically and ideologically—and instigate active reconstructions and re-imaginations of formerly interpellated identities and communities; thus, they demonstrate Arjun Appadurai’s contention that cultural groups become less attached to particular translocal public spheres over time.

This paper will discuss cinema as a negotiated public space where the female protagonists navigate the growing fluidity of South Asian translocality by challenging narrow definitions of female identity and community by patriarchal and parochial state apparatuses. By focusing on ways in which the protagonists redefine identity, validate heuristic communities, and discover their agency, this paper will explore Appadurai’s hypothesis of “diasporic public spheres” as increasingly distanced (geographically, emotionally, and culturally) from originary and translocal South Asian public spheres. Of particular interest are the ways in which the narratives move from the realm of exceedingly private predicaments—Rani is dumped on the eve of her wedding (*Queen*), Shashi has a dysfunctional and limited family life (*English Vinglish*)—to narrative broadcast spheres which then broaden into public spheres through technological motifs such as air travel, Facebook, and (indeed) subtitled cinema.

**Prathim-Maya Dora-Laskey** teaches English and Women’s Studies at Alma College. An alumna of Stella Maris College in Chennai (India), her awards include scholarships from the Pennathur foundation, the FSA board at the University of South Carolina, and a Violet Morgan Vaughan award while at the D.Phil program at the University of Oxford (U.K.). A poetry editor at *Jaggery* and a current moderator at SAWNET (sawnet.org), she has published work in *Contemporary South Asia, Interventions: A Journal of Postcolonial Studies,* and *South Asian Review.*

**Jana Fedtke,** American University of Sharjah

“…that shithole”: A Post-9/11 Portrayal of a Public and Private Pakistan in Season 4 of *Homeland*

This paper presents an analysis of the representation of Pakistan and US-Pakistani relations in the fourth season of the popular and highly acclaimed Showtime series *Homeland.* Season 4 finds CIA agent Carrie Mathison as the newly appointed station chief in Pakistan. The series
portrays Pakistan in a one-dimensional way that strips the country and its inhabitants of any agency and that sees anything Pakistani simply as a backdrop for American characters to develop in “…that shithole.” While Homeland accords some geopolitical significance to Pakistan in the post-9/11 “global war on terror” and thus in what can be considered part of a global public sphere, I argue that the series effectively renders Pakistan and Pakistani characters invisible in its pursuit of US-American-centric imperialist notions. Even though various critics and viewers have pointed out the many alleged flaws of the representation of particularly the public spaces in the capital Islamabad – the fourth season was actually filmed in South Africa, the Urdu that is used sounds “funny,” the protests in front of the American embassy could never have happened because the area is cordoned off, the medical college does not actually exist, etc. – this paper is not concerned with whether or not Homeland presents a “realistic” image of Pakistan. Rather, I argue that this one-sided representation of Pakistan is an instance of appropriation that serves US-American interests to dictate who and what is considered part of the public sphere. This is complicated by issues of gender and mental health as seen in the character of Carrie Mathison. Season 4 of Homeland thus presents an example of recent trauma narratives that attempt to come to terms with the events of 9/11 and its aftermaths and that, in doing so, fall back into outdated dichotomies of “us versus them.”

Jana Fedtke is Assistant Professor of English at the American University of Sharjah. Her research and teaching interests include contemporary transnational literatures, postcolonial studies with a focus on South Asia, gender studies, and the theory and practice of world literature. She is currently working on a book manuscript on representations of asexuality in literature, film, and new media.

Amrita Ghosh, Seton Hall University
Emerging Kashmiri Literature: Rethinking Violence and resistance in a “State of Exception”

The Partition of India in 1947 is merged with the painful history of Kashmir, whose genesis lies in the post-Partition arbitrary construction of borders. The violence in this conflicted space has led to a massive military presence in the Kashmir valley. In this paper, I focus on two contemporary Kashmiri texts, Mirza Waheed’s novel The Collaborator (2011) and Basharat Peer’s memoir Curfewed Nights (2010), and use Giorgio Agamben’s concepts of the “state of exception” and homo sacer to study the representations of violence and the military occupation in the Kashmir valley. As the two works reveal, the relationship between the state and the subject becomes based on state mechanisms of subjugation and a panoptic gaze of surveillance. I explore the aftereffects of mass violence on the Muslim subjects in the texts, and argue that a relentless intrusive violence seeps into the psyche of a society, and becomes covert violence constructed by the state apparatus. I also investigate the notion of agency, which Agamben leaves somewhat uncertain in his idea of the homo sacer and read the images of the death and corpses strewn in the Kashmir valley in the texts within the frameworks of Achille Mbembe’s theory of “necropolitics” and “ataraxia.” The inanimate corpses looming in both works are not impassive; they do not reflect ataraxia but want to signify something — they “speak” of the violence and ultimately reconfigure the idea of resistance and agency in emergency zones.
Amrita Ghosh is a lecturer at Seton Hall University who is currently working on an anthology on the Bengal Partition. She also edits an online journal called Cerebration, which strives to bridge the gap between academic and non-academic circles through critical discourse and art. Her research interests include postcolonial literature and theory, border studies, and Kashmir studies.

Atreyee Gohain, University of North Florida

The Muslim (as) Terrorist in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni’s One Amazing Thing

This paper addresses the extent and consequences of Islamophobia in post 9/11 America, with specific reference to diasporic South Asian writer Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni’s novel One Amazing Thing (2010). I examine how the novel not only emphasizes the role of government surveillance in sustaining the suspicion regarding Muslim bodies following the crash, but also considers the affective response of many first and second generation Muslim Americans to 9/11 through Tariq’s bitter experience of being unhomed. As Lori Peek observes in Behind the Backlash, while “Muslim Americans are no strangers to this ‘perpetual-foreigner’ stereotype, [f]ollowing 9/11, however, these encounters took on a much more hostile tone.” I argue that detention functions as a metaphor in the text, describing Tariq’s father’s physical experience as the victim of a sweep as well as Tariq’s experience of emotional isolation in his own “home.” Divakaruni’s text brings to the fore how 9/11 confronted first and second generation Muslim Americans with complex questions of citizenship and national identity: ultimately, Tariq is unable to accompany his mother to India because he resists being “driven” from his home.

Atreyee Gohain holds a Ph.D. in English from Ohio University and currently teaches part-time in the Department of English, University of North Florida. Her dissertation explores issues of women’s mobility in South Asian and South Asian diasporic literature. She has presented sections of her dissertation at the MLA and ACLA annual conferences as well as at the Annual South Asia Conference at Madison.

Sukanya Gupta, University of Southern Indiana

Desi Food Blogs in the Diaspora & the Transnational Public Sphere

This paper focuses on eight popular South Asian diasporic food blogs and their bloggers – Anjali Pathak, Anjum Anand, Atul Kochhar, Cyrus Todiwala, Dhruv Baker, Hari Ghotra, Mallika Basu and Meera Sodha – who have chosen to become ambassadors of the charity Find Your Feet’s “Curry for Change” campaign that helps fight hunger in African and Asian rural communities. Although they do not seem to contribute to public debate in the traditional Habermasian sense and their effects on the public may be seen as more social than political, I argue that these blogs participate in ‘transnational public spheres’. Blogs/bloggers affect public opinion when they (a) share recipes and the various stories behind every recipe; (b) involve the public in international campaigns such as “curry for change” and host fundraising events; (c) direct the public to/from trends, spice stores, and cooking utensils/methods; and (d) examine food as an idiom for identity, navigation, and assimilation of the Indian self in the diaspora. The efficacy of the blogs/bloggers is evidenced through the public attention they receive from channels such as Indian Food Network and London Live, local/regional newspapers such as the London Evening Standard, magazines such as India’s Complete Wellbeing Magazine, and even through their employment by charities. Through their impact
on public opinion, the South Asian food blogs/bloggers reconfigure and challenge geographical parameters and national boundaries. Referring to Nancy Fraser’s study of the ‘transnational public spheres,’ I show how these blogs both affirm and problematize the central features of Fraser’s concept of the transnational public sphere.

**Sukanya Gupta** is an Assistant Professor at University of Southern Indiana. Her research and teaching interests include Post-colonial Literature/Theory and World Literature. She has published articles on literacy issues in colonial India, William Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*, and Cyril Dabydeen’s *The Wizard Swami*.

**Michaela Henry, Brandeis University**

**Literary Public Culture: From AIPWS to Jaipur**

This paper positions the All India Progressive Writers Conference (AIPWC) in 1936 and the recent South Asian literary festival phenomenon, inaugurated in 2006 with the first Jaipur Literature Festival, as chronological and symbolic bookends of Anglophone literary public culture in South Asia. Drawing on the evidence of the literary festival and publishing boom in recent years, including a reading of the social media presences of several Indian publishing companies, I identify the moment of the mid-2000s to the present as a significant period of transition for literary public culture in South Asia. I explore to what extent we may characterize the AIPWC as writer-driven—in which literature serves as the space where the nation as imagined community is produced and where fledgling ideas about new post-colonial societies are worked out—and to what extent we may characterize the contemporary literary festival as foregrounding readership and readerly culture. In the prior case, the literary public sphere is concerned with producing the public body of the state through writing in a certain way and on certain topics; however, in the contemporary case, literature facilitates readership as a public persona based on a private act, emphasizing the subject-forming power of being readerly as a marker of aspirational class status, on multiple levels of affinity. I place South Asia’s recent explosion of literary festivals within a longer history of the relationship between literature and the formation of national identities in South Asia in order to further understand literature’s role negotiating relationships between these national identities, other levels of affinity (linguistic, regional, communal, familial, tribal), and many senses of globality.

**Michaela Henry** is a PhD candidate in the English Department at Brandeis University. Her dissertation concerns contemporary novels from India and Pakistan that consider the long history of nuclear weapons in the region and around the globe.

**Kathleen Hewett-Smith, American University of Sharjah**

**Public History Embodied**

In this paper, I explore the tension between public truths and private narrative, along with public history and individual experience, in Michael Ondaatje’s *Anil’s Ghost* and Kamila Shamsie’s *Burnt Shadows*. I examine the ways in which images of ruined cities (the bombing of Nagasaki; the ancient ruins of Sri Lanka) and ruined bodies (Hiroko’s seared flesh; the torture victims of the Sri Lankan civil war) disrupt and reconfigure these texts’ historical and political “truth” claims so that alternative histories—the voices of the disenfranchised, the victims—may be heard and understood. Both novels confront the ways in which narrative is
shaped, distorted, and reimagined by official histories and public discourse. At the same time, these texts question the impulse for truth-seeking and corrective discourse and ultimately offer in its place a version of narrative that is temporal and fluid, and which negotiates the interstices of public and private discourse.

**Kathleen Hewett-Smith** is head of the English Department at the American University of Sharjah. She specializes in contemporary South Asian fiction. Her interest in global literatures began long ago with her desire to know what was happening in the "rest of the world" in 1400 while teaching Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales.*

**Nalini Iyer, Seattle University**

**Speaking for Diasporic Youth: Tanuja Desai Hidier’s Young Adult Novels**

In his essay “Critical Notes on Habermas’s Theory of the Public Sphere,” Simon Susen notes that Habermas’s theory is useful to understand early modern society but the “gradual differentiation of late modern social life manifests itself in the proliferation of multiple public spheres, and hence a critical theory of public normativity needs to face up to the challenges posed by the material and ideological complexity of late modernity in order to account for the polycentric nature of advanced societies” (38). In the twenty-first century, such a polycentric advanced society needs to take into account transnational and diasporic lives of many of its inhabitants. In this essay, I propose that studying South Asian American young adult fiction offers important insights into polycentric and transnational public spheres from the perspective of those who are emerging into adulthood and are thus discovering their ability to shape debates and discussions in the public sphere focused particularly on such topics as gender, family, race, and nationality. My paper focuses on Tanuja Desai Hidier’s novel *Born Confused* (2002) and its sequel *Bombay Blues* (2014) to explore how these narratives engage a polycentric public sphere from the perspective of South Asian diasporic youth.

**Nalini Iyer** is Professor of English at Seattle University. She is the co-author of *Roots and Reflections: South Asians in the Pacific Northwest* (2013) and co-editor of *Other Tongues: Rethinking the Language Debates in India* (2009). At the SALA Conference, she is also speaking on the Presidential Roundtable on “Intolerance and Challenges to Free Speech in the Indian Public Sphere,” which she helped organize.

**Shakti Jaising, Drew University**

**Hierarchies and Counterpublics in Chaitanya Tamhane’s *Court***

Chaitanya Tamhane’s film *Court* (2014) mourns the increasing marginalization of a counterpublic sphere of protest folk theater by the legal and mass-mediated public spheres of neoliberal India. Although the film has been promoted globally as a courtroom drama, it is not simply this; rather, in the film courtroom scenes punctuate what is essentially a “network narrative” alternating between stories of a Mumbai lower court judge and two lawyers engaged in the trial of a Dalit folk singer charged with inciting a sewage worker to suicide. Like many works of contemporary transnational cinema—most notably Alejandro Inarritu’s *Babel*—*Court* uses network aesthetics to link characters belonging to diverse social contexts. Unlike *Babel*, however, *Court’s* network narrative is driven less by the suspense of discovering hidden connections between its multiple protagonists and more by an
anthropological interest in examining the various publics that inform and are subject to India’s dysfunctional legal system. I argue that the film’s network form enables it to address simultaneously a South Asian and a global audience. Moreover, by exposing the hierarchies structuring relations between various publics in neoliberal India, Court complements the work of theorists like Nancy Fraser that have critiqued the liberal conception of a unified and emancipatory public sphere by highlighting a multiplicity of publics as well as the power differentials among them.

Shakti Jaising is Assistant Professor of English at Drew University, where she teaches classes in postcolonial and Anglophone literatures and film studies. Her current research explores the aesthetic means by which South Asian and South African cultural production respond to dispossession taking place in the neoliberal present.

Maryse Jayasuriya, University of Texas at El Paso
Bricks, Mortar, Words: Memorializing Public Spaces Destroyed in the Sri Lankan Ethnic Conflict

Since the end of the military conflict in Sri Lanka in 2009, there was a concerted effort by the (then) Sri Lankan government to build, reconstruct, renovate and eliminate marks of destruction and devastation in public spaces. While many would applaud this as a positive change, some have pointed to the dangers of a seeming obliteration of history, a re-writing of history or an emphasis on selective histories. On the way to the northern city of Jaffna, on a bombed out, collapsed water tower is the slogan, “Say no to destruction”—a kind of echo of the words “Never again” associated with the European Holocaust—an attempt to remember the destruction in order to prevent its recurrence. My paper will look at literary attempts to memorialize public buildings and structures—the Jaffna Public Library, the Central Bank building, the Temple of the Tooth—that have been destroyed and the people who were killed during the ethnic conflict. Drawing examples from the poetry of Cheran, Anne Ranasinghe, Vivimarie Vander Poorten, and Jean Arasanayagam and the novels of V.V. Ganeshananthan and Romesh Gunesekera, my paper explores how even when concrete structures are damaged or razed to the ground, they can be and are remembered in literary works. This type of public memorialization of destroyed and desecrated public spaces is essential, for true reconciliation cannot happen until the destruction is acknowledged and the perpetrators held accountable.

Maryse Jayasuriya is Associate Professor in the Department of English at the University of Texas at El Paso. She received her Ph.D. from Purdue University and is the author of Terror and Reconciliation: Sri Lankan Anglophone Literature, 1983-2009 (Lexington, 2012), which explores the English language literature that has emerged from Sri Lanka’s quarter-century long ethnic conflict. She has published articles on South Asian and Asian-American literature in such venues as South Asian Review, Journeys, Margins, and The Journal of Postcolonial Cultures and Societies, and has also co-edited a Special Issue of South Asian Review (33.3) on Sri Lankan Anglophone Literature.

Asha Jeffers, York University
Lying in Public(s): The Multiple Public Spheres of Meera Syal’s Anita and Me

Meera Syal’s acclaimed 1996 debut novel, Anita and Me, begins with an unlabeled prologue that ends with this intriguing sentence: “I’m really not a liar, I just learned very early on that
those of us deprived of history sometimes need to turn to mythology to feel complete, to belong” (10). In telling the story of a second generation Indian-British girl, Meena, and her family in a small, post-WWII English town, Syal explores how her heroine navigates being highly visible in the wider English public sphere. At the same time, Syal depicts how Meena’s parents and their fellow immigrants construct their own public sphere within the confines of their private homes. This space has some of the same uses as the more traditionally-constructed community such as mutual care, social judgment, and identity-reinforcing discourse, but it does this in the context of providing a parallel alternative to the local communities to which the families also ostensibly belong. Meena is engaged with the specific social and political ways of living that govern her neighbours to a larger degree than her parents, but this does not cancel out her place in the Indian immigrant public sphere that finds its expression in their living room. Thus, I argue that rather than conceptualizing second-generation subjects as being caught between a Western public sphere and an immigrant private sphere, it is necessary to think of them as moving between multiple public spheres while actively constructing their place in all of them.

Asha Jeffers is a PhD Candidate in English at York University in Toronto. Her dissertation takes a transnational, interethnic, and comparative approach to literature about the children of immigrants (“the second generation”) in Canada, the US, and the UK. She is also a creative writer with a short story published in the summer 2015 edition of Puritan magazine.

Shahzeb Khan, University of the Punjab
Pedagogy of Alienation: Epistemic Hegemony of the Mental Space and Fatal Fault Lines in the National Space

In this paper, I delve into pedagogic practices that privilege the remote over the proximate, the unfamiliar over the familiar, and the far-off over the intimate. I delineate how this pedagogy of alienation entails embedding of ‘the west’ in cognitive spaces of the subjects and conditions ways in which they negotiate their familiar terrain: the national space. Spatial dynamics of the humanistic functions attached with the teaching of English literature: “the shaping of character, the development of aesthetics and the disciplines of ethical thinking” will also be identified. The paper investigates how English literary texts in an institutionalized space win assent for their judgments in a “clandestine” manner. An attempt has been made to equate these acts of assent, on part of the subjects, as steps of spatial alienation ensuring successive approximation to a desired behavior or a reconfiguration of the cognitive space, ultimately “transforming the way in which objects of knowledge are constructed.” The resulting epistemes have then been mapped onto the fatal fault lines of the proximal, national space to test their political efficacy.

Shahzeb Khan is an Assistant Professor at the University of the Punjab in Lahore. Before joining the English department, he worked as lecturer at GC University (also in Lahore) for many years. He is currently working on his doctoral dissertation on institutionalization of English literature in Pakistan, and his areas of interest include indigenization of knowledge, literature as an instrument of ideology, and the institutionalization of literary study. He has also contributed essays on varied topics and book reviews in premier English dailies of Pakistan.
Let the Women Speak: Colonized Representations of Muslim Women in Media

In recent times, Muslim women have been the subject of interrogation and questioning both in the Muslim world and in the non-Muslim world. A relentless questioning of their role, subjectivity, and identity has been fair game for both intellectual and popular debate. 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. In each representation, the women are silenced. This paper aims to explore representations of Muslim women in visual narratives in the West, and how those images become a reason to assert Western supremacy. In exploring the intersections of postcolonial and transnational feminist perspectives on some contemporary visual images of Muslim women in Western media, I will show why postcolonial critique is still relevant and much needed. In particular, to make my case I will trace the obsession with Malala Yousufzai as well as images of Alma Bibi, also known as “Afghan girl” (the iconic National Geographic Afghan child-to-woman), among others. Who speaks for the women photographed? How are they received, and who is the intended audience? What authority do the women have in their own identity construction? The question at stake in this interrogation is how to construct identity and give “authentic” voice to Muslim women in the West and within their own cultures. Ultimately, I aim to illustrate the precarious intersection of postcolonial and feminist discourse for Muslim women in a globalized world.

Sobia Khan is English Faculty at Richland College, Dallas. Her scholarly publications focus on questions of identity in postcolonial studies, transnational literature, Islamic feminism, and women’s literature. Her most recent essay, “Alienated Muslim Identity and the Question of Hospitality in The Reluctant Fundamentalist,” is published in the South Asian Review; “Transnational Feminism in Sidhwa’s Cracking India: A Geocritical Study of the Great Divide of the Indian Subcontinent” is published in Emerging South Asian Women Writers by Palgrave Macmillan.

Challenging the Colonial Narrative: An Exploration of Interviews with Formerly Indentured Women

Most of what we know about the migration of Indian indentured laborers to the Caribbean comes from public texts written by the British for a British audience: colonial officials and missionaries recording their experiences, court proceedings, and bureaucratic records. Furthermore, the few published accounts by bonded laborers are by men. As a result, we have a limited understanding of the experiences of women laborers. For example, we know from colonial dispatches and legislation that the control of Indian women, already a site of contestation in India, took on an added significance on the plantations due to the low numbers of women. However, we have little sense of how this affected female laborers on an individual level.

Oral histories are an effective tool to fill this gap. This paper will explore archived interviews conducted with three women who were indentured laborers in Trinidad and Tobago: Maharani, Doolarie, and Acahama. These interviews, as far as can be told, are the only instances of Indian women describing their experience of indenture in the Caribbean, yet
they have received little scholarly attention. The testimonials expand and challenge our understanding of indentured labor. For instance, two of the women note that they wanted to remain single, but British managers pressured them to marry, revealing colonial anxieties about single women laborers. As these accounts demonstrate, the private, individualized nature of interviews make them an effective tool for giving voice to those who do not typically have access to a wider audience. This paper brings attention to these women’s stories in order to offer a counter narrative to the dominant, colonial, public accounts of Caribbean history.

Alison Klein is a lecturer in the Department of English at the University of Massachusetts, Dartmouth. She earned her Ph.D. in English literature from the CUNY Graduate Center. Her dissertation, *The Ties that Bind: Gender, Race and Empire in Caribbean Indenture Narratives*, examined the ways that intimate relationships are used as metaphors in colonial and anti-colonial discourse about Caribbean indentured labor. Her work on postcolonial literature has been published in *The Journal of Commonwealth Literatures* and *Exit 9*.

Dorothy Lane, Luther College, University of Regina
Sites of Encounter – Sites of Exchange

This paper explores the ongoing fascination with pilgrimage in accounts of travel to India—the notable prevalence of both domestic and international pilgrims in the Indian subcontinent. Pilgrimage emerges in multiple faith traditions, often associated with an external journey that mirrors an internal or cosmic one: or the crossing of a threshold between material and spiritual worlds. The place itself is a site of individual and communal encounter, and a site of exchange, trade, social interaction as well as introspection. In addition, the contemporary narrative of pilgrimage is difficult to categorize as guide, memoir, or travelogue. My paper will briefly survey some examples that provide both recurring and unique glimpses of the genre, such as *A Rope in the Water* (Fraser), *Pilgrimage to India* (Jayapal), and the cinematic translation of *Eat, Pray, Love* (Gilbert). Finally, both *An Indian Odyssey* (Buckley) and *Arrow of the Blue-Skinned God* (Blank) trace the journey of the Indian epic *Ramayana* from the perspective of international pilgrims and journalists, who use the concept of pilgrimage to reflect on the social, cultural, and political past and present of the sub-continent. In my paper, I raise questions about the prevalence of the "postcolonial exotic" in a South-Asian public sphere that links both cultural and religious practices.

Dorothy F. Lane is a professor of English at Luther College, University of Regina in Alberta, Canada where she has held a faculty position for 22 years. Her published research has focused on the intersection of discourses related to colonization and Christianization in texts from Australia, Canada, and South Asia. Most recently, she has published and presented on postcolonial pilgrimage narratives and the work of melancholy in South-Asian diasporic writings.

Cynthia Leenerts, Associate Professor of English at East Stroudsburg University, teaches postcolonial, British, and other literatures. With George Bozzini, she co-edited *Literature Without Borders: International Literature in English for Student Writers* (Prentice-Hall, 2001), and with Lopamudra Basu, she co-edited *Passage to Manhattan: Critical Essays on Meena Alexander* (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009). She also serves on SAR’s Editorial Board.
At the Graduate Professionalization Caucus, she is speaking on the ways in which young scholars can expand their research and teaching horizons beyond their specializations.

John Maerhofer, City University of New York


As Angana Chatterji notes, India erases its legacy of oppression in Kashmir by maintaining “the myth of its triumphant unification as a nation-state with Kashmir at its headspring.” The preservation of its untarnished image as “the biggest democracy in the world” requires the governing of the public discourse of Kashmir, a process built upon the ideological mystification of its extra-territorial demands and the militarization of the Kashmir valley. The collusion of neoliberal and Hindutva fundamentalisms has deepened the State’s resolve to maintain the appearance of a liberal democracy, an internal process of political muzzling which means the branding of anyone who speaks out against the occupation as seditious, as we have seen in the case of the writer Arundhati Roy.

In this sense, Agha Shahid Ali’s seminal work, *The Country without a Post Office*, signals a crucial intervention in the process of ideological mystification that legitimates India’s occupation of Kashmir. While many acknowledge that Ali consciously writes from the point of view of an exile, the concretization of Kashmiri collectivity in his poetry evolves as a result of what I argue is an anti-imperialist aesthetic at the core of his work that radically undoes the disciplinary practices that quell anti-occupation dissent. Accordingly, my intention in this paper is twofold: (1) to trace how Ali’s work materializes an anti-imperialist aesthetic and (2) to explore how Ali’s writing can be utilized as a politics of solidarity in the global fortification of Kashmiri resistance to Indian occupation.

John Maerhofer teaches English and Comparative studies in the City University of New York system. He has published articles on postcolonial literature and theory and is currently working on a full-length project on Arundhati Roy and the aesthetics of anti-imperialist in South Asia. His first book, *Rethinking the Vanguard*, was published in 2009.

J. Edward Mallot, Arizona State University

“That Turning Blur is Me”: The Photographed Body in Mukul Kesavan’s *Looking Through Glass* and Hari Kunzru’s *The Impressionist*

Photography has prominently featured as one of the traditional Orientalist markers of national and colonial identity, providing supposed “evidence” of cultural, regional, and biological difference. For British explorers and self-declared “racial scientists,” photographic evidence provided alleged proof of difference; for their audiences, the images offered powerful notions of exoticism, and markers of cultural identity. Several Indian authors have employed the notion of photography in their texts, as markers of these differences, and as challenges to those differences. Following, perhaps, the example set forth by Athol Fugard et al’s emphasis in the seminal play *Sizwe Bansi is Dead*, these authors engage with the extent and the limitations of the photographed body as a marker of individual and cultural identity. This essay examines how Mukul Kesavan’s *Looking Through Glass* and Hari Kunzru’s *The Impressionist* use this relatively new, colonial-era medium as a signifier of both cultural and racial difference, and as a marker of cultural identity. In so doing, these authors signal
an awareness of the alleged identity “fixation” that the camera provides, but also reveal the inherent lie constantly destabilizing that “fixation.” Given the importance attached to the assumed ocular proof that photography promises to provide, these writers question the relationship between colonizer and colonized, as well as the ways that then-emerging technology provided (or failed to provide) proof of “difference.”

J. Edward Mallot is an Associate Professor at Arizona State University. His monograph *Memory, Nationalism, and Narrative in Contemporary South Asia* was published in 2012. His published articles concern a variety of South Asian authors, including Shauna Singh Baldwin, Amitav Ghosh, Kamila Shamsie, and Romesh Gunesekera, as well as a variety of postcolonial and transnational authors throughout the world.

Roger McNamara, Texas Tech University
Memoir and the Public Sphere: *Running in the Family* and the Shape of its Audience

This paper directly reworks a question asked in the SALA “Call for Papers.” Instead of examining how “the potential audience often plays a role in determining the direction of an artwork,” I wish to think through its opposite: what does the artist demand of his reading audience? Can the artist impose requirements of it? I apply these questions to Michael Ondaatje’s memoir, *Running in the Family*. As a sub-genre of non-fiction, memoir, does not separate author from narrator and is committed to “truth-telling,” However, in Ondaatje’s memoir, the truth is often intentionally displaced by the conventions of postmodernism—fantasy, caricature, and a non-linear narrative. Thus, instead of telling the truth, Ondaatje expects his audience to figure out the “truth.” His postmodern strategies are further complicated by his status as a diasporic writer, for he merges Canadian and Sri Lankan histories and cultural conventions, and all this is interspersed with his own family narratives in colonial Ceylon and contemporary Sri Lanka. One could argue that Ondaatje’s postmodern strategies work within the conventions familiar to a cosmopolitan audience. And given the addition of “local color” (as it takes place on the “tropical island,” that “pearl” called Sri Lanka), it promotes the experience of, to use Graham Huggan’s term, “the postcolonial exotic.” However, through a careful analysis of the text, I come to the opposite conclusion— *Running in the Family* resists becoming passively consumed by constantly requiring its audience to rethink, re-read, and remain uncomfortable with the text through its use of postmodern techniques and its intricate play with locale.

Roger McNamara is an Assistant Professor in the English Department at Texas Tech University. His research interests include secularism, South Asian minority writing, and mid-20th century transnational solidarities. Currently, he is working on his book manuscript, *The Contours of Secularism in South Asian Minority Writing*.

Reshmi Mukherjee, Boise State University
Cyber Rhetoric and Indian Women’s Empowerment

The popularity of various online venues for discussing social and political issues has transformed the cyber sphere into a public sphere as defined by Habermas. It is presented as a space where “private people gather together as a public and articulate the needs of the society with the state” (176). I, however, wish to argue that this sphere is a theatrical space where opinions are made for entertainment, TRP, and feel good value, often without any
intellectual reasoning; it is therefore injurious to or incapable of adequately addressing issues besetting the public sphere. The politicization of rape and the concurrent discourse on Indian woman’s empowerment is a good example. In this paper, I will illustrate my point through a discussion of the widely praised short film “Ahalya” (directed by Sujoy Ghosh and released on YouTube in 2015) and the BBC documentary *India’s Daughter* (directed by Leslie Udwin and released on YouTube in 2015). Their respective representation of Indian woman’s freedom or the lack of it, both forms of public spheres fail to adequately redress sexual violence in the real world and/or address real issues leading to women’s empowerment. I will conclude that these virtual arenas promoting discursive interactions cannot bring social, judicial, and/or policy changes in the real world and work only to dismantle the actual function of the public sphere.

Reshmi Mukherjee is a visiting Assistant Professor of English at Boise State University. Her research and teaching focus on global Anglophone and Francophone literatures, gender studies, postcolonial theory, biopolitics, and refugee studies. At present she is working on her book manuscript, *Reading Subalternity after Subaltern Studies: Representation, Space, and Agency in the Global South*. It examines the works of three major women writers—Mahasweta Devi, Bessie Head, and Assia Djebar—to study their retrieval of subaltern agency (speech, action, and consciousness) through what Gayatri Spivak calls “uncoercive rearrangement of subaltern desire.”

Shreyosi Mukherjee, National University of Singapore

**Volatile Virtuopolis: Contemporary Feminist Movement and Mobilization in Urban India**

In the wake of the December 2012 gang rape in Delhi, the Indian feminist movement underwent a dramatic re-strategization in terms of its propagation and networking. Amidst the burgeoning public angst and discontent over the inaction of the governmental machinery following the crime, the feminist movement too faced tough questions regarding its efficacy and currency. This paper probes how the women’s movement(s) in India responded to this crisis and resorted to social media to mobilize the nation’s conscience and organize large-scale public events at iconic urban venues like the Rajghat in New Delhi. Social networking portals like Facebook became the dominant mode of communicating information, organising events, voicing outrage and even staging and performing public protest. Numerous ‘e-petitions’ demanding justice for the victim, capital punishment for the nabbed criminals and reformation of existing anti-rape laws floated across the digital realm to garner public interest and mandate on the issue. The paper attempts to investigate how the activism on the internet translates and transforms the actual geographical location and nature of the protest. The metropolis was at the forefront of this mass upsurge and the movement continually drew strength from the seamless merging of the virtual and the actual locations of demonstration, occupation and protest. The radical facelift of the Indian feminist movement is primarily due to an equally radical redefinition of the ‘Indian cyber-urban’ that empowered the Indian (female) voice to transcend territorial borders and forge global connections with other mass mobilizations demanding social reform and justice.

Shreyosi Mukherjee is a doctoral candidate in the Theatre Studies programme at the National University of Singapore. She has presented a number of research papers at international conferences including the World Shakespeare Conference in Kolkata, India (December 2010), 19th annual conference of the Performance Studies International (Psi) in
Aniruddha Mukhopadhyay, University of Florida

Engendering Urban Spaces in Aditya Vikram Sengupta’s *Asha Jaoar Majhe*

Aditya Vikram Sengupta’s *Asha Jaoar Majhe* (2015) is a film about a working couple in Kolkata who live different diurnal cycles, getting to meet for just a few moments once a day. Sengupta adapted his screenplay from Italo Calvino’s short story “The Adventures of a Married Couple.” But more than this central moment of two people’s day-to-day lives, the film focuses on defining the public and private spheres of their existence in an industrialized city. It is in this gradual and detailed delineation, that urban studies coincide with film theory in Sengupta’s film.

In her book *Cities and Cinema*, Barbara Mennel brings together urban studies and film theory to look at the cinematic city (mainly in American and European films) as both product and producer of modernity. But while it is possible to read “urban patterns” in Sengupta’s film reflecting social differences like class, I’m primarily interested in analyzing how *Asha Jaoar Majhe* both establishes and collapses the boundaries of the public and the private to reproduce the modern anxieties and postmodern alienation of urban working class life contextualized in the failed narrative of industrial Capitalism represented by a city mired in the grip of a global recession. And along with this representation of public-private spaces in the cinematic text, I’m interested in how urban space is gendered in the film to enable a different appreciation of the cinematic city that is more nuanced than the simple plot of a couple’s romantic interlude in their quotidian lives.

Aniruddha Mukhopadhyay is a Postdoctoral Associate in the University Writing Program at the University of Florida, Gainesville. His research interests include postcolonial literatures, subaltern studies, diaspora theory, globalization theory, film studies, and animal rights/representations. His PhD dissertation explored the figures of the Native Informant and the subaltern in the works of Amitav Ghosh and K. S. Maniam. At present, he is working on a book project on the representation of adivasis in Bengali Cinema. At the SALA Conference, he is also moderating the Graduate Professionalization Caucus.

Delphine Munos, University of Liège

*Indo-Trinidadian Women and the Indian Public Sphere: Women under the Influence?*

Until the start of the 1990s, representations of the “cooie” woman have coalesced into the figure of the loose woman, either through Victorian-era “imperial postcards” (Gaiutra Bahadur), in which indentured female workers were highly exoticized and eroticized as “cooie belles”, or through the early twentieth-century discourse of Indian nationalism, in which concerns about the morality and sexuality of female indentured workers were aired in an attempt to end the indenture system. Much has happened since these early depictions of cooie women as “loose women” and/or victims of colonialism (cf. Tejaswini Niranjan), as evidenced by the recent upsurge of books written by Trinidadian women writers such as...
Shani Mootoo, Ramabai Espinet, Niala Maharaj, and Peggy Mohan. As Patricia Mohammed, among others, has shown, the presence of Indian films in Trinidad since 1935, the more recent popularity of Hindi films has meant the renewal of a sense of Indian identity among descendants of coolies, and the wide circulation of strong identificatory poles marked as ‘Indian’ for Indo-Trinidadian women. This new circulation of images of Indian womanhood has also manifested itself through the creation of ‘Indian’ beauty pageants in Trinidad. My paper thus looks at the ways in which, from the end of the 19th century onwards, the Indian public sphere (or what passes for it) has provided strong identificatory poles that regulate, empower and/or destabilize the construction of Indo-Trinidadian femininity.

Delphine Munos is an F.R.S- FNRS postdoctoral researcher in the English Department at the University of Liège in Belgium. She has published in the field of American and postcolonial literatures, diaspora studies, and South Asian studies, including After Melancholia: A Reappraisal of Second-Generation Diasporic Subjectivity in the Work of Jhumpa Lahiri (Rodopi, 2013) and “Mapping Diasporic Subjectivities” (2014), as well as a special issue of South Asian Diaspora that she guest-edited with Mala Pandurang. Her paper is based on a one-month research stay at the Institute for Gender and Development Studies at the University of the West Indies, St Augustine.

Abheeshta Nath JR, Govt. College for Women, Kerala University
Referralization of the Public Sphere in Relation to the Tibetan Question

This paper proposes to analyze the Tibetan question, particularly the changes in the portrayal of China's stand on Tibet and the Dalai Lama as a personality using a framework found in Habermas' concept of 'the referralization of the public sphere'. The sources that I use are discourses in the Indian public sphere particularly the Indian mass media. Due to changing policies in Indian mainstream political discourse and the climate of public opinion at large, opinion on foreign policy matters such as what our relation with China ought to be have also undergone a change. In the case of Tibet, it is not possible for Indian public sphere to take an open pro-Chinese stand; the reality of having a Tibetan government in exile and thousands of Tibetan refugees living in our country precludes this. However, discourses centered around the Tibetan question have shown a tendency to 'depoliticize' the issue. On the one hand, words like 'invasion' or 'occupation' are no longer used widely to describe what China did in Tibet; on the other hand, the enormous infrastructure and development initiatives and investments made in TAR have been played up in the Indian media. At another level, the Dalai Lama has been presented often with his known or unknown tacit connivance as less and less of a political leader and more of a spiritual one. The fact that his HQ Dharmashala is more of a tourist spot than the seat of a government coping with a potentially restive issue such as exile speaks for a certain normalization of the condition of exile. The playing up of his Holiness and the near total silencing of his politically charged statements lend credence to my argument that the Habermas' concept has happened, as far as discourses relating to the Tibetan issue are concerned.

Abheeshta Nath is an FDP Substitute Lecturer in the Department of English, Govt. College for Women in Kerala, India.
Ardra N.G., Jawaharlal Nehru University
Writing the Modern, Re-writing the Social: Communist Aesthetics and the Early Public Sphere in Kerala

After the Left disintegrated in the Soviet and Europe, the lasting presence of the Left in South Asia, particularly in West Bengal and Kerala, has a lot to do with their deep entrenchment in the popular sensibility of these regions’ public spheres. Scholars often discuss communist movements and their governance records but ignore this latter aspect, which is crucial to Indian modernity. This is what my paper foregrounds by discussing the ‘progressive literature movement’ in Kerala during the late colonial era, which involved a social reordering as concomitant of modern life.

The progressive movement linked processes of producing literature and social transformation in an unproblematized causal relation. Broadly oriented to a humanist outlook, the literary/cultural field turned into a key site of communist engagements in course of the progressive movement. It led to a communist appropriation of older anti-caste and communitarian practices, which accompanied ‘modernization’ in social structures of the region. The early communists were thus instrumental to the production of the ‘modern public sphere’ in the late colony. Communist writers brought in subjectivities marginal to traditional literature, like labouring classes, without being shorn of complexities like caste, community and gender. Interestingly, the interventions seem to converge on the affective register, exploring love, sexuality, morality and family values as they appear in unfamiliar, intensely ‘embodied’ tales of desire by the likes of Vaikom Muhammad Basheer. This is the history I trace: I suggest that their collective project should be seen as an attempt to re-write the Malayalam social sphere.

Ardra NG is currently a doctoral candidate at the Center for Political Studies, School of Social Sciences, Jawaharlal Nehru University in New Delhi, India, and holds an M.Phil from there as well.

Binod Paudyal, University of Utah
The Orient Writes Back: Hamid’s The Reluctant Fundamentalist as a Counter-orientalist Narrative

Following the catastrophic events of 9/11, American popular cultural production and other forms of narrative tend to homogenize South Asian Americans who appear Muslim and Arab into one category—that of ‘terrorist’—and treat them as what Sunaina Maira calls “the objects of intensified suspicion and surveillance” (333). Such works function as an aspect of American orientalism that characterize Muslim and Arabs as the “Other,” inherently violent and hostile to Americans, by associating them with terrorism and fundamentalism (192). In this paper, I read Hamid’s The Reluctant Fundamentalist as a novel that critiques and undermines the epistemology of the hierarchical binary that constructs Muslim as the “Other” who poses a constant threat to the American self. I argue that the novel is a counter-orientalist text that engages in what Awan calls “a clarifying campaign” against the popular American discourse that demonizes Muslims by associating them with extremism and terrorism in the aftermath of 9/11. Throughout the novel, Hamid strategically uses various globally recognized stereotypes as an essentialist strategy, as Spivak defines the concept, in order to deconstruct them and redefine the political and cultural implications of
these stereotypes. In doing so, Hamid positions his novel as a type of “writing back” that illuminates the reader about the misrepresentation of South Asian Muslims and others as potential terrorists, taking the reader into their fictional realm and creating the feeling of empathy. The novel offers us a new way of thinking and understanding about the changing socio-political and racial scene in the United States and beyond in post-9/11 era, marked by “global war on terrorism.”

Binod Paudyal is a PhD candidate in English and a University Teaching Fellow at the Ethnic studies program at the University of Utah, where he teaches courses on Asian American contemporary Issues and South Asian American Literature. He is currently completing his dissertation entitled (Re)Orienting Asian American studies: South Asian Americans in Asian American Literary Studies, which examines contemporary South Asian American literary works, including post-9/11 literature, and explores to what degree they reflect or challenge the premises of Asian American literary tradition.

Saba Pirzadeh and Tehmina Pirzada, Purdue University

“No sir! Na janaab! Ehtesaab bas ehtesaab!”: Pakistani Popular Music as Resistance

This paper explores Pakistani popular music as a tool for socio-political resistance, and emphasizes the dialectical relationship which popular music shares with the Pakistani public sphere. While primarily aimed at entertainment, Pakistani popular music has also denounced the oppressive tendencies of democratic governments as well as military dictatorships. Exploring the idea of popular music as a viable discourse for social resistance, this paper analyzes the music of three Pakistani bands: Junoon (sufi rock), Beygairat Brigade (pop), and Ali Gul Pir (rap). The popularity of these musical acts is based on their successful amalgamation of mass appeal and social criticism. These musicians have challenged the status quo by broaching issues like religious extremism, corruption, violence, censorship, abuse of power and lack of accountability in the Pakistani context, subsequently initiating critical conversations in the public/virtual spaces.

Habermas’s writing on music in relation to the public sphere emphasizes the fact that the conjunction of music and protest requires various forms of capital, not only financial, but also social and cultural capital. Building upon Habermas’ idea of capital, this paper will posit that Junoon, Beygairat Brigade, and Ali Gul Pir use urban knowledge, financial means, and technological know-how as cultural capital to restate local issues in a way which resonate with the masses (especially the youth). These Pakistani bands are recreating the public sphere by propagating an “expressive culture,” which allows common people to judge what they have heard, and to participate in the process of making meaning. This paper will highlight the significance of Pakistani popular music in creating an “expressive culture” that advocates sociopolitical justice.

Saba Pirzadeh is a doctoral candidate in the English Department at Purdue University. Her research interests include postcolonial theory, South Asian Literature, ecocriticism, militarization, and gender studies. Her work recently appeared in ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment and discussed issues of ecological degradation and agency within YA fiction.
Tehmina Pirzada is a doctoral candidate at Purdue University. She is a Fulbright scholar from Pakistan currently researching representations of transgressive Muslim girlhood in Pakistani and Iranian fiction/film. Her short presentation, “Violence and South Asian Women’s Narratives” won a certificate of Excellence in 2012 from the office of Interdisciplinary graduate Programs at Purdue University.

Moumin Quazi is an Associate Professor of English at Tarleton State University where he also serves as the Director of Graduate Studies in English. He edits the book series, “South Asian Art, Literature, and Culture Studies” for Peter Lang Publishing, and edits CCTE Studies, Writing Texas, and Langdon Review. He also serves as the president of the Conference of College Teachers of English and the Texas College English Association, as well as being the past president of the Stephenville Rotary Club. He is the Chairman of the Stephenville Board of Adjustment and is a Court Appointed Special Advocate for Children. At the SALA Conference, he is speaking at the Graduate Professionalization Caucus, on the importance of service experience as it relates to the marketability of a candidate on the job market, and introducing the Presidential Roundtable, “Intolerance and Challenges to Free Speech in the Indian Public Sphere.”

Richa Raj, Jesus and Mary College, University of Delhi
Art as Representation of Contestations within the Public Sphere: The Case of the Indian Statue of Mother Mary

In May 2013, a Roman Catholic Church in Jharkhand, an Indian state populated with indigenous tribal population, unveiled the statue of Mother Mary dressed in a white sari with a red border, wearing bangles and ear studs, and holding baby Jesus in a child sling — an image that makes the Christian icon resemble the local adivasi (tribal) women. The usage of iconography to assert the identity of the individual or an institution in the public domain encourages us to deliberate on whether this can be seen as an attempt to appropriate cultural symbols to be used for conversion or is it symbolic of the ‘acculturation’ of the Church itself. The sprouting of several Christian ashrams with Catholic priests donning saffron coloured shawls (a Hindu idiom) and involved in charismatic prayers and healing (a Christian idiom) in north Indian states is a significant example of cultural assimilation. As a subversion, the statue invited a flurry of protests from among a section of the tribal population, primarily the Sarna tribal community, provoked by the right-wing Hindu groups, who saw this as an attempt made by the Roman Catholic Church to appropriate their indigenous cultural symbols and to convert the tribal population. The ensuing arguments from the two oppositional sides create a public sphere that rather than working towards the Habermasian ideals of ‘concern of common good’ and ‘inclusivity’ is both distrusting and exclusive. My paper thus questions the theoretical definitions of the public sphere set up by Jurgen Habermas while examining how in the postcolonial context, the works of art – Mother Mary’s statue in this case - become the site of deliberation, contestation, negotiation and subversion.
Richa Raj is an Assistant Professor in the Department of History at Jesus and Mary College, University of Delhi. She has received her doctoral degree from the Centre of Historical Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University in Delhi, India. Her PhD thesis was entitled *Social and Political Impact of the Arya Samaj Movement in North India, 1890-1947*. Her recent article, “Pamphlet and Its (Dis)contents: A Case Study of Rangila Rasul and the Controversy surrounding it in Colonial Punjab, 1923-29,” is published in *History and Sociology of South Asia*, Vol. 9.2.

Elizabeth Redwine, *The Abbey Theatre*  
“A Tense Terrain”: Family Mirroring Nation in Wajahat Ali’s *The Domestic Crusaders*

My title comes from an interview with Wajahat Ali when *The Domestic Crusaders* premièred in London in 2013. Ali explained that he set his play in the “tense terrain” where “it seems that no one in a family gets along.” The family of six in the play is Muslim in America living in the years after 9/11, “part of an American community . . . exploding and imploding every second, yet . . . a diverse multicultural laboratory for the world.” My paper investigates how Ali’s play, *The Domestic Crusaders*, first performed in New York on September 11th, 2009 and published by McSweeney’s in 2011, connects American Islamophobia and tensions in a large Muslim-Pakistani family. Ali hoped that the play would be familiar to all Americans while giving the audience a sense of “discomfort” with questions of assimilation, political involvement, and Islamophobic prejudice. How Ali weaves these tensions throughout the play as a mirror to fissures in American culture is central to my discussion of the play. A second part of my paper explores the American response to Ali’s debut. American media, from NBC to The New York Times, praised Ali’s work, and Toni Morrison heralded the play as “brilliant.” I discuss connections between this fictional representation and the responses to Ali’s work in the American media while bringing Ali’s own responses to contemporay prejudice against Muslims into the conversation. A focus of this second section will be what the media avoided discussing in this high-profile premier on September 11th, 2009. The coverage of the play was fascinating for what was not said, as in many family discussions. What is not said in the “tense terrain” of this drama underlies both the play and the media response. With close readings not only of the play, but also of Ali’s subsequent work, interviews with actors and members of the audience, my paper will argue that the play dramatizes a family and a nation avoiding discussion of underlying fears. My presentation will include some footage from productions of the play and from media response as I examine Ali’s take on identity in family, nation, and religion in a play that brings six members of a family and three generations together for a 21st birthday.

Elizabeth Redwine is currently at work on a project about actress/author collaboration in *The Abbey Theatre* with a focus on intersections of postcolonial and gender concerns in the plays of Yeats and Synge. She received her PhD from Emory University in 2004 with a dissertation entitled “Written For Her To Act”: Theatrical Collaboration in the Plays of Yeats and Synge. Redwine has taught in the English Department at Seton Hall University since graduation, presenting and publishing on the issues of nation and identity in collaborative theatre.

Josna Rege, Worcester State University  
*An Ear to the Spheres: Attending to National and Transnational Political Communities in Three Novels of the South Asian Diaspora*
Readers of postcolonial literary works today must be attentive to their multiple audiences. Attuned to different national and transnational political and intellectual communities, these works can be read at and across different registers. In this presentation I will consider the treatment of political violence in novels by South Asian women, focusing on V. V. (Vasugi) Ganeshananthan’s *Arranged Marriage* (2008), Kamila Shamsie’s *Burnt Shadows*, and Jhumpa Lahiri’s *The Lowland* (2013). All three writers are based outside South Asia while the action in the novels moves back and forth between South Asia and North America. Written after the September 11th, 2001 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center, the novels can each be read through the lens of the transnational “War on Terror” as well as in their particular national historical/political contexts and references. In addition, each of them speaks to different communities of readers, as well as to different, often-overlapping national and transnational public spheres. I will not be arguing that the writers themselves necessarily pitch their novels at different reading publics, but rather, that their works are read differently in and through different geographically dispersed political frames, discursive sites, and communication networks. Besides my reading of the novels themselves and critical responses from the various communities of readers, my discussion will draw upon Nancy Fraser et al.’s *Transnationalizing the Public Sphere* (2014) and Ingrid Volkmer’s *The Global Public Sphere* (2014).

**Josna Rege** is a professor of English and member of the Women’s Studies and Global Studies faculty at Worcester State University in Worcester, Massachusetts, where she teaches postcolonial and transcultural literature, world literature, contemporary British fiction, and global studies. She works on the postcolonial novel, women writing in the South Asian diaspora and South Asian collaborative cultural production in and across nations. At the SALA Conference, she is also speaking on the Presidential Roundtable on “Intolerance and Challenges to Free Speech in the Indian Public Sphere,” which she helped organize.

**Zeeshan Riyaz Reshamwala, University of Denver**

The Polyglot Colonial and Precolonial Translations of the Qissa-i-Kamroop-o-Kala

This paper will analyze the narrative poem Qissa-i-Kamroop-o-Kala as an artefact of progressive adaptation in response to the tastes of multiple publics—from the Sanskrit literary culture at the time of the poem’s composition, to a Persian and Urdu one, and then to the period of European translation and oriental scholarship. I will ground discussions of the poem’s translation from a possibly Sanskrit text into Persian and Urdu versions in the context of the rich history of cultural and literary syncretism of the Deccan region of India. The Urdu version of the Qissa was composed in the late 17th or early 18th centuries. The poem’s Urdu oscillates between highly Sanskritized and highly Persianized registers. Indeed, the chapter headings throughout the poem are purely in Persian. In addition, I will discuss its translation into English and French versions (in 1793 and 1834 respectively) in the context of nascent imperialism in India. The translations present themselves to a European readership using the vocabulary of colonialism, citing in multiple places the usefulness of the poem as a guide to “oriental” behavior and cultural practices. Of Tahsinuddin, to whom the poem is attributed, very little is known. In the wake of his absence, I hope to show the Qissa as a product of repeated refurbishments in the hands of successive authors responding to changing literary cultures.
Zeeshan Reshamwala is a doctoral candidate at the University of Denver in Colorado. His research interests include postcolonial studies, romanticism outside Europe, Rudyard Kipling's poetry and fiction, and cultural studies, centered on contemporary depictions of India.

Dibyadyuti Roy, West Virginia University
Radioactive Masculinity: Anxious Atomic Publics and the Postcolonial Bomb

Shortly after India conducted five nuclear tests in May 1998, the outspoken Hindu nationalist leader Balasaheb Thackeray declared, “[w]e had to prove that we are not eunuchs.” Euphoric celebrations that were sparked across the country heralded a moment when India had finally found “apparent” access—through the thermonuclear bomb—to the global currency of geopolitical domination. While Balasaheb Thackeray’s rhetoric supposedly assured Indian atomic publics that the postcolonial bomb had culminated the crisis of masculinity—plaguing the subcontinent since the onset of colonization—it also emphasized the systemic gendered narrative underlying the nuclear public sphere. I argue that such performances of “radioactive masculinity” trace their lineage back to the Cold War: of nuclear weapons finding resonance in images of white hegemonic masculinity. This idealized masculinity is fluid and cannot be tangibly or materially realized, much like the constantly decaying radioactive nuclear bomb on which it is modeled. The desire of trying to achieve this idealized and hardened male body is itself responsible for creating an anxiety; an anxiety that “since 1945, the people of India and Pakistan have been subject[ed] to, [through] the institutionalized terror represented by the...Cold War” (Itty Abraham). In illustrating the unrecognized linkages between the nuclear bomb and the anxious masculine performances of atomic publics, I show the continued legacy of the Cold War on postcolonial subjectivities, as well as its effects on the South Asian public sphere.

Dibyadyuti Roy is a doctoral candidate and instructor in the Department of English and Cultural Studies at West Virginia University. He came to West Virginia by way of the University of Glasgow where he completed his M.Litt. His dissertation explores performances of masculinity within nuclear discourses and have led to him discovering the far-reaching effects of the atomic age on our daily existence. He has publications on varied fields ranging from Video Game Studies to British Theatre. Besides his scholarly pursuits, he particularly enjoys immersing himself and his students in the wondrous world of speculative fiction and fantasy literature.

Susmita Roye, Delaware State University, USA
Publicity of the Privacy of Purdah: Studying a Memsahib’s Depiction

This paper proposes to critically evaluate a short story by the famously unconventional – and also perhaps the most controversial – memsahib of nineteenth-century British India, Flora Annie Steel (1847-1929). “Glory-of-the-world” (1891) narrates the tale of a purdahnashin (a lady who lives life in seclusion). Although the protagonist, an elderly woman, is pious, traditional and strictly abides by the custom of purdah, wearing veils, traveling in covered 'dhoolies' and never socializing with men, during the trajectory of this plot, she finally finds herself forced to unveil her face in public. That supreme moment of her shame, shock,
bewilderment and defiance constitutes the climax of the story and is the focus of my analysis.

In this paper, I explore the complex dynamics of the location, juxtaposition and confrontation of two spaces: purdah (the private sphere) and non-purdah (the public sphere). This convoluted equation works on different planes in this short story and draws attention to the uneasy – indeed, often untenable – balance needed to be maintained between the public and private spheres in the purview of a purdahnashin. This issue became all the more difficult in the colonial context in British India where, especially by the end of the nineteenth century, purdah (with its entire repertoire of practices of privacy) was out in the open, being furiously debated in the public sphere, and this discursive rhetoric played a major role in an emerging nation’s sense of self-worth and identity-formation. That becomes additionally arresting when we analyze a memsahib’s politics of representation in depicting the ‘public’ sphere of a reclusive (often interpreted as: fanatically privacy-seeking) colonized female.

Susan Roye is Associate Professor of English at Delaware State University. She is the current Director of British and Anglophone Literatures area of the North-East Modern Language Association. Her articles on memsahib-writers (particularly on Flora Annie Steel), Raj studies, and Indian women’s writings have been published in peer-reviewed journals, including *Journal of Commonwealth Literature, South Asia Research and Studies in the Humanities*. Her current edited volume of essays with exclusive focus on Steel, ‘The ‘Female Rudyard Kipling’ and British India: Critical Essays on Flora Annie Steel’, is forthcoming. She has earlier edited another volume on memsahibs’ writings (NY: Cambria, 2013).

Asha Sen, University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire

Spirituality and Public Space

Religion has always occupied an overdetermined space in Eurocentric and nationalist discourses on India. Popular films like *Eat, Pray, Love* (2010) and *The Darjeeling Limited* (2007) continue to depict the country as a haven for the starving Western soul while fundamentalist discourses on religion still plague the lives of people on the subcontinent. However, a closer look at recent artistic and cultural productions from South Asia and its diaspora shows an emerging third space of possibility and transformation that counters these more essentialist discourses. In my paper I examine the current move away from hegemonic religious traditions towards the practices and principles embedded in the minority traditions of Sufism, Buddhism, and Tantra. The focus of the paper will be on three contemporary cultural workers Pico Iyer, Lata Mani, and Shabnam Virmani who use the principles embedded in these spiritual traditions to transform public policy and practice. For the purpose of this paper I will focus on the following texts: Pico Iyer's *The Art of Stillness*, (2013), Shabnam Virmani’s *The Kabir Project* (2011), and Lata Mani’s *Interleaves* (2001).

Asha Sen is the Director of Women’s Studies and a Professor of English at the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire. Her area of expertise is in postcolonial literature and theory and transnational feminism. Her most recent publication is *Postcolonial Yearning: Reshaping Spiritual and Secular Discourses in Contemporary Literature* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).
Indian authors writing in English are seen to be more directly engaged with the public sphere than ever before. The never-ending public debates on language and identity politics have become an integral part of Indian writing in English. The public sphere plays a crucial role in its cultural production and often assumes symbolic and non-constitutional forms of politics. In this context, the authenticity of representation of marginalized groups needs to be addressed. This becomes poignant given the fact that the diasporic Indian writers tend to mediate between two worlds (the First and the Third), marketing India according to the rules prescribed by the more privileged of these worlds.

This paper examines the portrayal of the Gorkhaland Insurgency in Kiran Desai’s novel *The Inheritance of Loss*. The novel is set in the exotic surroundings of Kalimpong, India. Many of its characters are displaced individuals who struggle to invent a life out of place, away from their ancestral homes and homelands. However this diasporic sense of alienation is also supplemented with a kind of nationalism. Desai’s novel seeks to expose and condemn the Gorkhaland insurgency that swept over Darjeeling and Kalimpong hills in the 1980s. This public movement is seen as a threat to cross cultural harmony on one hand and unity of nation state on the other. The paper focuses on how this Indian Nepali Insurgency interrupts Sai’s romance with her Nepali tutor, Gyan and looks into the novel’s criticism of Gorkhaland insurgency in the backdrop of the public sphere in India, which is deeply fragmented and structured by power relations.

Meena Sharma specializes in American Literature and teaches at Dibrugarh University in the Indian state of Assam. Other areas of interest include Shakespeare Studies, Women’s Studies, Indian Writing in English, Literary Theory, and Translation Studies.

Amritjit Singh, Langston Hughes Professor of English at Ohio University, has published well over a dozen books, including, most recently, *Postcolonial Theory and the United States* (2000); *The Collected Writings of Wallace Thurman* (2003); *Interviews with Edward W. Said* (2004); and *The Circle of Illusion* (2011). Past President of MELUS SALA and USACLALS he also currently serves as advisor to the SALA executive committee. At the SALA Conference, he is speaking on the Presidential Roundtable on “Intolerance and Challenges to Free Speech in the Indian Public Sphere.”

Ruma Sinha, Syracuse University

“We Are All Untouchable Until No One Is”: Dalit Women, Dissidence, and the Digital Public Sphere

This paper examines how Dalit women are increasingly claiming subaltern resistance identity using the platform of the digital public sphere like Facebook, Twitter, blogs, and photography, among others. Asserting their presence through socio-political global movements like “Dalit Women Fight” and “Dalit History Month,” they engage in these radical participatory projects that aim to cast out caste and expose systemic and structural manifestations of caste based sexual violence. These media based initiatives bring the local to the global public sphere while also asserting that gender and caste oppression are not
absent from the latter. This paper primarily focuses on the art and activism of Thenmozhi Soundararajan, popularly known as ‘Dalit Diva,’ a transmedia artist, who creates and translates stories for social change. A second-generation American born Tamil Dalit woman, she has become the voice of Dalit feminist activism in the diaspora who claims that the negotiations of caste privilege are often erased within the category of people of color. She collaborates with organizations like All India Dalit Women Rights Forum to fight for justice and create conditions for social and political change. Her blog ‘Dalit Nation’ brings together Dalit activists and their campaigns, movements, and rallies that work towards raising awareness to eradicate caste. I argue that the dialogic discourse of the digital public sphere has not only enabled new spaces for self-expression, it has also created an autonomous platform where Dalit women transcend the limits imposed by their historical absence from national and global cultural practices.

Ruma Sinha is a PhD candidate in the Department of English at Syracuse University. She is currently working on her dissertation that examines how Dalit women are asserting their presence and challenging their exclusion from the regional, national, and global forms of aesthetic representations. Her research and teaching interests include postcolonial and anticolonial studies, critical race and gender studies. She is especially interested in the works of Frantz Fanon, diaspora literature, subaltern studies, and Indian Literature(s) in English, with a particular focus on Dalit women’s literature.

Pennie Ticen, Virginia Military Institute
Tossing Caste, Nation, Economics and Race into the Public Sphere: Arundhati Roy’s "The Doctor and the Saint"

Arundhati Roy burst upon the international stage in 1997 with the publication of her novel *The God of Small Things*. Since then, Roy has channeled her writerly gifts into the production of essays and media focused on social and political issues. Readers and critics who were captivated by her “musical, densely patterned prose...[and] the mythic power of her tale” (Kakutani) have seemed, at best, startled and discomfited by the focused rage of the essays, while at worst, her motives and credentials have been frequently condemned. The most recent controversy erupted around her introduction to the 2014 annotated edition of Ambedkar’s "Annihilation of Caste."

Before the book was available in the United States, I was able to follow major threads of this controversy as it began in India via online newspapers and blog postings, including those on Round Table India, literally enacting Appadurai’s 1996 observation that technology has made it harder for images and their viewers to “fit into circuits or audiences that are easily bound within local, national, or regional spaces” ("Modernity at Large" 4). In my paper, I explore how these various individual voices, frequently exercised outside of the normalizing and controlling boundaries of the nation-state, the academy, or edited newspaper/journals can help us as readers directly engage with Roy’s project of broadening and complicating our understanding of Gandhi and Ambedkar and the discourses they foregrounded in the agitation leading up to Independence.

Pennie Ticen is an Associate Professor at Virginia Military Institute, where specializes in courses on Postcolonial Literature (including the literature of Indian Independence), as well as modern and contemporary British Literature. She earned her MA/PhD at the University of
Nisha Tiwari, Independent Scholar

Cinema and Social Space: A Perspective on Images of Femininity and Practices of Viewership in Hindi Cinema

This paper analyzes the confluence of viewership culture in relation to the production and consumption of images of Indian femininity through Bollywood/Hindi cinema. I examine the manner in which the spatial distribution of the Indian audience in movie theaters is premised upon economic stratification of the Indian masses. Subsequently, I delineate its influence upon the images of sexuality circulated by the Hindi cinema. The first half of the paper charts the trajectory of the images of ideal Indian femininity and its circulation in the public sphere through cinema since its inception to the decade of 1980. Using academic scholarship of critics like M. Madhava Prasad, Tejaswani Ghanti, Rachel Dwyer et al., I examine the construction of the ‘gaze’ for the Indian public and the spatial segregation of the audience to determine its impact on the construction of narrative content and rhetoric of Indian femininity circulated through Hindi movies. The second half of the paper looks at the changing spatial configurations of the Indian movie theaters in the decade of the 1990s with the advent of multiplexes and the resultant change in the constitution of the Indian audience. Using cinema scholarship of critics like Francesca Orsini and Adrian Athique, among others to flesh out the exponential rise of the Indian middle class and the changing space and nature of movie viewing in India, I look into its impact on the production and consumption of sexual content in reference to images of Indian femininity in contemporary Hindi cinema.

Nisha Tiwari is an Assistant Professor at the Department of English, Bharati College, University of Delhi in India. She teaches courses in the satire during English Restoration, modernism, feminism, among others. Her research and teaching interests include the study and of the body and theories of the body, in relation to its social and physical disciplining through gender roles and sexual violence. Her academic interests also include Indian popular culture, especially cinema and theater.

Pragya Trivedi, University of California at Irvine

Urban Space and the “Uncinematic”

Indian cinema often escapes to the street and into foreign locales and natural landscapes. “Family films of the 1990s retreated indoors and showcased a lavish world of endless commodities. The street, a sign of chaos and disrepair, functioned as a signifying absence during this period. Included in this cinematic omission were the bodies of those who occupied both street and home. According to film theorist Ranjani Mazumdar, the omission was part of an “urban lifestyle myth that could never fully exist in the physical spaces of the city,” but only in cinema. Today, the fantasy of the cinematic plays out on the street in the influx of privatized urban spaces like shopping centers, theme parks, multiplexes and gated communities. Using Victor Burgin’s formulation of the “un-cinematic” as those sites that remain outside the logic of the cinema, I argue that such a logic of the “un-cinematic” continues to inform the experience of the street through memory and
history, and everyday practice rather than through erasure. Bangalore’s urban landscape offers an example of the way the “uncinematic” figures into contemporary shifts in development. I trace the changes in street signs in Bangalore in order to establish a relationship between these images across time. Old traditional signs decay and the modernist aesthetic replacing them appears side by side, signaling an uneasy coexistence.

Pragya Trivedi recently taught as a lecturer at the University of California, Irvine. The research for the paper is funded in part by Lecturer’s grant awarded by the University of California, Irvine.

Joya Uraizee, Saint Louis University
The Diasporic South Asian Public Sphere: Disconnections and Connections in Kiran Desai’s The Inheritance of Loss

Kiran Desai’s “The Inheritance of Loss” describes a fragmented, diasporic South Asian community that spans three continents. Using Graham Huggan’s notion of the postcolonial exotic, I explore the internal and external disconnections experienced by Biju, the Judge, and Sai. As Huggan suggests, resistance is often overshot with the language of commerce such that the politics of recognition is also the aesthetics of difference. I argue that Desai reveals this simultaneous recognition and difference in the many contradictions within the characters of Biju and the Judge, and Sai. As an exploited restaurant worker in New York, Biju struggles to make sense of his identity, a process made complicated by the numerous ‘othering’ processes he endures. On his return to India, his materialist illusions and cultural identity are shattered. The Judge, as a young student in England, is disconnected from his environment and retreats within himself. On his return to India, he projects his self-hatred onto Nimi, his uneducated wife, and abuses her. Sai grows up with a deeply uncertain sense of self. Her exposure to the changing political environment leaves her bewildered. Her sexual and political encounters fragment her already fragile sense of self. Her sexual and political encounters fragment her already fragile sense of self. For both Biju and the Judge, India becomes a place to project their own insecurities, while for Sai, that projection itself remains an illusion. Ultimately, only Biju retains a semblance of connectedness to his community due to his ties to the land.

Joya Uraizee is Associate Professor of English at Saint Louis University in St. Louis, Missouri, where she teaches African and postcolonial literature and film at the graduate and undergraduate levels. She is the author of This is No Place for a Woman: Nadine Gordimer, Nayantara Sahgal, Buchi Emecheta and the Politics of Gender (2000) and In the Jaws of the Leviathan: Genocide Fiction and Film (2010), and is currently completing a book on representations of child soldiers. She has also written articles on nationalism, history and ecology.

Melanie R. Wattenbarger is an Early Stage Researcher and doctoral fellow at the University of Mumbai as a part of the EU Marie Curie ITN funded project Diasporic Constructions of Home and Belonging (CoHaB). A graduate of Ohio Wesleyan University and Ohio Dominican University, her work deals with issues of identity and authenticity in Indian literature and film. At the Graduate Professionalization Caucus, she will be speaking on will speak on the challenges of doing international research in the field of South Asian Studies, particularly as a woman.
Abdollah Zahiri, Seneca College (King Campus)
Diasporic Agency: Deepa Mehta’s Centripetal Reading of Caste/Indigenous Colonialism in Water

Deepa Mehta’s Water is a brave textualization of the multi-layered oppression in the rigidly stratified caste regime. This paper is an attempt to unravel Mehta’s unique sense of spatiality. Her diasporic positioning has enabled Mehta to discern and picture the gendered flaws in a religious ideology that still dominates the lives of 34 million widows in India in a much more poignant and effective manner than insiders. This situation especially continues in rural India where widows have to sit in shadows during their own children’s weddings. Mehta’s spatial location outside of India further enhances this counter-hegemonic negotiation for space that is the forte of Water. It also displays the special capacity of diaspora cum public sphere. This counter-hegemonic positioning from afar lends it immense credibility by virtue of displaying the gendered coloniality inherent in the caste regime, which is far from over; this coloniality is unfortunately universal in terms of gender violence and human rights, for Water is a clear testimony, an open graffiti of sorts, whose inscription caused a patriarchal uproar when its shooting in 2000 was stopped and the crew moved to Sri Lanka.

Abdollah Zahiri teaches at Seneca College in Toronto and has published articles on V.S. Naipaul, translation theory and postcolonial theory. He has also translated works of fiction and non-fiction into Farsi. He is currently researching the Sikh diaspora in Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Afrin Zeenat, University of Dhaka
The Indian Interwebs, Islamophobia, and Its Counterpublics
The days leading to and after the Indian election of 2012 resulted in a rather acrimonious virtual public sphere in the Indian interweb. In addition to the traditional methods of campaigning, the party in opposition, Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), successfully rallied majority Hindu public opinion through online forums to elect its leader, Narendra Singh Modi, as the Prime Minister of India. In what is touted as the world’s largest democracy, Indian national public opinion constitutes the strong publics of the majority while the minority Muslims remain its weak publics. The dominant discourse used faulty logic to claim that Islam favored violence and Muslim opinion deserved to be silenced. Such rhetoric increased hatred against India’s largest minority elided Modi’s culpability in the communal riots of Gujarat, which resulted in the death of many Muslims and promised “acche din” (good days) to the majority community.

In Transnationalizing the Public Sphere, Nancy Fraser repoliticized public sphere theory by questioning the political efficacy of a national public opinion that does not follow the all-affected principle, according to which “all potentially affected by political decisions should have the chance to participate on terms of parity in the informal processes of opinion formation to which the decision-takers should be accountable.” The Muslim population, comprising 14% of the Indian population or 172 million citizens, were unable to perform the “critical function of checking domination” and “giving birth to more legitimate public opinion” through traditional means, but they successfully countered the dominant public
discourse through online forums and social media. The digital public sphere offered them the scope to participate in a social and political imaginary. My paper argues that the weak counterpublics of the minority community counters Islamophobia by looking at the heated exchanges in social media and the comments section of online news portals.

Afrin Zeenat is an Associate Professor in the Department of English at University of Dhaka, in Bangladesh and holds a PhD from the University of Arkansas. Her primary area of specialization is nineteenth-century American literature. She also has a secondary emphasis in Rhetoric and Composition. In addition, she has an active interest in South Asian literature, comparative literature, and cultural studies.

Ather Zia, University of Northern Colorado at Greeley
The Work of Mourning: Affective Law and the Search for Disappeared Men in Kashmir

In Indian-controlled Kashmir, approximately 8,000 to 10,000 men have disappeared in Indian counter-insurgency actions since 1989. Kashmiri women have organized to search for those who have been subjected to enforced disappearance after being arrested by the Indian army. These women, mainly Muslim mothers and wives of the disappeared men, have become tireless human rights activists. This form of gendered civic engagement is unprecedented in a conservative, Muslim-majority society. The activist women mobilize demonstrations, pursue court cases, and collect documentation; they seek audiences with army or government officials, and scour prisons and morgues. In this paper, I ethnographically illustrate the performative politics of mourning as a hauntological interiorization which I conceptualize as an “affective law.” I trace the paradigm of “affective law” as an edict of continuous commemoration, a claim for a modicum of control and of agency. I illustrate how affective law manifests in modes of counter-memory which appear as a nuanced version of instinctive as well as deliberate resistance to the powerlessness induced by state terror. I put the affective law in conversation with Kafka’s parable “Before the Law” (1915) in order to explore the paradoxical and deferred relation to law and how affective law becomes the substrate for counter-memory and resistance. Affective law manifests resistance as relational to power and pinpoints a psychic contestation to the over-encompassing nature of power as well.

Ather Zia teaches at the Department of Anthropology and in the Gender Studies program at University of Northern Colorado. A former BBC journalist, Ather has also done a brief stint as a civil servant with the Kashmir government which she sometimes refers to as her “pre-pre-preliminary fieldwork.” She is a published author and columnist; her essays and creative work including fiction and poetry have appeared in a variety of magazines. Her first collection of poems was called “The Frame.” In 2013, she won the second prize for poetry from the Society for Humanistic Anthropology from the American Anthropological Association. She is the founder-editor of Kashmir Lit a journal based on writings on Kashmir at www.kashmirlit.org and us currently working on a book based on her doctoral research on militarization, gender, and human rights abuses in Kashmir. Ather’s other major projects include co-editing a reader on Kashmir and a non-fiction anthology for Harper-Collins.