

INTERCONNECTIONS AND UNEASY ALLIANCES BETWEEN THE BLACK
AND SOUTH ASIAN DIASPORAS: A STUDY OF HIP HOP VIDEOS, FILM,
AND LITERATURE

VISHA GANDHI

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This dissertation challenges the belief that racialized communities do immediately support and identify with each other; my research on the Black and South Asian diasporas unearths the Orientalist thoughts and anti-Black racisms that exist in each respective community. Using the work of Edward Said in his text, *Orientalism*, and research on racial triangulation by Asian Americanist Claire Jean Kim, my work attempts to clarify the often-conflicted relations and dynamics between South Asians, Blacks, and whites. Chapter two of this dissertation looks at romantic and sexual involvement between different racial communities; I specifically look at the films *Mississippi Masala* and *Bhaji on the Beach* to delve into the cultural rarity that is the Black-South Asian romance. Chapter three discusses Black Orientalism in American hip hop videos by such artists as Truth Hurts, and Timbaland and Magoo. Finally, chapter four looks at gendered dynamics and longings for blackness in the texts *Consensual Genocide*, by Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha, and *Londonstani*, by Gautam Malkani.

This dissertation is dedicated to my family, and especially to
Catherine Thompson, for her unending support.

And to all hip hop brown girls
who practice their appreciation respectfully.

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Introduction - Chapter One

"I love 'Slumdog.' I love naan. Uh... pepper, Ben Kingsley; the stories of Rudyard Kipling. I have respect for cows, of course. I love the Taj Mahal, Deepak Chopra, anyone named Patel. I love monsoon. I love cobras in baskets. Growing up to be a doctor. I love mango chutney. Really any type of chutney." (Schmidt, *New Girl* - "Cece Crashes")

This dissertation explores the themes of expressive cultures, identity, and diaspora in cities such as Toronto, New York, Los Angeles, and London. It examines the literary and musical art forms/works of African and South Asian diasporic cultures in these metropolises to probe the fraught relations of these cultural and ethnic groups. While studies of minority cultures abound, they seldom examine the interconnections, alliances, as well as conflicts that emerge in contemporary youth cultures (Maira 2003; Deike and Hodkinson 2009; Chatterton 2003). The current study breaks the mould of single cultural/ethnic group focused critical work and attempts to probe the cross cultural points of contact through an examination of selected literary, filmic and musical texts. This study examines these cross-cultural representations to ferret out the embedded stereotypes that circulate in the social imaginary and are imbibed by the youth themselves. Thus, while African diasporic musical cultures such as hip hop may utilize Orientalist imagery to represent South Asian cultures, South Asian literary and filmic representations often contain stereotypes and fetishistic attitudes towards Black communities. Neither cultural community is innocent of racism or simplistic views of the other ethnic group,

and yet in both the Black and South Asian cultural groups we do find moments of connection and cultural understanding.

One might ask several questions at the outset of analysis of research of the intersecting Black and South Asian diasporas. Firstly, how do gender and sexuality solidify or complicate seemingly simplistic ethnic identities? Also, how do South Asian artists and cultural workers enter into a dialogue with Blacknesses and Black identity in their cultural products? How can one look at such from an intersectional perspective, one that delves into the multiplicities of race, class, gender, and sexuality and how they come together in complex ways in the identity formation of the individual and in the cultural products studied? I use the term intersecting to the full limits of its meaning, as this study will delve into the often conflicted crossroads of said identity markers.

The identity formation of “South Asian” usually applies to those whose are in the countries of India, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan. The use of the term South Asian has developed over time, and is rarely used transnationally. According to Harish Trivedi, “‘South Asia’ is, of course, a term of factual geographical description...but its rapidly growing significance for us derives from its being used as a political, or more accurately, geo-political category” (6). Those called “South Asian” in North America are called “Asian” in the U.K. (in North America, Asian refers more commonly to those of *East* Asian descent). Also, in North America, “East Indian” was once common terminology; those in western Canada still use the term East Indian colloquially. “‘South Asia’ was virtually invented by the Pentagon in the late 1950s and early 1960s in the wake of the post-Sputnik Cold war panic when the USA, having been overtaken in the race to outer space, felt the need as a counter-offensive, to look closely at and cultivate a knowledge of several areas at least of our terra firma which had for it until then

lay in darkness” (6). In the 2006 Canadian census, respondents were asked to identify themselves as South Asian as opposed to East Indian or another designation.

South Asian identity formation in diasporic geographies solidifies in youth cultures who look towards common cultural reference points in a way that challenges communal and nationalistic discord. For many second-generation youth the struggle against racism and invisibility by the media and mainstream societies often necessitates solidarity between diverse South Asian communities. Thus, in places like Canada, Indo-Canadians and Pakistani-Canadians might find common ground where their parents and relatives in South Asia might not think any commonality to be possible. Yet the unifying aspects of the term South Asian do not fully alleviate the hierarchies and privileges within the community. In many cases the term “South Asian” is just a gloss for Indian cultures and people, while giving a cursory nod towards other nations in the region. A clear example of this might be Toronto’s downtown South Asian district, which is named Gerrard India Bazaar, and is known colloquially as Little India. In both the official name and nickname, the other five nations of South Asia are conspicuously missing.

It is difficult to find common ground amongst academics, community members, and others on a suitable nomenclature for Black communities and peoples. Currently terms like African diasporic, or Afrodiasporic are *de rigueur*, yet merely a decade ago the term Black (or black) was the most frequently used. The term Black is the quite common in activist circles and popular culture, which would lead one to believe that these segments of society eschew the most recent academic terminology. My frequent use of the term Black as opposed to African diasporic is influenced by the theorizings of such thinkers as Rinaldo Walcott, Kobena Mercer, and Paul Gilroy. Some theorists such as Walcott see power and purpose in the terms Black and Blacknesses, and link them to a transnationalism that allows an identity formation that all Blacks

in the diaspora can embrace. Walcott means to “signal Blackness as a sign, one that carries with it particular histories of resistance and domination” (27). Walcott also writes that the sign of Blackness is “never closed and always under contestation...[it] allows for a certain kind of malleability and open-endedness which means that questions of Blackness far exceed the categories of the biological and the ethnic” (27-28). Walcott discusses a transnational Black aesthetic, and also pointing towards the importance of analysis of Black cultures to all communities. To Walcott, Blackness is “always in progress, always in the process of becoming” (28). No fixedness can be attributed to Blacknesses or Black cultures, but rather they are always in a process of creative re-visioning.

Blackness in North America and the United Kingdom has a peculiar and particular place in the majoritarian public psyche. African diasporic individuals are reviled or celebrated, demonized or pitied, all in equal parts. Music critic Greg Tate is noteworthy on this topic, as he states

The African-American presence in this country has produced a fearsome, seductive, and circumspect body of myths about Black intellectual capacity, athletic ability, sexual appetite, work ethic, family values, and propensity for violence and drug addiction. From these myths have evolved much of the paranoia, pathology, absurdity, awkwardness, alienation, and anomie which continue to define the American racial scene” (4).

Vijay Prashad, in his foundational *The Karma of Brown Folk*, speaks of “blacks” in quotes deliberately, since it is not a self-referential category (159). For Prashad, Blacknesses do not refer specifically to Black bodies, of which he says there “really are none” (159). Rather he speaks of people deemed to be Black and who are assumed to “be inferior in various ways” (159). To Prashad, the word “nigger” was not just a slur relegated to those of African ancestry; during

“the British rule in India, for instance, the word ‘nigger’ was used liberally to refer to Indians, as in E.M. Forster’s phrase ‘busk niggers’ and in an etiquette book that pleaded with the English not to call their Indian servants ‘nigs’ (159). The word “nigger” was broadly used for those who were dark in colouring (159). These statements highlight the impossibility of ever coming across a name that incorporates all the nuances and ruptures within the ethnic communities in question. For the purpose of this dissertation, I will use the terms African diasporic and Black interchangeably, to both recognize current academic research and popular namings of these ethnic and cultural groups.

Rinaldo Walcott, in his study on Blacknesses and Black peoples, paraphrases W.E.B. DuBois and says that the communities are seen as a “‘problem’ in Canada” (12). Walcott speaks of the media’s inability to envision what “a truly multicultural place might sound like” in their debates on the use of dialect in Austin Clarke’s *The Polished Hoe* (12). Walcott calls Blacks in Canada an “absented presence always under erasure” in *Black Like Who?* The plight of Canadian Blacks is to be caught between the United States and the Caribbean, creating “a bubbling brew of desires for elsewhere, disappointments in the nation and the pleasures of exile- even for those who have resided here for many generations” (27).

In Walcott’s text, *Black Like Who?*, the scholar quotes Austin Clarke; Clarke states, in a discussion of Blacknesses, naming, and nation:

How can I embrace Africa after thirty-seven years in Canada? How can I be more Barbadian than Canadian when I have spent two thirds of my life in Toronto? How do I resist the dermatology of Canadian culture imbued in me over the years, and have the racial forwardness to regard myself as African? And why should I? Merely to give my protest a sharper context? Or more bluntly, to evade the wounding of being called

“nigger,” “Negro,” “blasted Jamaican,” or “West Indian”? Do I look more African than Canadian? If I permit this reasoning, then I am saying Canadians are white and Africans are black. And if one is black, one cannot have been born here, one cannot be Canadian.”
(in Walcott 11)

Clarke is pulling apart the terms of identification for Blacks in the diaspora; to align oneself with Africa and Africans, he says, denies his very real identity as a Canadian. To him, embracing an African identity implies that those who are true Canadians are white, and all others are foreign to the nation. Clarke seems to be arguing that to call oneself Afro-Canadian is an attempt to bypass the racist alternatives, and yet unfortunately it fails to do so. In this quotation, Clarke is also quite honest about his separation from a purely African identity, mythic though it might be. Clarke seems to think it disingenuous to claim African-ness when Canada has had such an effect on his psychology and character.

Furthermore, the terms Black and Blacknesses are included in this dissertation alongside the term African diasporic because this project also takes note of the importance of the term “Black” as a tool for fighting racial oppression in the 1960s in the United States, Canada, and the U.K. The identity formation of “Black” is believed to have come about in the 1960s, with the rise of the Black Power movement in the United States. James Brown’s “Say It Loud- I’m Black and I’m Proud” was one of the first cultural products to have instilled a pride in cultural and ethnic roots among Black people, and effectively aided the communities to see themselves as proud and empowered Black, rather than negroes (Brown and Tucker 200). However, Brown steps away from the radicalism of his song in his 1986 autobiography *James Brown: The Godfather of Soul*, calling it “obsolete now;” yet the recording of “Black and Proud” stands as a moment when it was essential to carve out of a militant Black identity (200). As Brown states in his book, his

song was seen as “militant and angry- maybe because of the line about dying on your feet instead of living on your knees” (200).

According to cultural critic Bill Mullen:

“Tiffany Ruby Patterson and Robin D.G. Kelley have noted... [that] the rush to embrace diasporic paradigms has also contributed to a tendency to view all diasporic moments as equal and thus to eradicate the local conditions of their making, on the one hand, and to forget that diaspora is itself a process and condition mirroring the history of imperialism and western racism” (xxvi).

We must further realize that the South Asian and African diasporas do interact and negotiate relationships with one another, as these social groups have occasionally intermingled in areas such as West Africa and the Caribbean, bringing about a spacial proximity and familiarity. Analysis of separate diasporic communities without looking at inter-connections has characterized much of the research on these topics. The future of research on diasporic communities must include an understanding of how such communities can simultaneously harbor both animosities and connective interactions with one another. South Asian and Black communities have been brought together in diasporic spaces by the history of colonization that has plagued such areas of the world. Transnational transportation, either through the chattel slavery trade or through indentured servitude has necessitated that these two diasporic communities interact and even build ties with one another. However, inter-communal solidarity is not a certainty merely because Blacks and South Asians live in the same geographic area and may have comparable experiences of racial oppression. This proximity does not lead always to true understanding, as Orientalist beliefs and anti-Black racism are almost impossible to dispel. There are often class-based antagonisms that have everything to do with the privileges that come

with being higher on the racial hierarchy. In areas like Trinidad, South Asians and those with some South Asian blood are treated with more sympathy, and often attain economic freedoms that many Blacks don't. Also, in such places as Uganda, as we shall see in my analysis of *Mississippi Masala*, this inter-communal animosity has been heightened to such an extent that South Asians were expelled from the country due to their seeming cultural and class privilege.

However, Asian communities must view this model Asian designation with suspicion, and just as easily as model minority status can be placed upon a community, it can be taken away based on behaviors that are considered suspect. This was seen in Canada in recent years, with the 2009 Tamil protests against genocide in Toronto, and the travels of migrant "boat people" from Sri Lanka. In both cases, Sri Lankan Tamils were painted with another brush altogether; the naming of the community as terrorists, terrorist-sympathizers, and immigration queue-jumpers illustrates the shifting nature of the reception of some South Asians by majority cultures.

Some South Asians feel a particular brand of racism towards Blacks, one that has rarely been written about academically. Class-climbing aspirations often tinge anti-Black racism in South Asian communities, along with a desire to align oneself with whiteness. South Asians can imagine themselves as equals to whites by taking on the racisms and stereotypical thinking of the white majority. Though these majoritarian cultures reject South Asians as easily as they do Blacks, this strategic alliance on the part of those upwardly-mobile racialized peoples is quite disheartening. Chromatism often colours this anti-Black racism, or a fear that future generations will end up even darker skinned through inter-racial dating and marriage, as many South Asians desire a Fanonian "lactification," or a desire to lighten the lines of future generations (Fanon 47). All of these dynamics come into play in anti-Black racism in diasporic South Asian communities.

Both South Asians and Blacks often absorb the racism of white society and incorporate it into a painful, oppressed identity. Richard Wright, in *White Man, Listen!*, speaks of his position as one who is an outsider in the States and at the same an outsider to the East:

...Being a negro living in a white Western Christian society, I've never been allowed to blend, in a natural and healthy manner, with the culture and civilization of the west... Yet I'm not non-Western. I'm no enemy of the West. Neither am I an Easterner. When I look out upon those vast stretches of this earth inhabited by brown, black and yellow men...my reactions and attitudes are those of the West. I see both worlds from another and third point of view. (in Mullen 43)

Centuries of racist science and social stereotypes leave those of both diasporas with much to fight against. Some leave racial oppression unchallenged, and instead live the life of a marked individual who is spattered with the messiness of belonging to an undesirable race.

Central to a discussion of anti-Black racism is the fact that South Asians acquire their stereotypes from the white western majority. Media, ranging from the fairy tales that Fanon speaks of to sensationalized news reports to films all lend to an anti-Black culture that South Asian immigrants inherit upon entry into the country. And immigrants learn their lesson well; the racial order of society (one that places whites at the top, Asians and other people of colour, like Latinos, in the middle, and Black people at the bottom, alongside indigenous peoples) relies on newcomers learning their place and the place of others to maintain the status quo. James Baldwin speaks of the difficult position of the Black American with relation to new immigrants in the United States:

I had my fill of seeing people come down the gangplank on Wednesday, let us say, speaking not a word of English, and by Friday discovering that I was working for them

and they were calling me nigger like everybody else. So that Italian adventure or even Jewish adventure, however grim, is distinguished from my own adventure...by one thing.

Not only am I black, but I am one of our niggers. (in Collins 11)

Much of the power that South Asians are afforded in western society rests on their disavowal of similarities with the Black experience and struggle. Thus, South Asian immigrants often treat Blacks as a familiar would, while othering them at the same time. This inside/outside status peculiar to Blacks in the west allows for racism from a variety of social groups, not just the dominant white majority.

The racism and colourism that affords South Asians with more privilege than Blacks is depicted in Sam Selvon's well-regarded novel, *Moses Ascending*. The ending pages of Sam Selvon's text provide a stark reminder of the categories that Asians and Blacks occupy in the west. In the novel, Moses finds himself occupying the basement of the house he himself owns, while Asians occupy the middle floor, and his white friend settles on the top floor. This humorous take on British society is indicative of the ties between South Asians and Blacks. Because of the model minority status that is often placed on all Asians, South Asians are compared to and racialized against all of the negative stereotypes placed on Black people.

To further understand the intersections and interactions of the African diasporic and South Asian communities, an understanding of the word diaspora itself will be helpful. Etymologically, the term diaspora comes from ancient Greek and refers to the scattering or dispersal of seeds. Diaspora studies began with the discussion of the Jewish community, and their movement from Judea, though it now refers to any racial, ethnic, religious, or even linguistic community that has moved from one place to another. We must also note the linkages to heterosexuality and maleness that are inherent in diaspora studies. In Judeo-Christian

“cosmology, seeds are metaphorical for the male “substance” that is traced in genealogical histories. The word ‘sperm’ is metaphorically linked to diaspora” (Gopinath 5). Gayatri Gopinath states that the two words come from the same stem, in Greek meaning to sow or scatter (5). Thus the term diaspora, in its roots, comes from a “system of kinship reckoned through men” and is thus steeped in patriarchal underpinnings (5).

I will illustrate how African diasporic and South Asian youth cultures challenge the entrenched beliefs about diasporic subjects. Texts such as *Consensual Genocide*, by Leah Laksmi Piepzna-Samarasinha, and *Mississippi Masala* by Mira Nair speak against the typical beliefs of diasporic subjectivity, due to their multiple allegiances within the hip hop community, the queer community, or the feminist community that occasionally pull them away from racial allegiances. They make a “rough peace” (to quote Dionne Brand¹) in Toronto or London, eschewing the youthful longing for the homeland that others might expect of them (45).

Moreover, this study will aim to build on the wealth of queer diaspora studies in the larger field of diasporic and ethnic studies. For more than a decade, scholars mainly based in North America have researched the intersections of queer studies and diaspora or postcolonial studies. Anthologies such as *Q&A: Queer in Asian America* edited by David L. Eng and Alice Y. Hom, and *Queer Diasporas* edited by Cindy Patton and Benigno Sánchez-Eppler, showed the reader that multivalent queer and trans identities existed in racialized communities; these identities challenged the stereotypes of the standard heteronormative diasporic cultures on the one hand, and white queer cultures on the other. This dissertation not only analyzes largely queer spaces as well as straight ones, but in some cases it queers the seemingly unqueerable. An

¹ Though Brand’s *What We All Long For* helped to spark the idea for my thesis topic, I was unable to work her creative texts to fit my research parameters, as she mostly speaks of the intersections of the Black and Southeast Asian diasporas.

illustration of this point occurs in my chapter on the novel, *Londonstani*. While Gautam Malkani's South Asian rudeboys exhibit an unabashed hypermasculinity, the possible unspoken attraction between two of the main characters, Jas and the rugged Hardjit, is masked by the characters' rampant homophobia.

While the two communities may confuse the behaviors and cultures of one another, we must also note that within the community there is often much pressure to act authentically ethnic, and to fall in line with often stereotypical or often blatantly conservative iterations of the Black or South Asian subject. This debate often centers on such elements as queerness. A firm belief in heteronormativity is a common thread in both diasporic communities, to the extent that queers are treated as outsiders, or even must self-exile. Self-exile occurs when the community is unfortunately unchallenged in homophobic beliefs, simply because queer members have left the larger ethnic community in search of other friendships and communities where they can pursue their desire unquestioned.

Whatever the racisms found between the two diasporic communities, there are times that Blacks and South Asians come together in solidarity and unity, usually in opposition to the violences of oppression(s). In this respect, this project will turn away from multicultural ideology, as it is plagued with mainstream longings for acceptance by white westerners. As embedded in Canadian political culture as multicultural theory is, it has been co-opted by interest groups intent on enveloping immigrants into the fabric of Canadian society, in a way that Graham Huggan succinctly calls "boutique multiculturalism" (in his summary of the work of Stanley Fish) (Huggan 124). Boutique multiculturalism, I believe, will not make Canada a welcoming place for all. Rinaldo Walcott, in his discussion of the naming of the films *Soul Survivor* and *Rude* as "Jamaican-Canadian" by the "Festival" issue of *Take One*, speaks of the

tendency of such naming by heritage to “occlude the complex creolized multicultural constitution of Black Canadians” (104-105). Multicultural practice and policy in Canada and beyond rests on a desire for “simplicity and knowability [that] is revealed in the naming” (105). To multiculturalists, diasporic individuals must have easily identifiable identities that have origins in an elsewhere that is not the west.

Moreover, fetishization often occurs in the consumed elements of the desired cultures: ethnic street fairs and restaurants don’t allow for shiftings and ruptures in the cultures in question. In youth cultures the claim to culture can often be quite tenuous, even more so if one’s queerness has created strained relationships with family and culture.

Along with the restrictions of a multiculturalist framework, diasporic individuals must combat the mythologized authenticity that is asked of them. The American hip hop producer who is marketing the South Asian authentic ethnic to make a hot track, and a writer like Gautam Malkani who is immersing his wealthy “rude-boy” Asian characters into American gangsta hip hop and culture both view of the Other community in time-worn stereotypes. This view is often based the fiction of veracity, that there is one true real way to be South Asian or Black, when there is none. There is no real, quintessential diasporic figure, and this fiction of the perfectly Black or the perfectly South Asian is not only damaging and constricting, it is lethally so. How does an *authentic* Black or South Asian person behave, and alternately how are they thought to behave by mainstream cultures? The quintessential South Asian or Black individual really doesn’t exist, when one takes into account the intricacies of multiple subject positionalities. Stereotyping alters the perception of Blacks and South Asians, while the desire to be seen as a good ethnic minority shapes behavior.

Both Black and South Asian cultures place a premium on a certain form of masculine behavior; this leads to a rigid gender policing of men through the use of references to queerness and femininity, which are meant to insult the heterosexual target's manhood. Men in both diasporic communities are often the most highly oppressed by their own fellow male community members. While women and men discipline the behaviors of women to make sure they don't stray into seemingly dangerous sexual territory, men also lead suppressed emotional lives and live a narrow view of gender expression. *Londonstani* clearly illustrates this behaviour, for example in the scene where the young friends place a high premium on public posturing and sexual prowess. In the scenes of sexual bragging that occur in Ravi's luxury car, the young men boast about sexual exploits while demeaning one another through homophobic taunts. This allows for a very narrow vision of what it is to be a modern South Asian Brit, and one that privileges heterosexuality, hypermasculinity, and male sexual prowess.

Especially apparent in Black and hip hop communities is this enforced gender behavior modification. Gender and race often work in concert to create an individual's idea and ideals of their place in the world. The premium on tough masculine behavior in Black men confines identity and constrains demonstrations of sensitivity or emotions other than anger. This public belief in hypermasculinity is a double-edged sword for Black men; on the one hand, societal belief in masculine and sexual prowess lends a sort of limited power to an often powerless social grouping, and on the other, these stereotypes demand a constant front of power and bravado that can be exhausting. Furthermore, the high standards of macho behavior are ultimately unachievable, and thus amount to a constant sense of failure for Black men.

These rigid codes of behavior have also trickled down to other hip hop "heads," who are not only challenged to maintain a tough masculine behavior, but are also held up to the

seemingly ultimate in masculine identity- Black men. For Asian, Latino, white, and other men, hip hop masculinity is always something that they will be unable to achieve, both in society's eyes and in their own.

Here, I would like to introduce a concept that I deploy in this dissertation: the racial or sexual veneer. In the field of carpentry, a veneer is a thin piece of "real" wood that is glued over particle board, or some other substrate, to give it the appearance of actual wood. While often seen as inferior, some believe that veneered wood is "some of the very finest furniture of all time has been built using veneers, and would not have been possible using hardwoods" (http://www.prowoodworkingtips.com/Introduction_to_Veneer.html). Because veneers can be applied to cores that are very stable, they "will not crack, or warp, due to humidity changes" (http://www.prowoodworkingtips.com/Introduction_to_Veneer.html). Veneers solidify a wood product; were the particleboard underneath to exist on its own as a finished product, it would be weak, unstable, and easily breakable. Similarly, racial and sexual veneers are created when the subject in question has anxieties or insecurities about their own identity, and they use the film of another identity, or even the identity of their own ethnic community to bolster their own. Racial veneering has existed in many forms in western and non-western culture, and the subject who is veneering is often praised for being a worldly or modern for their actions. The white suburban hip hop fan who can rhyme off N.W.A lyrics or the non-Indian yogini who travels to the subcontinent to "find herself" are tapping into the privilege of cultural cachet without all negative associated factors. However, racial and sexual veneers cannot be discussed without looking at the privilege of the subject, and the ease with which they slip on the veneer. When we add to this our analysis of possible racial hierarchies, the discussion gets even more complicated.

Not everyone veneers of course; some people learn about and express interest in their own culture and that of others in a way that is egalitarian and not fetishistic. We must also link veneering to older discussions of cultural appropriation that occurred in the 1980s and 1990s. However, my interest isn't solely in the criticism of those who exhibit a desire for another cultural expression. The condemnation of such behaviors culminates in the Sisyphean task of policing behaviours in individuals in a pluralistic society. Rather, one might look at when a person veneers, to what end, and when the veneer is put away, if at all. What does the veneering accomplish for the individual? A desire for an/Other, possibly essentialist expression of subjectivity, also always already omits the margins of the cultural identity in question. Veneering is often a culturally conservative activity, as those identities on the fringes of the veneer cultural group all get left by the wayside. Furthermore, one must ask where and when the veneer is being used; if a black veneer is being used in street culture or to procure a good punch-line but is dropped at a place of employment, what does this say about the veneerers' feelings towards the seriousness of black aesthetics? In my chapter on hip hop, I discuss criticisms of such self-serving forms of racial solidarity by looking at the issues that arise when non-Blacks identify with hip hop cultures.

Essential for the theoretical framework of my analysis is the work of Edward Said. Edward Said's foundational text *Orientalism* is critical to a discussion of the interactions between the peoples of the Black and South Asian diasporas, as he outlines the theory of how people from the East are seen by those in the west. According to Said, the "Orient was almost a European invention," a fact which highlights the ways in which the west had fabricated images and ideas of the Orient which often had nothing to do with the actual existing place (1). The Orient "had been since antiquity a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and

landscapes, remarkable experiences” (Said 1). Eventually, “Orientalism overrode the Orient... [for example] a verse from the Koran would be considered the best evidence of the ineradicable Muslim sensuality” (96). The academic offerings of Orientalists of Europe came to stand in for the Orient itself, and texts of poetry and religion were used to dissect the Arab mind (96).

Edward Said’s text speaks of the peoples of the Middle East as the Orient; he says that “Americans will not feel quite the same about the Orient, which for them is much more likely to be associated with the Far East (China and Japan, mainly)” (1). Europeans such as the “French and the British” have a long history of Orientalism. To Said, the Orient is “not only adjacent to Europe; it is also the place of Europe’s greatest and richest and oldest colonies, the source of its civilizations and languages...and one of its deepest and most recurring images of the Other” (1). Said’s elaboration of cultural fetishization of peoples of the near East, can be applied to South Asians quite readily.

Said noted that one of the elements of Orientalism was the proximity of the "near East" to Europe, making travel and commerce easy. For contemporary Black Orientalists like the hip hop producer Timbaland and even the writer of *Dark Princess*, W.E.B. Du Bois, before him, South Asia is a far off land, both literally and figuratively, and this distance causes a relationship that is vague and exoticized in its underpinnings. Western Black Orientalists often have a fixed and fossilized view of what South Asianness entails. Said’s catalogue of Flaubert’s Orient, which includes “harems, princesses, princes, slaves, veils, dancing girls and boys, sherbets, ointments, and so on” is alive and well in the imagery of many Orientalist representations of South Asia and South Asians in the diaspora, as seen through the eyes of Black Orientalists (190). And often, syncretism appears in Black Orientalism; this is when the Oriental fetish is placed alongside elements of Black culture to make a cultural product that is more visually and often times

sexually powerful. Thus, the East is seen to give the raw material that invigorates the Black society (Said 113-116).

Not only has the west defined the East, but the reverse has happened also. The Orient has helped to conceptualize Europe as its contrasting “image, idea, personality, experience” (Said 1-2). We cannot forget how important a part of the European “*material* civilization and culture” the Orient is (2). Thus there is a deep reciprocal relationship between the two regions. The relationship to the Other defines the self, and in the case of the Orient, Europe couldn’t exist without its constant vision of what it is not.

This relationship can be reduced to quite simple elements: “[there] are Westerners, and there are Orientals. The former dominate, the latter must be dominated,” which usually means occupation, the controlling of affairs, and the taking of treasures (Said 36). The concept of Orientalism also assumes an unchanging Orient, one that is totally different from the west. Orientalism is a “western projection and a will to govern over the Orient” whether it be economically in the present day, or in the control of images (95).

Black Orientalism doesn’t follow the configurations that European Orientalism follows, in that it is more modern and distanced from the East. According to Said, Orientalists are cataloguers of the East; they are academics and administrators. In the contemporary context, Black Orientalists have inherited from the rich history of European Orientalists of the nineteenth century and it is from here that they have gained their view of South Asia. Blacks in the west are in the peculiar position of seeing South Asians often through white eyes, as is seen in dominant Black Orientalist culture in the current era. Black Orientalism borrows from a time-worn history of exoticized views of South Asia, and this view is a distinctly white western one.

The research of Vijay Prashad is critical for my analysis, as he tells of the ways in which a praising white majority embraces South Asian Americans for all the wrong reasons. He quotes former New York Mayor Ed Koch as once saying ““They give us their culture and their taxes and their wonderful restaurants”” (3). This speaks to the “model minority” stereotype that Prashad attempts to shed light on in his text; he also illustrates the ways in which South Asians themselves have embraced this stereotype, not realizing how damaging it is to themselves (3). Prashad elucidates the ways in which the model Asian minority is meant to solve the problems of Black poverty in the States. As Prashad eloquently states

“such gestures remind me that I am to be the perpetual solution to what is seen as the crisis of black America. I am to be a weapon in the war against black America.

Meanwhile white America can take its seat, comfortable in its liberal principles, surrounded by state selected Asians, certain that the culpability for black poverty and oppression must be laid at the door of black America. How does it feel to be a solution?”

(4)

Prashad also speaks of the favourable connections between South Asians and Blacks historically. He tells of how Dizzy Gillespie spoke of Black musicians who either converted to Islam, or pretended to, for access to whites only restaurants. Being of the Muslim faith meant that ““you ain’t colored no more, you’ll be white. You get a name and you don’t have to be a nigger no more”” his friends would tell him (38). Thus Black musicians tap into the privilege of respectability that would otherwise be unattainable to them; the association with South Asianness gives them a place in their society that their own subjectivity never did. Yet decades later, those who engaged in inter-diasporic associations through hip hop often said that it was a passing phase. Prashad quotes Sunaina Maira’s text, in which a young woman says that Blacknesses are

a short-term “fashion” that would be discarded once the young desi² walked into the “arms of corporate life” (181).

Rinaldo Walcott, one of the most influential academics in the field of Canadian critical race studies, speaks of the Black call for justice and equality, and the ways that these demands largely remain unheard, “due to the continuing ambivalent place of black peoples in the national imagination” (12). This comes down to a question of belonging. “Do we belong or do we not belong?” Walcott asks (12). And once belonging is established, will the nation begin to acknowledge that Blacks are both the newly arrived and those who have been in the country “going back before Confederation?” (12). Walcott uses the concept of the detour as a method “for thinking through the circuitous routes of Black diasporic cultures, their routes connectedness and differences” (31). Detours are a significant factor of Black diasporic cultures. Walcott also speaks of an in-betweenness that is a condition of their inside/outside status in the nation/state (48). The national narratives of Canada stem from the idea of “two founding peoples’ to multicultural policies, to immigration policies, to provincial and municipal policing practices, and so on” (48).

Finally, Walcott speaks of the specific moment in time in which *Black Like Who?* is written, “after the civil rights era, second wave feminism, black cultural nationalism, gay and lesbian liberation, the Clarence Thomas/Anita Hill spectacle... the Yonge street riots, and the O.J. Simpson trials” (26). Writing Blackness in this time is a very challenging endeavor, and yet, Black postmodernity “insists on being chronicled as it makes fun of and spoofs the very notion of writing blackness” (26).

² A term in Hindi, literally meaning “person of the homeland,” the homeland being South Asia.

The Asian Americanist Claire Jean Kim's research aids in an analysis of inter-racial interaction, which she calls "racial triangulation". According to Kim, Asians in America haven't been racialized on their own, rather they have been racialized in "interaction with white and blacks" (40). While Kim speaks solely of Asians in the U.S., and like many scholars like her focus is on East Asians, her research can easily be translated to the South Asian context. Moreover, her research is fruitful for an interpretation of what occurs for South Asians in the diaspora, in that many South Asians are caught in the triangulated position with relation to Blacks and whites in the west. Unfortunately, what racial triangulation does is sever coalitional ties between the two groups, based on the social status and privileges afforded South Asians.

According to some scholars in the field, racial triangulation yields some interesting politics when it comes to the South Asian community in the west. South Asians don't see themselves in coalition with Black people at all as they entered the west as free labour and don't have the history of slavery, and in the eyes of the Black communities, solidarity would be impossible because of the privileges that South Asians always had (Raphael-Hernandez and Steen 5).

Kim argues that commonly there is a "single scale of status and privilege with whites on the top, blacks on the bottom, and all other groups somewhere in between" (40). However, this positioning of Asians in the middle isn't always fixed; at times South Asians attempt to sidestep racialization by aspiring towards whiteness (as I will illustrate later in my study). This can be seen in the 1923 United States court ruling against Bhagat Singh Thind, who tried to claim whiteness in order to receive American citizenship (50). The court ruled that though he was thought to be Caucasian by ethnologists, he was not white "in accordance with the understanding of the common man" (50).

However, interpretation hasn't always been along two axes when it comes to racial hierarchies, as those in the west have seen those who are racialized in varying ways. Kim reminds us of the analysis of Angelo Ancheta, who says that Blacks have historically been seen as inferior while Asians in the diaspora have often been seen as outsiders (40). Thus the field of racial positions includes a plane that has at least two axes "superior/inferior and insider/foreigner"; in a sense the groups become racialized in juxtaposition to one another and differently (41). According to Kim, this multidimensional axis has an intimate impact on who gets afforded opportunities, who gets restricted in which way, and what opportunities are offered (41). A discussion of class dynamics aids this discussion, for some Asian communities may be privileged as compared to Black communities when it comes to financial status, yet they are still seen as outsiders to the nation, based on language and citizenship.

Monisha Das Gupta analyzes rebel communities in her text *Unruly Immigrants: Rights, Activism, and Transnational South Asian Politics in the United States*. Das Gupta speaks of the ways in which the term "immigrant" encompasses "conditions of migrancy- a constellation of risks, crossings, in-betweenness, fragmentation, otherness, insecurities, survivals, resistances, and creativity". A person can be treated as an immigrant "whether she or he is a naturalized citizen, a citizen by birth, or technically a non-immigrant- someone who will "leave after a specified period of time" (4). This change in reactions to immigrants, both real and imagined, was exacerbated after the events of the World Trade Center disaster on September 11, 2001. Das Gupta also speaks of the displacement due to structural adjustment programs and neoliberal policies that cause migration in the first place (13). These global economic shifts our understanding of the right of the countries of the North to police their borders and "criminalize certain forms of entry" (13).

Das Gupta defines the identity formation of “South Asian”, and what this more inclusive term might mean for her research; in her analysis, groups use a pan South Asian identification as opposed to a nation-based identification (10). South Asian American comes to mean anyone from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and the South Asian diaspora to the political groups that Das Gupta studies. Yet even though they all are from the same subcontinent or its diaspora, “the act of claiming a South Asian identity does not automatically ensure an equal voice for the immigrants from the less-powerful countries in South Asia” (10).

With regards to queer South Asian identity, Das Gupta speaks of a South Asian Lesbian and Gay Association (SALGA) member who stated that ““when we go to South Asian events we can’t take our gay selves”” (71). This speaks to the ways in which queerness and cultural identity are defined in “mutually exclusive ways” (71). Das Gupta quotes historian Nayan Shah’s analysis of South Asian heterosexists as saying ““South Asian heterosexists have often denied the authenticity of queer identified South Asians by labeling homosexual relationships a ‘white disease’ insinuating that our presence in the U.S. or Britain has ‘contaminated our minds and desires’...They perceive queer identities as a threat to the cultural integrity of South Asian immigrants”” (69). Das Gupta points out that this othering within the South Asian American community was clearly apparent when SALGA attempted to march in Manhattan’s India Day Parade between 1992 and 1999 (70). The gay and lesbian rights group’s attempts were rejected for seven years, in a rigid controlling of public perception of the Indian community. Das Gupta states that the average South Asian immigrant views homosexuality as a western phenomenon (69). According to this faulty line of reasoning, the queer immigrant learns to be so after corruption in the west, where they are exposed to “all kinds of ‘sexual proclivities’” (69)

Martin F. Manalansan's text *Global Divas: Filipino Gay Men in the Diaspora* speaks to the ways in which "new queer studies" are questioning the monolithic gay/lesbian cultures and point to the growth of alternative "sex and gender identities and practices" (8). These new studies expand and "trouble...seemingly stable borders" of gay and lesbian identity categories by illustrating the ways in which the queer individual moves in between "specific national locations," establishing a complex relationship to each other and to the state (8). Thus transnationalism can be a very important element of the queer subject for Manalansan's global divas. The queer theorist also speaks of home and belonging for his Filipino subjects, saying that they are continually caught in "shifting stages of here and there" (186). While Manalansan says that home is most often seen as a place of either "celebration or "extreme despair," however, for his subjects these beliefs are rather simplistic (186). For the Filipino gay men, home and their relationships to the biological family occupy a "persistent yet vexed place" in their lives (ibid).

Manalansan points out that migratory people are not just "cultural vagabonds who are unmoored to specific spaces and identities" (13). The Third World queer diasporic subject is confronted "with multiple displacements" and faced with "the monumental tasks of creating and refiguring home" (14). In *Global Divas*, Manalansan gives challenge to nationalistic urges to fold Filipino gay men into the American status quo. He states that while "nationhood is no longer the primary anchor for creating a sense of citizenship and belonging, the situation is far from a simple dismissal of the nation" (13).

Imperative to our analysis of the intersections of queer studies, diaspora, and cultural studies is Gayatri Gopinath's *Impossible Desires: Queer Diasporas and South Asian Public Cultures*. According to her analysis, diaspora studies emerged out of Black British cultural studies in the 1980s and 1990s, with the work of researchers like Paul Gilroy and Stuart Hall,

who shifted the idea of diaspora from its “traditional orientation toward homeland, exile, and return,” instead using it to reference what Hall calls “a conception of ‘identity’ which lives with and through, not despite difference; by hybridity” (Gopinath 6-7). Gopinath also speaks of “open” and “closed” diasporas in speaking of bhangra in the United Kingdom. She quotes Stuart Hall as saying that a “closed” notion of diaspora is one marked by a sense of “exile, displacement, and longing for lost homelands” (32). On the other hand, an “open” notion of diaspora is one where immigrant subjects “remak[e] themselves and fashion new kinds of cultural identity by drawing on more than one cultural repertoire” (32).

For Gopinath queerness envisions diaspora politics in new and interesting ways. She states that instead of longing for a frozen “imaginary homeland,” queer diasporic subjects see past time and place filled with “contradictions and the violences of multiple uprootings, displacements, and exiles” (4). She states that the queer diasporic text “reorients the traditionally backward-looking glance of diaspora” (3). Furthermore, Gopinath states “home is a vexed location where queer subjects whose very desires and subjectivities are formed by logic simultaneously labor to transform it” (15).

Chapter One of this dissertation will discuss interracial love relationships in film, as seen in the texts *Mississippi Masala* and *Bhaji on the Beach*. I will discuss beauty aesthetics that pit Black and South Asian women in a vexed relationship as seen in such documentaries as *Good Hair*. In both *Bhaji on the Beach* and *Mississippi Masala*, we see the policing of the brown woman, as bearer of the culture and the future generation of the South Asian nation. In *Bhaji on the Beach*, the notions of family duty and obligation are passed down from both Black and South Asian families, and in *Mississippi Masala* fetishization travels both ways, as Demitrius exoticizes Meena for her ties to a mythic Africa. In both films, intergenerational conflict

challenges the central love relationship and both parents and children alike have to heal and move beyond racialism to overcome their antagonisms.

Chapter Two will look at “Indo chic” in Black American party hip hop, which started in 2002 with an illegal sample from a Lata Mangeshkar song in the Dr. Dre-produced “Addictive”, and continues on today with artists like producer Timbaland on his March 2007 album entitled *Shock Value*. This chapter will elucidate the ways in which South Asianness is fetishized by Black populations in the diaspora. This use of South Asian samples follows Said’s discussion of the Orient as raw material for the west to take from freely, and also points to the vague and unspecific nature of the interest in areas such as India, as evidenced by the decidedly middle eastern aesthetics of the video for “Addictive”. I will discuss the figures of the “chickenhead” and video vixen in relation to the ways that Black women are sexualized in the hip hop community.

Chapter Three will highlight the often stereotypical ways in which Blacknesses are referenced by South Asians. This final chapter will look at Gautam Malkani’s *Londonstani*, a recent novel that delves into the interactions between the Black and South Asian cultures in the UK. In Malkani’s novel, aggressive heteronormativity is rampant, and the young South Asian rude boys tap into hip hop culture; their version of Blackness is a fossilized, stereotyped entity, a hypermasculine realm that ignores the irony that is present in Black American formulation of male identity. I will also look at Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samasasinha’s book of poetry *Consensual Genocide* using Black theorists such as bell hooks to illustrate the ways in which youth culture and relationship to the Black diaspora are integral elements of her work. For Piepzna-Samarasinha, queer identity, hip hop community, and struggle in a post-September 11 world meld in her particular blend of fierce femme aesthetics and yield a brand of poetics that is

not only heavily influenced by the Black-inflected spoken word art form, but also lies at the intersections of multiple communities and identities.

Chickenheads and “Arabic Chicks”: Disposable Women and the Indeterminate Asian in Twenty-
First Century Hip Hop

Starting in roughly 2002 and continuing for about five years, hip hop (a music category that has expanded to include rhythm and blues, or R&B) went through what scholars and cultural critics consider to be an Indocentric phase. In this period in hip hop culture there were several videos and songs that included samples from Indian popular cinema (known colloquially as Bollywood), Indo chic themes in the imagery of the videos, and rhymes of the rappers that alluded to a cultural exchange between South Asia and Black Americans. An analysis of the Indocentric craze must begin in the foundations of anti-racist feminist critique and through this we can discuss the concepts of racial veneering and triangulation. Through discussion of the lyrics and videos of the songs “Addictive,” “React,” and “Indian Flute” we can uncover the figure of the Black Orientalist and the fetishistic nature of hip hop Indocentrism; this will lead to a postulation that the real tastemakers in the hip hop industry are the largely white record label owners who rule over their artists in a possibly colonial relationship.

According to KRS-One, the legendary MC and “conscious”³ hip hop artist, “rap is something you do, Hip-Hop is something you live” (in Krims 10).

³ As I stated in a previous work, conscious hip hop has gone by many names in the past, from message rap to revolutionary hip hop to backpacker music, and the prospect of nailing down a precise definition is quite daunting. Many would define it as a less-commercial underground musical culture, where discussions of revolution, nation, and Black separatist politics are more often present than not (Gandhi 2007).

There has been much debate about what rap is and what hip hop is (and its alternate names, hip-hop and Hip Hop), but in present day criticism the term hip hop is used to describe both the larger culture and the music of rhyming over beats and samples. Rap music is one of the elements of hip hop culture “along with graffiti writing, break dancing, and deejaying” (Pough 4). Afrika Bambaataa claims the creation of the term “hip-hop”; he traces it “to Lovebug Starski, a South Bronx disc jockey” (Keyes 49). Bambaataa states that at Starski’s parties the DJ would say “hip hop you don’t stop that makes your body rock” (Keyes 49). “So I just coined a word myself hip-hop to name this type of culture, and then it caught on,” Bambaataa states (Keyes 49).

Rap or hip hop music is an art form that combines the lyrical styles of a rhyming MC and a DJ, or disc jockey, who mixes music and samples. Hip hop is considered to be “one of the most vital forms of popular music during the late twentieth century” (Keyes 1). The art form makes use of “rhyme, rhyming speech, and street vernacular, which is recited or loosely chanted over a musical sound track” (Keyes 1). Moreover, scholars of literature would be quick to notice elements of internal rhyme, masculine and feminine rhyme, word play, punning, and other poetic elements in some lyrically complex hip hop songs.

As rap music and hip hop culture entered into the mainstream, they started to become more accessible to those outside the originating community. In 1983 DJ Red Alert started a hip hop and dancehall radio show in New York on WRKS on Friday and Saturday nights (Asante 93). This newfound interest put the musical art form into the public domain; now people in the suburbs and around the New York area could listen to this new form of music and participate in the culture. Some theorists even criticize the mainstream for co-opting elements of the culture in a fetishistic manner. Gwendolyn D. Pough states that in “the early days of [hip hop] the DJ

reigned supreme, and soon DJs were called upon to play in posh disco clubs where most [hip hop] kids could not even get past the velvet ropes” (4).

However, even while hip hop music and culture was enjoying a meteoric rise in popularity it was being restricted by institutions of power such as the police and the courts, who deemed it unsuitable for sensitive (white and other non-Black) audiences.⁴ This policing of hip hop continues in the gangsta rap and obscenity debates of the early 1990s, when the group 2 Live Crew was deemed to be legally obscene in their album "As Nasty As They Want to Be" (Sharpley-Whiting 61). The song “Me So Horny” was challenged by Broward County, Florida in June, 1990, when lawyer Jim Thompson filed a lawsuit against the group for performing the song, despite the ban, at a concert (61). They were later released from any criminal charges. Another incident occurred in 2003 when Staten Island city councillor James Oddo refused to support Democratic Presidential candidate Howard Dean’s decision to commission a graffiti artist named Keo to create a mural for Manhattan’s Bryant Park (Kitwana 19). In a letter to Dean, Oddo stated, “Maybe in your world, graffiti vandals are artists...In New York City, and in the real world, they are criminals who destroy our quality of life”⁵ (19).

Many believe the first song of the recent Indocentric era to be that of an R&B artist named Truth Hurts who, along with rapper Rakim, came out with “Addictive” in 2002. It was an instant hit, and reached number two on the R&B and hip hop albums list on Billboard Magazine’s tracking systems. The video, available on Youtube.com, featured an all-Black cast of women dancers performing moves that, while they seemed South Asian in origin, mostly had

⁴ An example of this occurred on September 15th, 1983, when Michael Stewart, a graffiti writer in his mid-twenties, was arrested on a subway platform in New York City (Asante 93-4). While “in handcuffs, Stewart was beaten to death by two white NYPD officers” (94).

⁵ Debates about graffiti rage on, and even in Toronto Mayor Rob Ford aimed to eliminate much of the graffiti in the city, despite outcry from hip hop community members and art-lovers.

elements of Middle Eastern inflection and rhythm. For example, the dancers seem to be influenced by belly dancing, a dance form that is most commonly linked to Arab countries and not South Asia. Furthermore, the women wear colourful scarves with gold coins sewn all over them, with jeans underneath. This mish-mash of Arab, South Asian, and Western shows a relationship with South Asian culture that is confused in its underpinnings, in that the makers of the video take no care in learning about which culture that they are actually appropriating in the first place. The “Addictive” video and lyrics harken back to elements of the mystery and exoticism of the colonial harem: the swirling bodies of the women, the scarves, the walls bathed in warm light, the lamps, the lyrics about dealing drugs, being “addicted” and “speaking in tongues” all link the song and video text to Oriental otherness.

The video for “Addictive” starts out with Truth Hurts lying on a bed with her back to the camera; what is highlighted in this scene is her mehndied⁶, nude back which features the word “Truth” in curly, possibly Indian-themed writing. This scene is both an introduction to the artist (as this is her first single) and the “jam,” the hot new Indocentric style of music that will take the hip hop and R&B communities by storm. There is arguably more connection between Truth and the Indian communities that she samples her music from, and we can see this from the genesis of her name. She says in *Billboard* magazine, “A lot of people aren't allowed to be themselves, so they sell themselves short just to do a record. My album is totally opposite of that. *That's why Dre named me 'Truth [Hurts]'* and we went in the direction we did-everything is upfront, honest, and from the soul” (*Billboard* June 22, 2002, emphasis mine). This alarming incident of naming a woman who already has a name (Shari Watson) is not unlike the Hindu and Muslim practice of renaming women once they enter the marital household. That Truth’s name isn’t even her own,

⁶ Mehndi is known in the West as henna, and is applied to hands, arms, and feet in often-intricate designs.

and rather is that of some super-producer Svengali is merely indicative of the position that women hold in contemporary hip hop. In a sense, with the temporary mehndi marking on her back, Truth is branded with her new name and her new identity, one that supposedly is “upfront” and “honest”. But as most people know, even the most pure mehndi lasts two to three weeks at the most, so just as Shari easily became Truth, so too can her new identity wash off or fade away as time goes by.

The video is an Orientalist swirl of racially veneered Black women with impossibly long, flat-ironed hair⁷ who dance while gesturing with mehndied hands. This footage is interwoven in the video with that of Truth writhing on a bed covered with South Asian silks and satins, and also footage of her singing in front of a small pool of water ringed with candles and draped again in silks. The dancing in the video is a feminized gestural motif. None of the men in “Addictive” are moving their arms in swirling motions, or popping their hips, rather they are more interested in enjoying the splendor of the Oriental scene that is unfolding around them. The background scenery of the video is standard colonial nostalgia: Persian carpets, covered lanterns, silks on the walls, shadowed figures dancing in the doorways, and plenty of candles. What we have then is a classic case of Black Orientalist culture for the new millennium, and one that led to a string of Indocentric and Orientalist music and interest for the next five years.

The harem fantasy sequence is key to the Indocentric hip hop video, and leads to a survey of the roles the harem plays in western thought. In the “Addictive” video, the scenes with the veneered Black women take on a tinge of harem exoticism, inviting the (male) viewer into a garden of sexual delights, “exotic beings,” and otherness (Said 1). Hurts’ video taps into a

⁷ Elsewhere in this study I will discuss black hair politics and the use of hair weaves. As I will state in my analysis of *Consensual Genocide* the Western standards of beauty of long, straight hair do enter into our discussion of Black-South Asian interactions.

Western view of South Asia, one that includes “sensationalistic tales of ‘religious frenzy, fights between Hindus and Mohammedans, the deeds of masters of magic and the wealth of Indian princes’” (Mullen xiv). These images combined are seen as “a genie’s lamp of derogatory and distorting myth” by Bill Mullen, scholar of Black-Asian relations. (xiv). In discussing the harem scenes in this video and the others in similar videos, we can look to Meyda Yegenoglu’s *Colonial Fantasies: Towards a Feminist Reading of Orientalism* (1998). In it, the scholar outlines the role that the harem plays in the Western cultural imaginary, using such theorists as Edward Said and Homi K. Bhabha. In her discussion of the exoticized harem woman, she states that the “ambivalence and splitting of colonial discourse, reflected in its fetishistic mode of representation, can be illustrated in the conflictual way of pleasure and fear, strangeness and familiarity, recognition and refusal of difference are articulated” (28). Thus, the harem woman is recognizable, and at the same time strange and scary; this scariness has to be diffused in some way. Turning to Said, Yegenoglu focuses on his use of “the perspective of power/knowledge nexus”, suggesting this analysis could be extended to research beyond the traditional colonial periods. Indeed, academics have used Said’s research to develop an analysis of how Orientalist themes have played a part in all time periods, the contemporary included.

An important element of Yegenoglu’s research that will aid in our analysis of Indocentric hip hop videos is the use of the veil and veiling. To the theorist, the woman’s veil is not just a benign female garment, but rather, it is an item of clothing that is coded with many layers of meaning in the Western mind. Yegenoglu states that it is “one of those tropes through which western fantasies of penetration into the Orient and access to the interior of the other are fantasmatically [sic] achieved” (39). The theorist’s examples of this are rather interesting: during the Algerian war the French frustrations with the military actions of the Algerians lead to an

obsession with the unveiling of the Algerian woman (39). Therefore, for the French army, to conquer the Algerian woman was to conquer Algeria “the land, and the people themselves” (40). The veiled woman is both seen as exotic and feared at the same time because the colonial Other can look without being seen, and in a sense is almost invisible (63).

The veil erects a barrier “between the body of the Oriental woman and the Western gaze, the opaque, all-encompassing veil seems to place her body out of reach of the western gaze and desire” (39). Thus, the westerner is thwarted by the invisibility and ways that the veil obstructs his view of the fetishized Oriental woman, “this mysterious fantasmatic figure” (39). Yegenoglu finds “countless accounts and representations of the veil and the veiled woman in Western discourses, all made in an effort to reveal the hidden secrets of the Orient” (39). Yegenoglu’s theories are corroborated by present day debates to ban the burka and niqab in European countries and in Quebec show similar underpinnings, debates which purport to save the Oriental woman, but actually aim to unveil her. Therefore, the thirst to “penetrate the mysteries of the Orient and thereby to uncover hidden secrets (usually expressed in the desire to lift the veil and enter the forbidden space of the harem) is one of the constitutive tropes of Orientalist discourse” (Yegenoglu 73). The Westerner harbours an obsession with that which is “concealed” in Oriental life, and with the enigmatic woman and “the harem” in a drive to conquer what is the inner space of the Eastern milieu (73).

Sharma illustrates the stereotypes of South Asians that are present in hip hop cultures in her book, *Hip Hop Desis: South Asian Americans, Blackness, and Global Race Consciousness*. In it, she describes a “post-9/11 framework [that] enables us to examine American race relations within a global rather than nation-bound context;” she states that pop culture becomes a “lens through which to analyze such broad-scale movements and to enact change at local levels” (236).

Sharma follows the personal and professional triumphs of her subjects, who are South Asian Americans with a love for hip hop culture. In such sub-cultures, “a global scale can link Blacks to the hegemony of America” (253). What often happens in Indocentric hip hop is that “new racial projects lump together Middle Easterners, South Asians, and other “Muslim-looking” people as enemies as well as highlight their distinction from “Americans,” including Blacks” (235). Sharma is quite explicit on the topic of 9/11 and its effects on South Asians in the United States: “If desis were seen in a positive light in the 1990s, Americans’ conceptions of them changed drastically in the early 2000s. Post-9/11 discourses and images have solidified and realigned inter-minority race relations” (235).

“Addictive” is riddled with harem themes, and iconography that displaces “brown people from the United States by locating them in exotic and distant lands,” according to Sharma (246). From the dancing women to the baths to the “inner sanctuary” which doubles as a hip hop V.I.P. room, the music video is driven with the need to uncover the secret of the East, to uncover its “Truth”. These “depictions of poorly-translated Hindi, and harems in post-9/11 mainstream hip hop videos express American nationalism aligned with western imperial projects in the Middle East” (245). The video moves from the dancing video vixens and Truth writhing in her bed while speaking of her lover to the inner sanctum of the harem/ V.I.P. room. The lyrics, of course, are as sexualized as the images, as Truth sings “I like it rough,” and “My back is aching/ From our love-making”. While many R&B songs are very sexual, the tour of the East has given Truth and her producer and lyricist free reign to heighten the sexuality, as the East is a place commonly linked with rampant sensuality and eroticism. As the primary vixen in the harem, Truth has a central role in the video text, and the other vixens dance around her, enclosing her in colourful scarf walls; these scarves can be penetrated easily by the (male) viewer.

However Truth's central role is easily tossed to the wayside when Rakim enters the exotic scene. As with many western imaginings of the colonial harem, the veneered women wait prettily for the man who will set them afire, and this man is the very Western Rakim. With his feet planted firmly in traditional hip hop iconography, and wearing no elements of South Asian veneering, the respected rapper drops rhymes about dealing drugs and that "last big deal". As is standard in hip hop and R&B videos, in the visual landscape, the man is in the centre while the women drape themselves over the one rapping, as a way of bolstering his power in the scene. During Rakim's rhymes, Truth's backup dancers swirl around the old-school rapper, and women lean in while he speaks of a hyper-masculine world of "drug wars trips to jail and shootouts," as we discover on a lyrics website. In one final scene, Rakim and Truth are in the centre of the frame of the camera, yet Truth, whose song the video is promoting, is leaning in, back curved, her attention on the older hip hop performer. It's easy to see who is the focus of this scenario. Moreover, Rakim seems so uninterested in Indocentricism that his performance and identity aren't swayed by Orientalized belly dancing and scarves, although he seems to be voyeuristically enjoying the spectacle. He still remains his true American hip hop self, as is displayed in his leather jacket and baggy jeans. The minor reference to his brush with the east are the verses "We ball like we own the world/The only concern is you my only girl/ And when we speakin' in tongues/Breathin' hard when I'm squeezin' your lungs"; the phrase "speakin' in tongues" seems to be an awkward attempt to reference the Hindi sample in the song. The Orientalist elements exist around him but fail to veneer him, because of his Black masculine identity. Therefore, South Asianness can become an exciting new element in a track or song, without changing the identity of the male performer.

When hip hop videos had their inception, Black and other women didn't have the debased position of solely corporeal figures and objects of desire and lust that they do today. Early videos in the 1980s often were rather homosocial, as we can see in the case of "Paid in Full," with Eric B. and Rakim, in which most of the dancers are men, with a few children singing parts of the hook. Other songs, such as those of the immensely popular MC Hammer, feature women who are dancers, and who back up Hammer, performing the same moves that he does. They wear leggings and tight-fitting tops, which were popular street-clothing choices in the 1980s and 1990s. Sir Mix-A-Lot's "Baby Got Back" is an oft-cited example when analyzing gender and hip hop; this video is an ode to Black women's posteriors. However, despite the theme of the song, the lyrics contain much humour⁸, and again, the women are dancers, and, compared to the low standards set by present day videos, are relatively modestly clothed in shorts and halter tops. However, arguably, the format of the party video that we are familiar with in the contemporary moment, with "sick" samples and gyrating women in club-like atmospheres, started in 1992 with Wreckx-N-Effect's "Rump Shaker". Here we see all the standbys of commercial hip hop that we have come to expect: the women wear bikinis, the camera often focuses on their shaking asses, and one woman even gets suggestively doused with water.

The new formula of babes, bikinis, and beats has persisted, with slight variation, for the last eighteen years. In Notorious B.I.G.'s "Hypnotize" in 1996, the artist produced a video with an interesting espionage theme, but it was completed with bodacious mermaids and beguiling women in revealing cocktail dresses. The video also included, of course, his babydoll dress-wearing dancers. The formula of sexualized women in videos reached its pinnacle with Jay-Z's

⁸ While Sir Mix-a-Lot's song sounds initially demeaning, it seems to be a rant against the "waif" phenomenon in popular culture and the modeling industry; instead the artist celebrates what he sees to be the natural curves in a Black woman's body.

“Big Pimpin’”, a song in which he proudly states, “You know I - thug em, fuck em, love em, leave em/Cause I don’t fuckin need em/Take em out the hood, keep em lookin good/But I don’t fuckin feed em,” as the Original Hip Hop Lyrics Archive shares. The video is a playa’s paradise of video vixens, all of them cavorting on a large yacht, being showered with alcohol, sunbathing, and swimming in pools. Videos such as southern artist Mystikal’s offering “Shake Yo Ass” (2000) seem to turn the corner on representation of the young Black woman; the video was influenced by the orgy scene in Stanley Kubrick’s film *Eyes Wide Shut*. In the video, we see a plethora of bikini-clad women doing just what the hip hop artist has asked of them; they are violently shaking their asses, and often “grind,” or rubbing their behinds in a eroticized dance against the bodies of Mystikal and Pharrell, the singer and producer in the video⁹.

Recent videos that have exaggerated portrayals of Black and other women’s sexuality and have at times limited the women to physical assets include such offerings as Lil’ Wayne’s “Lollipop”. Set in the hyper-real playground of Las Vegas, the 2008 video features numerous curvaceous women, some of whom lie on beds of lollipops while the rapper sings “call me, so I can make it juicy for you,” and also claims that he’s met a woman who wants to perform fellatio on him in a club. Ludachris’ 2010 song called “Sex Room,” (featuring Trey Songz) also set in Las Vegas, features a similar formula of vixens with styled hair, heavy makeup, and revealing clothing, and the premise of the video is that the two men each spend a wild night with their multiple women, nights so wild that the women blank out the details. A more sinister reading is

⁹ Much ink has been spilled over Nelly’s 2003 “uncut” video called *Tipdrill*. An uncut video is one that featured softcore porn situations, nudity, and was played after hours on Black Entertainment Television (BET), and is therefore in a different genre than the ones named in this chapter. The video and song were immensely controversial, and featured Nelly chanting instead of rapping about a woman who wasn’t attractive to him, but was still someone that he wanted to bed. With lyrics like “I said it must be ya ass because it ain’t ya face, I need a tipdrill, I need a tipdrill” it was no wonder that Black feminists, the church, and members of the hip hop community were shocked and angered. Nelly’s video culminated in the rapper swiping a credit card through the exposed ass cheeks of a video vixen whose face we don’t see, all the while grinning happily.

that the women have been given a date rape drug that has erased their memories. Thus the recipe for commercial hip hop videos has only slightly changed in the last two decades, a fact that should be alarming to us as viewers and consumers of the genre.

The role of women in these videos has become increasingly disconcerting to the feminist critic. Call them video models, video vixens, video “hoes,” groupies, or even chickenheads, the women who dance and perform in the typical hip hop video play a pivotal role in the merchandizing of those albums, while reaping minimal profits. According to one documentary on video vixens, the standard “principal girl,” or woman who is prominently featured in the video, can make as much as \$1500 dollars a day (for a shoot that can last over twelve hours). However, an extra only banks as little as \$150 dollars a day for the same amount of work. When digesting figures like this, one must keep in mind that the rappers that they dance for in the videos make much, much more than they do, earning millions off these women’s bodies and coy smiles. Hip hopper and mogul Jay-Z listed as number 15 on the Forbes Celebrity List, earns \$63 million dollars U.S. a year. Sean (Diddy) Combs is a little lower at number 68 on the list, and earns \$30 million dollars U.S, while Dr. Dre recently became the first hip hop billionaire by selling his popular Beats by Dre technology company to Apple. These men make their hip hop franchises pandering to the heteronormative and capitalistic values that reign large in commercial hip hop today. In contemporary hip hop culture, it is rare to see a video that doesn’t have a vixen posing and dancing for the camera; these women are in essence the backbone of the culture, even though they get little respect or recognition. Vixens are featured in hip hop magazines, they sell clothing, and they of course sell the albums that artists produce. In fact, present day hip hop videos desperately need an ever-changing roster of stunning and curvaceous women to sell the

merchandise, namely the record. If an artist gets the right principal girl for his song, it can mean millions for him, while she reaps much less in money and prestige.

Some scholars have suggested that there is a direct link between sexual violence towards Black women and a collective “visual culture” that places Black female bodies on display as corporeal objects, there for the pleasure of all men (Sharpley-Whiting 81). This is the thesis of documentarian Aishah Simmons’ *NO! The Rape Documentary*. In it, she posits that commercial hip hop’s promise of the sexual availability of Black women invites a situation in which men can commit “physically exploitative acts” (Sharpley-Whiting 81). And the messages that hip hop videos transmit (the above videos included), can be alarming, even dangerous. Scholars like Sharpley-Whiting and Tricia Rose have spoken of the “playa-pimp-ho-bitch” framework that exists in current hip hop culture and videos. In such a culture, women can only be seen as hoes and bitches; either they are former or prospective conquests, or they are the annoying, trash-talking Sapphire. Also, while many hip hop videos and songs have adult content, they can enter into children’s culture quite easily through Top 40 radio stations. How does one explain the song “Lollipop” by Lil’ Wayne to a five year old, when the radio edit does little to shield the mature content from their ears¹⁰?

Elsewhere I have argued that Black women are placed in a divide and conquer situation, where some are praise-worthy queens and others are “ho’s” who need to be punished for their rampant sexuality (Gandhi 2007). The division of women into good and evil, pure and impure, has implications for the collective or nation, as well. When the woman is seen as the symbolic bearer of the nation, her chastity and sense of propriety are of the utmost importance, and thus the sexually promiscuous woman becomes the enemy, and the pure becomes the mother of the

¹⁰ I am by no means arguing for a mythic notion of childhood innocence, I just believe that certain songs and videos enter into children’s culture before they have the tools to understand what they mean.

nation. This split between favourable and unfavourable female sexuality is quite similar to the Madonna/whore binary. Whereas female fecundity and sexuality are highly prized in the mother of the nation, in the “unruly female” they are the highest form of disobedience and “[threaten] to discredit the nation” (Nagel 256). As Nagel states, “the right women needed to be sexually available to the right men”; when a woman is deemed to be excessively or inappropriately sexual she is punished or chastised by her community (256). The enemy woman is deemed to be sexually promiscuous and thus “legitimate targets of rape” or violence (257).

As Sharpley-Whiting discusses *Pimp’s Up, Ho’s Down: Hip Hop’s Hold on Young Black Women*, most hip hop feminists have little sympathy for the women associated with groupie culture, or the action of following around hip hop shows in order to sleep with rap stars, and the impossible dream of entering into a relationship with a big name performer. As the Sharpley-Whiting evocatively states

[lying] prostrate or on bended knees, Black groupies are an essential cog in the ‘playa-pimp-ho-bitch’ gearshift of hip hop culture. Like wet wipes, they are convenient and disposable. Indeed, our generation has witnessed the steady emergence of a hip hop groupie culture as a crucial part of the larger hip hop culture. Unfortunately, many of these young Black women see their version of “girls gone wild” as the fruit of women’s sexual liberation. (13-14)

And here hip hop and the men who make up the culture places women in varying categories “the ones you fuck” and “the ones you marry.” According to Tricia Rose:

[the] fiction of separation- the good girls over here/bad sisters over there- is one that some male rappers, fans, and other apologists use about Black women. This separation of Black women into good ones...[and]...the ones we have the “authority” to label and insult

is the primary means by which sexism and other forms of discrimination work. (Rose, The Hip Hop Wars 173)

As Rose argues, people in the hip hop community “divide women into groups that are worthy of protection and respect and those that are not” (119). Rose reminds the reader of other such binaries in U.S. culture “good Blacks and bad Blacks” and “model minorities and problem ones;” this should remind us of other vilifications that take place in popular culture. (Rose, The Hip Hop Wars 173).

Self-proclaimed hip hop feminists such as Joan Morgan spend much time breaking down the racial and sexual politics of rape, and yet when it comes to topics such as Black women’s sexuality, she proudly calls herself a “good black woman” (186). In doing so, she is clear to draw from a matrilineal heritage, and to speak of being “*professional*, driven, fiercely independent,” (emphasis mine) all the things that a groupie or “video ho” with her limited financial status would not be (186). In the last chapter in her book she speaks of being struck with “chickenhead envy,” or envy of a woman who is, like a chickenhead, disposable, discardable, and easily tossed aside (186).

As with other chapters in my work, nomenclature and naming can’t be approached innocently, but one must recognize how significant slang terms are to the cultures that create them. The online source *Urban Dictionary* has dozens of definitions for the name of chickenhead, all mostly pertaining to women, all derogatory. The least insulting refers to a chickenhead as “a female who likes giving head, bobbing up and down like a chicken”, and some of the worst call her “a dirty bitchhoe that will suck up every last drop like a chicken on feed...a party favour...everyone gets one...”. These definitions are written by hip hop fans and rated by fans also, so their link to the community is closer than that of a printed dictionary written by

professionals, who might be more subtle in their indictment of the woman deemed to be a chickenhead. Chickenheads perform a sexual service, but are not the one desired romantically, in the end, by the average Black male.

Morgan's rather confessional book speaks of a moment in her personal history when she has fallen for a man who was duped by a chickenhead (192). This chickenhead (she isn't dignified with a name, pseudonym or otherwise, she is just the "chickenhead") is not smart, or driven, or interesting. However, she is wily; she has the cunning to secretly get pregnant in order to snag Morgan's true love (194). How one secretly gets pregnant when reproductive responsibility is something that both parties in a casual heterosexual relationship should take seriously is something to be pondered, yet Morgan is adamant, despite her proclamations of a feminist background, that this woman has tricked her friend (194).

If a Black woman calls another Black woman a chickenhead she considers herself a more respectable female. Thus, Morgan may lament losing her love to a chickenhead, but she could never see herself as something similar, due to class and professional privilege. Of her own situation, Morgan states "And moi? Let's just say thoughts of my late mortgage, the new paint job my co-op could definitely stand, and the still-to-be-paid-for elite degree that was supposed to give me the keys to the world, temporarily clouded my vision" (197). She is quick (and quite happy) to point out that she possesses all the trappings of upward mobility, including a middle-class conscience. When tempted with the cash that a chickenhead lifestyle could bring in, the hip hop feminist states "I wouldn't do it forever, three and a half years would be plenty," which in her estimation was long enough to get the money to start a small business, or some other morally upstanding profession (197). Therefore, her possible chickenhead leanings are always for some greater good, a feminist business and financial freedom, while the actual chickenhead only does

so to latch on to a Black man and ruin his chances of happiness with someone more suited to his lifestyle and intellect.

The chickenhead figure must be beguiling to entrap these professional men: rap artists, ball players, business men. What does she offer? Well sex, yes, but also the power that comes with having a desirable, and desired woman on your arm. To be able to control female sexuality only heightens the respect of others and to have one or more chickenheads on call asserts that in the complex heterosexual mating dance, you hold the cards, and you follow the “love ‘em, leave ‘em” mantra that make up the first lines of Jay-Z’s iconic playa anthem. For the hip hop artists to see the women in their videos as chickenheads is to see them as disposable, unwanted, and only good for two things- their body and their sexual favours. When one body fails or is no longer desirable, she is easily tossed aside for a newer, younger chickenhead. This is indicated by a website claiming to celebrate video vixens that catalogues photos of the girls in which most of them are cut off at the head (<http://thelovepage.com/>).

To return to the Truth Hurts video, in light of the analysis of chickenheads and vixens, we might ask, why do these women racially veneer? Elsewhere in my dissertation I have spoken of the (myth) of the model minority. Fiction though it is, this belief in the upward mobility and good moral fabric of the South Asian community is well known in mainstream society. The model minority saves Truth and her dancers from being average vixens and “hoes”, or worse yet, chickenheads. Instead, for the space of three minutes and forty-seven seconds, they are something else, they are exotic, they are other, and they still desired. To be a chickenhead is to be desired and to be ultimately rejected, but to be a model minority veneered vixen is to change the power dynamics (though still for the male gaze, of course).

South Asian women are also associated with exoticism, excitement, and the thrill of difference. All of the veneering in “Addictive” places the Black women firmly in the East (though it is obviously a muddled version of it) and not in South Asian America, where there would be fewer bindies and more Western street wear. The average Desi westerner isn’t as decadent and erotic as their Orientalist glossing would have them to be; the everyday taxi driver or E.R. doctor or information technology professional or housewife shatters the myth of Oriental “despotism and sensuality” as outlined by Edward Said (102). The lived reality of the South Asian-American is obliterated, making Black people Americans and South Asians and South Asian culture the exotic foreign taste that they can bring to the forefront as a hot new element of cultural sampling.

One must be careful, however, when discussing such notions as authenticity and cultural appropriation; Nitasha Sharma's work allows us to reframe these concepts. Sharma calls authenticity “a beleaguered term,” saying that it is “so tied to dangerous notions and oppressive economic forces that some argue against it” (275). However, it is “a concept that frames Americans’ comprehensions: it is also a concept that people can choose to infuse with new meanings”. As John Jackson asks, ““what happens...when we think of race in terms of sincerity and not just authenticity” (quoted in Sharma 275).

Moreover, South Asians, in North America at least, are largely on the fringes of the cultural fabric in the media. There are few recognizable working actors in Hollywood, and only one show, *The Mindy Project*, to put a public face on the South Asian communities in the west. In terms of musicians and hip hop artists, there are a few underground artists in the Toronto scene, such as Sikh artist Humble the Poet and UNKNOWN MIZERY (AKA Brother Dalit). Therefore, for some veneering (as evidenced in some of the rudeboy characters in my chapter on

Londonstani) is a necessity, as South Asianness fundamentally isn't recognized in popular culture as interesting, tough, or cool.

In recent years, two women MCs, M.I.A. and Nicki Minaj, have become popular, a fact that has brought South Asians more into the mainstream. Yet, though Minaj is arguably one of the most popular hip hop or pop artists of 2012, there is little recognition or discussion of her South Asian heritage. Much popular discussion of her fixates on her curvaceous body in a way that is quite racialized. Furthermore, while M.I.A. (a U.K.-based MC whose birth name is Mathangi "Maya" Arulpragasam) does get some press recognition as a non-mainstream act, her punk-inflected brand of hip hop keeps her from superstar status, except for popular radio-play for "Paper Planes," her one hit song. It seems that female South Asian hip hop acts have more access to public approval than male stars because of the emphasis on a constrictive masculinity prevents recognition of Brown men as "hard" or "street".

In "React," another Indocentric hip hop song and video by Erick Sermon featuring Redman, we find a similar party atmosphere to the one in the Truth Hurts video, yet the elements of the East are presented with humour, mocking of the point of contact between Black and the South Asian cultures. In this video too we find veneered Black women and few, if any, genotypically South Asian individuals. The video depicts a wild party with Erick Sermon and Redman surrounded by attractive women who are lightly veneered because they wear bindis. One wears a scarf tied around her hips, and many of them dance in an Orientalist manner. Erick and Redman are clueless about what the veneered Black women are saying about them, and speech bubbles above the women's heads lend agency to the often powerless video vixen by having her say, in Hindi, to Erick "your hair is nappy" and "your jewelry is fake". Thus, by using a language that is not recognizable to the hip hop stars, the two powerful principals of the video,

the vixen is both admired by and yet at the same time insulting to the hip hop star, with a South Asian dialect. However, while this element of the video adds comedic effect and possible agency to the vixen, it erases the meaning and Indianness of the sample, by having erroneous English translation overlaid on it. The video director and hip hop stars are careless in their use of the Bollywood music, even allowing it to translate to something that it does not, something that might possibly be infuriating to the original artist.

The sample used in Sermon's "React" is roundly mocked by viewers in the South Asian community in the United States as being jarring and completely ill-placed in the song. Every time the hook plays, Sermon or Redman says after the female singer, "Whatever she said, then I'm that," without seeming to know or care that the Bollywood sample actually translates to say "if someone wants to commit suicide, so what can you do?", as we learn from a 2003 *Village Voice* article. In a *Village Voice* article on South Asian reactions to hip hop usage of such samples, interviewees such as Samir Bali comments: "If you're not Indian it sounds fine but I understand, and everyone I know thinks it sounds stupid."

Thus Bollywood and Indian culture seem to be used with little attention to cultural sensitivity or specificity. To use a sample from another language, but not bother to check its meaning for interest or cohesiveness, suggests that some artists and producers viewed Hindi simply as they would another instrument, used for their sound and melody, ignorant and careless of any meaning they might convey. Without regard for cultural specificity, the sample text then is accorded meaning by the artist for a largely oblivious Western audience.

This carelessness with Asian culture and people re-orders the racial hierarchy that occurs in hip hop culture. In some popular cultures in the US, Black people are on top in terms of mainstream interest, Latinos are lower (there were several key Latino artists in early hip hop

communities) while whites in hip hop are substantially lower and Asians and others like Arabs and First Nations people are at the bottom. In many hip hop communities in the West, South Asians are invisible, and possibly unwanted. This differs from the racial hierarchy that exists in other contexts in the West, such as business, education, and high fashion. It is quite difficult to find South Asian urban music artists, specifically in North America. The possible links to model minority ideology, and a largely upwardly mobile population makes some Asians in the hip hop community immediately suspect.

This lack of attention to the use of sample clearly indicates who the audience for “React” is supposed to be. When speaking of who seems to belong in the hip hop nation, South Asians in the West (particularly the United States) are unseen and unwanted. South Asian continental culture is prized as a raw material for sparking creativity, yet Black musicians appropriating the culture are not interested in intercultural communication. According to Sermon and his video and music producers, cultural specificity is irrelevant, while the quest for a hot song with an exotic twist is pressing. If South Asians had more cultural and political capital in the United States, the casual and careless conflation with the Middle East wouldn’t happen so easily, and jarring and ill-used samples likely wouldn’t occur. The “React” video features images of a camel parked outside the club like a car, and Sermon wants to “scoop up an Arabic chick before she close” (<http://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/ericksermon/react.html>). To the average fan of party hip hop who might be watching a video like “React,” a Bollywood sample, bindied women, and Saudi Arabia are easily one and the same.

The use of samples¹¹ is a key element of many hip hop songs. Sampling has garnered some criticism from conservative members of the music community, who seem to think that it is cultural theft, even though the earlier artist is usually paid for their work. However, most theorists of hip hop culture acknowledge that samples have a long musical history in both white Western and Black cultures. Cheney argues that DJs and producers assume “the role of historians, using those sonic files as primary sources to create a historical narrative and to introduce audiences to political figures of the past and present, or, they can assume the role of a cultural critic using music as a method to construct and deconstruct historical narratives” (Cheney 10). Hip hop theorists are more knowledgeable than many audiences about the use of samples, and do not see them as violation. When Dead Prez sample Chairman Omali Yeshitela, they do so in the hopes that their listeners will be turned on to African revolutionary politics; they also harken back to moments in collective memory of Black diasporic peoples. When George Clinton sampled James Brown in a significantly older generation of hip hop, he was signifyin’ on the history of Black musics and the “hot” jams that he probably heard in his parents’ home (Keyes 41). To quote one theorist, “Subcultures borrow from dominant culture, inflecting and inverting its signs to create a bricolage in which the signs of the dominant culture are “there” and just recognizable as such, but constituting a quite different, subversive whole” (in Krims 95). Krims calls this “signifyin’”, using Henry Louis Gates’ definition of the practice (95). Signifyin’ is “a central aspect of Black cultural production,” and is the process of “borrowing, ‘inflecting and inverting’ signs” of the (Eurocentric) culture (95). As well, many generations of hip hop artists have used the music that came before them to liven up their own songs. In early

¹¹ Samples are recorded music taken from older songs and remixed, layered, and altered when used in the current track.

hip hop, “disco and funk samples used...were often quicker than present day samples” (Krimms 56).

Moreover, sampling is far from a simplistic exercise. As Bill Stephney points out:

These kids will have six tracks of drum programs all at the same time. This is where sampling gets kind of crazy. You may get a kid who puts a kick from one record on one track, a kick from another record on another track, a Linn kick on a third track, and a TR 808 kick on a fourth- all to make one kick!” (in Rose, Black Noise 79)

Looking at the way that music is learned, practiced, and produced, the value of sampling to hip hop and Black musical arts is clear. Sampling allows the DJ or hip hop artist to break down the older track into its basic components, to see it from the outside in, and to learn more about the making of music itself. Daddy-O, a rap producer, says this about the hands on education he’s gained from sampling “...I don’t know how they made those old funk and soul records. We don’t know how they miked the drums. But we can learn from their records” (Rose Black Noise 79).

According to hip hop scholar Tricia Rose, though some use sampling is careless, poorly thought out, or “uncreative,” more often “sampling, not unlike versioning practices in Caribbean musics, is about paying homage, an invocation of another’s voice to help you say what you want to say” (Rose, Black Noise 79). It is also a form of “musical and cultural archeology,” a way of looking back into history (79). Rapper Michael T. Miller, describes hip hop as a “vehicle for telling history,” and moreover for the history that isn’t in American history books (Potter 116). For example, in the 1980s, the “central histories at stake [are] the worsening situation in cities under Reagan’s funding cuts, crime, drugs, police brutality, and U.S. militarism abroad- but they also extend backwards through the years of hope and frustration in the ‘60’s and ‘70s... back to the experience of slavery and the Middle Passage” (Potter 116).

Of course, questions about just what history the song tells arise, or what sort of an education the listener of party hip hop and R&B in particular is getting. Some recent songs sample work from just a few years prior, and the young listener of the track may not know that the source song is really contemporary also. Some of R & B singer Ashanti's songs used samples from Notorious BIG, an immensely popular deceased rapper. Another well-known artist, Jay-Z, has been sampled over a hundred times by younger artists. One artist, Onyx, even went as far as to mouth Jay-Z's own words from the older artist's 2009 song "Brooklyn Go Hard" in "Black Hoodie Rap"; Onyx created this song only a year later after Jay-Z produced his own track. In sampling Jay-Z, Onyx is not only paying homage to Jay-Z's artistry, but he is also reaping the power and privilege that the celebrated artist claims.

Younger listeners are often ignorant of the source of the "hot" beat, and so are unaware that the signification on a signification is occurring, and thus have no incentive to go back to either source. Thus, sampling does not always gesture toward a collective history and promote progressive politics. It also depends on where the listening of the song occurs. If a song is heard in a club it is reduced down to bare beats and hook, and comes with no liner notes. The casual listener of hip hop music might only hear songs in such venues, and have little interest in the multiple layers of meaning that the artist is trying to place in their work.

Moreover, the typical party song certainly is "dumbed down" in fact, Rose argues that this dumbing down has had a "profound effect on lyrics, within which complexity can be challenging for listeners" (Rose, The Hip Hop Wars 270). According to Tricia Rose, many talented lyricists have been told to simplify their rhymes, and to make them "less metaphorically sophisticated" if they are to sell records (270). Lupe Fiasco is one such artist; he even wrote an extremely lyrically complex song to deal with the situation, called "Dumb it Down" (270).

And while hip hop academics largely support sampling, those who are being sampled often aren't quite so laudatory (Cheney 10). "Some musicians have argued that it is downright cultural theft. Others, like Abiodun Oyewole of the pioneering spoken word ensemble the Last Poets, object to its signifying capabilities" (10). Oyewole was highly critical of the use of samples of his work by West Coast gangsta rap group N.W.A. (Niggaz With Attitude), because he felt that the meaning of his original piece was being distorted (10). Jazz great Wynton Marsalis has been highly critical of hip hop culture, for various reasons (Sharpley-Whiting 7). Certainly the practice is controversial.

Thus far we have spoken of the history and theory behind hip hop sampling with regards to its sampling of Black cultural history. What are the implications of Bollywood samples in a hip hop track? Bollywood and Eastern inflection in the early part of the twenty-first century were trendy. From the dancehall "Diwali" riddim (a beat that many dancehall artists used in their songs) to the songs mentioned earlier, Bollywood and Indian culture experienced a popularity that was carefully mediated and packaged for the record-buying public. However, the sampling has no resonance for artists and audiences for whom the culture and the specific material has no resonance. Many of the samples used, such as the Lata Mangeshkar sample in "Addictive" or the Meena Kapoor one in "React" are not recent; the Mangeshkar sample, from a 1981 song entitled "Thoda Resham Lagta Hai", was produced by the renowned Indian composer Bappy Lahiri, while the Kapoor sample was recorded in 1963. This would lead one to believe that hip hop still places an importance on history and the action of "digging in the crates"¹², even if those crates are from another continent. But the average listener of either of these songs has no memory of

¹² This refers to the action of looking through piles of old vinyl records in the search for a hidden treasure. Rappers and DJs have long been enamoured with this process. There was even a hip hop crew in New York named The Digging in the Crates Crew, which included such rappers as Fat Joe, and the late Big L.

the samples, thus charging the cultural exchange. The VH1 article quotes one Indian musician in calling such sampling “cultural imperialism,” and many were displeased with the final product.

The consumer of these songs and videos with genuine connection to the finished song, the samples, and the intersectional project is the diasporic South Asian hip hop fan. They have been brought up in a Western culture, where hip hop has become a dominant art form, and they may have nostalgic and sentimental memories of old Bollywood material, or, at the very least, recognize it. Yet when it comes to the problematic politics and generic location that occurs in such hip hop songs, that very audience is disappointed by the dominant popular culture. Hoping for solidarity, instead they find themselves exoticized and even insulted by other people of colour.

Moreover, many diasporic South Asians have a very complex and at times painful relationship to the Indian subcontinent, and so to see Orientalist or Black Orientalist culture be so easily consumed can be a bitter pill to swallow. For South Asian hip hop fans, the cultural sharing is not as easy as the swapping of hip hop culture for Desi beats.

Furthermore, not only do Black American hip hop artists fetishize the East and its peoples, they also at times procure samples in less-than-ethical ways, leading to legal nightmares for the producers and record companies of the veneering songs. In the case of the Truth Hurts song, VH1 online reports that the sample wasn't paid for when it was taken from its owner, Calcutta's Saregama India Limited. The Indian music company sued Interscope, Truth's record company, for more than \$500 million over the use of an “unlicensed sample” on the song “Addictive”, according to the article. Also named in the lawsuit were the album's producer, Dr. Dre, and his label Aftermath Records.

“Addictive” was found to use a sample from a popular classic Hindi language movie by musician Lata Mangeshkar, who many call “the songbird of India.” Mangeshkar is a prolific artist and has recorded numerous songs over a decades-long career, and comes from a musical family that includes her sister Asha Bhosle. According to the attorney Dedra S. Davis, as quoted in the VH1 article, no permission was given by the copyright holder, and “the hook, melody and rhythm were also lifted” from the original song. “When you hear it, it's like, 'Oh my God, they didn't even try to get original with it,' " she said. "[They didn't] try to change it up or anything like that". Thus we can note the problematics in interactions between the two diasporas; the Black hip hop artists and producers may have liked the Bollywood tracks as a raw material, but they didn't see the seriousness of copying and stealing a sample from a very famous musician from the East. The producer of the track, DJ Quik, tells this story about how he stumbled on the sample:

"I woke up one morning, ... I turned on the TV and landed on this Hindi channel and just turned it up real loud. There was a commercial on, and I just got up and went into the bathroom and started brushing my teeth. ... Before I knew it, I was grooving. ... [The beat on the TV] was just in my body. I went back in there and looked at the TV — there was a girl on there belly dancing, just like real fly. So I pushed record on the VCR".

The presumption that people of colour approach inter-cultural interactions with more sensitivity and appreciation is an idea that needs to be looked at more critically. The hip hop mainstream can be “complicit with state-sanctioned and everyday forms of racism that portray South Asians as foreign others and Blacks as a native-born/devalued group” (Sharma 235). Hip hop becomes “an arena in which their inter-group relations play out in collaborative and divisive ways” (235). South Asian samples may simply be “foreign-sounding music” and these musics may be seen

as an “unidentifiable sonic lump that can be sampled, pillaged, borrowed, appropriated, or plagiarized” (Sharma 250). As Bill Mullen states of Orientalists, “the Orientalist makes it his work to be always converting the Orient from something else: he does this for himself, for the sake of his culture, in some cases for what he believes in the sake of the Oriental” (xiii).

The court case was finally resolved in early February of 2004, when the court stated that Indian composer Bappi Lahiri's name had to be added to stickers on all CDs and albums of Truth Hurts' work, to credit his role in the song, a February, 2003 VH1.com article on Truth Hurts tells us. In the case of the song “Addictive”, as seen on azlyrics.com, the Indian copyright holders, Saregama India Ltd, were said to be upset with Rakim's use of the word “fuck,” and some of Truth Hurts' sexually suggestive lyrics, such as “He makes me scream”. These lyrics in the song were said to go against some Indians' “cultural and religious sensibilities,” a VH1 online interview reports. However, as with other discussions and debates that occur in the Indian public sphere, the nomenclature of “Indian” becomes a monolith, and often a very conservative one. Do all Indians take offense to the lyrics of an American R & B singer, or are they more concerned with the more pressing matters of drought, corruption, communal antagonism, and other numerous issues?

Nitasha Sharma highlights another layer of complexity in the Lahiri sample case. Sharma indicates that “many desis know Lahiri as the Indian producer who, without giving credit, remakes songs that turn into hits” (251). Sharma quotes journalist Jeet Thayil in *India Abroad*: “Most observers in the music business find it interesting that Lahiri, who has been accused of lifting hit songs from all over the world and making Hindi versions of them, has now taken an American producer to court for exactly the same deed” (251).

Bollywood is mostly unfamiliar to their audience, unlike the more traditional sample. Many of the songs analyzed fetishize the sample within the song, and use the sample as an escapist jaunt through the larger Orient. Despite hip hop's attempts to bridge cultures, many of the artists have reductive and even insulting views of the East. As one of Sharma's subjects, hip hop artist Chee, states "If you want to build on anything, you have to appreciate [it]. That's where it goes back to sampling, you have to understand the time frame, when it was recorded, why it was recorded, what was going on socially" (277).

In 2003, Super-producer Timbaland and his rap partner Magoo came out with "Indian Flute," a song that contains the elements we have been discussing, such as racial veneering. The video shows writhing women surrounding the male rappers, and also features Indian male musicians. It seems to stress authenticity, as most of the women in the video are South Asian, and the rappers even attempt to speak Hindi to their desired principal women. The video opens with a shot of the historic monument, the Taj Mahal, suggesting that the hip hop artists have journeyed to India to have their sexualized romp. A rather demurely dressed South Asian woman emerges writhing, cobra like, out of a large pot while an Indian man plays a flute, coaxing her out of hiding. She then enters the harem scene and whispers sweet Hindi nothings into the ears of Timbaland, Magoo, and Sebastian respectively. The women in this scene are dressed rather scantily, and the background is, incongruously, replete with ancient statues and a Hindu temple-like atmosphere, odd since the Taj Mahal is a Muslim edifice.

There are several venerated Black women in the video, but they are in the minority, and they don't appear to be principal vixens. It is possible that they are placed within the video to establish familiarity with the video watching public who might be unable to connect with an all-South Asian cast, and yet there are so few that they are easily missed, and they look out of place

in a mostly South Asian harem. The male hip hop artists veneer themselves by speaking Hindi to the desired South Asian vixen. They are not, however, thereby immersing themselves in South Asian culture as the Black women in the video are, but rather they go back and forth between the two cultures. The song didn't catch on with mainstream hip hop audiences, as it only peaked at number 73 on the Billboard R & B charts in 2003.

Not only do the rap artists speak Hindi at various instances in the song, but in one clip in the video, Timbaland makes up-and-down swirling motions with his hands, possibly meant to be Indocentric. Magoo, too, later performs some dance moves that seem to be influenced by the Eastern elements of the song. This is in stark contrast to the song "Addictive", in which Rakim exudes a very Western essence, and other than a few rhymes enjoys the Orient but is not transformed by it. "Indian Flute" was an unsuccessful track, for several reasons, including poorly thought out samples, uninteresting rhymes, and a mediocre hook. The parts that are sung by the hip hop stars appear to take on an Eastern element, possibly confusing the audience with the sing-songy, and stereotypical, snakecharmer's flute melody, that isn't "hip hop" at all.

Indian music has entered the Western cultural consciousness at several times in the twentieth century. In the 1960s and 1970s, Indian music, spirituality, and culture came to the United States and United Kingdom, starting with the spreading of Transcendental Meditation through Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, who at one time counted the Beatles as his followers (Lavezzoli 6). Writers like Alan Ginsberg and Jack Kerouac tapped into the mysticism of Buddhism in their writing, and Ravi Shankar and Ali Akbar Khan were embraced as classical musicians by the Western musical establishment (6). During the counterculture movements of the 1960s music by artists such as Shankar provided a soundtrack to partying and the consumption of psychedelics, a link that he quickly denounced (6).

When the Beatles released Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band in the summer of 1967, the album was hailed as a masterpiece. The album included "Within You, Without You" a song performed almost entirely on Indian instruments, with George Harrison on sitar (7). Harrison, who had been introduced to Ravi Shankar's music by members of The Byrds, had taken lessons with the sitar master (7). Later in the summer of 1967, Ravi Shankar, with Ustad Alla Rakha on tabla, took the Monterey Pop Festival by storm, as the lone performers in a Sunday afternoon slot (7). Shankar won a Grammy later that year, with his *West Meets East* album, with Yehudi Menuhin.

John Coltrane's similarly showed a connection to Eastern musical cultures. "Some of Coltrane's pieces, like "India," were direct musical and spiritual references, but the real link between Coltrane's approach to improvisation and Indian classical music, rather than chord changes" (Lavezzoli 10).

Indian cultures and musics entered into the cultural imaginary yet again, several decades later. One reason why Indocentrism entered into hip hop in the early twenty-first century, has, yet again, to do with racial triangulation. In the 1990s, two of the most influential white women in Western popular culture, Gwen Stefani of the ska/pop band No Doubt, and Madonna, suddenly became influenced by the East, and more particularly, India. After No Doubt broke onto the music scene in 1995, their lead singer Gwen, sported bindis and midriff-baring tops, and melded punk-grrrl light with Desi elements. Her journey to the East culminated in 2006, when very pregnant she wore brightly coloured shiny tunic dresses, and her pictures appeared in People magazine with the caption "East meets West". Another pop queen who briefly dabbled in Hinduism and South Asian culture is Madonna, whose Ray of Light album was greatly

influenced by Eastern mysticism and incorporated such cultural artistry as mehndi¹³ hand designs, and even shlokas¹⁴ from Hindu texts into her work. However, though her interest seemed earnest (if brief), many Hindus were displeased by this white woman's interpretation of Hindu culture. When Madonna appeared on MTV's Video Music Awards to perform her "Shanti Ashtangi" along with "Ray of Light"- in which she writhed around to the guitar-playing of Lenny Kravitz- The World Vaishnava Association, a Hindu religious organization, issued a press release, still found on their website, criticizing the singer for mixing "Eastern Mysticism with Western Hedonism"¹⁵

It seems that hip hop artists were introduced to Orientalism, by way of western culture through the interest shown by other western artists. Like DJ Quik, Timbaland was influenced by Hindi music through satellite television. Though Timbaland and DJ Quik (of "Addictive" fame) watched Indian television for their source material, their confusion about the East and its inhabitants, and the Orientalist flavour of the videos and lyrics of these songs suggests that they glean their information from white Western mythology about India and the East, and not an "authentic" source, as they claim. The old discourses of sensuality and splendor are difficult to dispel.

Furthermore, India is always an ancient culture (Bhabha 1994), and never a new and modern one. In the world of binary oppositions, Western hip hop culture is considered current,

¹³ With the double influence of Madonna and Gwen Stefani, mehndi hand designs in North America became a fashion fad, but disappeared from the cultural radar within a year or so.

¹⁴ Shlokas are religious verses from Hindu holy books. In "Shanti Ashtangi," Madonna sings Sanskrit shlokas set to an electronic beat.

¹⁵ It is arguable that the singer is judged all the more harshly due to her outsider status, and the fact that she is not South Asian in ethnicity. South Asians have been mixing Eastern and Western influences for decades. We might recall all the Bollywood films that mix East and West, filming in Europe or North America. Also, the practice of Tantric sex, which is spiritual and sexual at the same time, is a strong example of the two elements of human experience being linked in one practice. South Asians have been mixing the sacred and the sexual, and the East and West, but perhaps this is unforgivable in a white American artist.

contemporary, and “hip,” while South Asian culture is steeped in traditional values and roles and religions. There is no reference to India as an Information Technology capital of the world, or a booming economy, but rather American hip hop artists choose to see South Asia, and more specifically India, as a place of “haunting memories and landscapes” (Said 1).

Furthermore, there has been a long history in western culture of white audiences only accepting other cultures when they are presented by a westerner. Would a South Asian hip hop artist have gotten on as many playlists as the Black hip hop performers who are acting as mediators and screening the west’s view of South Asia?¹⁶

Moreover, the East is seen to invigorate the West and hip hop, through its exoticism and sensuality, which infuses party hip hop with “hotness”. The sensual exoticism of the East has long enlivened the West, however, as Said reminds us. The continual discussion of the “death” of hip hop, and the retirements and returns of such stars as Jay-Z suggest the genre’s search for renewal. Even Timbaland in 2003 www.mtv.com interview, discussed retirement, saying “I wanna be selective. I wanna be like [Dr.] Dre — very selective. Right now hip-hop's very boring to me”. Thus his use of Indo-beats and “tour of South Asia” videos may have been an attempt to revive or resuscitate a dying genre, but this approach to inspiration in creating new urban music also comes from a white Western background, and so we can see how the white, Black, and South Asian tangled in a mesh of mis-representation, desire, and commerce.

The latter element, commerce, is key. The uniformly exotic, sensual and decadent video vixens are a consumer product, valued as such by Black hip hop artists, and also the white owners and CEOs of the record labels that they work for. To see the East as mono-cultural (and that is always Hindu, and readily sexually available) creates a video version of sex tourism for

¹⁶ Though it must be said that M.I.A is quite popular now, however much of her first album had little South Asian music in it, and she only hit the mainstream with one song off her second album entitled “Paper Planes”.

the mostly white, middle class buyers of the CDs. It is easy to see South Asia in this way, instead of complex, varied, and both ancient and modern at the same time.

There is a distinct racial hierarchy in the rap world. Many of those in power are men, and they are white men who are divorced from Black urban communities or cultures, but are rather just good businessmen. There is a racial glass ceiling in the rap world; although many talented artists own a label imprint, none command the power that comes with owning or operating one of the large companies. Asante illustrates this in his discussion of meetings with such men;

... I found myself, along with my producing partner, in robust Manhattan high-rises with fancy elevators and views that were surreal, meeting with executives from record labels, cable channels, and radio stations who were “into the whole rap thing.” Old white man after old white man, blazer after blazer, gray head after gray head, and striped tie after striped tie, I was shocked to discover that hip hop’s decision makers weren’t hip hop at all. I quickly came to the realization that hip hop, this urban Black creation, was something that urban Blacks (or even just [Blacks]) didn’t control at all...These meetings symbolized how perhaps African-America’s richest cultural capital is outside of African-American hands. (103)

To Asante, the real power in the hip hop community lies in the hands of rich, older white men. These men, however, are not the face of hip hop, and so we come to the sinister element of the hip hop industry. While consumers might think that they are purchasing into a mostly Black musical culture, in fact, the real taste-makers of the industry are typical suburban white consumers.

The white record owners and label execs are marketing dangerous and illicit Black gender norms and selling them to their figurative white suburban sons. This is a representation at

least partially crafted by white record company owners, and something that Black artists are complicit in perpetuating. From this music, white young men enjoy the thrill of danger, but one that is highly mediated by a white powerbroker. A stylized form of Black inner city life, essentially, is being filtered through white record owners and sold to the masses. The product is titillating because it is so far from reality of those who purchase or download the music.

The economics of “the rap game,” makes it commercial and consumable a genre, like so many other Black musics created in situations of struggle. As Asante states, “Never has one people created so much music and been so woefully kept in the dark about the economic consequences of their labour and talent by their intellectuals and politicians” (105). While hip hop began as an expression of Black life and struggles against racism, the current culture of party hip hop divorces the genre from its roots. Urban poet Saul Williams, whose particular style of conscious spoken word has garnered him a faithful following, comments on the lost foundations of hip hop”:

“So what is hip hop? Well, with Public Enemy and KRS-One, hip hop became the language of youth rebellion. But now, commercial hip hop is not youth rebellion, not when the heroes of hip hop like Puffy are taking pictures with Donald Trump and the heroes of capitalism-you know that’s not rebellion. That’s not ‘the street’- that’s Wall Street”. (Asante 10)

So while hip hop has had a beginning that was linked to the street and the community, today’s most popular tracks are completely divorced from their realities. As Asante records that some hip hop artists and others in the business speak of “the pressure they get from white people to prove they are ‘really [Black]’” (28), a Blackness based on stereotypes and limited exposure to Black people on the media. Early hip hop fed into white paranoia, reinforced stereotypes, and often

made life difficult for middle-class Black people who had little to do with the ghetto life hip hop portrayed.

The effects of ghetto living are similar to those of colonization; the etymology of the word “ghetto” is suggestive in this regard. Asante records that “[linguists] trace it back to the Italian words ‘getto’ (to cast off) and ‘borghetto’ (small neighbourhood)” (34). The word may also come from the Venetian slang ‘gheto,’ the Griko ‘ghettonia’ (neighbourhood), and the Hebrew word ‘ghet’ (bill of divorce) (34). When speaking of the inhabitants of ghettos, Asante quotes Norman Kelly in “The Political Economy of Black Music” who says

Blacks in inner cities, if not as an aggregate, share some of the classic characteristics of a colony: lower per capita income; high birth rate; high infant mortality rate;...weak middle class; low rate of capital formation and domestic savings; economic dependence on external markets; labour as a major export; a tremendous demand for commodities produced by the colony but consumed by wealthier nations; [and] most of the land and business are owned by foreigners (113).

Moreover, much of small enterprise in the ghettos of the West, after “the flight or destruction of viable [Black] businesses” are ones “whose primary goal is to capitalize on [Black] poverty” (45). Cheque cashing businesses “exploit low-wage earners unable to afford a bank account and who need quick money,” pawn shops prey on those who need to liquidate their assets (45). Fast food restaurants offer up grease and poor health; liquor stores capitalize on the hopelessness of poverty (45).

Hip hop started from urban street culture, and was a mode of documentation of such lives by the men and women who recorded songs, performed graffiti art, and mixed music. Chuck D’s oft-quoted statement that hip hop is “the Black CNN” suggests the salience of the genre to Black

urban life. As many hip hop artists say, “rap is from the streets. If you don’t know what’s going on out there, you can’t do rap. You can live in Beverly Hills, but your heart has to be in the streets” (Keyes 5). The necessity of being “from the streets” has been seen as critical for much of hip hop’s history (Keyes 5). In fact, “Male rap artists romanticize the ghetto as the fertile root of cultural identity and racial authenticity, asserting that knowledge of ghetto styles and sensibilities provides a Rorschach test of legitimate male masculinity,” according to Michael Eric Dyson (in Cheney 12). As Bakari Kitwana states in his study on race and hip hop, “hip hop has been so thoroughly associated with young Blacks and the urban ghetto that it is difficult (though not impossible) to divorce it from Black American youth” (156). Yet, however ghetto culture is valorized, its roots are both heterosexist and “purposefully masculine” (Cheney 12). The hip hop nation is conservative in some of its beliefs; for example, concerning sexuality, the disciplining of wanton women, and heterosexual relationships.

Artists starting out, and certain subgenres of hip hop (such as gangsta, crunk, and conscious hip hop), set their videos in the hood, and seek popularity thereby with non-Black audiences. Well-respected director Kevin Bray was once asked what the most important elements of a music video were, and he replied “Posse, posse, and posse....They’ll say, ‘I want my shit to be hood, yeah, we got this dope old parking lot where I used to hang out when I was a kid.’” (Rose, Black Noise 10). However, familiar the setting may be to the artists, this visual and aural representation of ghetto life affects whites and other non-Blacks as well. Many scholars are highly critical of the consumption of rap by white suburban youth; South Asian and other youth consume it as well. For those with a higher class background, tales of guns, police, and jail comprises a voyeuristic carnival, but are a reality that can always easily be pushed aside for respectability when corporate North America comes calling.

Many consumers of hip hop are so divorced from the environment in which it is produced that they can only be considered casual listeners, with little interest in the roots of the culture. Casual fans differ from members of "hip hop nation". Those who are hip hop nationals make an effort to go to live shows, and not just the ones in suburban stadiums. They seek out new and unsigned artists and rub shoulders with musicians, DJs, and urban poets when taking in these shows. Now that hip hop is easily accessible on Internet, it has gone global. However, most of its new fans, no matter how knowledgeable, have little connection to "the street" that gave birth to it. Justin D. Ross speaks poignantly of his experience in a suburban town as a teen "listening to the latest rap music that glorifies violence, peddles racist stereotypes and portrays women as little more than animals" (in Rose, The Hip Hop Wars 223). Ross states "we look through the keyhole into a violent, sexy world of 'money, ho's and clothes' ...excited to be transported to a place where people brag about gunplay, use racial epithets continually and talk freely about dealing drugs" (in Rose, The Hip Hop Wars 233). However, this gritty reality can be casually viewed, and then (white) hip hop fans then can turn off "whatever we're listening to and return to our comfy world in time for dinner" (in Rose, The Hip Hop Wars 233).

The hip hop nation is actually, in some areas, a very segregated one. In urban centres, crowds at shows might be mixed or mostly black; however some "larger-venue concerts [take place] in mostly white suburbs" (Rose, The Hip Hop Wars 233). According to Tricia Rose, hip hop "is firmly at the epicenter of youth culture" (Rose, The Hip Hop Wars 233). As Rose states, it "is conceivable now to be a white fan of hip hop artists and tales of ghetto life but who has little or no contact with Black people and knows very little about Black life and history" (Rose, The Hip Hop Wars 233). Rose discusses the consumption of a cultural product with little knowledge of its roots, or what life would be like for the artist who is spitting the rhymes.

Moreover, forgotten by listeners are the notions of play, irony, and performance that are often present in hip hop, even by the artists claiming to represent “the street”. As with any autobiographical text, there is always editing; does the artist keep in the rhymes where he’s playing with his baby girl, or the ones where he’s speaking about dealing drugs? It is easy to see which verse would sell more records to an audience that only sees the playa/thug/pimp, and not a multi-dimensional being. Furthermore, as with any genre, convention and style are important in hip hop. The conventional representations of Black heterosexual masculinity in hip hop culture require a certain persona, and anyone who strays outside of these boundaries is rigidly policed. This occurred with Cee-Lo of The Geto Boys, who has been dogged by rumours of homosexuality for years. The nature of his sexuality is not the question; rather he is categorized and critiqued for being gay because he has a softer voice and flow¹⁷.

The limited view of human expression in mainstream hip hop is audiences around the world see and at times emulate, unaware it does not represent the full range of masculine behaviour in Black cultures. Gone from the mainstream charts are songs by homo hop artists¹⁸, many women, and much conscious rap. Ironically, the mainstream rap world has much more in common with conservative political groups who threaten sexual freedom and homosexuals with boycotts and bans. The limited and subjugated roles of women and the dominance of men in mainstream rap produce a simple view of interpersonal dynamics, uncomplicated by feminism, and other threats to the masculine order. The world of the rap video is a hedonistic dream for

¹⁷ However, despite the threats of reprimand for straying from the Black masculine ideal found in hip hop, some have found a way to forge a new and interesting view of what it is to be a Black man. Andre 3000, of Outkast has a stylishness that borders on fashionisto, wearing everything from hot pink to satin. Also, Kanye West was taken to task for wearing light pink, but he continued to put fashion before traditional gender roles, and refused to be reprimanded by a homophobic hip hop community.

¹⁸ Homo hop is a genre of hip hop that celebrates queer life and cultures. Alex Hinton’s 2006 documentary, *Pick Up the Mic*, explores and investigates the lives of several queer rappers. The word “homo” is used rather than the term gay or queer, as these are seen to represent white queer life.

most male viewers, filled with guns, girls, and cars; it is pure escapism, and yet these representations have a concrete effect on the Black communities and on artists such as women and queer rappers who attempt to break into the industry.

Rap videos also affect the lives and ideas about race and class of South Asian viewers. Many share the difficult lives depicted in street rap.

We weren't all the children of doctors and engineers. Whether we grew up in minority neighborhoods or not, or had previously experienced the type of overt racism that is an every-day struggle for many Black and Brown people, the anti-establishment tones of hip-hop opened our eyes. (Nair and Balaji viii)

These young men and women might live in ghettos and so hearing about ghetto life re-affirms their identity and experiences. They too might struggle for work, have the legal and policing systems a constant presence in their lives, and wrestle with poverty. However, middle-class and wealthy South Asians who mimic ghetto life and styles perform acts of cultural appropriation just as do white audiences. Here we might think of the character Samir in Mike Judge's film *Office Space* (1999), who voraciously consumes hardcore rap, but is terrified when a Black man approaches his car asking for change. For some like him, "[all] this fascination with hip hop is just a cultural safari..." (in Kitwana 53). The sight of younger hip hop fans listening to Tupac Shakur to relax between classes at an elite university, unaware of the poverty that might be invisible in their own communities, and while preparing for a privileged life is an example of the ironies and contradictions that surround hip hop and mute its intentions.

Much of Kitwana's criticism regarding white interest in hip hop can easily be applied to South Asians in the West. He recalls that many initially were attracted to the "progressive and radical messages of Public Enemy, Poor Righteous Teachers, X-Clan and KRS-One" (27). In the

heyday of hip hop (the 1980s and 1990s), it was easy to find political rap, at a time when other music was devoid of political messages. For those who wanted to learn while they listened, or, as in the case of South Asians, were coming to grips with their own racialization in an often rejecting country, hearing an artist like KRS-One collapse the word “officer” into “overseer” in his hit song “Sound of da Police” was more helpful than the most articulate high theory. Furthermore, to any youth in North America or Europe who wants to comprehend race politics and oppression, conscious hip hop was and is an excellent way to learn from organic intellectuals. Moreover, according to Kitwana, “[hip hop’s] innate inclusiveness also made it attractive. For many white kids who got into hip hop during this period, being down with [hip hop] was as much a political statement as it was an alternative musical choice” (27). Says one of Kitwana’s interviewees, Kyle Stewart, 41,

“When [hip hop] made its way out west,... I made what I felt was a natural progression into [hip hop]. Like punk, [hip hop] was counterculture. It gave youth a voice to tell the truth and exposed the ills of society, especially racism and our hypocritical government. Also, the beats were infectious”. (26-27)

Therefore, hip hop has historically been seen as a more radical musical culture, and at times a progression from punk rock or other political musics.

However, interest in hip hop and Black cultures is something that is donned at will for non-Blacks, and this fact angers some. As Melvin Donaldson states, it’s hard to “argue what an individual is feeling, but an argument can be made about young white [hip hop] kids putting on a guise” (148). He continues, regarding appropriation, and the investment that some have in the hip hop and Black communities:

With blackface you can take it off. White [hip hop] kids can turn their caps around, put a belt in their pants and go to the mall without being followed. Black people have to deal with oppression, but also character types that the [hip hop] industry has created with the music by continuing the thug and gangsta stereotypes about [Blacks]. White [hip hop] kids can pick and choose without repercussions and the full weight of racial stereotypes (148).

Although someone might like the culture and the music, they are not stigmatized by the image that hip hop projects, and are not racialized in the way that Black fans are. A white or South Asian fan of the musical genre may be invested in hip hop culture, but they can easily remove the veneer when they choose, Blacks in America, of course, cannot.

Moreover, the interest and desire for Blackness is neither discussed nor analyzed by non-Blacks who say that they love hip hop. In one television segment where conservative pundit Bill O'Reilly and Simon Cowell of American Idol discuss the phenomena of Eminem, Cowell states emphatically, to O'Reilly's surprise, that Eminem is a genius (Kitwana 13). When asked why, he responded that "He's somebody who understood that white boys want to be [Black] and exploited that fact" (13). Cultural critic Greg Tate (and other contributors to his book, *Everything But the Burden: What White People are Taking from Black Culture*) is just as harsh in his discussion of white participation in Black cultural production. Tate writes of one of "the most particular outgrowths of hip-hop's popularity," namely "the birth of the 'wigger'" (Tate 8). According to Tate, a wigger is someone who acts hip hop "in dress, speech, body language, and, in some cases, even gang affiliation" (8). Reception of the wigger ranges from seeing it as a "comical form of flattery...or as an up-to-date form of minstrelsy" (8). Tate's view of white participation in Black cultures is fairly condemning; he states in his introduction that whites

“have always tried to erase the Black presence from whatever Black thing they took a shine to: jazz, blues, rock and roll, doo-wop, swing dancing, cornrowing,... you name it” (2-3).

Cultural critic Carl Hancock Rux outlines the Eminem phenomenon and the politics behind the white rapper’s popularity in his article “Eminem: The New White Negro”:

He has proven to the oppressed that he is not one of us, but he is down for us, - and he has proven to the oppressor that he is not one of them, but he is the product of their extreme idea of “us”- and by virtue of neutralizing the nebulous medium, Eminem *becomes* us with supernatural powers beyond us. Ultimately, he *replaces* us, paying homage to an old abstract idea” (Rux 28).

Although hip hop fans who are not Black might be fascinated by the culture, they often are unable to explain their attraction, or their desire for difference and the Other. As Marcyliena Morgan states, “to say you love [hip hop] is to say you love [Black] things. People need to interrogate why they don’t want to say they love [Blackness]” (Kitwana 152). Greg Tate proposed an alternate way of thinking of this sentiment, when quoting Roger Guenveur Smith: “why does everyone love Black music but nobody loves Black people?” (Tate 4). The culture of gangstas, hos, and cars is alluring and dangerous, and for an upwardly mobile white or South Asian youth, it is in effect a class suicide. These hip hop kids willfully turn away from the privilege that their parents hand to them, and don oppression with ease, even though it makes their lives more difficult. For these fans the choice to engage in the culture is also a rejection of the life-plan that is laid out for them, and the stresses of elite schools, exams, and trappings that come with being a model minority child. Hip hop is a salvation, and an easy way to create distance between the generations.

Furthermore, according to Nitasha Sharma, some of her South Asian subjects were possessive of outright racist views of Blacks:

In the event that they wanted privately to refer to a Black person in their presence, they would refer to him or her as *Kalu*, an uncomplimentary alteration of the Hindi term for *kala*, for “black”-potentially the equivalent for “nigger,” depending on the context” (241).

Some mainstream Brown people “adopt essentialized and negative ideas of Blacks that inform their own masculinity, violence, and sexuality” (240). In a sense, Black cultures are mined for meaning while black people themselves are insulted, ignored, or invisible to mainstream South Asians. According to Sharma, some mainstream and materialistic South Asians love hip hop for the “‘wrapping’ (the latest fads in designer wear and jewelry) than the ‘rapping’ (the messages of hip hop)” (238-239).

In a discussion of hip hop Orientalism and the Indocentric rap craze that started roughly in 2002 (and continues on today in the work of such artists as Timbaland), we have learned of the flawed racial veneering in such songs and videos as Addictive, React, and Indian Flute. Racial triangulation is also something that plays heavily in the interactions between Black rap artists and South Asian “raw” musical product, as in some senses, the music produced may have been influenced by white female pop stars, and is very definitely vetted by powerful white record label and radio station owners. In this interaction, the one who is often silenced is the video vixen (and she often goes by much harsher names); she is the one who is used up for her physical assets and discarded once she is no longer useful.

“The World is Not So Quick to Change”: Interracial Desire and Racial Triangulation in

Mississippi Masala and *Bhaji on the Beach*

In our race-obsessed western society, interracial romances and sexual encounters are at once titillating and unacceptable. When looking for representations of Black and South Asian couples in popular culture, the examples are few and far between¹⁹. This could possibly be because of North American and British confusion at such a relationship even taking place, and yet these relationships are occurring in Western societies with increasing frequency. By looking at the two films *Bhaji on the Beach* and *Mississippi Masala*, we can outline the difficulties and animosities that occur between these two ethnic groups, issues that are heightened when love enters the discussion. As always, white culture plays a key part in the analysis; Black and white relationships are the most discussed form of interracial desire, and by using the history and interpretation of these alliances we can glean information about fetishization and desire on the part of white normativity. While aiming to focus on the couples themselves in the two films, we cannot turn away from other relationships that enter into the frame, be they family or community

¹⁹ When speaking of interracial desire between Black and South Asian communities, the figure of the dougla is of note; this term is used in Caribbean communities to describe the children of Black-South Asian couples. Described in Shalini Puri's *The Caribbean Postcolonial*, the word originated in Hindi, and has several meanings including “bastard”. M. Nourbese Phillip's *Coups and Calypsos* explores the failed relationship between a South Asian man and his Afro-Caribbean ex-wife, and the impossibility of their bond in the highly segregated racial communities of Trinidad and Tobago. However, several scholars are reconfiguring the negative connotation of the identity formation with the concept of dougla poetics (Puri 1999; Mehta 2009; Reddock 1999). In Shalini Puri's estimation, dougla poetics “could provide a vocabulary for disallowed racial identities...[and] could offer ways... of reframing questions of black-Indian party politics and of race and gender relations” (Puri 32). Puri sees dougla poetics as a “potential site of collision of classifications, for negotiations over the dougla's racial “value” and a place in a racially hierarchized society, and for disruptions of notions of racial purity” (Puri 32).

bonds or a love for one's country; these auxiliary relationships play a significant role in the viability of Black and South Asian desire.

In order to speak of interracial desire, we must speak of the restrictions that have historically been placed on men and women regarding who they love and marry; these were seen even recently in the United States and South Africa with anti-miscegenation laws. In *Interracial Intimacy: The Regulation of Race and Romance*, Rachel Moran writes: “[from] colonial time until the mid-1900s, antimiscegenation laws banning interracial sex and marriage were a common feature of state law” (4). Though the statutes criminalized interracial sexual and romantic interactions, “penal sanctions served different functions at different times” (4). In “the colonial era, white indentured servants often worked in close proximity to Black slaves, so that intermixing was bound to occur” (4).

In creating a body of legislation against interracial desire and marriage, U. S. state governments were “building a normative hierarchy of sexual and marital practices” (75). Moran's discussion of middle class culture states that, “[just] as the laws reinforced the racial superiority of whites, they placed their middle-class aspirations for love and marriage at the pinnacle of respectability” (75). Moreover, these laws “sent a clear message that some members of the population could not be trusted to make responsible decisions about sex and marriage” (5).

During the late 1800s and early 1900s, for instance, urbanization broke down traditional means of regulating sexuality in small rural communities. Newcomers, both immigrant and Black, flocked to the cities, and white elites feared the collapse of social decency in the resulting hubbub. (5)

This quote not only highlights a subtle classism at the heart of some anti-miscegenation laws, but it also points to the rigid enforcing of cultural standards on love and sex, in the face of a rapidly changing demographic.

The establishment of a one-drop rule “mandated that any person with a trace of African ancestry was [Black]” (4). Though, with this rule firmly in place, official antimiscegenation laws continued to be followed “despite efforts to dismantle racial inequalities in public life”. It must be noted though, that despite the one drop rule and the laws on the books against sex and marriage between the races, such relationships continued to occur. Thus, self-appointed vigilante groups delivered swift and terrible punishment to Black men suspected of consorting with white women. The Ku Klux Klan formed at about this time, and it sometimes lynched freedmen prominent in Reconstruction politics under the guise of retribution for the mistreatment of white women. (27)

Here we can note that even in a time that involved the political equality of Blacks in the South, racist white members of society wanted it to be known that this would not be followed with social equality in the form of acceptance of more intimate liaisons.

Herein lies the paradox: to be given the vote and other elements of political equality during the Reconstruction era but to be told that Black people cannot and should not expect to be treated as equals. Thus we can note the problematics of the Reconstruction era, an irony that could be expanded out to other time periods: “[officials] were quick to distinguish between “political” equality, which related to formal access to the governmental process, and “social” equality, which related to informal relations among neighbors, friends, and family” (77). The Reconstruction attempted to enable Blacks to vote, hold political office, and serve on juries, “but

it did not necessarily try to promote ‘race mixing’ through interracial neighborhoods, friendships, and families” (77).

The implicit belief that white women were and are delicate is tied in to this view of racial mixing, along with the belief that they are in need of protection from lecherous Black men. The belief in the weakness and weak will of white women signals a sexism on the part of white men, and a lack of understanding that these women should be given agency in their own sexual interactions, without white male domination.

Furthermore, whenever individuals contested “racial and sexual boundaries,” antimiscegenation laws gave people “a way to assert the propriety of same-race sex and marriage” (75). Thus a value judgment was placed upon the act of transgressed racial lines in sex and romance, and “the law signaled the debauched and depraved nature of those who crossed the [colour] line” (75). Thus interracial desire meant that one’s reputation and livelihood would be ruined; there was little room in the equation for romantic feelings and sentimentality (75). Moran speaks of the importance of antimiscegenation legislation in the following passage:

Antimiscegenation laws were designed to establish racial boundaries, contain ambiguity, and preserve sexual decency. When racial identities and sexual norms were in flux, the statutes were challenged, but they survived substantially intact until the 1960s. In upholding the laws, courts revealed the shifting significance of race, sex, and marriage. Race gradually became transformed from a genetic hierarchy to a biological irrelevancy. (76)

It was in the 1960s that the laws against interracial intimacies began to be repealed. In 1967, Chief Justice Earl Warren presided over a court that unanimously held in *Loving v. Virginia* “that antimiscegenation laws unconstitutionally discriminated on the basis of race in violation of equal

protection and that they interfered with the fundamental right to marry under the due process clause” (6). Intrinsic to Warren’s opinion were two important and separate themes: “a commitment to racial equality and a commitment to marital autonomy” (6).

Though one would believe the American South to be the most likely to cling to antimiscegenation laws and beliefs- and the South was the place where these laws were “enacted first...and abandoned last,”- it was actually in the western states that such laws became the most detailed (17). According to Moran, “[in] the late nineteenth century, western legislators built a labyrinthine system of legal prohibitions on marriages between whites and Chinese, Japanese, Filipinos, Hawaiians, Hindus, and Native Americans, as well as on marriages between whites and [Blacks]” (17). It was in the western United States that immigration by Asians led to laws forbidding marriage between them and white inhabitants of this part of the country.

This brings us to a discussion of the notion of colour consciousness as compared to the idea of being colour blind. As Moran states, believers of colour consciousness “argue that the color line still exists and cannot be ignored” (2). For these Americans, the utopia of colour blindness “has been betrayed by centuries of segregation and discrimination” (2). While some in the West believe that race should be “irrelevant to sex, marriage, and family in a color blind society, others contend that race correlates with cultural heritage and social contacts in a country in which housing, education, and employment remain highly segregated” (99). Moreover, not all racialized peoples wish to live a colour blind existence, as race pride, and a relationship to one’s roots and culture are quite important to some. While some parents might feel it important to align themselves with white majority culture, this white-washing often backfires with youth and children who are thirsty for connection to roots and ancestors. Therefore, colour blindness should not always be an ultimate goal for all. Moreover, to accept colour consciousness in intimate

relationships might be a way of respecting the “importance of historical discrimination, persistent racial division, and distinctive cultural practices” (99).

Moran quotes Michael Omi and Howard Winant on the topic of race in western culture: One of the first things we notice about people when we meet them (along with their sex) is their race. We utilize race to provide clues about who a person is. The fact is made painfully obvious when we encounter someone whom we cannot conveniently racially categorize- someone who is, for example, racially “mixed.”...Such an encounter becomes a source of discomfort and momentarily a crisis of racial meaning. (157)

Thus Omi and Winant highlight the importance of race to contemporary North American culture. People who cannot easily be categorized in one racial group or the Other are often deemed suspect, as majority society often puzzles to try and determine the genotype of the ambiguous person.

When people are mis-recognized as a different race, the act of passing becomes an important element of discussion. Passing is when an individual of one race allows others to believe that they are of another background, usually that they are white. Passing “became a way for some [Blacks] to circumvent the color line without directly challenging it” (47). The concept of passing is a very controversial topic, with much criticism lying in the belief that passing allows some to gain privilege without the entire racial grouping gaining that same privilege. According to Moran, Blacks “used an ambiguous phenotype to integrate into white society and evade a genotypical definition of race. Yet those who passed never disabused whites of their beliefs about how [Blacks] looked and acted” (47). To do so would be to lay oneself bare to possible attacks, and for someone in a vulnerable social position this incredibly risky. Thus, the passing person did little to “demonstrate to white colleagues that [Blacks] were in fact

competent” (47). Moreover, neither did passers who married white people “change their spouses’ minds about the lovability of people classified as nonwhite and inferior...passing offered no means for collective improvement of the [Black] condition” with relation to white supremacy (47).

In 1991, a Gallup poll in the United States showed that more Americans approve of interracial marriage than were against it (Moran 112). However, this belief does not follow with actual shifts in marriage practices between the races in North America (112). Also, between 1982 and 1990, 70% of interracial Black and white marriages were between a Black man and a white woman (104). Nitasha Tamar Sharma found a similar gender balance in her research of interracial Black and South Asian couplings in her text, *Hip Hop Desis: South Asian Americans, Blackness, and a Global Race Consciousness*. Choosing a partner outside the race particularly within Black communities, is often criticized because some people feel that searching outside the race for a partner is an act of disloyalty, and a willful forgetting of past wrongs and injustices.

In *Interracial Intimacies: Sex, Marriage, Identity, and Adoption*, Randall Kennedy outlines the camps in Black communities with respect to interracial relationships, and this discussion can possibly apply to all such relationships, and not just Black-white ones. According to Kennedy, the first camp sees such choices “as a positive good that decreases social segregation; encourages racial open-mindedness; increases [Blacks’] access to enriching social networks; [and] elevates their status” (109). The second camp is “agnostic,” and sees such alliances simply as a private choice that individuals should have the right to make. Cornel West, for example, after noting that ‘more and more White Americans are willing to interact sexually with [Black] Americans on an equal basis,’ has maintained that he himself ‘view[s] this [development] as neither cause for celebration nor reason for lament.’” (104)

It should be noted that West himself is in an interracial marriage, and thus has an investment in the belief in the possibility of an egalitarian relationship between Blacks and whites. We also see an attempt to normalize Black-white relationships, to not see the union as a Civil Rights cause for celebration or a traitorous act on the part of Black and white parties alike. Alternately, arguments of Black women who criticize Black men for dating white and other women follow the belief that “successful [Blacks] must, in all fairness, “give back” to [the] community” (119). The easiest way for them to do so is “to make themselves available personally, as spouses, to other [Blacks]. Given the plummeting marriage rate within African American communities, some even contend that this is an essential act of solidarity” (119).

As Kennedy states, in some recent studies it was found that only a small portion of Black men marry interracially; in 1999, the figure was 7% (120). This might be considered to be a small amount; however, it is still seen by those who argue against interracial alliances as cause for alarm “given the relative paucity of marriageable [Black] men as a consequence of poverty, imprisonment, and other factors” (120). Thus some Black women feel themselves to be losing a portion of the eligible partners who are otherwise engaged with relationships with women of other races (120). The lack of prospective partners in the Black communities is supported by some American studies; in 1992 researchers found “that for every three [Black] unmarried women in their twenties, there was only one unmarried [Black] man whose earnings rose above the poverty level” (120).

In some discussions of interracial desire between Blacks and white, what causes concern for some is “the burden of the past- the feeling that certain brutal facts of history should dissuade African American men and women from entering into an intimate relationship with whites” (118). According to Kennedy, the painful history of the rape and assault of Black women during

Antebellum times and after are a keen reminder of the necessity for the separation of the races (118). I would also add that the lack of accountability for racist actions throughout history, the inability to apologize for the legacy of slavery and crippling racial stereotypes of Black communities have created in some a hesitation for intimate contact. Will an intimate partner really fully understand the weight of history that comes with being a member of a social grouping largely seen as inferior? This mistrust trickles down to relationships with other racialized peoples, especially those who are seen to be more privileged in the way that some South Asians are.

Kennedy recounts the belief “or fear” of Black women that many Black men “believed, first, that white women were relatively more desirable than [Black] women, and second, that [Black] women themselves were downright *unattractive*” (116; 116). Kennedy quotes Mary A. Dowell from a 1969 issue of *Ebony* who offers this harsh and forthright statement on the situation as she sees it:

“Let’s just lay all the phony excuses aside and get down to the true nitty, nitty NITTY-GRITTY and tell it like it really is. Black males hate [Black] women just because they are [Black]. The So-Called Civil Rights Act was really this: ‘I want a white woman because she’s white and not only hate but don’t want a [Black] woman because she’s [Black]’...The whole world knows this”. (116)

Dowdell is speaking to the post-Civil Rights world as she knows it, a world in which a level playing field has made her less attractive, less interesting, and white women infinitely more sought-after.

Frantz Fanon is even harsher on the topic of interracial desire in *Black Skin, White Masks*. In it, he defines situation of Black men and women who desire white partners, as a desire for

whiteness. In discussing one novelist's analysis of sexual desire, Fanon writes, "She had been recognized through her overcompensating behavior. She was no longer the woman who wanted to be white; she was white. She was joining the white world" (58). Here, we can see the theorist's connections between the desire for a white partner and the longing to be white. This representation of the white-washed Black person is a complicated one, and one that needs to be looked at critically. Is there some essential Blackness that makes one an upstanding member of the Black community? These essentialized views of what it is to be a Black person make it difficult for any sort of difference or variation in personality or cultural interest. And just as one joins the white world, we might ask if one can join the South Asian world as easily when in a relationship with a South Asian person.

Fanon's candid discussion of race politics and desire when it comes to white and Black relations could just as easily be applied to brown and Black peoples, due to racial veneering. In discussing the homosociality that is inherent in some such situations of interracial desire, Fanon states, "It is essential that some white man say to him, 'Take my sister.'" (68). Thus, the interest in a sexual and romantic relationship with a white woman transfers into a masculinist bonding moment between a Black and white man. Similarly, in the case of brown men and women who are entering into Black cultures, this search for a relationship might possibly start with an acceptance by peers of the same gender who validate their longing for a sexual partner.

By looking at the writing of Frantz Fanon we can develop a critical framework for an integrated analysis of interracial desire between the triangulated races. In Fanon's discussion of his relationship to whiteness, white culture figures as a woman, interestingly. Fanon states, "I marry white culture, white beauty, white whiteness. When my restless hands caress those breasts they grasp white civilization and dignity, and make them mine" (63). To claim a woman as

whiteness, and a *temptress* at that, is nothing new, yet Fanon is quite bold in his exclamations of desire for whiteness. To him white civilization comes with it other, seemingly incongruous relationships. White civilization is related to beauty, culture, dignity, to everything that we think to be good and noble in polite western societies. To Fanon, his relationship to whiteness is a marriage, one that allows his “restless hands” to “caress those breasts” (63). Therefore, whiteness is also a life-giving entity, a mother, and a wife to him. Yet, Fanon’s claims to make white culture his by force speak to his position as a man from the Antilles who now lives in France.

In the same passage, Fanon speaks of his longing for whiteness quite eloquently, stating:
Out of the [Blackest] part of my soul, across the zebra striping of my mind, surges this desire to be suddenly *white*.

I wish to be acknowledged not as [*Black*] but as *white*.

Now-and this is the form of recognition that Hegel had not envisaged- who but a white woman can do this for me? By loving me she proves that I am worthy of white love. I am loved like a white man.

I am a white man. (63)

This legendary passage in anti-colonial literary history depicts the longing of a Black man for whiteness as like the lust for a white female partner. To speak so candidly about his relationship to whiteness is a brave endeavor; in this passage Fanon is highlighting the longing for white culture that is sexualized into a longing for white bodies, thus making him want to see himself as a white man. Black and white mix and mingle in a confused interplay, as Fanon seizes the love of a white woman and through it makes himself white too. It is a shifting of races that racial veneering cannot even begin to cover, as the longing and nostalgia that a Black subject brings to his experience of white culture is quite different than the situation of veneering. Fanon wants to

be *worthy and accepted* by whiteness, to be enveloped into the white society that his created him but not fully welcomed him as its child.

Fanon's interracial longings, though they may seem specific to Black and white cultures and relationships, can also be related to South Asian and Black desires, or at least partially so. The relationship that Fanon has to majority white culture and his thirst to embed himself into it forcefully can be seen in some South Asians' longings towards Black cultures. However, while Fanon views white culture as a tempting white woman, in our analysis, Black cultures are often seen as a streetwise, hip hop identified Black man. Thus the longing for an intimate relationship and the desire to embed oneself in Black cultures become one, as the South Asian thirsts for acceptance and welcome.

When configuring the emblem of the Black nation as male one might ask if the relationship between the desiring South Asian subject and the Black nation to which they want to gain is a homosocial or homoerotic one. Just as Fanon eroticizes his encounter with the white-nation-as-white-woman, so too do South Asian males find their relationship to Blackness an eroticized encounter with the Black male body. A response from one of Sharma's study subjects makes this apparent. One particularly candid informant named Rajiv, an apolitical University of California Berkeley student, spoke of his lack of attraction to Black women thus:

But we want the physical typing. We want to maintain the Indian goodie-goodie, academics, but we want to have that too. The view is to have the best of both worlds. But in terms of Kalu²⁰ women, the majority of us actually don't find them too attractive... I actually find white women more attractive than kalu women...Our whole connection to the kalu culture is through the men, y'know? (160-161)

²⁰ Kalu is a term for Black people; it is sometimes considered a racial slur.

Here Rajiv speaks not only of homosociality that rejects the importance of Black women to the culture of brown men, but he is also highlighting Western beauty aesthetics that make those with white or white-seeming features more appealing than others. In this equation, Black women are rejected as unattractive while, oddly, Black men are celebrated for their superior masculine power, despite the fact that their skin colour may be similar. Apparently, at least to this subject, a woman's worth is not only physical, but also measured by her relation to whiteness. Sharma attempts to break down the desire that can ripple between Blacks and South Asians. Sharma does so by interviewing her subjects, some of whom are in such interracial relationships; however when looking beyond *Hip Hop Desi*, we have to use research in interracial intimacies, research that ignores South Asian and Black couplings, and extrapolate to the films and subject matter at hand. According to Sharma, ethnicity isn't an "internally cohesive identity and a positive reaction to immigrants' exclusion from mainstream America" (39). The subjects that she studied turn away from both an "ethno-national identity" and from an "assimilated mainstream White identity" (39). These youth might identify strongly with their national background; however, "they nonetheless feel constrained by their elders who define 'real' or authentic ethnic expressions and norms" (40). This is true of the subjects of my research also; second generation South Asians and Blacks often find that they don't fit into the roles that their parents set out in terms of cultural behavior. Tradition becomes a loaded word, and younger diasporics struggle against those who insist on traditional behavior, not recognizing that culture and tradition are living things that change with each generation and over time. As Sharma says,

[part] of the critical distance of hip hop desis stems from not fitting into such hegemonic conceptions; yet even those artists who *do* fit in the parameters- who are North Indian,

middle class, and upper caste- are sometimes critical of ethnic parochialism and chauvinism. (40)

Bhaji on the Beach (called *Bhaji* herein) is a British feature film directed by Gurinder Chadha, and written by Chadha and her writing partner, Meera Syal, of *Goodness Gracious Me* fame. The film was released in 1998 and was well received by its British viewers. *Bhaji* tells the story of an intergenerational group of Asian²¹ British women, as they take a trip to Blackpool, a seaside town, for the day. The group includes everyone from a judgmental and conservative-minded senior to a young battered mother to a young student who has just that day found out that she is pregnant. The movie takes up issues that Asian women face in the diaspora; it recognizes that these women interact with multiple races in their daily lives, while dealing with gendered oppression at the same time.

The opening scene illustrates clearly some of the tensions that the film will work through; Indian grocery and corner shop owners in traditional Indian clothing settle into a new day's work while neo-Nazi skinheads spray-paint shops that are still shuttered. The daily newspaper being dropped off for sale delivers grim news of racial strife. Here we have writ small the race, class, and gender issues that the film will take on. The shopkeepers, at least in this scene, outnumber the white youth who is defacing the closed shop, though the powerlessness of the Asians in the face of white supremacy is quite poignant. This film highlights the triangulated relations between Black, white, and Asian quite clearly, as the Indian-origin protagonists deal with majority culture and other people of colour with whom they have to forge relations, despite mistrust and xenophobia.

²¹ When referring to *Bhaji on the Beach*, because it takes place in Britain, I will be using the term Asian to refer to South Asians. The term Asian is used most frequently in Britain to refer to people of the South Asian diaspora.

A focal point for analysis is the romantic relationship between Hashida, played by Sarita Khajuria, and Oliver, played by Mo Sesay. The Asian woman and Black man have been in a secret relationship for a year when Hashida discovers that she is pregnant, on the eve of starting medical school. While Hashida seems more interested in her sketchings of Oliver and her trips to art museums, her parents are enthused at the thought of having a young doctor daughter. When her father proudly states, “She’s *my* daughter, the first doctor in the family!” he illustrates both the emphasis on upward mobility in British Asian families that prevents an artistic daughter from expressing her potential in other arenas than the sciences, and also parental pride in the daughter who makes possible entry into the professional class, which affords a hope of security. In Hashida and Oliver we have an unusual pairing in film, and that is the Black and Asian romantic couple.

Concerning British race politics Sharma writes: “African, Caribbean, and South Asian former British subjects came together as ‘Blacks’ in England... ; this unity began to fracture during the 1980s when other South Asians demanded particular representation” (30). These Asians eventually distanced their race activism from Black people in attempts to distinguish themselves from people of African descent (30). Despite this separation, Sharma states that Black and South Asian communities face similar struggles. According to Sharma, Blacks and Asians experience similar racialization in several diasporic contexts; in both England and the United States “South Asians and [Blacks] are both racialized minorities subject to overlapping processes of historical and global exploitation, displacement, and racisms via coloniality (Hesse and Sayyid 2006); acknowledging these overlaps does not erase difference but allows minority groups to inhabit a stance of belonging-in-difference” (Sharma 32-3).

The unions of Blacks and South Asians are the well-kept secret of both communities, but they are occurring; Blacks and South Asians are dating, having sexual relations, and even marrying. As Sharma writes, “[the] lack of attention paid to Asian/Black relations, particularly sexual and romantic ones, insinuates their impossibility in our imaginings of racialized sexuality” (141). While there is a significant body of research on white-Asian relationships, scholarly research and popular culture has yet to touch upon desire between Asians and racialized minorities.

In Sharma’s research, her test subjects consider themselves “‘not really Indian’ or ‘outsiders,’” a status that allows them to communicate with Black cultures in ways that those who identify with Indian culture might not be able to (89). This dissatisfaction with conservative South Asian culture leads often to an embracing of different experiences and “developed a critical awareness of power”; the artists that she spoke with “learned about the South Asian and Black interconnections that many gloss over and other Americans hardly know” (89; 89).

As I discuss in my chapter on hip hop, much of mainstream culture looks to Black popular culture to “find models of sexuality and gender roles” (Sharma 141). Within hip hop videos and songs are found a strict code of behavior for young men and women. However, alternate to this code are the teachings of South Asian elders who “feel it is their duty to indoctrinate children with culturally appropriate gender roles and sexualities, an especially urgent task within the context of displacement from their home countries” (158-9). And here gender roles are strictly enforced, as young women are “‘burdened with the preservation of language, dress, food, and child-rearing’ but also female chastity and regulations against exogamous relations are of the ultimate importance” (158).

While young women are burdened with the role of keeping culture, when the relationship is a queer one, the pressures of a usually conservative society can be even more oppressive. South Asian elders who see queerness as a white disease can shatter a family structure. Though not always; in *Re-Writing the Script*, a film about South Asian gay and lesbian interviewees and their families, we see what is rarely seen- families accepting and even celebrating their gay and lesbian children, and overcoming their own conservative upbringings. Though the message is a hopeful one, many South Asians in queer interracial relationships experience at least some friction with family- if not with immediate family, then at larger gatherings. In these instances latent or overt homophobia is added to anti-Black racism; this can make for a potent mix that can be difficult to challenge.

Sharma elucidates what she calls the “raja syndrome,” a state of affairs in which young males in families are more likely to follow their family’s orders. While young women might have a pressure to conform, according to Sharma, it is the young South Asian men who often end up conforming to expectations and marrying women who their parents would approve of. “Indian guys are probably more into the obligation [to family] than girls. I’ve heard so many stories where guys just leave their girlfriends because their parents found a wife for them” says Meena, one of Sharma’s subjects (165). Many of Sharma’s artists speak of the Indian mama’s boy (165). Moreover, Sharma details the “only in college” phenomenon, in which young South Asian men’s behavior in dating and other interests, such as hip hop, change after they complete their degrees. At this time, “they’ll get a good job and they’ll marry who their parents want them to marry, so they keep the traditions going,” without questioning them or challenging their parents’ beliefs or ideas (166).

In *Bhaji*, when Oliver tells his father he and Hashida are pregnant, Oliver's father tells him, "When you marry the girl, you marry the family," effectively describing the network of connections that desire between Blacks and South Asians create. Particularly in interracial relationships, familial pressures may amount to a stress that can weaken a relationship. No matter how separate a couple may be from their parents, or how rejecting a family may be at the start, desire and dating leads to auxiliary relationships even if parents and other family members pretend that the relationship or even their child's partner does not exist.

In *Bhaji*, the encounter between Oliver and Hashida's parents is both poignant and moving. After the young couple quarrels, Oliver goes in search of Hashida and ventures to her family home, asking about her whereabouts. Hashida's parents are unaware of their relationship. Sesay's performance pulls apart the layers of the encounter: the anxiety of the young lover, his sadness at the closeness and at the same time distance between him and his girlfriend's parents, and everything that gets left unsaid in the meeting. It is a difficult, if brief, scene of the connections that could be but aren't, due to xenophobia and lack of open-mindedness on the part of Hashida's family.

We also see Hashida's parents' suspicion of the young Black man at their doorstep. Once pleasantries are over and the young stranger lingers, Hashida's mother pointedly asks her husband "What is it?", willing the South Asian patriarch to make the Black stranger go away. Her fear of the dark stranger who has upset her morning has overcome the niceties of gentle middle-class South Asian breeding; it seems that she just wants him to disappear. A little before this, Hashida's father asks if Oliver has "Any message?" However the message is not for Hashida, but for the parents, who have a closer connection to the Blackness that they fear than they could ever know. They cannot recognize Oliver though he is right in front of them, nor can

they recognize the relationship that he and Hashida have had for a year, and so, the connection that they too have to him.

Another auxiliary relationship that we see in *Bhaji* is Hashida's more fruitful and respectful friendship with Oliver's father. Oliver goes to see his father for advice, having forgotten that it is the older man's birthday; Hashida, however, hasn't forgotten, and has even sent a card. Here we can see the hints of the easy and friendly interaction that one would hope for two people who are connected in the way they are. This scene also points to something that Sharma noted: in Black-Asian relationships, often the couple feels more relaxed socializing with the Black family members, due to anti-Black racism on the part of Asian family members (177). This despite the fact that Asian culture may be unfamiliar to Black partners who are unwilling to travel outside of their comfort zone, or who are concerned about possible racist attacks from their partner's family. In *Bhaji*, we are given hints of a relaxed relationship between Hashida and Oliver's father, which is something that her boyfriend can only dream of having with her xenophobic family.

Interestingly, Oliver doesn't only get advice and guidance from his strict father. He also has a very opinionated Black male friend who counsels him to break up with Hashida, even though she is pregnant with his child. This advice reflects a racial politics for the new millennium. Jay-man scoffs at "Black solidarity" saying "Black don't mean not white anymore". By saying thus, he is both shattering the idea of coalition politics, and privileging Blackness and the struggles of Black people above other people of colour in Britain. Jay-man also speaks of the racism in between Asian and Black communities, saying that in British society Black are always suspect and always second-class citizens. Jay-man describes Oliver's state of mind in half-rap rhymes: "try fusion and you get confusion". Looking to Black men for guidance, he gets

differing advice, reflecting, in part the differing opinions within the community as well as generational politics in Britain. This might illustrate the occurrence of a generational shift in the Black populations, with some younger men shirking responsibility where they should shoulder it.

Interspersed throughout Chadha's film are incidents illustrating the animosities among Blacks, South Asians, and whites. When the group of women finally gets to the seaside and relax on the beach, an older, conservative woman named Pushpa sees a Black family enjoying a beach picnic nearby and quickly checks that her wallet is still in her purse. This short scene is played to humorous effect, as the seemingly middle-class family are read in the film as no obvious threat to her body or her purse, and yet the mere fact that they are Black marks them as suspicious, highlighting the pervasive anti-Black racism in Asian communities, which particularly exists in the older generations who have taken on the majority white mistrust of Black populations. Even though to the Asians in the film their greatest threat are the white skinheads and lager louts who fetishize and harass them, Blackness is always read as danger and regarded with suspicion.

When one of the Aunties says upon finding out that Hashida is pregnant by Oliver, "And why a Black boy? What is wrong with our men?" highlights a well-known and oft-repeated sentiment that those who cross racial lines are traitors to their own racial or ethnic group. As well, she calls Oliver a "boy," and yet has referred to Indian males as men, thus resuscitating brown masculinity in the face of Oliver's seemingly abundant sexual prowess. It is also important to note the history of calling Black men "boys" is a long and complicated one; this is something that goes back to slavery in the United States, and is a way of disempowering Black men in general by belittling their masculinity. Thus, it is not only offensive to the Aunties that Hashida has become pregnant out of wedlock, but that she has crossed racial lines, and rejected brown men in favour of a Black one.

As with many of the texts that are analyzed in this study, masculinity is appraised in the characters in the film, and a hierarchy is created, or rather the men are regarded differentially based on race; one of the first groups to be discussed are brown men. In the beginning of the film when Madhu and Ladhu are preparing for their trip to the seaside their mother comments on a young Asian man who is in college and has already saved up for his own car. In this scene he smiles shyly at the girls as he polishes the vehicle before leaving for the day. One of the girls jokes that the car is a “penis substitute” and laments about the “guys in this town”. The representation of an earnest Asian masculinity comprised of good grades, regular car payments, and a strong credit rating is completely uninteresting to the girls, one of whom ends up having an innocent tryst with a young white man on their day trip.

Storylines concerning other Asian men in the film include Ginder (played by Kim Vithana)’s abusive husband, Ranjit (played by Jimmi Harkishin) who, with his brothers, follows the women to Blackpool in an attempt to get Ginder and her son, Amrik and make them return to the joint family home that they have left. What ensues is a manipulative attack on the part of the father and uncles (although one of the brothers, Manjit, is coded as the good one) to force Ginder to behave according to their demands- that is to not ask for an egalitarian relationship with Ranjit. As with other elements of the film, the plot lines concerning these characters emphasize patrilineal relationships and male-male bonding as taking priority. However Chadha highlights the issue of domestic violence in Asian communities, and the silence and shame the surrounds the victim/survivor. Ginder constantly falters in her decision to leave the charismatic and handsome Ranjit, who is presented as a worldly and educated Asian male. She fears the challenge of starting a life alone, which would bring with it the stigma of being considered a

rejected and “used-up” woman; simply going back to the family and behaving as she is expected, meek, docile, and without a will of her own, seems easier in comparison.

In Ranjit and his brothers we have three models of brown masculinity that get steadily and progressively worse. However, none is completely without fault on the trip to the seaside and in the interactions with the women around them. Manjit, who is coded as the good brother, is seen first in the family home in the kitchen, the domestic sphere where only the women toil away at making the family’s meals. Manjit is seen attempting to steal some time with his wife, who shakes him off because she is hard at work. Of course he doesn’t actually help out with the meal so she will be free sooner, as this would separate him from the circle of brothers with whom he has an ambivalent relationship. When Balbir, the boorish and athletic older brother, attempts to insult his younger brother, he does so by attacking his masculinity. At one point when all three brothers are in the car, Balbir spits out the comment, “Every time you open your mouth your wife jumps out! Get in the bloody car.” This is in reaction to Manjit’s logical suggestion that they all leave their masculine posturing and go home empty handed. Manjit’s closeness with his wife is cause for derision by his brothers, who view him as less manly for taking her advice and treating her with respect and equality.

While Manjit generally seems to challenge his brothers, he does so largely without their questioning his masculinity, and his actions in aid of Ginder are a study in subterfuge. Often without Ranjit and Balbir knowing that he is aiding his sister-in-law, he pulls his brothers in different directions and attempts to make peace after the masculine storm of sadism has erupted; yet he rarely steps in and says outright that what his brothers are doing is wrong. In one instance, Balbir torments the domestic abuse survivors at a shelter trying to get Ginder’s whereabouts, and after getting the information he needs, Manjit apologizes profusely to the

women on the way out. His brothers are safely out of earshot. This might speak to his lack of power in terms of stature and age, and yet to the feminist viewer it feels that the “good guy” might be playing both sides. However, in the end of the film Manjit makes his feelings known when he sucker-punches Balbir in the stomach. Here we realize that masculine power understands physical force only; had Manjit talked to him sternly or otherwise dealt with him non-violently Balbir would have laughed in his face. But an interesting tension is developed, and the fact that violence is used at this point by a character who has always seemed to be non-violent, almost a peacemaker, is noteworthy.

The character of Ranjit is just as nuanced as that of his younger brother, Manjit. Ranjit is the manager of the family company, and is depicted in the film as urbane, sophisticated, and educated. He wears a suit jacket and shirt throughout the film and his hair is in a tousled, James Dean style. Balbir contemptuously mocks Ranjit’s position in the family and his masculinity, saying, “Too much brains and not enough balls... Your fancy cigarettes and your degree they couldn’t keep her, eh? I ain’t the stupid one. I know what I am and what I do. And I still got a wife.” Here Ranjit is ridiculed for his education and predilection for imported cigarettes, which in Balbir’s mind codes him as feminine, or possibly queer. The subtle inference that Ranjit isn’t man enough to keep his wife is in line with Balbir’s policing of masculine behavior, and even feminine behavior, as I will discuss further on.

Paralleling Oliver’s scene with his father, we are provided a scene between Ranjit and his son, Amrik. Here, Ranjit seems ecstatic to see his young boy, and keeps repeating the words “My son, my baby, baby boy.” The importance not only of the first child, but of the son in the Indian household is illustrated in his decision to try and get his son back, and hope that Ginder will follow. Many Asian families feel that a son will carry on the family name, and provide for

ailing parents, taking them in after they retire. This belief has carried on into the diaspora, a point emphasized by the film's making the character a male one. In the scene with Amrik, Ranjit takes his young son's plastic glasses and puts them on his own face, highlighting his own masked identity. Ranjit wears a guise that few people can see through, as even his brother Manjit doesn't know of the violence that he enacts upon his young family.

An interesting subplot in the film concerns Asha, a middle aged Asian woman and one of the vacationers, and Ambrose, a white native of Blackpool and her would-be suitor. Ambrose is an older white man who, as the day progresses, reveals that he is quite enchanted with the rituals and traditions of Asian culture. It is no coincidence that their names start with the same letter; they are connected, even though they come from different cultures, different places, and different personal situations. Ambrose is desperately trying to make this connection work and to bring Asha into his world, even though she is uninterested in many of the elements of white culture. When Ambrose brings her to a large glass amphitheater where some white seniors are sitting down and clapping in a synchronized manner along to the "Chicken Dance," he is delighted; to Asha the mundane quality of Ambrose's interests seem unimpressive. Ambrose is quite proud to show this to Asha in his tour of his home of Blackpool, and yet this element of the majority culture doesn't translate as interesting or compelling to the overworked mother, who was a vocalist in university, and thus possibly is a connoisseur of culture. This scene is emblematic of much that would be missing in Asha and Ambrose's relationship should come to fruition. Cultural events and symbols that mean much to Asha have no resonance for Ambrose, and vice versa.

Ambrose, a flailing thespian, is drawn to Asha for reasons that become more apparent as the story progresses, as he reveals his views of tradition, culture, and race. While touring his

local haunts in Blackpool, he is careful to point out all the quaint and idyllic areas. When Ambrose shows Asha an old theatre and laments the destruction of so many other such theatres in England, he states while caressing her face, “It breaks my heart. Look what we’ve become. Not like you- you’ve kept hold of your traditions. Proud, exotic, fascinating, gentle, exquisite, and beautiful.” Here, he is using Asha’s seeming traditional values- and it should be noted that she is wearing a sari and sandals- as a romancing tool. This is an interesting statement, seeing as her dalliance with him is very *untraditional* and out of character for the generally conservative Asha. For her to allow a strange (white) man to touch her face and hair is tantamount to infidelity in the rigidly cloistered community in which she lives. She is even disciplined by one male member of her community, Balbir, who does his fair share of policing of sexuality and gender roles and norms.

Ambrose’s interest in Asha has more to do with stereotypical views of Asian populations and his own heartache due to queer sexuality than anything else. When Asha asks after his wife, Ambrose says, “Tragedy hit last year, I’m afraid. My dear wife...she turned feminist and ran off with her agent Mandy”. Here is revealed his true interest in Asha and her “exotic” kind. In a woman like Asha, Ambrose is hoping to find someone untainted by the seemingly western issues of feminism and lesbianism. Little does he know that Asha herself is in a crisis over the loss of traditional values in her community, and has extended daydreams about her own duty to her ungrateful family. Asha even fixates on the misdeeds of young women such as Hashida, and fantasizes about frowning, vengeful Hindu deities.

Ambrose is so persistent that his eventual rejection by Asha does not deter him from eventually seeking out other Asian women. When Asha and the other women leave Blackpool by van, Asha sees him chatting up some women in burqa, who might be seen to be even more

embedded in tradition that she is. Thus, in the film, the white suitor is represented as dashing and yet completely ignorant of Asian custom. Ambrose doesn't realize that he can only see what Asha represents and not who she is as a person. Her heritage excites him in such a way that it would prevent them from having a real, human connection. Ambrose is too busy being the charming English gentleman to realize that Asha, though she may be new to Blackpool, is no stranger to white British culture. Rather, she sees it every day; the youth who enter her shops and all of her daily experiences embed her in British culture and make her a hyphenated Brit, just as the younger generation is.

Ambrose is charming, but doesn't quite fit into what Asha needs in a romantic partner. In one scene, Asha daydreams a Bollywood-esque romance between them where he chases her through the rain; when she finally sees his face in the rain, his "brown face" makeup is dripping due to the rainfall. In her dream, Asha recoils in horror. Thus Ambrose may seem to fit into her ideal of a Bollywood hero, but the veneer is a thin one, and it splinters and cracks upon close examination.

In comparison to the other males in the film, Oliver steps up to his responsibility despite initial reluctance. Oliver is at first more concerned with his homosocial bonds than his relationship with his girlfriend of one year, and we see this in the masculine posturing that occurs with his friend Jay-man. Oliver looks to the Black male community to aid him in his dilemma, instead of looking to his Indian girlfriend and seeking to build a stronger unit with her in the face of their difficulties. His hesitancy suggests the prospect of Oliver turning into the stereotype of a Black male who shirks his obligations.

However, after some confusion and lack of clarity, Oliver recognizes that he needs to be with his girlfriend in this difficult time, and proves to be the most agreeable of the male leads. He

travels to Blackpool, and even knows to seek her out in an art museum, signaling an understanding of her true interests in life, despite parental pressure to study the health sciences. The hero has proved himself to be true, and the couple decides to move forward with the relationship. The viewer is privy to an *interracial kiss*; one of the last scenes in the film is of Oliver and Hashida kissing, just as a ferris wheel behind them becomes ablaze with colourful lights. Of all the suitors in the film, Oliver is the most real, the most agreeable, and the most well-rounded. Moreover, he gets the girl in the end.

This plot development may indicate Syal and Chadha's views on a multiracial Britain, and what is needed for the nation to move forward: racial harmony and racial mixing. The racial mixing that occurred with Ambrose and Asha was marred by a history of fetishization and layers of Orientalism that didn't allow Asha to be herself. Oliver allows Hashida to be who she wants to be, and ultimately connects to her as he too is a second generation Brit struggling under the rule of a disciplinarian parent.

While Oliver and Hashida look towards the future in a more obvious way, it is easy to forget that those older Asians are themselves revolutionary, despite their dress and outward behavior. Some of the older women characters who choose to wear Asian clothing and who are more deeply interested in Indian culture and tradition are also embedded in elements of western culture, and this is seen in scenes involving food and drink. We see this cultural mixing in scenes with the conservative-seeming Pushpa and others. In one scene, she drinks tea (and not chai) in a shop, when she and her friend bring out steel tins of puris²² and samosas²³ to complement their entirely British drink. Adding another layer to this scene is the fact that tea, even if it is Orange Pekoe or Earl Grey, is always an Asian product, due to the colonial history of tea plantations.

²² Puris are usually whole wheat flour bread products which have been fried in oil.

²³ This is a snack food of spiced, cooked potatoes which are wrapped in a flour wrapper and deep fried.

The most English of drinks has always had its roots in Asia, Asian culture, and colonization. In this scene in the shop, the restaurant owner is horrified at the Indian foods that are sully the Britishness of the shop, and she scolds the women, saying, “It’s strictly English food in here!...Bloody heathens. No manners... And they breed like rabbits!” This racist rant not only highlights the adversity that the Asian women have to face on a daily basis, but also the power of “ethnic” food to disturb an otherwise placid English diner with its foreign smells and tastes. However this scene also highlights that even the older Pushpa can employ cultural mixing, sampling from Asian and English culture to make her own interesting style of Indo-Brit identity. Thus drinking Orange Pekoe tea with samosas develops into the creation of a new formation of Asian, even though to others the older woman seems unchanging and rigid.

Another scene involving Pushpa’s approach to cultural mixing occurs when she samples some chips²⁴ while on the boardwalk. This quintessential beach fare and the experience of the decadence of fried foods are marred by the fact that the women’s palates are uninterested in the subtle flavours of potato and oil. They quickly put some spice on it (from a shaker in one woman’s purse), and the pleasure of eating is resumed. This scene could be a summation of many of the scenes involving white culture in the film. Majority culture is bland, tasteless even, until it is spiced up in some way. What we as viewers also see in these interactions is the shock and dismay on the character’s faces when they experience a tasteless chip, or a mundane Chicken Dance, as Asha experiences. The embarrassment, confusion, and slight disgust on the face of the Asians point to the fact that they expect more of a culture that dominates, that writes its dominance on their stores daily or weekly. Is this the whiteness that they are so afraid of?

²⁴ This is the British word for french fries.

While much of *Bhaji's* investments are in homosocial bonding and ties, there are many scenes of female-female bonding that illustrate the filmmaker's stress of women-centred plotlines. This woman-centred storyline leads us to an analysis of "Auntie culture", something that I discuss briefly in my chapter on *Londonstani*, but I also will delve into here. In *Bhaji*, many of the young women are policed in their behavior by the approval of their older Aunties, who are Asian women who may or may not be related to them. These arbiters of proper dress, etiquette, and morals are a persistent presence in the lives of young women such as Ginder, Hashida, and Madhu, who often alter their actions to please these older women. In one scene, Madhu, a younger, teenage girl, exits a bathroom in an outfit completely different than the one that she had worn on the bus ride up to Blackpool, and begins to apply heavy makeup. This is an act of *double dressing* that is familiar to many from Asian/South Asian backgrounds; double dressing is when a woman from a strict household carries sexier or trendier clothing or makeup in their bags to sport upon their arrival in the outside world. The complexities of a liminal identity- being both the good girl and the vamp- are brushed over as double dressing is an action of survival in a modern society. Madhu is merely answering to demands on women to act and behave a certain way to be considered desirable.

Madhu's transgression of double dressing in order to look appealing to the young white Blackpooler she has a brief romance with goes undetected; however other young women do not escape Auntie condemnation. Hashida's secret relationship and pregnancy are discovered by Asha, who tells the whole group of older Aunties, who are quite willing to spew their disapproval and contempt for her life choices. Pushpa, the oldest of the group, has this to say: "Kunjarie, besharam²⁵! You wait till nine months are over, and see how many Aunties you've

²⁵ A kunjarie is a woman who is considered morally loose, and the word besharam roughly translates to shameless.

got left”. Pushpa alludes to the fact that having the respect and support of an Auntie is completely contingent on one’s behavior, and that the relationship is not one of unconditional love. Even Ginder is constantly pushed by Asha to reconcile with her husband, as Asha says to the group, “She must have done something” to sour the marriage, rather than Ginder’s physically violent husband being at fault. Thus the film clearly illustrates that those who uphold patriarchal family values the most appear to be the older women in the community, and they either discipline women for sexual transgressions, or push them towards their estranged husbands without knowing the reasons for the initial separation.

However, rather than meekly towing the line, Chadha’s film shows the young women to be strong and willful, and to resist the pulls of community chastising. When Simi, the support worker, attempts to make peace after Hashida’s outing, telling the sisters to unite, Hashida does the unimaginable and lashes out at the older and younger women, saying, “You’re not my fucking sisters!” What had been pegged as a day of woman-centred relaxation is marred by Hashida’s revolutionary action, something that queers her body in comparison to the other women. Where the others are mostly content to be small “r” rebels; among the young women Hashida stands alone in standing against the beliefs of Auntie culture and a rigid code of conduct that the older women lay out. Moreover, even when she and Oliver aren’t quite sorted out, she stands by him and her relationship with him, even if this means that she will lose her community.

We might ask what exactly an Auntie means to a young woman in Chadha’s film Are the older women are merely fodder for ridicule, as we see in one scene with Madhu and Ladhu, in which they mimic the flailing arms and “Hai Rams²⁶” of someone like Pushpa, before collapsing into giggles at their subversion. Or perhaps are they women to be defied, as Hashida does in her

²⁶ “Hai Ram” is a religious exclamation that calls out to the deity Rama.

interactions with the Aunties, eventually leaving the group, perhaps symbolic of the move towards her life with Oliver and away from a British-Asian community. Aunties set a standard of behavior for the young women to live by, but as Chadha's film illustrates, they are often wrong in their edicts on cultural values, love, and responsibility. What has worked for generations in the homeland doesn't quite fit in British society, as the new pressures that the young women face are out of the scope of traditional Indian values. Thus Indo-British society must evolve or lose its youth, Chadha seems to be suggesting, and even some of its elders themselves, as in the case of the tormented Asha.

The filmmakers provide an analysis of Indian culture and the women who uphold it that is varied and nuanced. One Auntie, Rekha, is from Mumbai, and her short-skirted suit and high heels fly in the face of what an Auntie should be. Thus, not all Aunties create a unified front. Rekha even laughs at the N.R.I.s, mocking their clothes and traditions. When another Auntie talks about the importance of India, their "home," Rekha interrupts her with an incredulous statement: "Home? What home! How long has it been since you've been home? Look at you! Your clothes, the way that you think!... Oh come on yaar, you're all twenty years out of date!" According to her, such Asian traditions are decades out of date and laughingly quaint, while in the much-mythologized India newer, more modern ways have been embraced.

An internal irony in the film is that one of the most conservative and policing of the Aunties actually behaves in a manner that is less than respectful. Asha, in her interactions with the suave Ambrose, is acting in a way that might be considered questionable. Even her younger male relative asks her pointedly, "Is this a private visit?" illustrating that her dalliance with Ambrose is outside of the realm of a proper and dignified housewife. Asha's day with Ambrose, whom she fantasizes about as a romantic partner, is still considered to be respectable, due to his

racial background. While Ambrose is an outsider, he still isn't regarded with as much suspicion as Oliver. Moreover, Asha's extra-marital flirtation isn't regarded as negatively as a committed relationship between a Black and Asian person.

The effects of interracial desire on family, intimate partners, and community is imperative are critical to examine for this study. In Sharma's text, she brings up the term "BMW," which she describes as "a witty acronym used by novelist Gautam Malkani (2006) to stand for 'Blacks, Muslims, and whites,' the hierarchy of preferences from 'least' to 'most' desired, if one makes the mistake of marrying 'outside'" (168). In speaking with her subjects, Sharma found that some called this hierarchy "extremely traumatic" to those in relationships with Blacks (168). To have parents and families insist that those of (South) Asian ancestry are more suitable as a marriage partner can be deeply wounding for a young Desi, especially if they have grown up with a more liberal mindset, one more welcoming to those of different backgrounds. In South Asian communities relationships with Black people are secret, but they are occurring- at least in personal memory, and we see them in novels as those by M. G. Vassanji, and Ramabai Espinet, and the films analyzed in this chapter. However, there are several factors at play in these type of relationships, sexual encounters, and attractions. The reasons for sexual desire for (an)Other must be understood.

Sharma discusses the topic of interracial desire between Blacks and (South) Asians with one of her subjects, Meena, who outlines the importance of colourism or chromatism in South Asian societies. Meena states that, according to her estimation, Indian men at her college often link those Desi women with darker skin colour with looser sexuality (174). Sharma also discusses with the youth that she studies the stereotyping that is pervasive in mainstream and

(south) Asian communities. In Meena's analysis, darkness becomes a foreign territory, and one by which the mainstream brown male is both excited and disgusted.

At the same time, hip hop identified South Asian women sometimes find themselves attracted to Black men, and the underlying currents of this attraction tell us much about race, sexuality, and interracial intimacies. Just as for women a certain aesthetic is prized, for men "preferences for 'big' 'muscular' and 'dark' Black men" lead us to believe that in some cases, (South) Asian men lose out in the masculinity model of contemporary society (162). Sharma's case studies found that some Desi girls prized Black men over all others for their seeming sexual and masculine prowess, and this was read through their often larger bodies, darker skin, and musculature (162).

Conversely, while Black men are sought out for their physical features, mainstream stereotyping of South Asian men puts them at the bottom of the pile in terms of masculinity and desirability. Some "media depictions of emasculated Asian men as caricatures, cab drivers, and as nerds and geeks who rarely get the girl" point to a public image of Asians and South Asians as asexual, studious, and servile. Here in Canada, the two most popular television commercials that depict South Asian men show them as a technical assistant for Bell Expressvu cable (with a Desi who has the innocuous name of "Jay"), and a dentist or other dental professional in a toothpaste advertisement who rids ailing citizens of their sensitivity to ice water. As Sharma states "in relation to Black masculinities, South and East Asian men become lumped into the constricted dualism of Asian/Black" (167). However, Sharma is quick to point out that there is no real research on relations between Black and South Asian men, but the latter may feel and be stereotyped as less manly "thereby accounting for the desirability of Black masculinity (but not mentality) recounted by Rajiv", one of her respondents (167).

However, not only do the intricacies of relations between Black and brown affect youth as they sort through their desires, but they often find that their longings and lusts are created in opposition of a traditionally white model of sexuality and body aesthetics. Some South Asian and Black youth find that they don't feel attractive to their white peers, and thus turning towards brown-Black romances and sexual trysts is an embracing of a desire that rejects what is often seen as beautiful by mainstream society. Some South Asian women find themselves teased as teens and children about their curly, unruly hair, brown skin, and features, and to have all of these embraced and celebrated by a Black lover can be a new venture into acceptance of one's own corporeality in an unwelcoming western society, with all of its pressures on women of colour to conform or be miserable.

As Sharma states, in high school her subjects became "all too aware of their racial difference from White beauty ideals, especially for those who went to white schools and who felt unattractive to White girls" (169). Then, of course, along came *Jungle Fever*; one subject says, the movie and the phenomenon' of interracial attraction- came on the scene in his senior year. He reacted to this and... 'wasn't really trying to have too much time for White women or White people in general, you know?" (169)

Thus, the rejection of white beauty ideals that policed their bodies and made many (South) Asian and Black youth feel less than desirable leads to an actual rejection of white people themselves. This is sometimes seen in radical antiracist political circles, where the only whites who are granted access are those who are painfully aware of their white privilege, and who might have another oppression to balance out their association with dominant power structures. Another subject of Sharma's stated that "minority women 'understand where I'm coming from and... I can be honest with them'" (170).

However, this immersion into Black culture by someone who claims to be anti-racist is seen as an act of embracing of cultures of colour, at the rejection, occasionally, of all else. Some South Asians who grew up on hip hop and revolutionary politics, and ascribe to the belief in the oppression of Black peoples in the West almost take this on as a cause, and practice a philosophy of anti-racist inclusiveness in their friendships and their sexual preferences. When one has a detailed theoretical framework behind one's sexual desire, it might be said that relationships are a bit overdetermined. Yet for some, to turn away from whiteness and white culture is a daily choice, and one that ends up placing Black peoples in the uneasy position of victim, desired object, and receptacle for a lived practice of a rather problematic anti-racism.

There are several problems with the fetishizing of Black peoples by South Asians and other people of colour in a concerted effort towards a life free of the sexualized gaze of white admirers. While a South Asian who might be disgusted at the thought of being desired for the colour of their skin, the irony of creating an affinity for another largely based on their Black skin is lost on these self-same anti-racists. Some of the hip hop artists that Sharma interviews discuss a lack of interest in white sexual partners as a political act; D'Lo and other artists and activists like him don't see the inherent racism in choosing a partner largely based on their lack of whiteness. Moreover, these affinities place Black men and women again in the position of the desired sexual object, as someone who is commodified in the culture as having a worth located in their body. Can one get past the histories of desire and lascivious viewing of the Black body to see Black people on the same level as all others, or does a legacy of belief on the inherently sexual nature of Black peoples relegate them to lusted-after object? A lofty claim to anti-racist views often does little to dispel years of cultural conditioning that sees Black people as sexual conquests.

For those in the West who have felt silenced and negated by hegemonic conceptions of white beauty and desirability, to turn towards other people of colour amounts to a political act, and not just a random choice. Pressure within anti-racist communities makes it difficult for those with white partners to justify their choices. Moreover, Sharma quotes Milton Gordon (1964) who claims that intermarriage to whites is often deemed to be the final stage to assimilation (170), If this is the case, Sharma asks, “then what does it mean when one chooses a non-white partner” (170)? As Sharma states, the hip hop artists that she surveys and their views on Whiteness and their tendency to date minorities suggest a relation between their racial politics and the way they conceive of themselves as racial and sexual subjects, thus discrediting the notion of a colorblind or post-racial America. (170)

Experiencing hostility in childhood and young adulthood can result in Desis and other people of colour turning away from white people as sexual partners, actively seeking out other people of colour in what might be termed an affirmative action dating system. But this system is not without its faults- some of them very serious.

In Black-South Asian relationships and sexual encounters, typically some people do lose out, and this has to do with the gendering of these relationships. Many of these heterosexual couplings consist of a Black man and a South Asian woman; we can see this depiction in the texts analyzed in this study. Why the partnering occurs in this configuration is complex. Prizing the masculinity of Black men may account for the women’s choices, moreover, many South Asian women are wary of Indian subcontinental men because if the young woman is a feminist and hostile towards traditional Desi culture, the thought of being with someone who might expect traditional gender roles in the household might raise concerns. Thus Desi men, though

they may be very radical in their thinking, may be avoided simply because they are *believed to be* too conservative, whether or not they are.

When Black men and Desi women enter into a relationship, Black women are sometimes resentful. As Thien-bao Thuc says, “The growing number of African American men with Asian women has caused some tension between Black women and Asian women” (in Sharma 312). Black women see their rejection as not being enough for “their” men in a culture that favours light-skinned Desi women. The effects of “skin color and hair texture” impact “Black women’s self images and how others treat them” (Collins 166). Sharma relates that a “fair-skinned green-eyed Indian woman from Seattle told me that Black men like her because she is ‘whitish but also ‘not Black’” (178).

The triangulated relationship between Black men, South Asian women, and Black women is highlighted in Chris Rock’s recent documentary entitled *Good Hair*, which delves into Black women’s relationships with their hair, and the booming economy that surrounds this seemingly intimate bond (2009). According to Rock’s humorous, if occasionally sexist, documentary, many Black women in the West buy expensive weaves of what is called “Indian hair,” or hair that is sold by Hindu temples in India to the United States and other countries and sewn into the braided scalps of Black women at a high cost to buyers. Thus one Indian woman’s religious sacrificial offering of “tonsure,” where her hair is shaved by a priest in a temple, becomes a Black woman’s mode of attaining the white beauty ideals of smooth, bouncy hair. The economy of Black hair runs in the millions and even billions, and the fact that none of these often impoverished South Asian women are paid for this hair that then sells for over \$1000 dollars is astounding.

The politics of hair are a very messy business, in a world filled with interracial longings and connections. Just as some South Asian respondents of Sharma rejected the thought of desiring white sexual partners, some Black men and women do look towards South Asian partners as a suitable replacement for Black partners, hoping that the person of colour solidarity will strengthen the relationship, without possibly thinking that the turn towards someone with less Black features is something that needs evaluation. For those who feel that they can't date white people, South Asians provide a suitable alternative- one that may yield the promise of "good hair," a possibly lighter skin tone, and genetics that tend towards a beauty ideal that would be unattainable by most Blacks.

Mississippi Masala (called *Masala* herein), a 1991 film written by Sooni Taraporevala and directed by Mira Nair, highlights an interracial Black and South Asian romantic relationship. Starring a slightly stilted Sarita Chaudhury as Mina and Denzel Washington as Demetrius, the star-crossed lovers challenge family and community, and weather cultural clashes to be with each other. The film has a transnational element, as Mina's family has been expelled from Idi Amin's Uganda, a move that has traumatized her father, Jay, who spends years attempting to sue the corrupt Amin government to have his land returned.

In Mina, Jay, and Mina's mother, Kinnu, we see a merging of both Black and brown to create something that is new and exciting, a fusion identity that seems to work for the characters without them exhibiting any anxiety over racial or cultural position. Mina one day wears a kurta²⁷ and the next she an African print shirt; her allegiance to African and Indian cultures seems equal and completely uncomplicated by confused hybrid navel-gazing. The film begins with a scene of Mina's birthday party as a child in Kampala before the expulsion. The family

²⁷ This is a piece of clothing, in this case, made of cotton that is a tunic and is worn over pants.

wears African print shirts and dresses, and listens to Ugandan music. When packing their car to leave, they change to Indian clothing for the journey to the West. This easy shifting from African to Indian cultural markers and signifiers illustrates the ways in which the family have both integrated themselves in Ugandan society and yet kept their Indian heritage.

This journey away from Uganda comes at a formative age for Mina. However it is Jay who seems to be most affected by leaving the country. As the family drives away from their comfortable, upper-middle class home with its extensive, well-tended gardens and African servants, Jay cannot help himself from crying at his fate. The young Mina asks, shocked, “Are you crying? You said that big people don’t cry? Why do we have to go, Papa?” Not only is Jay rendered speechless in the face of Mina’s difficult questions, but he is unable to do what he should in this tense situation, and that is comfort his child, who has just been uprooted from the only home that she’s ever known.

Jay’s current situation of emotional stress and physical movement is due to both an oppressive Black African government with a narrow view of ethnic inclusivity and his own relationship with his close family friend, Okelo. Okelo and Jay had been raised almost as brothers, and more jarring to Jay than an expulsion that seems inevitable is the fact that, according to Jay, the Black Ugandan Okelo betrays him by siding with Amin’s politics. Thus on both a macro and micro level Jay is rejected and challenged by Black men about his very identity as a Ugandan, something at his very core. Jay’s refusal to acknowledge Okelo’s presence at the family’s leaving of the city illustrates how deep his wound is- if he had considered Okelo blood, to be then seen as an outsider, as someone who cannot call themselves Ugandan or African, would be a horrible betrayal.

While in a bus on the way to the plane to leave the country, Kinnu is pulled away from her family and teased by Black male soldiers, who stare at her lasciviously and steal her gold jewelry. When she is taken from the bus, Jay tries to intervene, but the soldier challenges him with his firearm and state might. Thus we can note the layers of racial hierarchy and military might that render Jay helpless. This too, in a heterosexual context in which a man's role in the family is protection of his spouse, Jay's helplessness in the face of Black military domination is yet another blow to his fragile psyche.

Interesting in this scene is the playing of the song "Mera Joota Hai Japani," a song from a post-partition movie starring Raj Kapoor. The intertextual reference is an important one, and bears a critical look. The full verse of the song is as follows

Mera joota hai Japani,

Yeh patloon Inglistani,

Sar pe lal topi Rusi,

Phir bhi dil hai Hindhustani.

Mukhesh, the vocalist of "Mera Joota Hai Japani" sings of the transnational elements of his dress; he speaks of the fact that his shoes are from Japan, his pants are English, and his hat is Russian. Yet despite the international elements of his attire, the character that Kapoor plays in the original film text has a heart that is solidly Indian. Added to this translation is the fact that Kapoor plays a wanderer in the film *Shree 420*, from which the song is taken. The song highlights the foreign elements that have come to be a very present reality in the lives of Indians. However, despite foreign goods and international meddling in the future of the new nation, the song is a nation-building one, and attempts to create a national identity and patriotism in the aftermath of the Partition that split the country into two.

For Kinnu and Jay the words of the song and the fact that they have this record take on an entirely different meaning, decades after the independence in India. They too have become nomads, a people without a home, and have to journey from their beloved Uganda now that they have been expelled by Amin. However, in the case of the young South Asian family, privilege plays an important part of their relationship to the experience that they are about to embark on. While Raj Kapoor journeys on roads by foot carrying a small bundle, Mina and her family travel by car, and the gravest indignity is the loss of their wealth, sprawling home, and gardens. Moreover, the motif of the journey is an important one in *Masala*, as later on Mina fantasizes about journeys with her lover Demetrius, and eventually journeys from her home in Mississippi to start a new life.

“Meri Joota Hai Japani,” and the playing of this intertext in the film at such a crucial moment brings to our attention the nature of cultural identity in a time in which travel and movement is the norm for many people. Where does the heart lie for Mina and her family? It is arguable that they are able to uneasily reconcile their Indian identity with their African one, and to foster a South Asian cultural identity while remaining staunchly Ugandan nationals, despite their expulsion. Jay particularly, has an affinity for his Ugandan national identity, and challenges anyone who believes he does not belong. That the song would play when the soldiers are tormenting Kinnu may speak to the ways in which South Asians are seen as insular, traditional, and unable to assimilate into the country that they have migrated to. It also would have one believe that they are always seen as the outsider²⁸. Some individuals within a country see Asian/South Asian immigrants and newcomers as interlopers who have different allegiances and

²⁸ This is seen in such remarks as Britain’s Lord Tebbit’s “cricket test,” which stated that people of England should cheer for the England team, whatever their ethnic background.

who will never embed themselves into the national fabric. To such individuals, the South Asian heart is always frustratingly Indian, no matter when they travel and settle down.

Demetrius' father is a hard-working, gentle, and loving patriarch; he and his focused son have a tight bond. Also, as in *Bhaji*, the mother is missing from the scene, possibly to allow Williben (Demetrius' father, played by Joe Seneca) to illustrate his parenting muscle, and to make Demetrius a more empathetic character. This is in stark contrast to the nuclear family unit that is seen in Mina's family, where both mother and father have a distinct role in her life and future, even pushing her towards specific South Asian suitors who are considered moneyed enough to take care of her. However, despite the fact that Mina has both of her parents and Demetrius' mother died before he was about to go off to college, even Mina says that Demetrius' family exudes a feeling of home and love that hers is lacking, due to the shock of forced migration and poverty.

As in *Bhaji*, Oliver's friend and his father present two diametrically opposite poles of Black masculine existence, the dutiful and the shirking, here too we see a similar representation of the spectrum of Black masculine behavior. While Demetrius presents the face of the good son who holds down a steady occupation and has ambition and drive, his brother Dexter, played by Tico Wells, is the picture of recklessness, preferring to hang out with friends on a street corner instead of focusing on a career. The splitting of Black male reality into good and bad allows the filmmaker to discuss several different types of Black men, though it doesn't allow the good men to be fallible, and the bad ones to have moments of respectability. South Asian film rarely presents a negative portrayal of the South Asian man, equivalent to the Black loafer or, as in the case of *Bhaji*, the friend who tells Oliver to ditch his pregnant girlfriend.

In *Masala* there are brief events displaying white racism; these occur mostly in the interactions of Williben and Demetrius with the white people to whom they are financially beholden. After the scandal of the entanglement with Mina, Demetrius attempts to procure a bank loan, despite his sinking social status. When he goes to the white bank manager, fully knowing that his business contracts have plummeted, the man says to him “In my life, I’ve worked hard for what I’ve got. I want to see you work hard too!” The statement is both ironic and unjust given that the viewer knows Demetrius’ personal situation- that he had to forsake college to care for his family, and that he slowly cobbled together a business cleaning other businesses, all to have it taken away when personal scandal arises. Hard work is not the issue. Clearly, racism is.

When Mina and Demetrius start dating, it appears that Mina experiences nostalgia for her homeland of Africa. At the birthday picnic that Demetrius takes her to, their first official date, Mina says that there is “really a feeling of home there”. This could be because Demetrius’ family is quite curious about Africa and why she was there. The Indo-African and the African-Americans experience a bond that challenges all notions of ethnicity and blood ties, as Mina is able to share with them a piece of the world that they are so curious about, but have never seen, and probably never will. Thus, through ethnicity and national identity they forge a bond that Amin’s xenophobic government cannot break, and that is the bond of those who are nostalgic for Africa.

The theme of birthdays as pivotal moments in the film continues as Mina cancels her plans with her parents to have a beach vacation with Demetrius in Biloxi, all the while telling them that she is spending time with a female friend. She therefore severs the bond of filial

loyalty for romance and sex, as we are privy to the sexual encounter with Demetrius, seeing brown on Black skin for possibly the first time in mainstream cinema²⁹.

In this scene, as in much of the film, Mina's hair is the star of the show; she brushes her hair over Demetrius' face, and her long, winding curls seem to highlight her South Asianness. As discussed earlier, her hair is a significant marker of Mina's identity. Mina has "good" hair herself, and the fact that she is often compared to Demetrius' Black ex-girlfriend is noteworthy. Therefore, even though the film is made by a South Asian filmmaker, Mina is shown to be an exotic piece of flesh and oriental sensuality- all curls, earth tone clothing, and gold jewelry. Mina is effectively a cliché of the desirable and fetishized South Asian woman.

Mina and Demetrius go to a fair and ride a small Ferris wheel while in Biloxi on their romantic getaway; the movement of this small fair ride is symbolic of the movement away from Mina's usual, placid life that the adventure of interracial desire is taking her. Drunk on romance, desire, and the excitement of inter-cultural connection, they joke about their future together, yelling over the din of the rides and music. "I say we travel together, what do you say?" Demetrius asks, before they both giddily name all of the places they will journey to, places that include Africa and India. The theme of journey has now taken on the tone of adventure, where in the initial scenes of the film it connotes sadness and loss of identity. For Mina, her new relationship brings with it new vistas and excitement, and takes her away from the drudgery of cleaning motel rooms for little pay. The fact that Mina will pull away from her nuclear family and travel with her new lover signifies a new beginning in her life.

²⁹ It is important to note here that while actor Denzel Washington has had a prolific career, he has rarely played a romantic lead. Controversy was courted in the 1993 film *The Pelican Brief*, when Washington was cast opposite Julia Roberts. An interracial Black-white romance never transpired in the film, though, it is interesting to ask the question, does Washington only play romantic leads opposite women of colour? In the 1996 film, *The Preacher's Wife*, he plays opposite Whitney Houston, a Black singer and actor, yet no other romantic leads could be discovered in an analysis of his film roles.

Despite the romantic attachment that the two lovers feel for one another, difficulties do arise in their relationship, and they center on the interracial desire that they feel for one another. Though Mina has fallen for Demetrius, she can't help feeling that his attraction for her is surface. At their initial meeting, Mina accidentally drives her car into the back of Demetrius' work van. Though he gives Mina his card along with a few long, hard stares, he barely remembers meeting her later, when they see each other at a club that night. Mina's beliefs about Demetrius' attraction towards her are that he is using her for revenge: "You never once asked me about myself. And you know why? You were too busy using me to make Alicia jealous!" Mina's exclamation in their final argument highlights the fears that she has about her worth to her lover, but also illustrates the fact that Black-South Asian relationships do often cause frictions amongst women of both communities, and pit them against each other as competitors. Thus, while Mina is the desired woman, she is also keenly aware that she is being escorted around in front of Demetrius' former girlfriend, an up-and-coming singer with a new boyfriend. And herein lies the problem of interracial heterosexual desire. While Demetrius' attraction for Mina may be innocent, she is many of the things that his former girlfriend isn't- she has long, curly hair, lighter skin, an exoticism. When the relationship between Demetrius and Mina initially sours due to her family's shock at Mina dating a Black man, Alicia, Demetrius' ex-girlfriend has harsh words for him. "You let down your family, your community, your entire race. Oh, and I don't see no shortage of Black women around Greenwood," the singer snaps at Demetrius signaling the frustrations of his Black ex-girlfriend on the perceived betrayal of interracial desire.

Mina has few marital prospects in her life; early on in the film she ironically laments being a "darky daughter," something that will get her little in the way of matrimonial attention in the diasporic South Asian community. However, with Demetrius, Mina is beautiful, and can look

forward to a possible life away from the monotony of lower middle-class South Asian motels and weddings where she is cruelly gossiped about by older women. Where before Mina shocked elders by snagging the desired bachelor of the community, Harry Patel, who had financial clout and a respectable family to back him, now Mina moves away from the marriage market that denigrates her for her looks and her parents' social standing. To be with Demetrius is to reject the triggering effects of class, privilege, and beauty aesthetics, and to embrace a relationship for mutual attraction, desire, and interpersonal connection.

It is important to note that even Mina's parents accept the value of the South Asian marriage market without challenging it. When the family prepares for a wedding before Mina begins her relationship with Demetrius, the primary goal is for Mina to meet and ensnare the wealthy Harry Patel. When an argument arises over Mina's choice of shoes and Mina's father takes her side in saying that they aren't important, Kinnu exclaims in frustration, "Spoil her! Spoil her, ne? And when she sits on our head it will be your responsibility." The sentiment that a South Asian parent's primary responsibility is to marry off children, particularly young women, is echoed in this film. While in one scene Jay laments the fact that Mina doesn't have the desire to go to college, for Mina's parents, her primary avenue of acquiring a secure future would be through marrying a wealthy South Asian man. The importance of heteronormativity, gender norms, and economics to the traditional marriage market in the South Asian community allow little room for the woman to express feminist values, seek to individuate her identity from family and mate, or find herself through travel, education, or (mis)adventures.

In my discussion of Black and South Asian relationships, the concept of racial triangulation with white people gives us a mode of analyzing networks of power, desire, and fetishization. However, another triangulated association is also created, between Black men,

South Asian women, and the seemingly rejected Black women. By looking at the films, *Bhaji on the Beach* and *Mississippi Masala*, this dissertation gains an interpretation of not only the primary relationships, but also of the auxiliary ones that bring family, community, and country to impact our experience of longing and lust.

Coconuts, Batty Bwoys, and Good Sistas: Racialized Representations of Gender in Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha's *Consensual Genocide* and Gautam Malkani's *Londonstani*

The possible reasons for interracial desire are various and complicated, but are rarely innocent. This desire is particularly complex when it comes to loving or desiring Blackness, even for people of colour. As bell hooks tells us, “[opening] a magazine or book, turning on the television set, watching a film, or looking at photographs in public spaces, we are most likely to see images of Black people that reinforce and re-inscribe white supremacy” (hooks 1). hooks goes on to state that in her eyes, loving Blackness is dangerous in a white supremacist culture, and that death can be a punishment, as seen in some Black American literature (hooks 9). However, hooks writes at a time when fascination with hip hop culture had not acquired the popularity it has in contemporary society; many would argue that Black cultures and art forms are now quite widely accepted, or at least seen as appealing. The novel *The Swinging Bridge* by Ramabai Espinet and discussions of the triangulation of racial dynamics and the model minority myth will yield an analysis of *Londonstani* and *Consensual Genocide*, the texts that will be interrogated in this chapter.

Espinete's novel takes place both in Canada and on the island of Trinidad, and discusses queerness, diasporic identity, and interracial desire; through it we can lay a ground work for our discussion of interracial desire. Espinet delineates the distance between the Black and South Asian populations, though they reside in the same town. She states

the city of San Fernando housing its twin but separate populations, African and Indian, each lacerating the other, each tolerating the other's crossovers, the strays, the inveterate mixers seduced by curiosity and a taste for difference whose blood and semen juices would solidify and form the rickety bridge across which others might begin to cross the rapids that they feared would wash them out to open sea. (Espinet 103)

Espinet illustrates the severity of the mistrust between Black and brown populations in Trinidad. She also hints at the illicit thrill that the transgressors of this age-old animosity must partake of with the word "seduced" (103).

Mona, and other young Indian women in her community, are seen as the property of their parents, and fear of the racial Other extends to a theft of their precious virginity. Mona's friend Susie and her other Indian friends "had the same problem, but [they] suffered in silence" (186). Mona's father Da-Da is so concerned about the whereabouts of his daughter that "suspicions would overpower" him after her excursions with her friends (186). For many, suspicions lead to even harsher punishments, as some girls are "cursed and even beaten by family members for so much as looking at 'man'" (187). Yet while treating Mona like a vessel for his own family's pride, Da-Da takes little interest in her life or her upbringing. Thus is the double bind of South Asian familial duty: a rigid communal insularity fostered by the parents who at the same time know so little about the actual goals and aspirations of their children.

The divide between Black populations and South Asian ones is strict and sharp, as the protagonist Mona learns at a very young age; of note are the teachers in this harsh lesson. While driving with her relatives, the group sees a Black and South Asian couple, and Mona's "Uncle Baddall steupsed loudly and exclaimed in a voice that could cut glass, 'Huh! Indian with she Creole man!'" (75). In these forceful lessons about racial separation, Mona's elders impart

knowledge about the transgressiveness of racial mixing while her peers seem to be more forgiving, thus illustrating a generational divide that proves hard to overcome. Mona's father is her harshest disciplinarian and polices her sexual behavior early on; in fact all of her South Asian female friends suffer the same indignities under parents who watch them like hawks. In one instance, when out for a drive, a Black man in a diner gazes at Mona in a way that displeases her father. He calls Mona a "little bitch," saying she's flaunting herself "up and down looking for man" (174). As shown, interracial desire is suppressed by male authority figures and the community, who control and police it.

Clearly, the strictly curtailed sexuality of the brown woman often has more to do with the honour of the brown man than not. Da-Da rigidly guards the boundaries of Mona's sexuality, all in attempts to bolster his own flagging power in the society and in the home. As a man with little social power and little wealth, Da-Da's only source of power are the punishments he exacts upon his family. This dynamic illustrates the power that men in diasporic South Asian communities have with respect to "their" women. Power negotiations are played out on the body of the brown woman, and these negotiations often are focused on an anxiety about brown masculinity and brown male power within society. Da-Da's neurotic questionings of Mona about her interest in "man" come from a fear of pollution of what belongs to him, and what he will offer up to no man, especially not a Black or creole. The Black or creole lover is double the threat, due to stereotypical beliefs about their excessive sexuality.

However diligently Mona obeys Da-Da, all bets are off when she meets Bree. As Espinet states, "Bree was a red boy, an obvious mixture of African and other races, medium muscular build, medium good looks" (182). Despite the fact that Bree seems unremarkable, Mona was "unprepared for the rush of feelings when [she] saw his action on the field" (182). Her desire is

doubly transgressive as her longing is for someone who is otherwise out of bounds, namely someone of another race. It can also be a desire to envelope oneself in the cultural products of another social grouping. These desires transcend familial obligation and social sanctions, and, as hooks suggests, they are never innocuous. In the case of sexual desire for another, innumerable elements comprise one's desire and longing, and the thrill of disobeying one's parents and community is clearly a component of the sudden crash of love at first sight that Mona experiences.

Moreover, the desire can even lead to becoming suffused with the racial markers of the other race. In Espinet's novel, Mona experiences community sexual policing, as a neighbour named Gosine catches her with Bree after they have started dating, and starts to taunt her with the knowledge (185). "[Gosine] was at the door, about to leave, but as he squeezed past me in the narrow doorway, he spat the words 'red nigger' into my face with such venom that I drew back in shock" (185). This incident illustrates that to Gosine, Mona too becomes Black, and thus hated and mistrusted. The same neighbour continues his taunts around town, even spitting out the insult "red nigger" at church, showing her that he is watching, and that he knows of her forbidden desire (185). Mona becomes Black by association, and takes on the markers of another racial grouping, simply for dating her creole boyfriend.

Espinet's text is thoughtful about the animosities between Black and brown. *The Swinging Bridge* illustrates that family ties can often pull one away from racial desire, no matter how strong the pull is. Mona, in the end, chooses her family over her mixed race lover, and she spends the rest of the novel feeling lost because of it.

Another framework of inquiry takes up the triangulation of race, to use Claire Jean Kim's term. According to Kim, Asians in the West haven't been racialized in a "vacuum"; rather they

have been racialized “relative to and through interaction with whites and Blacks” (40). Kim speaks specifically of the American context, and she seems to focus her discussion on East Asians, as do many who research Asian Americans. However, her research is fruitful for an interpretation of what occurs for South Asians in the diaspora, in that many South Asians are caught in the triangulated position with relation to Blacks and whites in the West. According to some scholars in the field, racial triangulation produces some troubling politics for the South Asian community in the West; they do not see themselves in coalition with Black people because they entered the West as free labour and have no history of slavery. In the eyes of the Black communities, solidarity is impossible because of the privileges that South Asians always had (Raphael-Hernandez and Steen 5).

Kim discusses racial hierarchy theory, the belief that an implicit racial hierarchy categorizes people and affords or denies them special privileges. Most commonly, this hierarchy comprises a “single scale of status and privilege with whites on the top, Blacks on the bottom, and all other groups somewhere in between” (40). However, this positioning of Asians in the middle is not always fixed; at times South Asians seek to occupy whiteness (as I will illustrate later in the chapter). This can be seen in the 1923 United States court ruling against Bhagat Singh Thind, who tried to claim whiteness in order to receive American citizenship (50). The court ruled that though he was thought to be Caucasian by ethnologists, he was not white “in accordance with the understanding of the common man” (50). Kim also notes that the shifting locations along the racial hierarchy also include Black struggles for emancipation and advancement (47).

Kim reminds us of the analysis by Angelo Ancheta, who says that Blacks have historically been seen as inferior while Asians in the diaspora have often been seen as outsiders

(40). Thus the field of racial positions includes a plane that has at least two axes “superior/inferior and insider/foreigner”; in a sense the groups become racialized in juxtaposition to one another and differently (41). According to Kim, the hierarchical axis has an intimate impact on who gets what opportunities, who gets restricted in which way, and what opportunities are offered (41). If class is taken into consideration, the analysis becomes more complex because some Asian communities may be financially privileged in comparison to Black communities, yet they are still seen as outsiders to the nation, based on language and citizenship.

The troubling concept of the model minority, frequent in Asian North American studies, is also germane. According to Kim, Ronald Reagan’s speech on February 23rd, 1984 illustrates white American investment in the model minority myth, as Reagan had congratulated Asian Americans for “revitalizing the American Dream” (60). This American belief in the model minority is also expressed in the contempt that some conservatives display when Asian Americans are covered by affirmative action policies (60). Some politically conservative pundits have criticized the fact that Asians fall under employment equity and other equity systems because of their belief that all Asians are wealthy and able get employment and into postsecondary schools without affirmative action and employment equity. Kim echoes Prashad’s evaluation of the myth by saying that the model minority discussion “has always worked in tandem with explicit constructions of Blacks as culturally deficient” (57). Thus the “failure” of the Black poor and working classes is compared to the “overachieving” South and East Asians. Separating the racial groups and praising one relative to the other allows conservatives in Western countries to continue with “racial retrenchment” without the appearing to do so (59). The practice is not only theoretical as was seen, for example, during the LA riots (renamed by some as the LA uprisings), when the Black and Korean populations were pitted against each

other in a battle that was characterized as a fight over inner city neighbourhoods, class warfare, and the resentful Othering of the Koreans Americans as “foreign” to the U.S. nation.

The model minority myth must be believed by those so designated, as well as by the host society. Asians are required to believe in their privileged status so they do not realize all that they in fact have given up for their apparently privileged position in society; the image of the gilded cage comes to mind. Many South Asians who came to the West as young children, or were born here, found their parents so pressured by the stresses of a new country that they were unwilling to speak of the subtle and not-so-subtle racism that they experienced every day. The younger generation lived in a media culture that constantly negated their brown bodies, and they withstood schoolyard taunts and violence, often without parental support because their parents were not equipped to handle this aspect of their new country. Despite the trauma of immigration, and the anxieties of a school system that continually ignored their presence, some few South Asians are gifted with the luxury of an upper middle class life, home ownership, and a well-paying job. These people *must* believe in the model minority myth, or the culture of meritocracy, to place credence in the Western dream. The myth rewards material ambition and ensures that these South Asians will distance themselves from “lazy” Black Americans. It ensures that the average over-achieving South Asian is always already on a quest for the next big thing: the next big trip, the next big luxury car, the next big electronic device. This flurry of acquisition turns the model minority into the model consumer, essential for the booming economy. It also ensures that the average upwardly mobile South Asian will not concern themselves with politics that do not immediately affect them, and this mix of wealth, capitalism, and lack of political engagement makes a very dangerous subject indeed, and one who is far from being a model, active participant in the shaping of their communities.

Gary Okihiro also interrogates the debate on the role of the Asian in Western societies (specifically American in this case), in *Margins and Mainstreams: Asians in American History and Culture* (1994). In it, he elucidates the role that the nomenclature of “non-white”³⁰ has placed on both “Africans” and Asians (xi). Okihiro takes an activist approach to the discussion of the role of Asians in America, saying “yellow is a shade of [Black], and [Black], of yellow” (xiv). His position indicates that solidarity movements are possible among groups in the West who are fighting for similar rights under white supremacy. In fact, his entire introduction rests on the central question: is yellow black or white (xi)? In positing the question, Okihiro adheres to the racial dichotomy structured into Western nations such as Canada, the United States, and the United Kingdom; without enlarging it to include other social groupings, he merely slots Asians and others into the pre-existing molds. Okihiro furthers this discussion by bringing to light the fact that Blacks and Asians have been split apart due to the fact that Asians have been prevented “from becoming naturalized and thereby [denied]... the rights of life, liberty, and property” (xi). To Okihiro “yellow is neither Black nor white, and [Asians], situated between Blacks and whites, receive special opportunities but also face unique disabilities” (xi). Thus, America (and other nations of the west) see race relations as “bipolar-between Black and white- and locates [Asians] (and American Indians and Latinos) somewhere along one divide between Black and white” (33). To see race in such a way means that the racial grouping is never only seen as themselves, and so Asians in the west are seen as “‘near-whites’ or ‘just like [Blacks].’” (33). This positioning is flexible and useful to those in power. When white (or even racialized) power

³⁰ The term non-white has always been unsatisfactory, as it associates the person it labels with what they are not, and moreover, it clumps together groups of peoples based solely on the fact that they do not share white pigmentation; this results in a person who is labeled by lack.

structures wish to praise Asians, they are lauded as white or almost-white, and when they are policed or scolded for bad behavior, they are compared to Blacks.

These nuances in the interactions between the Black and South Asian communities can be found in the cultural products of several young artists of both diasporas. One such artist is Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha. The spoken word artist and author of *Consensual Genocide* had made a home in Toronto's queer and transsexual/ transgender³¹ communities of colour for ten years, and is a well-known promoter, youth worker, and self-identified *fierce femme* (2006). Piepzna-Samarasinha's TSAR book of poetry is a deeply confessional book, and frequently blurs the line between speaker and artist. Elizabeth Ruth called her collection of poems "[b]io-mythographical snapshots" in a www.rabble.ca interview. Her poems delve into her life as an incest survivor, tell tales of her various lovers, and describe her experience as a poor, mixed race woman who struggles to make ends meet in Toronto. The collection of poems is a poignant image of the life of a "conscious half-masala girl" reveling in femme identity, desperately attempting to claim brownness, and finding chosen family where she can (Piepzna-Samarasinha 21).

Piepzna-Samarasinha's poetry contains numerous references to Blackness, Black culture, and her desire to decolonize herself from white supremacy. Though the poems are not chronological, the reader can discern a narrative from her childhood in the United States to her life as an adult in Toronto, and a view of the speaker's relationship to Blackness. Her text raises several questions. What does she mean by Blackness? Can a brown woman who grows up in white patriarchy not consider Blackness and Black culture as Other to her? What does it mean

³¹ I do not use queer as an umbrella term because of the possibility for marginalization of transsexual/transgender communities within the larger queer communities. Thus I name trans people separately. In activist communities in Toronto, the communities are often named "queer and trans" to allow space for otherwise silenced transsexual/transgender people.

for her to turn away from her privilege as a woman with light skin and “good hair”? And finally, what does it mean to decolonize desire? How can a woman who grew up in a racist family desire an/Other in the face of a society that says that dark skin is dangerous, and unappealing? Piepzna-Samarasinha’s poetry gives us a complicated look at interracial desire in the postmodern era. And like others before her, such as artists like Isaac Julien in *Looking for Langston*, Piepzna-Samarasinha reconfigures bodies of colour as sexy and desirable, from her positionality as a queer brown woman (1989).

According to Gayatri Gopinath’s *Impossible Desires: Queer Diasporas and South Asian Public Cultures*, “the framework of a queer diaspora radically resituates questions of home, dwelling, and the domestic space that have long concerned feminist, queer, and postcolonial scholarship” (14). For Piepzna-Samarasinha and other racialized queer and transsexual/transgender people like her, home and family are often vexed locations that require at least a partially exilic existence in order to survive and live out a queer or transsexual/transgender life. In Piepzna-Samarasinha’s *Grown Woman Show*, the performer discusses her status as an incest survivor, which has led to her estrangement from her parents since her late teens (2007). As someone who grew up with a white mother, home was also a place of extreme indoctrination and forceful imbedding into white culture. Moreover, it is not just the Eastern European side of her family that desires whiteness. In the poem “good burgher girl,” Piepzna-Samarasinha is told by family to

study hard in school

be white or just one drop of tea in milk after all

doesn’t your father sound like he went to Oxford? (19)

Here we can see that not only her white mother wishes whiteness for her. The phrase “one drop of tea in milk” points to a history of Westernization within Sri Lankan culture that asks the bi-racial child follow in her father’s footsteps and desire Western ways, as is evidenced by her father’s British-sounding Sri Lankan accent.

Piepzna-Samarasinha’s mother exhibits outright disgust at Blackness performed by her daughter in the poem “white mama blues”.

I remember
my mother
Christmas day 96
ripping the dreadlocks
outta my head
pushing my head down
the sink’s wet white hole. (26)

Here the whiteness of the sink is a symbol for the gaping hole of white culture that threatens to consume her. The poet’s mother goes on to shout that the dreads are “DIRTY” and that’s why she has “HEADLICE,” “THAT’S WHY THOSE / PEOPLE HAVE LICE / I RAISED YOU BETTER THAN THAT” (26).

Piepzna-Samarasinha’s white mother configures Black people, but possibly all people of colour, as dirty, debased, and dangerous. She also creates a separation between Leah’s family and the nameless Black people. Piepzna-Samarasinha’s family is “BETTER,” while those who represent Black cultures are then conversely lesser (26).

Piepzna-Samarasinha’s rejection of the privilege afforded her by her mother can be read as a revolutionary stance for a young woman of colour. In “white mama blues,” the poem in

which Piepzna-Samarasinha's mother brushes straight her curly hair for hours a day, the poet states that "the British empire is alive and well on my head / in 1982, 1983, '84, 85, 86 / thousands of days of my life" (27). This revelation leads her to reject white culture through the body of her mother. She dries her own hair one day, and is overjoyed at its curliness, curlier than anyone's she's seen on television (27).

I let it dry in the sun
and realized it was curly
so curly
curlier than I ever saw hair being. (27)

Piepzna-Samarasinha revels in this acceptance of her own body. Her comparisons are interesting: she says she hadn't seen hair like hers anywhere "except on Slash and some of Prince's girls," linking herself and mixed race Black people, even as a youth (27). The young artist clearly desires acceptance into a culture to which she physically resembles as she is so categorically rejected by both the white and South Asian sides of her family.

Similarly, years later, in discussing her final rejection of white male lovers in "don't fuck anybody you wouldn't want to be," Piepzna-Samarasinha has come to the conclusion after years of dating white men that they are using her and exoticizing her brownness (28). She realizes that she is "the kind that's just dark enough to be sexy / not dark enuf to be scary" (28). Black cultures and dark skin are coded as danger, as seen in her white lovers' desire for her light brown skin. Leah is acutely aware of her light skin privilege and eventually rejects it and the culture that bestows it upon her.

In the same poem, Piepzna-Samarasinha challenges the privilege given to her by white male lovers in order to decolonize love, sex, and sexuality (28). She begins the poem with the proclamation that

I gave up two things this New Year's
I gave up cigarettes and white boys
'cause I figure they're the same thing
taking years off my life teeth out of my mouth
while they spit down they're the only thing that's going
to save me. (28)

In these lines Piepzna-Samarasinha clarifies her complicated relationship with white male lovers who believe they will be saviors to her on the one hand, and who fetishize her brown skin on the other. Her experience dating white men is that they want her to be “the jewel in his crown”; moreover, they want to “rub their skin off on me” (28; 28). They long for her to add a bit of colour to their lives, while at the same time they want to erase her racial and cultural identity. Thus Leah rejects whiteness and white culture to embrace communities of colour, though her light skin privilege would afford her a free ticket into white society where she could easily pass as “Italian Jewish Portuguese” (28).

Piepzna-Samarasinha speaks exclusively of white *male* lovers, and seems to collapse the identity formations of heterosexual, white, and male. To turn away from this type of lover would obviously be turning towards a woman of colour lover. For Piepzna-Samarasinha, decolonizing desire effectively means both rebuffing those who would envelop her into the fold of whiteness, and also seeking out lovers of colour. The lovers must be female because of the conflation of heterosexuality with patriarchy and colonization. In “Don't fuck anybody you wouldn't want to

be,” Piepzna-Samarasinha’s turning away from her white male lovers is a turning towards “somebody whose armpits smell like my grandmother’s kitchen” (28). The space of feminine domesticity is reconfigured in a queer context, as the kitchen space now becomes a place of desire and eroticism. Piepzna-Samarasinha is also doing the revolutionary; she is taking the smell of curry, something with complicated and nuanced registers, particularly for second generation youth suffering from internalized racism, and making it an object of longing. Lines like these also make the reader re-envision the South Asian kitchen in a queer context, as Piepzna-Samarasinha makes the reader see that lesbian and Sri Lankan can be juxtaposed with one another. By doing so, the poet challenges those who would say that queerness is Other to South Asian culture, and she is also doing so by linking it back to her ancestral home.

The poet continues to describe her embrace of the new lover with phrases like “[the] tamarind smells from her pussy match mine”; these phrases that speak to a desire that is rooted in a love of cultures of colour, queerness, and Otherness. The poem ends with the speaker coming to a moment of sexual healing with her new woman of colour lover, after years of psychic violence pressed upon her brown body by racist white lovers. Piepzna-Samarasinha imagines a lover “who ain’t [sic] afraid of chili lips burning hers” who “lies on my earth” (28; 28). The welcoming of queer desire and the acceptance of brown girl identity go hand in hand in this poem, as Piepzna-Samarasinha rejects both heterosexuality and whiteness.

It is interesting to speculate about the racial background of this imagined lover, a question that yields fruitful analysis in terms of inter-racial desire, and the consumption of culture. Is it possible that the poet’s new lover is a Black woman, one who is venerated with South Asian iconography and cultural symbols? Piepzna-Samarasinha seems to have a lax attitude toward intercultural sharing between people of colour, so we are given few clues to the

possible background of her lover, we are given a few clues in the poem. The poet says that her woman lover “nudges plantain all up in me,” which could associate the unnamed person with the Caribbean (28). Though it grows in many parts of the world, plantain is a food most often associated with Caribbean cooking. Furthermore, when Piepzna-Samarasinha says that when lying down, “our hair naps into one forest of kinks,” a phrase that leaves the ethnicity of her imagined lover ambiguous at best (28). Yet in all of the other lines, the woman lover at least *initially* seems to be coded with South Asian markers of identity; in one line Piepzna-Samarasinha states that their sexual expression would be “something like Kali and Durga must’ve rocked,” referring to Hindu goddesses (28). Of all the lines in this section, this is the most striking. Kali is known as the “dark” goddess in Hindu culture, and is often depicted in Black stone, so it is quite possible that Piepzna-Samarasinha’s lover is a Black woman enveloped in South Asian culture, or possibly a dark-skinned South Asian woman.

When Piepzna-Samarasinha is in the arms of her new imagined lover, she states that “[o]ur colors don’t clash” (28); this illustrates her affinity for her new, darker skinned lover. She has come to desire difference, and to decolonize desire, at least in her own mind. In this poem, Piepzna-Samarasinha seems to desire a dark skinned woman in the place of white men, but it is simplistic to hope that such a union would be without its problems and racial issues. To ask which skin colours complement one another and which are incongruous invokes an individual aesthetic value system often based on Second Wave anti-racism that deems all white people to be the enemy.

Some Black scholars, from E. Patrick Johnson to bell hooks, have illuminated exactly what it means for a non-Black person to be attracted to Black culture in general, or in the case of the hooks article “Eating the Other,” the Black body itself (1992). Johnson states that the

concept of Blackness is “slippery- ever beyond the reach of one’s grasp” (Johnson 2). He states that “[once] you think you have a hold on it, it transforms into something else” (2). Johnson is highly critical of the notion of Black authenticity, stating that it completely “depends on who is doing the evaluating” (4). In *Appropriating Blackness: Performance and the Politics of Authenticity*, Johnson speaks of the dynamic that occurs when white people appropriate Black culture, and argues that whites often “exoticize and/or fetishize [Blackness]”. He states that “the historical weight of white skin privilege necessarily engenders a tense relationship with its Others” (4; 4). While Johnson is silent on the dynamic of other people of colour appropriating Blackness, a sense of ethics must occur, especially when class and other privileges are in place. Johnson states that Blackness doesn’t “belong to any one individual or group. Rather individuals or groups appropriate this complex and nuanced racial signifier” (2-3). In this vein, Piepzna-Samarasinha can veneer herself with Black culture and “pass” as mixed in a Black community that is much more welcoming to her than the white one that she was brought up in. While E. Patrick Johnson indicates a laissez-faire attitude towards the desire and appropriation of Blackness, bell hooks is more critical. hooks describes the situation of some white men on her campus creating a list of the women of colour they would like to have sex with, according to elusiveness and availability. For these men, hook states, “[the] direct objective was not simply to sexually possess the Other; it was to be changed in some way by the encounter” (hooks 24). hooks is highly critical of the unequal footing on which the racialized culture is placed. In commodity culture, the “Other will be eaten, consumed, and forgotten,” which speaks also to the power that occurs when whites view some Other cultures as interesting at some times, and others at other times (39). Ethnicity “becomes spice, seasoning that can liven up the dull dish that is mainstream white culture” (21). This interest in non-majority cultures can be fleeting.

In light of the work of these scholars, we might wonder how to view Piepzna-Samarasinha's desire for Blackness. How does the speaker in the poems navigate the waters of anti-Black racism that are the mainstay of the communities that she grew up in to maintain a healthy relationship with Black cultures? In her poem "love poem for Sakia Gunn," Piepzna-Samarasinha describes her love for the murdered Black queer youth, and opens up a space for interracial desire amongst young queers of colour (3). Piepzna-Samarasinha describes her life as a wild teenager, saying that "I was horny for the revolution / but I didn't have it" (3). The poet's desire for Gunn is so complete that she states

looking at your face on the memorial website
I know I could've fallen in love with you
so easy when I was sixteen
you could've met my eyes just once (2)

The possibility of love at first sight, or the crash-bang of inter-racial desire, is striking if contrasted with the icy reserve her mother exhibits towards cultures of colour. To desire a Black lover and envision their life together is in direct defiance of a mother who cannot even stand a conventionally Black hairstyle on her daughter's head.

Clearly, this seemingly elegiac poem is actually more about Piepzna-Samarasinha than it is about Gunn. The poet's second stanza starts "When I was 16 I gave blow jobs behind the high school/I would do anything to feel my breasts buzzing" (2). In fact much of the poem is a snapshot of Piepzna-Samarasinha's life as a youth, and perhaps the lives of other queer youth. Piepzna-Samarasinha states "Sakia/ you were just trying to get home/ We/ are all trying to get there," and in a sense doesn't allow the reader to feel the tragic loss of another young Black person. Rather, Piepzna-Samarasinha is writing a poem that deals with life as a young, wild

queer of colour, but is doing so without recognizing the problematics of opportunistically using the death of Gunn to do so.

Looking to the tradition of African American writing, several poets have elegized their dead to commemorate the life he or she lived, and were able to do so without bringing themselves into the picture, as Piepzna-Samarasinha unfortunately does. Both Sonia Sanchez and Gwendolyn Brooks wrote poems about Malcolm X, the fallen Black Muslim orator and leader. In Brooks' poem, she states of Malcolm X that "He had the hawk-man's eyes./ We gasped. We saw the maleness" (Brooks 3). In writing such lines, Brooks focuses the attention on Malcolm and not using the poem as a platform for her own self-aggrandizement. In the United States and elsewhere, the history of murder and degradation of young Black men and women is long and painful for members of Black communities. The artistic endeavor of Black people lamenting the loss of their young and their leaders is in stark contrast to what Piepzna-Samarasinha does in her poem about Gunn. One would have to look hard to find an acknowledgement of the elegiac tradition of Black writers.

Piepzna-Samarasinha's seeming desire for connection with Black cultures continues in the poem "good sistas," in which she delineates the difference between good sistas and bad, and speaks of her relationship to the nomenclature of "sista" (43). One must first note that the term "sista" is one that is deeply rooted in Black cultures, and often refers to a strong Black woman. It is arguable that the term comes from Black Muslim cultures, or is possibly harkening to the use of similar terms in Black Christian churches, as the terms "brother" and "sister" are used to address a fellow member of the faith. In the poem, Piepzna-Samarasinha at first speaks of "good sistas," who don't "shave the dreads" or don't "eat roast pork when the moon makes them crazy" (43; 43). In saying so, all the cultural markers of Black peoples, having pride in one's

dreadlocked hair, and an aversion to pork due to religious or cultural beliefs, are commented on, as Piepzna-Samarasinha discusses the fictionally pure women who don't "look like or be a ho" (43). However, in the second stanza of the poem, something changes, as the piece becomes both a celebration of the bad girl, and the mixed race South Asian who slips into the identification of a *sista*. Piepzna-Samarasinha states that the "girls I know are none of the above/ *we* mama revolutions at the table and streetcorner" (43, emphasis mine). The women who aren't good *sistas* celebrate their "*I heart my cunt* stickers" and "bare their ass over a park bench / when the sun is still warm" (43; 43). These last two lines are noteworthy, as Piepzna-Samarasinha seems to suggest that good *sistas* are pure and virginal, while the bad *sistas* celebrate sexuality in a way that is revolutionary. Instead of exhibiting sympathy for the good *sista* who feels that she must conform to a certain code of conduct, Piepzna-Samarasinha is contemptuous; this scorn almost seems born from an insecurity and rejection by the proper Black community. One might wonder, however, if this is Piepzna-Samarasinha's battle to fight.

Moreover, the *sistas* are named in a way that Piepzna-Samarasinha never was as a young girl growing up in her parents' house, as the confusion of being mixed race gave the speaker a childhood that was fraught with insecurities. But can just *anyone* become a *sista*? To name oneself a *sista*, some might argue, renders the word meaningless in the community that Piepzna-Samarasinha so easily enters. One might wonder if the speaker has a full investment in being a *sista*, or if it is an identity that she slips on and off like a sweater. This feat is not so easy for the average Black woman. A partial investment in Blackness is something that should always be considered suspect.

Piepzna-Samarasinha's interactions with Black diasporic peoples and cultures continue in Toronto as an adult in her poem entitled "mi vida loca, summer 1988" in which she describes her interactions with a Black woman boss at a beauty salon (21-22). The poem states

I couldn't afford sunblock that summer
was smearing myself with olive oil from the kitchen instead
I just kept getting browner and browner
and she'd look at me and be like
"You know what?
You look...mulatta!
are you?" (21)

Later on in the poem, a Somali falafel stand owner asks her "'are you black? / Sri Lanka, where's that?'"³² (22). Piepzna-Samarasinha's curly hair and rapidly browning skin now allow her to pass in Black communities where she never did in white or South Asian ones. However this passing is just as fraught as her previous mixed raced identity, when she was told "Daddy's brown Mommy's white / you're beige" (3). The identity of "mulatta" is tense with a history of lack of belonging, often in either Black and white communities. So for Piepzna-Samarasinha to change one weighed down mixed race identification for another is the height of irony. However, Piepzna-Samarasinha's boss at least recognizes that she isn't wholly white and we must read this passage of misrecognition in juxtaposition with her mother's words that she is "not brown except for a speck for flavor. Garnish" (16). Thus to be seen as Black, even partially, is a prize given the years of childhood torment.

³² This quote highlights not only Piepzna-Samarasinha's passing, but also the vexed relationship of South Asians, namely their invisibility, when it comes to Blacks. The Somali falafel shop owner knows nothing of Sri Lanka, and so Piepzna-Samarasinha is subsumed into his own racial grouping.

Moreover, one must compare Piepzna-Samarasinha's partial acceptance into Black communities to her tense relationships with both racial communities that she grew up in. Whereas her mother attempts to erase all vestiges of her Sri Lankan identity, her father makes no attempts to nurture her relationship with her community. In one poem Piepzna-Samarasinha writes

I asked my father again and again
What are we?"
His face was a slammed door
"Why do you want to know?"
his only answer" (3)

Therefore it is noteworthy that with her Black boss she is named, even if it is incorrectly. Where she once desires to be recognized as Sri Lankan and is denied this by her mixed family, she is now afforded an even greater prize: she is misrecognized as Black by community members. Moving to a new community in Toronto, even her very body, her very skin, transforms when released from the stifling grip of her hostile parents.

However, this newfound acceptance is not an easy one; Piepzna-Samarasinha's speaker is misrecognized and passes as many other ethnicities by people who misread who she is and where she is from³³. She is also prized for her light skin in a rather problematic reiteration of what Gayatri Chakraborty Spivak would probably call chromatism (Spivak 164). In "mi vida loca, summer 1998" Piepzna-Samarasinha writes,

³³ Out of the scope of the analysis of this paper is a reading of the poet's pieces such as "I didn't want the end times to be like this: 9/11 in seven slams" (50). In these passages of *Consensual Genocide*, Piepzna-Samarasinha discusses the ways in which many brown skinned people in Toronto, herself included, are profiled as Arab and experience hostilities after the events of September 11,th 2001.

She kept saying
"I want your hair.
If you die, leave me your hair"
this Grenadian woman
owner of the hair salon
on the second floor
of a shit coloured building
downtown drag strip
Toronto
Summer 1998". (21)

Here we can see the interplay of mutual desire and longing. Piepzna-Samarasinha, the poor flyer girl making \$7 dollars an hour, is being told that her hair is worth \$2000 by a darker skinned Black woman (21). We can note the latticework of racial desire and unequal power relations. In a world where Piepzna-Samarasinha can pass for Black but a more palatable version of Black that appeals to the white hegemony, her hair becomes a commodity in the salon and to the wealthier salon owner. Moreover, Piepzna-Samarasinha yet again benefits from light skin privilege, but this time in the context of the Black community that is welcoming and frustratingly admiring of her features at the same time.

Another recent text that delves into the desiring of Black cultures, Gautam Malkani's *Londonstani*, was published in 2006 to mixed reviews. The novel follows the characters Jas, Amit, and Hardjit (the buff leader of the crew) and their rudeboy friends in the suburbs of London as they engage in a life of petty mobile phone theft and thuggery. When they steal the phone of their former history teacher Mr. Ashwood, they are encouraged by him to meet with

Sanjay, a wealthy and established business man in London with a very “bling” flat, who, surprisingly becomes their sole stolen phone buyer. The text is steeped in hypermasculinity, hip hop culture, and inter-generational conflict, as the young Asian men negotiate relationships with their demanding parents and older family members. *Londonstani* analyzes the continuing conflicts that arise between Muslims, and Sikhs, and Hindus; the wealthy rudeboys often settle scores with Muslim men who dare to date Sikh or Hindu women. Finally, the novel ends with an interesting twist of racial identity when Jas, who until then has been seen as an Asian, is revealed to be white.

Racial triangulation and masculinity will frame our analysis; the novel’s principal focus might be called the saving of the brown penis. According to Caroline Osella, Filippo Osella, and Radhika Chopra, Frantz Fanon and Edward Said both suggest that Asians in the empire were seen to be unmanly and effeminate (Osella, Osella, and Chopra 3). According to these scholars, such beliefs about (South) Asian male masculinity still linger today (3). They quote T.M. Luhrmann’s 1996 study which proposes that South Asian feeling of lack is a reaction to the white colonizer (3). According to Luhrmann, the British “constructed themselves as dyadic opposites, particularly around the categories of gender, age and race” (Osella, Osella, and Chopra 3). Frantz Fanon discusses the dynamic in which, in the colonial encounter, the white man replaces the father in the Oedipus Complex to the effect that he creates submissive, subjugated Black men (Fanon 31). *Londonstani* contains numerous passages that attempt to rescue the brown penis from rejection by society and women, and to make the reader marvel at its surprising power and might. It is an anxious project on the part of these Desi rudeboy characters. This theme of sexual power in the text is seen in the locker-room style jokes of the four friends, many of which consist of discussion of how large a condom they would need, or

their sexual prowess. In one passage Amit tells the others about a sexual conquest in which the condom was “extra large” (20). He continues on, saying “Yeah, bruv, if I din’t use a rubber, she’d probly have twins or triplets or four babies altogether or someshit” (20). Thus, he illustrates both the size of his penis and his sexual fecundity. Gone from the equation is the woman herself, her own fertility, or any discussion of pleasure or intimacy. Moreover, when Amit thinks of fertility and possible children, veneering enters into the discussion. He tells his rudeboy friends “Whereas me, if I had a kid wid dis bitch from last week, it’d b better-lookin than Pharrell, innit” (20). Pharrell is the Black producer and musician from the United States who is one half of the production duo The Neptunes. The “bitch” that Amit has had sex with is not Black, so somehow Amit himself has been veneered with Blackness by comparing his imagined child to a Black American cultural figure in attempts to rescue himself from possible brown effeminacy. In this triangulation, the Black person is invisible and yet often the savior in the equation, resuscitating Amit and some of his friends from a possible fate of weakness. Thus, any fears of the inferiority of the (South) Asian penis are quelled by the rudeboys by veneering themselves with Blackness, a Blackness that strengthens their masculinity against possible challenges of effeminacy.

The characters are not alone in this use of Blackness. Marlon B. Ross argues that the visibility of Black men is “far greater than their actual numbers in the national population” (599). Ross paraphrases Virginia Woolf in saying that these men have become a “fantastical mirror with the capacity to exaggerate the power of American macho far beyond its actual influence in the world” (599). For those in America and beyond, the figure of the Black male has reigned supreme as the ultimate in aggressive, rugged American manliness (599). According to Ross, not only do the stereotypical white boys from the suburbs ascribe to hip hop aesthetics, and step with

“a macho urban bounce,” but also boys and men from across the world “can be found mimicking the gestures, styles, and lingos invented by and thus associated with young African American men” (Ross 601-602). However, while the iconography and aesthetics of Black men are much desired, they themselves are disembodied in the nation, and in their communities (602).

Representations of South Asian men in Western popular culture imagine them to be challenged in their masculinity particularly by white men, and we see this in the fathers of the rudeboys in the novel. In the colonial moment, British officials gained societal power in South Asia, while the South Asian male was made servile, subjugated because he was ruled by the British. Sixty years later, colonial subjugation still haunts older (South) Asian men. In fact, much of the older generation that is depicted in the novel, the fathers of the rudeboys, are all lost men, who possess economic power but not the physical strength to actually impress the rudeboys and Sanjay. Jas and his friends desperately desire male guidance and role modeling, yet their fathers fail them. The youths’ obsession with body sculpting also suggests their fathers’ perceived failures in masculinity. Jas eventually elects Sanjay, the club owner and businessman, to be his surrogate father, but is dismayed when the Oxbridge grad asks Jas to steal from his own father’s cellphone warehouse. The likening of Sanjay to Jas’ dad continues in this scene when Jas notes that “Sanjay just sat there an din’t say jackshit. Din’t even nod or smile. The exact same shit that my dad does, except with my dad it’s cos he’s either sulkin or he just in’t got shit to say” (298). The weak brown(ed) male in Malkani’s text abandons his son to be parented by their mothers. Jas sighs that “in real life you never get that proper Bollywood showdown, the one where your father finally stops sulkin an kicks some ass” (323). In fact, much of the novel’s hypermasculinity speaks to the longing for proper father figures, ones who will support the young men, and not just buy them off with fancy presents.

In the search for father figures, the rudeboys have turned towards hip hop, sports figures, and even their own veneered selves, leading virtual surrogate families that are mixed race in nature. In “...The Day the Niggaz Took Over: Basketball, Commodity Culture, and Black Masculinity” Todd Boyd elucidates the issues that arise when sports figures and musicians become role models (Boyd 123-144). Some of these figures, such as Charles Barkley and Ice Cube, take on the status of the “bad nigger,” someone who refuses to be “restrained by white oppression,” a sort of folk hero in the Black community (126). This figure challenges both white authority figures and the Black women, who are seen to hold him back, as we can see in Ice Cube’s solo record *Amerikkka’s Most Wanted* in which he boasts he is a “bitch killa” and a “cop killa” at the same time (126). According to Boyd, the bad nigger “embodied the notion of resistance at the highest level as his presence defied all acceptable norms of behavior, decorum, and existence” (126). However, figures like Charles Barkley, the basketball player, insisted that they were not role models for young children to follow. In *Londonstani*, the unsuitable Black father figures have seemingly spoiled the good Desi boys with their rhythmic music and dead end career choices. The young men’s worship of hip hop moguls and thugs has left their parents and teachers perplexed and fearful. When one of the boys tells their former teacher, Mr. Ashwood that he wants to be an MC and is somehow dismayed at the unlikelihood of this career prospect panning out, his negativity indicates the disappointment that the rudeboys’ elders feel for their career paths (130). It also illustrates that Ravi and the others have bought into a culture that says that they can have the same highflying life that their heroes do.

Therefore, the rudeboys are turning away from model minority privilege towards something substantially less secure. When an Asian man becomes “blackened” in society he is all the more policed by those in power, as we see in the interaction with Mr. Ashwood, and also

in the scene with the police officers who stop the fight between Hardjit and Tariq (110-112). Where the rudeboys could choose a life of upward mobility, status, and Oxbridge prestige (though it thinly covers actual shady dealings), they instead chose Black hip hoppers such as DMX as their surrogate fathers.

In Malkani's text, the young Asian men are always already veneered with Blackness, and in an interesting turn of events, the white men are at the bottom of the racial ladder. Jas, the newest member of the rudeboy crew and the white member who is passing as a Blackened Asian, is constantly mocked for being weaker and thus seen to have less sexual prowess. These insults liken the emasculated white male along the shifted racial hierarchy to a queer, or more accurately a gay male. The anxious heteronormativity of these Desi rudeboys is such that they constantly liken white men to gay men in attempts to rescue brown and straight masculinity, and re-establish a new racial hierarchy for a new England. In one scene where the boys discuss sexual encounters, Amit mocks Jas on multiple levels, saying "Fuck you Jas...Jus cos you in't shagged no one. No one female anyway. An even if you did, the durex'd probly slip off your pin-sized prick n you'd end up wid but-ugly kids cos they'd have your genes" (19). Jas, who passes for Asian, is mocked as gay with the comment "[no] one female anyway," the implication clearly that Jas is more interested in men (19). Amit is also not only insulting Jas' penis size (a code in this subculture for one's manhood) as the new racial hierarchy puts white men at the bottom of the ladder, but he is insulting what most Conservatives in England would consider Jas' superior white British genes. This mention of Jas' genes also hints at his true identity as a white man (Malkani has stated in a 2006, Toronto, reading of his book that he had placed several clues to this effect throughout the text to foreshadow the racial passing at the end of the novel). The constant debasement of Jas' sexual prowess and sexual attractiveness, and ways that the boys

incessantly liken him to a gay male only go to show that to the rudeboys, to be white is to be lesser.

The new racial hierarchy that is present in Hounslow society is illustrated through Malkani's use of irony in the novel. As the white teen that the four friends beat up implies in the beginning of the book, Asians have somehow positioned themselves on the top of the racial hierarchy, with whites on the bottom as their victims (13). The rudeboys in *Londonstani* are living a dream life; they are driving fast cars and dating gorgeous women, yet they also manage to have the support of their parents and have minimal responsibilities as they all live at home. No one can touch them. But what do they have, really? The four friends are retaking their A levels because they failed them in high school, yet they keep cutting class to manage their shady phone theft operation, or engage in general mischief. As the figures who seem to have the most status in their suburban town, they also often defer to their very powerful mothers and aunties, the people who really seem to wear the pants in the family. In one scene, the boys are at Hardjit's house after getting a fresh supply of stolen phones, and they switch quickly from their bad boy fronts to darling, studious boys, profusely thanking Hardjit's mother for the samosas and drinks that she brings to his room, her sari rustling (68).

Not only do we find that Jas, the most significant white character, is rendered as effeminate in the re-visioned racial hierarchy of new Britain, but also the other characters, such as Asians who are seen to identify with white culture, are denigrated by the foursome as being lesser men. Whereas identifying with Blackness is prized by the foursome, ascribing to white aesthetics makes one the subject of much mockery. The concept of the "coconut", a person who is seen to be brown on the outside and white on the inside, plays rather heavily in the novel. This, in fact is another racial veneer, yet one that is ridiculed and derided by the four friends as

comprising effeminacy and inferior racial identity. Jas himself reluctantly describes to the reader his “coconut” days, implying some inner veneer essence of brownness waiting to show itself, despite the fact that his ethnicity is actually white. However, in a memorable scene in which the four boys are riding in Ravi’s lilac BMW, and happen upon someone who incurs the wrath of Hardjit and the others:

You could tell him from his long hair, grungy clothes, the poncey novel an newspaper on his dashboard an Coldplay album playin in his car that he was a muthafuckin coconut. So white he was inside his brown skin he probably talked like those gorafied³⁴ desis who read the news on TV. (20-21)

In the scheme of the racial hierarchy, this “coconut” has unfortunately chosen the wrong racial side according to the rudeboys, and is mocked for it. The fact that he doesn’t drive a slicker BMW but instead drives a silver Peugeot 305, and his British (which is always seen as somehow white) and not hip hop inflected accent are all reasons for the boys to mock him. Jas describes his anger towards the stranger as such: “In’t no desi needin to kiss the white man’s butt these days an you definitely don’t need to act like a gora. Fuckin bhanchod³⁵” (23). While this is a common curse word, this last insult implies that the “coconut” is so undesirable sexually that he would have to have sexual relations with his sister, as his lack of prowess would make him uninteresting to women of his own social grouping. By not choosing the now superior hip hop culture and Black aesthetics, this man has debased himself to the realm of “[coconuts], Bounty bars, Oreo biscuits or any other fuckin food that was white on the inside” (23).

The “coconut” stranger doesn’t seem to aspire to the “bling” ideology of the rudeboy crew, as we can see with his less expensive car, and the fact that he isn’t described as wearing

³⁴ The term Gora refers to a white person; in some situations it can be a derogatory naming.

³⁵ This swearword literally translates to “sisterfucker,” and is found in such languages as Hindi and Punjabi.

expensive clothes. He is mocked not only for his seeming aspirations towards whiteness, but also for his lack of aspirations towards conspicuous consumption. The Peugeot driver is also a class traitor, as in Hounslow society, it seems that the wealthiest are the Asians. All the white characters, save Jas and his family, are working dead end jobs, and for the “coconut” to be choosing to align himself with this racial group would be laughable to the wealthy protagonists.

Seeing this “coconut” does several things to the rudeboys: in Jas it inspires a hatred that is altogether racial, sexual, and class based, based on his previous experiences as a coconut, and in Hardjit it strengthens his veneer of Blackness. Jas mocks the hapless stranger in the Peugeot, thinking to himself that someday he’d be “workin in Heathrow fuckin airport helpin goras catch planes to places so they could turn their own skins brown” (23). By remarking on this, he comments on the tension between the “coconut” and the white communities, as white culture rejects and uses them for cheap labour. Jas highlights the fact that while the coconut seems to want to be white, most white British people want to be brown. This comment is curious, coming from a venerated white person who has been accepted so completely into Asian community in Hounslow. It also highlights Jas’ own superiority, as he obviously doesn’t see himself ending up in such a horrible employ, thereby bolstering his masculine status as compared to the “coconut” figure. Jas’ painful reminiscences of his days of “drainpipe trousers an batty books” lead to anxious searching for former coconut friends on the streets who might disturb his new, tough, rudeboy pose (23). Thus the connection to white culture is always linked to queerness (the term “batty” is often used, a West Indian insult for the receiver in a gay male sexual act). It also leads to a sort of anxiety in the gender performance of the viewer of the “coconut”. Jas suddenly fears slippage into “coconut”hood at the mere sight of this hapless character, and this makes him hate him all the more. The Peugeot driver has put Jas into a flurry of nervousness over his own masculinity,

and his own unstable, brownness. This is what makes the “coconut” such a dangerous figure to the rudeboys. He challenges their own fears and worries about their own Asianness, and masculinity. Whereas seeing the “coconut” makes Jas remember his embarrassing past as one himself, it bolsters Hardjit’s masculinity, in a rather interesting way. Hardjit uses a mix of South Asian and Black culture to instill fear in the “coconut” and police the boundaries of his masculine and racial behavior. Hardjit “steupses” loudly, or rather he sucks his teeth, a common West Indian sign of disgust, and is possibly something that Hardjit appropriated in his hip hop inflected presentation of brown masculinity (22). He also shouts Asian swear words at the poor Asian man over loud rap music, which seems to drive his combative attitude even further. Thus seeing the “coconut” makes Hardjit apply his veneer of Blackness even more, as a tactic to display his superior masculinity, and to show the hapless stranger that Black veneered masculinity is the ideal form of male behaviour.

Poncey, batty, dickless: these words and others are linked, in the *Londonstani* world, to the emasculated white(ened) male, and are often also conflated with the queered male. According to the Collins dictionary “poncey” is someone who is “too feminine or artistic” (<http://dictionary.reverso.net/english-cobuild/poncey>). For all the obsession with queer sex and with straight male genitalia, the invisible gay male persona in the novel is somehow always seen as dickless. When Hardjit disciplines the Asian stranger in the Peugeot, he yells at him “Fuckin batty boy, u sound like a poncey gora. Wat’s wrong wid’chyu, sala kuta³⁶? U 2 embarass’d to b a desi? Bet’chyu can’t even speak yo mother tongue, innit” (22). His tirade links several themes and identities: queerness, effeminacy, and whiteness are all connected in the eyes of the rudeboys, and these identities are believed to be found in one who is ashamed to be “a desi” (22).

³⁶ This is an insult that likens the object of the slur to a dog.

Hardjit doesn't, however, challenge his own connections to Indian culture, as a hip hop identified Sikh who speaks a fusion of Hindi, Punjabi, and urban English. This discussion of terminology continues in one scene where Jas breaks up with his secret Muslim girlfriend Samira, and berates himself as a "Dumbass, gimpy, dickless fuck" (289). His inability to control the situation, tame her flirtatiousness, and be the boss of his woman has rendered him literally impotent, literally without a penis, and in the *Londonstani* worldview, queered. Jas and the others are neurotic in their fears of being thought of as batty boys; Jas' admiration for Hardjit's sculpted body causes him to constantly tell the reader that he's just "watchin him feel his biceps" though Hardjit would "rinse me for being gay or a gora lover, or both" (19;19). To be associated with queerness is to be linked with whiteness, and therefore to be a race traitor. The presence of queerness in South Asian cultures is negated; those who are charged with being being "poncey" are somehow whitened, whether they are white or not. The Asian man in the Peugeot and Jas, when he looks at Hardjit's built body, not only transgress the strict codes of masculinity that the rudeboys have put forth in their circle for all to obey, but they betray the new South Asian cultural laws that say that a brown man is *always* a straight man.

In his study of hip hop rooms in gay clubs Q. McCune Jr. examines the concept of "coolness" as it relates to Black men, other men of colour, and even white men (302). According to McCune, who uses the work of Marlene Connor, this coolness is a system of how to "dress, behave, and interact with approval from a largely [Black] and male spectatorship" (302). It is "a theory in practice" and "regulates and monitors what is and is not acceptable among Black men under and outside of white surveillance" (302). Coolness acts "as a way of survival, a coping stance/pose that [Black] men engage, in order to make do with what they do or do not have" (302). And it is always performative; it is an "utterance and action...like all performances, it

changes depending on those involved, the dimensions of space/place, and who is reading and interpreting the scene of action” (302). Surprisingly, even amongst gay men, “the way to affirm one’s normalcy is through participation in homophobic or sexist acts” (307). The speaking of the profane confirms that the speaker is sufficiently masculine (307).

For the Asian rudeboys in *Londonstani*, coolness requires a specific code of behavior and posturing that is linked to their desire to fit into their insular group, but also to codify their group as “hot”, not unlike the subjects of McCune’s hip hop rooms who coded their space in the gay clubs as the most alluring. The rudeboys’ strict rules on how to dress and even how to shave create a code of behaviour that the most diligent would have trouble following. In discussing the offensive language that his crew uses, Jas has this to say:

I wouldn’t decide that the proper word for a dickless poncey sap is a gay batty boy or that the proper word for women is bitches. That shit in’t right. I know what other words like homophobic an misogynist mean an I know that shit in’t right. But what am I s’posed to do bout it? If I don’t speak proply using the proper words then these guys’d say I was actin like a batty boy or a woman or a woman actin like a batty boy. One good thing though: Now that I use all these proper words I’m hardly ever stuck for words. I just chock in a bit a proper speak an I sound like I’m talkin proper, talkin like Hardjit. I just wish I was the Proper Word Inventor so I could pick different words, that’s all. (45-46)

Misogynist and homophobic behaviour is somehow easier, and takes away the confusion for Jas’ formerly shy self who was often at a loss for words. In this passage, he illustrates that to show sympathy for a group with less power only opens one up for ridicule, and breaks the code of coolness.

The above passage also illustrates Jas' deep hero worship of Hardjit, a theme that runs through the text. Hardjit, as his re-named self implies, is the ideal "hard" man; he is tough, buff, and powerful. To Jas, he is even seductive, as the numerous passages where Jas describes the fact that he is *just looking* and not actually attracted to his built friend lead us to believe that Jas is rather proclaiming his heterosexuality a little too heartily. In one scene where he first starts his friendship with Hardjit, he gushes

I was talkin to Hardjit an Hardjit was sorted. You can't give up tryin to chat proply when you're chattin to someone sorted, someone like Hardjit. You'll be thinkin I fancy him now, won't you? That I really am a batty boy after all. But it in't like that cos I in't batty. I just wish I was sorted as Hardjit, that's all. (29)

The desire for the approval of Hardjit, and the attention to the stunning body of Hardjit is only comparable to Jas' interest in Samira, his girlfriend. His constant fear of being seen as "batty" is just another sign of his interest in the dominant Sikh leader of his crew. How far does hero worship go until it turns into sexual interest?

The rudeboys have social power due to wealth, unlike many who use coolness as a survival tactic. Their status makes it difficult for any to say that they are being discriminated against. In fact, there are several instances where the boys cry foul of white characters, saying that these minor characters are being racist, when it is apparent to the reader that they are not. Hardjit is the most trigger happy in his pulling of the "race card". In one instance where he is asked at a posh health club to sign a form stating that he doesn't take steroids (which is obligatory for all patrons), he heatedly asks "Or is it jus dat we ain't want'd round ere? Heh? u b wantin us 2 take our business back 2 da Cranford Fitness Centre where we used to go? Dey ain't got no problem wid us down dere. Is it cos we Pakis, heh?" (187). Hardjit and the others are

afforded privileges of race that others, Blacks included, would never be given, and this is due to their class position in Hounslow society. In the world Malkani creates, it is the wealthy Asians who hold the most power, while the white characters don't seem to benefit from what would seem to be a more favoured racial position. The white characters in *Londonstani* have limited social power, and the most well-developed one is a teacher who watches his brown students, such as Sanjay, go on to greatness and upward mobility while he himself squeezes out a living on government pay.

The new Asian code of hypermasculine behavior can be seen quite clearly in several passages in the text, where characters revel in “bling” toys, and a very conspicuous consumption. The rudeboys spend much time riding around in Ravi's slick lilac BMW M3. As Jas gushes, most “desi bredren had got the E36 model, but Ravi drove an E46. Slick side gills, wider wheel arches, curved roof an four chrome exhaust pipes stickin out under the rear skirt” (14). But all this conspicuous consumption isn't enough for Ravi, as he'd stuck on “an even slicker spoiler, alloy hubcaps that kept on spinnin... an matchin lilac windscreen wipers” (14).

Finally, car, cellphone, and gym cultures complete Malkani's portrait of rudeboy culture. The portrait is shot with irony, although Malkani writes that it is based on his Oxford University undergrad thesis, a study rudeboy culture in and around London. The author might be commenting on the fact that male cultures are caught up in artifice and rigid beauty ideals. In one scene where Hardjit and the others beat a white boy for allegedly calling them Pakis, the leader of the rudeboy crew takes a moment between punches to “straighten his silver chain, keeping his metal dog tags hanging neatly in the centre a his black Dolce & Gabbana vest, slightly covering up the &” (4). In another scene when Hardjit prepares for another fight, he primps in front of the mirror for hours. Jas comments,

He'd chosen the Adidas tracksuit top carefully this morning, standing in front a his full length mirror and comparing it to his Nike tracksuit top (which didn't show his shoulders enough), his tight leather jacket (which showed his pecs too much), a Ted Baker top (which showed too much bicep) and his bomber jacket (which didn't show anything)...I just sat there in his room, pretending to be reading some Bollywood magazine...thinking to myself: This must be what high-class hookers are like before they go out on a job. Trying to wear just enough to take off but not so little that they reveal too much too quickly..." (86)

Here Jas likens Hardjit's vanity to that of a woman; as we can see from this text, men too exhibit a strong sense of how they want to portray themselves visually. Also, in typical fashion, Jas sexualizes his analysis; Hardjit is literally whoring himself out to his designer aesthetics and sensibilities, a comparison that also speaks to Jas' libidinal interest. Moreover, almost everything that these young men do is done taking into account masculine, hip hop aesthetics. Hardjit has to look "hard" for this upcoming fight, even if it means ironically preening for hours in front of the mirror.

Along with a celebration of all things masculine comes constant and incessant fear of not being manly enough, and this is linked to a Blackness that is very stereotypical in its depiction. The slick cars and designer clothes are all items that the boys have gleaned from the hip hop stars that they admire, and are adapted to their own sense of Asian masculinity. To the rudeboys, the limited, fossilized vision of masculinity that is the hip hop thug is their one masculine aspiration. Amit is asked by his mom to buy some products from the pharmacy, he is horrified that a girl that he fancies is at the cash register. Even more so, Amit is embarrassed at the items that he will

have to bring to the cash register: lipstick, lavender oil, and other items (95). Ravi enlightens him about one item in particular, saying

Dudes... I read bout dese pills in some porn mag, I think. Relax, dey in't really laxatives. I mean, dey ain't what most people use them for. Everyone knows dat... Dey for relaxin, innit. But seems dat dey also wat gay boys use, you know, to make it easier. (95)

Amit is horrified, and begins to load his basket with manly items to dilute the femininity of his mother's items. Into the basket go "Dolce and Gabbana Cologne; Gillette Mach 3 shaving blades; FCUK deodorant; Givenchy Rouge aftershave; muscle rub for sporting injuries; bodybuilding protein shakes; some designer hairwax; Boots' own brand dental floss" (95).

However, Amit's anxieties over his masculinity being challenged by the feminine and possibly gay products are not quelled by all the brand name consumer goods geared towards the average stylish man. He heads towards the condoms, and doesn't satisfy himself with large condoms, but rather with "Durex Avanti. He says they've got 64mm width stead a the usual 56mm width. Also they ain't got extra lubricant, which means he generates his own, or rather, some lady's own" (95-96). A frantic Asian masculinity allows for no incursions of women, gays, or whiteness, though the elements of hip hop culture strengthen and solidify this new identity. Amit somehow thinks that everyone would have this specific knowledge about the laxatives, and that the knowledge would not only challenge his sexuality, but his racial identity also. The adherence to aesthetics that are stereotypically hip hop: the fast cars, the hot clothes, and the expensive colognes are an interesting melding of bling hip hop culture and brown upward mobility. These boys are living the "baller" lifestyle; that is, the purchasing power of the upper middle class,

linked with their obsession with all things masculine, has led to a situation whereby they are able to live out their preferred gender performance and revel in it.

The anxious iteration of Asian masculinity is both soothed and challenged by the constant presentations of Blackness in the text, through the forms of music, names of hip hop artists and producers, and other elements of Black culture. The rudeboys perform their masculinity through Blackness, but ironically, this performance doesn't quell the ever-increasing gender anxiety of the rudeboys. They veneer themselves with Blackness to feel more manly, but yet the Blackness that they envelope themselves is one of the very elements that causes their tensions about gender. In several scenes in the novel the four rudeboys drive around town in Ravi's lavender Beemer. Their CD of choice is DMX's first album, "It's Dark and Hell is Hot" (1998). The hip hop aficionado would recognize DMX's aggressive style of almost barking his rhymes, and his videos, such as that of "Ruff Rider's Anthem," that show him riding sports motorbikes and lifting weights made of concrete blocks, place him in the realm of the hypermasculine. When listening to DMX, the rudeboys' neuroses about their lesser Asian manhood heighten, and they counter it by frenetically asserting their manhood in the realm of girls, cars, and other manly domains. In one scene, when Hardjit turns up DMX's "Ruff Rider's Anthem," the four boys share the homosocial bond of oogling a girl on the street, yet the music seems to create a nervous anxiety about sex, desire, and masculinity, until Amit has to say "Dat gyal ain't nothin, if yous lot wanna see proper fitness you should see this bitch I shagged last weekend. Harpinder was her name" (19). When harassing the man in the Peugeot, they also are listening to hardcore rap (22). Both of these incidents suggest the anxieties that the invisible yet still very powerful Black subject bring to the four rudeboys. Perhaps DMX himself is the ultimate ideal of masculinity, someone who is admired, but also loathed because he brings about fears about their own

manhood. And these tensions are unleashed on others who have less status, namely less masculine men, women, and their families.

Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha decolonizes desire by learning to love cultures of colour, and turning specifically away from light skin privilege and towards Blackness. However her turning does not come without its issues because colour hierarchies in the Black community are hard to dispel. Malkani's rudeboys dread connections to queerness and whiteness, and conflate the two, and to stave off these incursions on their Asian manhood, they venerate themselves with Black masculinity.

Conclusion

“How does it feel to be a problem?” Du Bois begins *Souls [of Black Folk]*... But there is also another question that needs to be asked... “How does it feel to be a solution?” Addressed to all Asians, but increasingly with special reference to South Asians, this question asks us brown folk how we can live...as a weapon against black folk. (Prashad vii-viii)

This dissertation challenged the belief that racialized communities immediately support and identify with each other against white supremacist racism; my research on the Black and South Asian diasporas unearthed the Orientalist thoughts and anti-Black racisms that exist in each respective community. I have shown that older members of both communities are often most wary of contact with the other ethnic group; on the other hand communities of second generation individuals and millennials are entering a new world of experience and intra-racial connections. Using the work of Edward Said in his text, *Orientalism*, this dissertation aimed to uncover centuries-old beliefs about South Asians and South Asia, beliefs that find new ground in communities such as that of the Black diaspora. As outlined in my Introduction, Said discusses the western perception of the Orient as a place of splendor, heightened spirituality, and exoticism (Said 1), and these stereotypes flavour the interactions young South Asians have with members of the Black community.

My research aimed for an inter-disciplinary, cultural studies analysis of the communities in question. By looking at how they interact on intimate levels, I underscored the limitations of the approach that conflates the two communities, while aiming for an intersectional analysis of

the source materials. Moreover, my research was an attempt to highlight some of the conflicts and tensions in South Asian-Black interactions, as the two communities experience both suspicion and mutual attraction towards one another.

This methodological approach also incorporated the theories of racial triangulation by Asian Americanist Claire Jean Kim. Racial triangulation was at the heart of my discussion of how the two communities connected, interacted, and were compared to one another. We realized that racial communities cannot be studied in a vacuum, for in the globalized cities studied, the Black and South Asian communities live in close proximity to one another. Utilizing Kim's and Said's theories, my work has attempted to clarify the often-conflictual dynamics between South Asians, Blacks, and whites.

Blackness in the west has given a framework for existence as a marginalized racial community, though the direct overlay of Black ways of being onto South Asian individuals can create outright conflict. Though the Black and South Asian communities in Canada, the United States, and the United Kingdom may seem outwardly similar with regards to their struggle against racism, we must see the particularities of both communities in their respective geographic locations, and the particularities of their racializations. I have indicated that modelling a Black-identified persona when one isn't phenotypically Black raises the question of cultural appropriation and veneering. Investment in a culture not one's own, though it may be familiar, raises many questions about community, belonging, privilege, and desire. Without closing the door on the possibility of coalition and cross-cultural communication, South Asians and Blacks in the west have entered into unknown territory, and have the opportunity to reflect on networks of privilege in their interrelations. By eschewing stereotypes and time-worn modes of perception, Blacks and South Asians can carve out fresh ways of interaction and building alliance.

This dissertation opened up the less-examined areas of these intra-diasporic relationships. We need new research on diasporas that focuses on how racial and ethnic identities play out in the public sphere. Asians interact with Blacks, Blacks with Latinos, and First Nations people with settler Asians, and the circles of connectivity continue on. New modes of being challenge how the Black and South Asian diasporas view and appreciate one another. In the cultural work I analyzed, we can see the creation of identity, the forging of new iterations of what it is to be an ethnic or racial minority in the west; the very existence of this body of work is creative and self-affirmational at the same time.

In my discussion of how the communities connect I delved into the myth of the model minority; this research illustrated the corrosive impact of the popularly-held belief that South and East Asians are the models other minorities should emulate. From the upward mobility and capitalist values of many South Asians, to the limited political engagement of some community members, many South Asians become more focused on their own financial success than on change in their communities. I pointed out a strong vein of conservatism in some South Asian communities that makes them welcome tokens for politicians with whom they share a “family values” approach to society. Yet according to Gary Okihiro, “yellow is a shade of black” (xiv), meaning that Asian and South Asian communities have more in common with Black peoples than the white majority they might aspire to join.

My research yielded a unique approach to the study of diaspora, connections between communities, and racialization of ethnic communities in the countries in question. The concept of “auxiliary relationships” expands out to the ways the community members interact with one another. Initially proposed in the characters Hashida and Oliver in *Bhaji on the Beach*, the concept of auxiliary relationships can be expanded to show that communities are not separate

entities living in splendid isolation, if they ever really were. In today's global cities, overlapping diasporas carve out the city streets, intermingle, and connect, often both positively and negatively at the same time. The concept of auxiliary relations highlighted the complex web of associations that all in a community share with one another, at times without acknowledging it.

While auxiliary relations posit a hopeful view of inter-ethnic interactions, there are times when close connection can yield a problematic result. In my utilization of concept of veneering, I tracked the ways that a member of one cultural community can overlay themselves with the icons and emblems of another culture without truly understanding their significance or history. Such mimicry can often rely on stereotyping and subtle cultural supremacy. Veneering is never innocent. The concept of racial veneering, particularly in hip hop identified cultures, is problematized in my dissertation because of its embedded notions of Black hypermasculinity and insecurities about the South Asian male's "effeminacy". Veneering can occur for many reasons, yet when it is an attempt to bolster a seemingly flailing masculinity based on stereotypes about Black hypermasculinity, such actions are highly suspect. The subjects studied in my analysis of *Londonstani* search for their fathers, and father each other regarding masculine behavior, sexuality, and dress. Furthermore, they take on Black surrogate fathers, including the hip hop artists and athletes they admire. The belief in authenticity, in a quintessential Black or South Asian experience that can be mimicked, results in iterations of Blackness or South Asianness that are always already fraught with distortions and stereotypes.

During the course of my research, I gleaned a fuller understanding of the interplay of power and privilege in the two ethnic communities. My approach is deeply invested in feminist and gender based analysis of the cultural products that reflect Black-South Asian interactions. This approach was imperative, for gender policing and constrictions of behavior do not exist for

women alone. I examined the spectrum of male behaviors, and their relationship to racialization. I studied the often punitive pressures placed on men to display what is seen as conventional masculine behavior; this pressure comes from society at large, from their male friends, and even from themselves. The male characters explored in this study experience ostracization, humiliation, and even physical brutality at the hands of other men who uphold the models of satisfactory male behavior. My research also illustrated the fear among brown men's communities of emasculation by Black men. This relational masculinity reveals that men of many different races hold each other up to rigid performances of gender, often based on beliefs about an invisible hierarchy of maleness.

This investment in a feminist approach continued on in my work on hip hop. Hip hop feminism must always be infused into any analysis of hip hop cultures, and through it we can gain a clearer vision of the roles that Black and other women have in the musical culture. The ruthless utilization of women's bodies and faces to fuel an international, multi-billion dollar music industry is all the more shocking because, when these women access their sexual capital for their own interests or romantic motives, they are viewed with utter disgust and contempt. A truly sex-positive society will be where women have full autonomy over their own bodies- in sex, in dress, and in adherence to or rejection of societal norms.

I focused much of my analytical attention on interracial desire in the cultural products studied. Through a historical analysis of anti-miscegenation legislation in the United States, I found that, to paraphrase Gayatri Spivak's celebrated statement, anti-miscegenation laws in the United States were an attempt on the part of white men to save brown and white women from Black men (Spivak). I found that such legislation and social regulations were an attempt to

curtail unfavourable interracial sexuality in white and Asian women; these women are seen as unable to make their own decisions about their desires and romantic attachments.

One dynamic observed in this study was the negative reaction to couplings between Black men and South Asian women. These unions often lead to antagonisms within the Black communities based on the frequent beliefs that Black men should “give back” to their communities by entering into a secure relationship with a Black woman. I showed how some Black women are angered by the seeming “easiness” of an interracial relationship, believing that one with a Black woman would be more challenging. This view is powerfully articulated in Djanet Sears’s *Harlem Duet*, in which Othello delivers a poignant and painful statement to his Black ex-wife, Billie:

“You don’t want to know the truth. You want me to tell you what you want to bear. No, no, you want to know the truth? I’ll tell you the truth. Yes, I prefer White women. They are easier- before and after sex. They wanted me and I wanted them. They weren’t filled with hostility about the unequal treatment they were getting at their jobs. We’d make love and I’d fall asleep not having to beware being mistaken for someone’s inattentive father (Sears 1205).”

This quote illustrates the belief that the challenges of societal racism in a co-ethnic relationship can be easily escaped by desiring someone from another race. My discussion of such interracial relationships brought to light the flow of intimate desire in communities of colour, and its complicated relationship to body and beauty aesthetics.

When writing a dissertation, one spends as much time setting aside questions and avenues of study as they do answering queries posed by their research. While I aimed to be comprehensive in my analysis of the topic, upon completion of my study I find that there are still

many questions I needed to put aside. In this vein, I now aim to highlight all the roads my work could have travelled, all the networks of questions and connections that could have yielded an entirely different finished product. I put such questions aside for future research, and I would love to see other researchers put their talents to answering the following analytical dilemmas.

Much more research needs to be performed on attitudes to racial mixing, because anecdotal analysis suggests that western societies aren't quite as open-minded as sociological studies and surveys would suggest. Terry Goldie speaks of the continued discrimination against interracial couples in *Queersexlife*: "Black nationalists view heterosexual interracial couples as failing to build the nation by creating at least the potential of the 'half -breed'" (150). Future theorists and scholars of interracial desire should be encouraged to root out xenophobic sentiment in racial minority communities in order to get a fuller understanding of our views on race and equality.

While my research delved into the cost of masculine models of behavior for Black and Brown men, my study doesn't explore the impact of this view of maleness on men of other communities- East Asians, Latinos, whites, First Nations, and so forth. To say that there is one governing code of conduct for men is simplistic, and yet the behaviors described in the texts analyzed have a far-reaching impact on male societies. We need to take a clear-eyed look at the ways that men of ethnic minority communities are viewed, and celebrated or denigrated in comparison to one another. We should also look at the oppression of men based on an impossible ideal of body and behavior that affects all, just as the patriarchy and sexism towards women affect all.

In this vein, further research would be welcomed on the ever-increasing industry of male beauty aesthetics and the politics of body building aesthetics fuelled by advertising and

consumer cultures. I would love for future studies of body modification in the realms of diet, weight lifting, and intentional muscular hypertrophy to consider all the racialized implications of this niche in contemporary society. While I touched on some of this analysis in *Londonstani* and *Bhaji on the Beach*, I would love to explore these male communities in future studies, though I realize that the crossroads of male beauty aesthetics and critical race studies could yield an entire new field of research.

My chapter on hip hop attempted to look at a rarely analyzed subset of the genre, club music. Studies of party hip hop fell by the wayside in the academic rush to research rap and urban music, but hip hop has always been about the party. From street parties to dancehalls to underground rhyme battles, hip hop culture has always had the element of fun at its centre. While many scholars have gravitated to the music of those espousing social justice initiatives, much more research needs to be done on the popular hip hop one would hear in a club and on the streets. Some academics and cultural critics are starting to look into this very large section of hip hop, as we saw with the flutter of critical articles on Nicki Minaj's "Anaconda," and I welcome these theoretical dissections of the music that the everyday hip hop head is listening to.

While some begin to look to popular hip hop music, few undertake article length analysis of hip hop videos. The musical genre has had a constant visual representation in the form of videos, album covers, and magazine covers, and these are very fruitful source materials for research. Even with the demise of video play on MTV, hip hop videos can cost in the millions to produce, and as we've seen in 2014, can be as eagerly awaited as film releases are. My research of this arm of hip hop culture opens a door into a new sub-field of cultural studies, and I would love to continue my analysis of this aspect of hip hop culture in future research. I would

appreciate seeing others engage in rigorous textual analysis of the visuals that are very much the marketing arm of the hip hop industry.

In the past two years there has been a renaissance in the representations of South Asians in popular culture. The very foundation of my research questions included the paucity of positive, non-essentialist representations of South Asians in film, music, and television- this is becoming a thing of the past. It is a wonderful time to be analyzing South Asian North American culture, and the future will only bring more nuanced and meaty source material for these researchers. From *The Mindy Project* to the character of Cece on *The New Girl*, from Nicki Minaj and MIA to characters on television shows like *Parks and Recreation*, *Smash*, and *Big Bang Theory*, South Asians and the South Asian experience are becoming mainstream where they were once fringe. I believe that book-length studies of South Asians in comedy would yield much fruitful analysis, while MIA's edgy art hip hop begs for closer analysis, from her postcolonial growlings in *Arular* to her brushes with the queen of pop, Madonna.

My study of the intersections of the Black and South Asian communities aimed to insert a new mode of analysis for diasporic research. I looked at the two diasporic communities in connection with one another, to see how they relate, where they come in a coalitional union, and where they fall into frictive conflict. I aimed to use new research subjects and engage with recent cultural interventions in the fields of film, music, and literature. The "rough peace" Dionne Brand speaks of in *What We All Long For* is seen in the streets of Toronto, London, and New York, as communities are piled one atop the other in waves of immigration and internal movement. It is impossible to not see the deep, decades long interactions between the two diasporas, and this mode of cultural analysis yields a true view of what it is to be a person of colour in a largely pluralistic society.

The subjects of my study, be they Black or South Asian, create a very new, modern process of representation. Through these webs of connectivity, South Asians develop a sense of their own subjectivity relative to Blacks, and vice versa. The racial triangulation of the three communities, Black, white, and South Asian, yields a net of connections that cannot easily be teased apart. This approach to diaspora posits a new iteration of Blackness, and a new definition of South Asianness, and how they play out in the multicultural and multiracial societies living in the global city.

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