University of Alberta

Resisting Women:
Orientalism, Diaspora, and Gender

by

Shazia Rahman 

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Department of English

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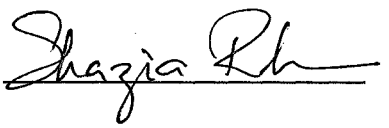

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Dr. Mark Driscoll

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Date: 5 April 2002

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FOR MY PARENTS

Shehla, who taught me to see
and
in memory of Aziz, whose gentle patience still inspires,
with love and thanks

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Abstract

This project traces the ways in which five South Asian women writers of fiction in North America contest orientalist stereotypes about South Asia and South Asian women in their literary texts and interviews. I study the resistance of Anita Rau Badami, Rachna Mara, Kirin Narayan, Bharati Mukherjee, and Sara Suleri in terms of their struggles for legitimacy, which lead them to engage with ideologies of diaspora, nationalism and patriarchy. My approach to the texts I study is materialist feminist ideology critique because I read these women's rebuttals to orientalism as historical and constructed rather than essentialist. My project asks, what are the subversions of orientalism in these women's fiction given the context in which they write and the politics of their reception in North America? Their resistance to dominant orientalist ideology is important because even though culture shapes the subject, the subject also shapes culture. Thus, the texts I discuss construct meaning and create culture that is resistant and oppositional but not hegemonic.

First, I use the theories of Pierre Bourdieu to explain the packaging of South Asian women's novels as a result of the orientalism of our culture, which insures that exotic book covers sell more books and lead to popular legitimacy for the author (chapter one). Then, I compare the works of two writers to determine the relationship between popular legitimacy and textual resistance to orientalism (chapter two). Next, I read a novel that subverts the notion that authentic identities actually exist in order to argue that contradictory identities should be used for political change in the diaspora rather than strategic essentialism (chapter three). In order to discover the effects of nationalism on orientalist ideologies, I examine the books of an author who has lived in India, Canada, and the U.S. with the result that her response to each country's myths either adds to or diminishes her attempts to resist orientalism (chapter four). And finally, I discuss a memoir that fights orientalism by

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critiquing all categories including "woman" and "third world" while simultaneously creating a relational subjectivity at the intersections of the categories it rejects (chapter five).

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Introduction

As multinational capitalism systematically expands its network of exploitative relations of production and consumption, patriarchal and capitalist relations become even more securely imbricated – witness the growing disciplinary violence against third-world women by multinational corporate research, the increasing sexualization of women by an all-pervasive commodity aesthetics, and the intensified contestation over woman's body as the site of reproduction in the first world and of production in the third world.

– Rosemary Hennessy and Rajeswari Mohan

In a recent issue of *Signs*, Cynthia Enloe advocates "the art of admitting surprise" to feminists who want to produce scholarship that leads to activism (Enloe 1025). She feels that by not admitting surprise and simply incorporating each new social and political development into a pre-existing feminist framework, feminists risk replacing curiosity with cynicism. When I first started noticing exoticized images of South Asian[1] women[2] on the book covers for fiction by South Asian women, my initial response was one of cynicism and dismay. Despite the presence of important critical work on the links between stereotypes of non-western[3] women and imperialism, I felt that South Asian women themselves were allowing images of fixed difference to be commodified,[4] thereby adding to both gender and

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[1] I use Naheed Islam's definition of the term "South Asian," as people from "Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka" (Islam 242). I do not consider this term a homogenous category. These countries have very different histories, cultures, languages, and religions. As Islam has pointed out, the category South Asian is often considered synonymous with Indian. While the bulk of my material can be considered Indian in origin, these writers are diasporic and include Pakistani-American writer, Sara Suleri.

[2] While there are some similarities between representations of South Asian women and East or West Asian women, the differences between them and their contexts are numerous enough to make broad generalizations dangerous. I do not wish to reinscribe the orientalist traditions I am critiquing by universalizing the conclusions I make about South Asian women in this project to other minority writers in diaspora.

[3] Even though I do not capitalize the terms east and west because I do not want to add to their power as monolithic categories, I choose not to deny my complicity with these terms either. As a result, I do not put quotation marks around binaries such as west and east. Quotation marks are often used as a means of distancing oneself from inappropriate terms.

[4] I use the phrase "commodification of difference" to refer to the ways in which difference is used to sell, among other things, clothes, movies, books, and music. Here I am referring to the slippage that occurs between difference and the commodity it is being used to sell. At some point, difference becomes the commodity that is being sold. In this project, I study the relation between difference

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race oppressions. Fortunately for my project, I eventually admitted surprise and allowed my curiosity to lead me to the important questions of how these oppressions work and whether, in the words of Cynthia Enloe, "even if continuing, [they have] been contested" (1026). In this project I trace the multiple and varied ways in which five South Asian women writers of fiction contest orientalized images[5] of women in our contemporary North American culture.[6] What I have discovered is that the field of cultural production is more complicated than any binary – essentializing these women as dominant or dominated – might assume.

This project will explore the ways in which Anita Rau Badami, Rachna Mara, Kirin Narayan, Bharati Mukherjee and Sara Suleri work against orientalist stereotypes about South Asia and South Asian women[7] in their literary texts, interviews and essays. I will pursue this investigation through close readings and analysis of each of these texts along with their

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and capitalism where orientalist stereotypes are used to increase profits. When this happens capitalism taps into the ongoing orientalism of our culture. This does not mean that anti-orientalist images cannot be used for profit-taking motives. The difference is only that in the latter case the discourse of orientalism is not deployed.

[5] By orientalized images, I mean images that focus on and emphasize difference. In his book *Orientalism*, Edward Said writes that his "contention is that Orientalism is fundamentally a political doctrine willed over the Orient because the Orient was weaker than the West, which elided the Orient's difference with its weakness" (204). While maintaining Said's emphasis on power, I would like to add that I see contemporary orientalism as a preconceived and simplistic idea of fixed difference. For instance, those who have orientalist notions about someone often find that this person is either not as different as expected or far more different.

[6] I define culture as the "shared meanings" and "shared understandings" (*Representation* 1) which are produced and exchanged by its participants. I agree with Stuart Hall that these shared meanings "organize and regulate social practices, influence our conduct and consequently have real, practical effects" (*Representation* 3).

[7] Since my project is located in the west and my audience is largely western, I use this category (South Asian) in my work to counteract the stereotypes that circulate in our (western) culture about South Asian women. For instance, on an MTV special with the Spice Girls, a very demure woman's voice with a "South Asian" accent was used to name each of the Spice Girls between segments (August 1998). The softness of her voice combined with the fact that she repeated the word "spice" many times left an impression that South Asian women's sexual and culinary prowess is indeed spicy. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's novel *The Mistress of Spices* furthers the stereotype that connects South Asian women and spices. Because of stereotypes such as these as well as the fact that women are often the sites of conflict between the old world and the new due to patriarchal gender relations, I plan to limit my discussion of the South Asian diaspora to women writers.

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critical reception in terms of book reviews and literary criticism to examine the extent to which each writer resists the latent orientalism of our culture. These women's oppositional practices deserve critical reading because they provide an antidote to our culture's preconceptions about differences. These preconceptions lead to debates about Multiculturalism in Canada, about Affirmative Action in the U.S. and decisions about immigration and asylum, specifically gender-based asylum which South Asian Sikh women are seeking.[8] Latent orientalism[9] influences how we interact with minorities on a number of levels, from within a classroom or community to within nations or globally. Each of the five authors I've chosen resists orientalism within various competing and overlapping ideologies.

My project is based on a number of premises about ideology. First, all texts – literary, book covers, book reviews, interviews and even this project – construct ideology. Second, these constructions may or may not be hegemonic. Third, regardless of their hegemony, discursive representations are correlated with social practice. And finally, this correlation finds expression in culture. On the one hand, I see culture as shaping the subject, but on the other hand, I see the subject as having the power to shape culture. As Rajeswari Rajan writes, "culture appears as the chief matter and consequence of dominant ideological investment, powerfully coercive in shaping the subject; but since it is also heterogeneous, changing and open to interpretation, it can become a site of contestation and

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[8] I am referring here to a paper presented by Inderpal Grewal titled "Refugees, Cosmopolitans and Americans" where Grewal finds that South Asian Sikh women started applying for gender-based asylum to the U.S. in 1994. However, they are not as successful as women from China and Iran in getting asylum. Grewal's analysis suggests that the safest narrative for these women is one that minimizes their agency by depicting third world women as victims. On the other hand, if their narratives are too similar to narratives by other women, the officials reject the application because they assume that the narrative is a fabrication.

[9] I will discuss latent orientalism in the section "Ongoing Orientalism." Suffice it to say here that it is a phrase coined by Said and refers to an unconscious orientalism that is different from actual material knowledge of non-western countries and peoples.

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consequently of the reinscription of subjectivities" (10). Even though this project explores the intersections of orientalism, diaspora, representation, and ideology, this introduction will devote a separate section to each term. I hope that the intersections among them will become clear despite the structure of separation I have chosen as a format. Some of the questions that arise at these intersections include: how is contemporary culture marked by the ideology of latent orientalism? How can contemporary representations of diaspora unsettle orientalist stereotypes? How can diasporic representations of contradictory and incoherent subjectivities be politically useful in contemporary culture? In order to explore these questions, I will begin with readings of the book covers that first caught my eye because these exoticized images serve as the original impetus behind this project. Second, I will describe what I mean by orientalism, diaspora, and representation. Lastly, I will discuss my method and my project with emphasis on the ways in which dominant ideology is subverted by the authors I study.

Beginning with Book Covers

In this section, I will describe what I mean by exoticized book covers. In order to do this, I will read a selection of covers used for fiction by Bharati Mukherjee published at different times over the last three decades. I will not visually reproduce these images here because I do not wish to duplicate the orientalizing practices that I want to critique.[10] What

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[10] I do not assume that by refraining from displaying these images in my project, I can avoid engaging with the dominant completely. In order to resist and critique these images, I describe them in detail and therefore I do engage with the dominant. However, I choose ekphrasis over the visual because I agree with Rey Chow's critique of Malek Alloula in "Where Have All the Natives Gone?" Chow writes "Alloula's entire message could have been delivered verbally" in order to avoid the "pornographic obviousness of the images and . . . their abusive structuration" (Chow 41). I am simply choosing to avoid the orientalist obviousness of the images I describe. I am not, however, assuming that these images are always orientalist regardless of context. Even Chow provides the alternative of visual reproduction in conjunction with "a careful reading of the materiality of the

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I hope to show in my readings is not only that these images of South Asian women are extremely orientalized but also that these images have become more orientalized over time. One could argue that the reason for this increased exoticism is that latent orientalism is increasing in North America. However, I would prefer to argue that latent orientalism has remained consistent in our culture since the nineteenth century. I would explain the difference in book covers over the last three decades as a difference in marketing. Because our marketing strategies have become more sophisticated over the last 30 years, we have started using more exotic covers to sell works of fiction by South Asian women.

Theorists of book marketing bolster this assertion. The importance of book covers to marketing increased, according to John Sutherland, when, in 1939, a man named Robert de Graff changed the way paperbacks were sold in the U.S. Inspired by the success of Penguin in Britain, de Graff developed a different commercial strategy for the U.S., which is still widely used today. "Eye-catching covers were the main selling point. He devised a campaign of 'saturation' marketing, an over-supply which meant that up to sixty per cent of American paperback copies were never sold, but served as display for those that did sell. Gross over-production remains a feature of the American paperback industry" (Sutherland 7). Thus, book covers are an integral part of marketing for a book because they are used for display purposes. This makes the function of the book covers I describe more than merely ornamental.

Bharati Mukherjee is the most successful South Asian woman writer in Canada and the U.S., having published books for three decades. Even a writer of Mukherjee's stature is

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images" in order to "show that what is assumed to be pornographic is not necessarily so" (Chow 40). I believe that such a reading can be done for any visual image including the ones I read in this project. However, my larger goal is not to find anti-orientalist resistance in the images but to find it in the texts.

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unable to wholly intervene in the discourse of orientalism that cloaks her writing. Even as Mukherjee's insistence that she is an American writer becomes stronger, and even though she has spoken out against exoticized images of women, her publishers, especially Fawcett, continue to select book covers that are exotically Indian in focus, sometimes printing covers that are even more orientalized than those published in the 1970s and 1980s. In 1985, in the introduction to her collection of short stories, *Darkness*, Mukherjee was adamant that people who had moved here from other places must stop "clutching the souvenirs of an ever-retreating past" (xiv). These souvenirs, which she had presumably stopped clutching, were for her Indian culture. A year later a critic noted that Mukherjee "rejected the temptation of clinging to Indian culture, packaging and selling it" (Nazareth 184). While this is certainly true to some extent, most of Mukherjee's fiction contains covers that display South Asian women in South Asian dress. Out of these covers, most display stylized drawings of South Asian women which could be construed as breeding exactly the kind of nostalgia that she speaks against. The earlier books are excellent examples of this. For instance, Houghton Mifflin, Penguin, and Fawcett (Random House/Ballantine) published *The Tiger's Daughter* in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s respectively. But even though they had different publishers in different decades, each of their editions of *The Tiger's Daughter* displays a South Asian woman in South Asian dress using a stylized drawing.

Houghton Mifflin's 1972 cover illustration is in an arched window. Two pairs of images are juxtaposed in the background. The sun peaks out from behind a dark cloud while the American flag peaks out from behind the Taj Mahal. Since the Taj Mahal is as recognizable a symbol of India as the American flag is of the U.S., the cover implies that America is the sun that peaks out from behind India, the dark cloud. In the foreground is a woman, hair parted in the middle and pulled back on each side, wearing a three-banded

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necklace and a low-cut yellow blouse. The back cover contains a large black and white photograph of the author, which is exactly the same as the stylized drawing of the woman on the front cover. Like her, the hair is parted in the middle and pulled back on each side and like her she is wearing a three-banded necklace and a low-cut blouse. That the reader sees this illustration through an arched window points to the Indian frame of the book. Secondly, that the illustration of the protagonist of a fictional novel is almost identical to the photograph of the author on the back cover is an attempt by marketers to signify the authenticity of the story and its author.

Penguin's 1987 paperback cover illustration is similar to Houghton Mifflin's cover in that there is a South Asian woman in the foreground and symbols of India and the U.S. in the background. The South Asian woman's hair is cut into a chin-length bob. Over her left shoulder in the distance is the Statue of Liberty and New York City, and over her right shoulder there are green hills, the Taj Mahal, and a large house with a circular driveway. The back cover has a small black and white photograph of the author with, surprisingly, a chin-length bob like the illustration of the protagonist on the cover. Like Houghton Mifflin, Penguin is connecting the protagonist's illustration with the author's photograph to market the book as authentic. It is fitting that both Penguin and Houghton Mifflin use symbols of India and the U.S. on the covers of *Tiger* because of Mukherjee's attachment to national symbols, myths, and discourses. Unfortunately, her latest publisher seems unaware of this aspect of Mukherjee's writing and consistently depicts exoticized South Asian women without national symbols. The images, thus, cannot be linked to any national imaginary. They are dehistoricized and decontexualized in a way that is particularly orientalist.

According to John Sutherland, "One of the paradoxical and most intractable tasks of the paperbacker is to give the reprint – essentially an old, second-hand copyright – a gloss of

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novelty" (4). But the novelty that Fawcett chooses isn't novelty at all. Whereas both the 70s and 80s covers show women with uncovered heads, Fawcett's 1996 cover shows a woman with a covered head. And whereas both the 70s and 80s covers showed women without a bindi (red dot on forehead), Fawcett's new cover shows a woman with a bindi. She looks over her shoulder mysteriously whereas the women on the covers of previous years stare straightforwardly at the consumer. But Tara, the protagonist of the novel, is nothing like the woman on the latest cover. She has lived in the U.S. for seven years even though the setting of the novel is her visit to India to see her parents. In the novel, she is described as someone who wears silk saris but she also wears "turtleneck and breeches" (212). Upon seeing her wearing sunglasses, her friends exclaim, "she wasn't always so glamorous! I mean look at her short hair and all. And that sari! It *has* to be from New York!" (53). The content of the novel makes it seem highly unlikely that Tara, the glamorous woman wearing shades and sporting a short hair cut, would cover her head and wear a red bindi as Fawcett's cover depicts. Thus, Fawcett's 1996 cover of a book that first came out in 1971 is more exoticized than the covers from 1972 and 1987 even though Mukherjee has become more vocal about her dislike of such practices.

In 1988, she wrote very specifically against the seductions of the exotic. When reading what creative writers in their 20s who were born in Asia but raised in the U.S. were writing, she was disappointed to read their reliance on Asian material that they were obviously unfamiliar with.

> It's with a sinking sensation that I read their stories, too often hokey concoctions composed of family memory and brief visits to ancestral villages. Here they are . . . turning their backs on some of the richest material ever conferred on a

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> writer, for the fugitive attraction of something dead and "charming." Third-world material will never be harshly received, that's true . . . Editors and classmates will indulge you, and faintly condescend . . . We may look a little different, and carry different-sounding names, but we mustn't be seduced by what others term exotic. ("Immigrant Writing" 29)

Mukherjee is more than aware of the market for the exotic and also how dead such material can be because it is based on stereotypes rather than close observation. Critics continue to argue about whether or not her own fictional characters are stereotypical or fully developed. Anne Brewster, Sangeeta Ray, Kristin Carter-Sanborn and Gurleen Grewal are among those critics who find Mukherjee's characters exoticized and stereotypical while Deepika Bahri and Suzanne Kehde argue against this assertion. Regardless of what these critics say, Mukherjee herself has strong views against exoticism and one would expect her books not to be marketed with stereotypical South Asian women with covered heads and, in the case of the latest cover for *Tiger*, sporting a large red bindi.

As with *Tiger*, Mukherjee's second novel, *Wife*, was published with less exoticized covers by Houghton Mifflin and Penguin in the 70s and 80s when compared with Fawcett's more exoticized cover of the 90s. Granted, all three covers depict South Asian women in South Asian dress and this in itself could be construed as unnecessary exoticization. Nonetheless, Fawcett's cover is especially orientalist because it depicts a close-up of a South Asian woman's face whose head is covered and who is wearing a teeka or forehead

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ornament and holding a lotus[11] flower. She, like the women on all the *Tiger* covers, has an inscrutable, mysterious look on her face. Her expression is so lifeless that it is impossible to tell what she is thinking. The close-up of her face is not designed to reveal emotions but rather just to focus on the fact that she is South Asian. Even though three-fourths of the novel is set in New York, Fawcett's cover contains an arched window in the background through which we see a gray building with a dome atop a minaret with more arched windows and a smaller dome atop some pillars. Again, like the close up of the South Asian woman, the arched windows and domes are not designed to depict setting but rather just to catch the eye of consumers looking for stories in exotic settings. Like Fawcett's *Tiger*, the woman has a covered head even though the protagonist is not described in this way in the story. Fawcett's covered head, teeka, domes, and arches are all designed to depict the exotic and have nothing to do with the content of *Wife*. In a 1997 interview, Mukherjee said, "I'm against commodification and commercialization of ethnicity and race" (Byers-Pevitts 196). Yet this is exactly what the covers of her novels appear to do.

In 1985, Penguin Books Canada published *Darkness* with a cover displaying a Hindu goddess. The background is an apartment building and far from exotic but the foreground with the four-armed semi-naked goddess carrying a sword and someone's head is decidedly exotic. Despite Penguin's cover's exoticism, Fawcett's latest cover for *Darkness* far surpasses it. It was republished in May 1992 and shows a stylized drawing of two women. One is in South Asian attire with a bindi and covered head while the other is in western clothes and is holding a torn piece of paper with Persian writing on it. The problem with this cover is that half the protagonists in the book are either male or white so why depict two dark women on

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[11] The lotus flower is associated with eastern spirituality. Specifically, it is associated "with the birthplace of the Hindu deity Brahma and the conception and birth of the Buddha" (Bose 161).

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the cover? It seems that this is Fawcett's trademark for Mukherjee's first three books: South Asian women in floral and paisleyed South Asian attire with heads covered and sporting a bindi or teeka.[12]

In an interview with *The Iowa Review* Mukherjee speaks openly about her conception of the protagonist of her fourth book, *Jasmine*. When asked whether she believes in reincarnation, Mukherjee answers, "My way of dealing with it has been to say, like in my novel *Jasmine*, we are re-inventing ourselves a million times" (18). The protagonist of *Jasmine* is continually being reborn, continually changing. Unfortunately, both Grove's paperback and Fawcett use fixed, exotic and unchanging images of South Asian women for their covers that do not actually account for the continual change and re-invention of character that Mukherjee discusses. Grove's front and back covers are both framed by an arched window. Above the arch is an extremely intricate design. Within the arched window on the back cover is a synopsis, some blurbs, and an author's biography. Inside the arched window on the front cover is of course a slightly out-of-focus photograph of a South Asian woman in South Asian dress. A yellow light appears to be emanating from the outline of her head and shoulders. Half of her face is in shadows and therefore too dark to see at all. The expression on her face is, predictably, hard to read. The intricate designs, arches, out of focus and glowing woman who is half in shadows combine to create an exoticized image of an other. Fawcett's cover is not that different from this one. It too displays a photograph of

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[12] This image of women using South Asian accessories can be found in popular culture as well. The lead singer of the popular band "No Doubt," Gwen Stefani wears South Asian accessories such as bindis, much to the pleasure of her adoring fans. Singer Shania Twain wears a bindi and a long scarf on her head in the video for her song "From this moment on" (Dir. Paul Boyd, Mercury Records, 1998). Thus, singers who use this image to sell their music parallel Fawcett's use of these images to sell books.

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a South Asian woman staring through a window with an expressionless face. The expressionless face is important in these images because it can be construed as inscrutable and mysterious.

The consistent use of orientalist covers for Mukherjee's books may be related to what professionals in publishing think these designs should be. According to Corinne A. Kratz, even though cover designers, editors and marketing specialists all have different ideas about the cover's relation to a book, they often agree that the cover must be "striking." "Perhaps the ideal for all concerned is the visually 'striking' cover – an attention-getting sales hook – that simultaneously condenses and evokes the book's topical concerns" (Kratz 187). In footnote 14 of the same article Kratz defines the word striking. "This adjective recurs in discussions about book covers. What it means, however, may vary – for example, bold, bright, elegant, unusual, shocking, intriguing. The choice of term – *striking* rather than *beautiful* – again points to the commodity nexus of the aesthetics involved" (197). When it comes to deciding what is "striking" for the cover of a book by a South Asian woman writer, it appears that the final decision equates "striking" with exotic perhaps because of the commodification of difference. In the case of Bharati Mukherjee, most of her books are marketed with strikingly exotic covers. The most recent reprints of her first three books along with *Jasmine*, her most popular book, are all highly exoticized and focus on exactly the ethnicity that Mukherjee insists is insignificant. Even though the covers from the 70s and 80s acknowledged Mukherjee's place of residence by combining American and Indian symbols on the covers, the latest covers for the same books and newer books all focus on uncontextualized fixed difference. There is no visual marker showing that these women live in North America. This emphasis on difference is orientalist. In the next section, I will discuss what I mean by the term orientalist.

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Ongoing Orientalism

The book covers I have just discussed provide examples of the ways in which the discourse of orientalism continues to influence contemporary North American culture. In this section, I will describe Edward Said's important work on orientalism and its relevance to my project along with the way in which Meyda Yeğenoğlu supplements his work with attention to gender. This discussion of orientalism will not only relate to the book covers I have already discussed but will also provide a description of the discourse that the authors I study attempt to resist in their writings.

Before I discuss Said's work, I would like to point out some of the problems with the cover images I discussed in the previous section. According to Deborah Root, "the content of exotic images links it closely to colonialism and to contemporary systems of economic and cultural domination . . . . That which is deemed different is consumed, its aesthetic forms taken up and used to construct a dream of the outside" (30). She is careful not to criticize most people's interest in and curiosity about different cultures. Instead she focuses on the link between domination and difference for its own sake. "The problem seems to occur when . . . this interest goes out of balance in such a way that the fact of difference itself is able to produce intense excitement and pleasure at the cost of negating the people or culture that is the source of interest. This imbalance seems most likely to occur when a notion of abstract difference is maintained, as opposed to a recognition of many everyday differences" (30). Root maintains that encounters between cultures need to occur as a series of events in which exchange or dialogue takes place. But when an image of difference is selected to sell a book, the frame becomes one of domination. And the result of this domination is that what has been determined to be different is positioned so that it is unable to move out of the conceptual box in which it has been placed.

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In the previous section, when I discuss the illustrations on the book covers, I often make the redundant statement "South Asian woman in South Asian clothing." This is because the covered head, bindi or teeka, is a marker of difference. I want to argue that the use of these markers of difference on the covers of these books follows in the tradition of orientalism. Rana Kabbani has shown how the emphasis on difference is the result of a desire to consume the other. "In order for the Orient to continue to provide the Occident with such wealth of personas to choose from, it must remain true to itself, in other words, truly Oriental. If it diverged at all from its given Orientalness, it became useless, a travesty of what it was *supposed* to be" (Kabbani 11). Even though South Asian women are finally representing and publishing their experiences in Canada and the U.S., their books are still marketed with the promise that the representation is truly oriental because marketers assume the occidental audience is only interested in the book for the possibility of its difference. The fact that marketers are making this assumption stems from orientalism, a discourse that Said is most famous for discussing.

In 1978 Edward Said's *Orientalism* examined the historical development of a style of thought found amongst people working in a variety of disciplines studying the orient. "*Orientalism* is the generic term that I have been employing to describe the Western approach to the Orient; Orientalism is the discipline by which the Orient was (and is) approached systematically, as a topic of learning, discovery, and practice. But in addition I have been using the word to designate that collection of dreams, images, and vocabularies available to anyone who has tried to talk about what lies east of the dividing line" (Said, *Orientalism* 73). This style of thought is based upon the assumption that the orient is essentially different from the west; Said insists that this difference was considered eternal and unchanging. Said's most important contribution, however, is the connection he makes between politics and

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culture: "to believe that politics in the form of imperialism bears upon the production of literature, scholarship, social theory, and history writing is by no means equivalent to saying that culture is therefore a demeaned or denigrated thing" (Said, *Orientalism* 14). Said shows the complicitous relationship between orientalists (those working in the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries), orientalist ideas, and various western governments and policy makers whose interests in the orient are neither scholarly nor objective but in fact are colonialist and imperialist. What matters in the end is that the discourse of orientalism produces and represents difference in such a way as to make imperialism possible. "My whole point about this system is not that it is a misrepresentation of some Oriental essence – in which I do not for a moment believe – but that it operates as representations usually do, for a purpose, according to a tendency, in a specific historical, intellectual, and even economic setting" (Said, *Orientalism* 273). Like Said, I do not believe in an oriental or South Asian essence. My purpose is simply to study the ways in which South Asian women's literature combats orientalist notions of essence, authenticity and fixed difference.

Said's description of the difference between latent and manifest orientalism is also quite useful to my work. He believes that in addition to concrete and material knowledge about the orient, there is an unconscious sense of the orient. "The distinction I am making is really between an almost unconscious (and certainly an untouchable) positivity, which I shall call *latent* Orientalism, and the various stated views about Oriental society languages, literatures, history, sociology, and so forth, which I shall call *manifest* Orientalism" (Said, *Orientalism* 206). Thus, in Said's study, manifest orientalism changes from writer to writer but latent orientalism remains stable and constant. Meyda Yeğenoğlu elaborates, "Orientalism, then, simultaneously refers to the production of a systematic knowledge and to the site of the unconscious – desires and fantasies; it signifies how the 'Orient' is at once an

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object of *knowledge* and an object of *desire*" (23). Moreover, she claims that latent orientalism has fundamental significance and "wider implications than Said himself recognizes" because it is permanent and consistent (23). Latent orientalism is useful to my work in describing and contextualizing the book covers of these South Asian women writers because I can refer to these illustrations as latent orientalist imagery – something unconscious that is still with us as a culture. Even though each book has different publishers, marketing executives, and cover designers, the imagery is quite similar. I want to argue that it is this similarity which is an almost unconscious part of our culture and which these women work against in their writing.

Said's work is important to my project for at least four reasons. First, he insists that orientalism is a system of circulating representations that I find useful in explaining the images on the book covers as well as the resistance of writers I study. Second, Said writes that orientalism demarcates an east/west divide that emphasizes difference. The book cover images needlessly emphasize the difference of South Asia and South Asian women. In light of Said's work, I read this emphasis on difference as stemming from an orientalist style of thought that assumes an essential and absolute difference will be found in the books written by these South Asian women. However, Said is quick to clarify that he is not trying to paper over differences between people and cultures. "My aim, as I said earlier, was not so much to dissipate difference itself – for who can deny the constitutive role of national as well as cultural differences in the relations between human beings – but to challenge the notion that difference implies hostility, a frozen reified set of opposed essences, and a whole adversarial knowledge built out of those things" (Said, *Orientalism* 350). In order to combat orientalism, the authors in my study try to refute this idea. Their writing shows that differences exist but

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are fluid and constantly changing – depending on contextual specificities – not frozen for all time.

Third, like Said, I believe these representations of difference operate for a purpose. In the nineteenth century the purpose was colonial but at this contemporary moment the purpose is to market difference to a western audience.[13] It assumes that the western public's interest in buying the books will best be aroused by the promise of essential and absolute difference. Thus, orientalism is still operating in the marketing of books by South Asian women in North America. Lastly, according to Said, orientalism has a transhistorical reach. To show examples of latent orientalism in contemporary culture he discusses popular images in the media, cultural relations policies, and the American economic system. Thus, orientalism can be found in contemporary culture in everything from television images to public policy. "One aspect of the electronic, postmodern world is that there has been a reinforcement of the stereotypes by which the Orient is viewed. Television, the films, and all the media's resources have forced information into more and more standardized molds. So far as the Orient is concerned, standardization and cultural stereotyping have intensified the hold of the nineteenth-century academic and imaginative demonology of 'the mysterious

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[13] Here, I use the term western to describe the North American audience for these books because I am trying to show that Said's nineteenth century colonial notion of orientalism is operating in Canada and the U.S. However, in recent years, as Susan Koshy has pointed out, the weakening of the centre/periphery binary has led to a weakening of Said's notion of east and west because countries originally thought of as eastern are not necessarily economically weak. This means that migration does not solely occur from east to west. "What we see appearing are global networks that do not conform to earlier models of departure from Asia and settlement in America that occurred within a vastly different geopolitical economy . . . patterns of reverse migration are beginning to emerge among Taiwanese Americans and Korean Americans due to strengthened economic conditions and the increase in living standards in their home-countries, and a decline in living standards in the U.S." (Koshy, "Fiction" 335)

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Orient'" (Said, *Orientalism* 26).[14] In this context of intensified stereotyping Said asks, "How then to recognize individuality and to reconcile it with its intelligent, and by no means passive or merely dictatorial, general and hegemonic context?" (Said, *Orientalism* 9). My answer to this question is my work. Even while the stereotyping has intensified over the past 30 years on the book covers of Bharati Mukherjee, I hope that my work recognizes and contextualizes her voice amidst the many negotiations she makes with various discourses. By discussing both the latent orientalism these writers work against as well as their voices of dissent, my project is an attempt to move beyond the orientalism that Said discusses. If his book articulates a problem, I hope this project begins to suggest a solution.

I move beyond Said in three ways. First, despite the reference to the contemporary moment in the last section of the last chapter, *Orientalism* is mainly a book about the nineteenth century. The collection of essays, *Orientalism and the Postcolonial Predicament: Perspectives on South Asia* is very helpful in establishing a connection between the nineteenth century orientalism that Said discusses and the present moment in history where the writings of the authors I study are useful in undoing orientalism. Breckenridge writes that we must focus on the present to resist orientalism. "Thus, one way out of the orientalist dilemma is to remain steadfastly focused on the present, seen as a historical moment that owes itself at least in part to the very heritage of orientalism that we now seek to undo" (Breckenridge 18). Also, because this collection of essays is focused specifically on South Asia, it points out the orientalist view of this part of the world. "But the pervading sense that India is a land of pathological differences, that its essence is unique and unfathomable and that its populations

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[14] Unfortunately, in the wake of the "Attack on America," the media's cultural stereotyping has led to hysteria and violence against not only West Asians and Muslims, but also visibly different South Asians such as Sikhs.

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are ungovernable, owes itself to orientalist views of some sort" (Breckenridge 11). This is helpful to my work because it explains the emphasis on difference and on mystery in the cover designs I have already discussed and the discourse against which the authors I study write.

The second way in which Said's book is inadequate for my work has to do with gender. Even though Said discusses racial and ethnic difference very well, his discussion doesn't cover gender difference in a systematic way. Rana Kabbani's *Europe's Myths of Orient: Devise and Rule* is much better at pointing out that gender issues are a recurring theme in nineteenth century writings about the orient. Kabbani finds that the travel narratives she studies revisit these two main themes. "Among the many themes that emerge from the European narration of the Other, two appear most strikingly. The first is the insistent claim that the East was a place of lascivious sensuality, and the second that it was a realm characterised by inherent violence" (Kabbani 6). While Said's *Orientalism* discusses representations of women only briefly, Kabbani's book looks at depictions of oriental women in orientalist paintings and in the writings of Richard Burton. She finds that these women "offered a prototype of the sexual in a repressive age, and were coveted as the permissible expression of a taboo topic" (Kabbani 7). Thus, I find Kabbani's book more useful than Said's book in providing a Victorian historical context for the images of South Asian women that my authors try to subvert in their fiction.

Meyda Yeğenoğlu's *Colonial Fantasies: Towards a feminist reading of Orientalism* is an even more recent look at gender and orientalism. Her main argument is that the issue of gender is inextricably linked to orientalism because the orient is always figured as feminine in the imagination of the west. Even western feminists are imbricated in a western masculine discourse when they study the orient. Yeğenoğlu's naming of fantasy and desire as

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unconscious and latent processes of the colonialist subject position is useful to my work because she links it to Said's latent orientalism. The specific instance of desire that she addresses in her book is veiling. From the eighteenth century letters of Lady Mary Montagu and the nineteenth century philosophical writings of Friedrich Nietzsche to twentieth century Algerian and Turkish nationalism, Yeğenoğlu describes the metaphorical and literal uses of the veil in orientalism and nationalism. She argues that even when the veiled woman is forced in Turkish and Algerian nationalism to unveil or re-veil, respectively, orientalism is the cause. She writes, "although the veiling and unveiling of women appear to be reverse strategies of responding to Western hegemony they are both in fact conditioned by and therefore the products of Orientalist hegemony" (136). Yeğenoğlu's work is useful for moving eighteenth and nineteenth century latent orientalism into the twentieth century.

However, there is one last reason why both Said's book and Yeğenoğlu's book are inadequate for my purposes. My work does more than simply document contemporary orientalist representations. While I find the book covers reminiscent of orientalist imagery, I find the actual texts of the books to engage with and resist orientalism and these comprise the bulk of my project. Just because the marketing of the books is orientalist doesn't necessarily mean that the books themselves are. In the next section, I will discuss the ways in which theories of diaspora are useful in resisting orientalism.

Diasporic Deviations

Because orientalism is based on a sharp division between east and west, its implications preclude the impure and fluid identities and cultures of the diaspora. In this section, I will describe the diasporic perspective and how it deviates from and can work against orientalism. Each of the five writers I study live and work in diaspora. Even though

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one of them, Bharati Mukherjee, tries to avoid diaspora by appealing to assimilation, I include her in this list because I use a wider definition of diaspora in my work.

When theories of diaspora were first developed, theorists tried to define them in ways that James Clifford has argued were too limiting. He writes that the main features of diasporas used to be "a history of dispersal, myths/memories of the homeland, alienation in the host (bad host?) country, desire for eventual return, ongoing support of the homeland, and a collective identity importantly defined by this relationship" (Clifford 305). I agree with Clifford that definitions of diaspora need to be more open and less a matter of meeting such strictly defined criteria. In fact, Vijay Mishra has specifically contested the criterion having to do with the desire to return. "Let me repeat: one of the overriding characteristics of diasporas is that diasporas do not, as a general rule, return. This is not to be confused with the symbols of return or the invocations, largely through the sacred, of the homeland or the home-idea" (Mishra, "New Lamps for Old" 75). In my work, the South Asian women characters in Bharati Mukherjee's fiction do not have a strong attachment to or even a desire to return to a homeland. I would consider them diasporic for their myths, memories and double consciousness even though Mukherjee herself would not define diaspora this way. In keeping with this open view, James Clifford has suggested "that it is not possible to define diaspora sharply, either by recourse to essential features or to privative oppositions. But it is possible to perceive a loosely coherent, adaptive constellation of responses to dwelling-in-displacement" (Clifford 310). I find Clifford's definition useful to my work because it allows me to include Bharati Mukherjee's definition of immigration whereby immigrants to the U.S. adapt to their present location without a desire for return.

This diasporic perspective can then have political value in the place of residence. Paul Gilroy wants "to develop the suggestion that cultural historians could take the Atlantic

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as one single, complex unit of analysis in their discussions of the modern world and use it to produce an explicitly transnational and intercultural perspective" (Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic* 15). Similarly, I see the people of South Asia within a complex unit of analysis that acknowledges significant differences between them as well as the fact that in North America those differences are sometimes elided. Gilroy is aware of the contradictions between both of these realities. "The critical political project forged in the journey from slave ship to citizenship is in danger of being wrecked by the seemingly insoluble conflict between two distinct but currently symbiotic perspectives which can be loosely identified as the essentialist and the pluralist standpoints" (Gilroy, "It Ain't Where You're From" 4-5). The essentialist standpoint is one that chooses a characteristic such as nation, language or religion and insists on the similarities between those people on the basis of that characteristic. The fact that I choose South Asian to describe the diaspora I study could be considered essentialist by this argument and the pluralist standpoint could solve the problem of essentialism. However, I agree with Gilroy that a completely pluralist standpoint is also not acceptable. "The difficulty with this second tendency is that in leaving racial essentialism behind by viewing 'race' itself as a social and cultural construction, it has been insufficiently alive to the lingering power of specifically 'racial' forms of power and subordination" (Gilroy, "It Ain't Where You're From" 5). I use this critique of the pluralist standpoint to justify my use of South Asian as a category of analysis. Even though there are differences of language and religion between the peoples of South Asia, issues of power and subordination in North America often elide these inter-ethnic differences to focus on race alone.

It is important to draw the boundaries of this category, "South Asian," carefully. With Stuart Hall, I see the diaspora as a process rather than as something fixed. "The diaspora experience as I intend it here is defined, not by essence or purity, but by the

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recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity; by a conception of 'identity' which lives with and through, not despite, difference; by *hybridity*. Diaspora identities are those which are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference" (Hall, "Cultural Identity" 401-402). This non-essentialist stance is important in the works I study because this stance works well against orientalism. Ien Ang also finds racial essence to be exactly what the diasporic perspective contests. "In the same vein, if we are to work on the multiple, complex, overdetermined politics of 'being Chinese' in today's complicated and mixed-up world, and if we are to seize on the radical theoretical promise of the diasporic perspective, we must not only resist the convenient and comforting reduction of Chineseness as a seemingly natural and certain racial essence; we must also be prepared to interrogate the very significance of the category of Chineseness per se as a predominant marker of identification and distinction" (Ang, "Can one say no"). In a similar way, the term South Asian, in my work, signifies something heterogeneous and anti-orientalist rather than reductive and essentialist.

In thinking about ways in which to subvert stereotypes I have found Rey Chow quite useful. She writes, "'natives' are represented as defiled images – that is the fact of our history. But must we represent them a second time by turning history 'upside down,' this time giving them the sanctified status of the 'non-duped'? Defilement and sanctification belong to the same symbolic order" (Chow, *Writing Diaspora* 53-4). Some aspects of Anita Rau Badami's fiction provide a romanticized view of India and fall into the category of sanctification. I find Hall useful in theorizing Badami's sanctification because he not only defines diaspora identities as shifting and unstable but also meaning itself. Unlike Badami, Hall does not merely replace one set of stereotypes with another. His strategy "accepts and works with the shifting, unstable character of meaning, and enters, as it were, into a struggle

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over representation, while acknowledging that, since meaning can never be finally fixed, there can never be any final victories" (Hall, *Representation* 274). My project discusses the multiple representations of South Asia and South Asian women found in the literary texts, essays and interviews of five South Asian women as well as in their book reviews. Because I agree with Hall that the meanings of all these representations are unstable and shifting, my project enters into the struggle over representation while acknowledging the partiality of my conclusions.

This sense of partiality is especially important when I discuss the category women. On the one hand, the impetus behind my project is the visual images of South Asian women on their book covers. Thus, I am completely in agreement with Rey Chow when she points to the visual aspect of women's oppression. "One of the chief sources of the oppression of women lies in the way they have been consigned to visuality" (Chow, *Writing Diaspora* 59). On the other hand, my work on Sara Suleri shows that she is a critic of all categories, including the category women. Ien Ang has provided a partial way of looking at this category in her critique of an all-encompassing feminism. She calls for a partial feminism which I find in keeping with Suleri's as well as Rachna Mara's work. Ang points out that a partial feminism would take the limits of global sisterhood into account. She suggests "that these moments of ultimate failure of communication should not be encountered with regret, but rather should be accepted as the starting point for a more modest feminism, one which is predicated on the fundamental *limits* to the very idea of sisterhood (and thus the category 'women') and on the necessary *partiality* of the project of feminism as such" (Ang, "I'm a feminist but" (60-61). By choosing a partial feminism, the authors I discuss resist hegemonies of all kinds – feminist ones and orientalist ones.

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In a similar vein of partiality, R. Radhakrishnan has been careful to point out that the diasporic perspective should not become all-encompassing either. "Just as much as I have been contending against the morphology of national identity as basic or primary and the diasporic as secondary or epiphenomenal, I will also assert that the diaspora does not constitute a pure heterotopia informed by a radical counter-memory. The politics of diasporic spaces is indeed contradictory and multi-accentual" (Radhakrishnan 173). According to Radhakrishnan, both national identity and diasporic identity should be considered partial; one should not replace the other as primary. This point is particularly important in light of the premature metropolitan celebrations of diasporic critique, which assume its superiority to all other forms of critique on the basis of its double consciousness. But, as Radhakrishnan points out, "It is futile and counterfactual to contend that ideas and movements are rooted and monolocational" (Radhakrishnan xxv). Since all ideas and movements are multiple, including diasporic ones, I agree with Radhakrishnan that we must insist on partiality and relationality in our thinking. Furthermore, as Anne McClintock has usefully pointed out, gender, race and class oppressions must be related to each other in our thinking because "race, gender and class are not distinct realms of experience, existing in splendid isolation from each other; nor can they be simply yoked together retrospectively like armatures of Lego. Rather, they come into existence *in and through* relation to each other – if in contradictory and conflictual ways" (McClintock 5).

As the critic of all categories, Sara Suleri also prefers a relational perspective towards identity. Moreover, as I will discuss in my chapter on Suleri, it is important not to let theories of diaspora become dehistoricized. As Radhakrishnan writes, "the context of the diaspora has the capacity to exacerbate the disharmony between utopian realities available exclusively through theory and agential predicaments experienced in history"

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(Radhakrishnan 173). As I will show in the next sections, even though I don't believe that diaspora theory represents reality per se, I do believe that theories are representations that relate to the real. Thus, I use the concept of diaspora in my work as a theory that shouldn't lose sight of history or the losses that accompany displacement. I contextualize not only the fiction I study but also the theories that inform them. My work is careful to point out the losses and gains of diaspora in an arena of partiality and relationality, which are modes of thinking that I find useful in breaking orientalist binaries.

Discursive Representations

In this section, I will discuss the diasporic South Asian women's literary critical work that has already been done on discursive representations and show its usefulness to my work. The word representation sometimes implies that something authentic precedes the inauthentic representation that comes later. In fact, Susie Tharu and K. Lalita show that Anglo-American feminist work in the 70s and 80s tended to operate on this assumption. "The idea of the 'real,' therefore, carries the impress of a *truth* that emerges as the shackles of prejudice – or false consciousness – are thrown off" (Tharu and Lalita 35). I do not use the word representation in this way because it assumes a binary of authentic versus artificial that I want to resist in this project. As I will explain more fully in the next section, my project is mainly concerned with discursive representations that do not represent the real world. I believe that the authors I study construct representations that carry meaning that, when shared, becomes a part of culture. The production and circulation of cultural meaning takes place through these representations. Because I agree with Stuart Hall that meaning is "*produced* – constructed – rather than simply 'found'" (*Representation* 5), and that

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representation enters into the very constitution of things where culture[15] is a constitutive process, my approach to representation or the production of meaning is broadly constructionist. Thus, I believe in the importance of constructing representations that resist the dominant and hegemonic – whether patriarchal, orientalist or nationalist.[16]

Inderpal Grewal's book, *Home and Harem: Nation, Gender, Empire, and the Cultures of Travel*, argues that discourses of travel construct "home and away or empire and nation at various sites in the colonial period through gendered bodies" (4). Focusing on the nineteenth century in India and in England, Grewal argues that both 'home' and 'harem' are "relational nationalist constructs that require the deployment of women and female bodies within the antagonistic and comparative framework of colonial epistemology" (*Home* 5). In my project, when I discuss orientalist stereotypes of east and west, I am referring specifically to Grewal's "antagonistic and comparative framework of colonial epistemology." She counters this framework by showing how "encounters with difference" occurred everywhere, not just when one was away from "home" (4). Grewal takes the orientalist binary of self and other and shows how it operates in both English and Indian nationalism. She is particularly attentive to the ways in which women are used by both sets of nationalists, British suffragists aligned themselves with masculinist imperial discourses, English working class peoples were interpellated into imperial education and consumerism through museums,

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[15] Rajeswari Rajan provides an excellent definition of culture. "Culture then, viewed as the product of the beliefs and conceptual models of society and as the destination where the trajectory of its desires takes shape, as well as the everyday practices, the contingent realities, and the complex process by which these are structured, is the constitutive realm of the subject" (10).

[16] My working concept of resistance practice is indebted to Michel Foucault's theory of resistance. "Where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power . . . These points of resistance are present everywhere in the power network . . . But this does not mean that they are only a reaction of rebound, forming with respect to the basic domination an underside that is in the end always passive, doomed to perpetual defeat" (Foucault, *History* 95-96).

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and lastly, Indian feminists' negotiations with missionary, reformist, anti-colonial and nationalist discourses. She concludes "all constructions of 'home' during this period are implicated with colonial discourses" (8). This is important to my work because I want to show that the fiction I study is implicated with discourses of latent orientalism in contemporary North American culture.

Deepika Bahri and Mary Vasudeva summarize this context in their introduction to *Between the Lines: South Asians and Postcoloniality*. They write that there is a "growing awareness in the academy of the need to unpack and complicate such categories as 'Third World woman' and 'postcolonial,' even as the academic and popular market's demand for a consumable Other shows no signs of abating" (2). In my third chapter, I discuss how Kirin Narayan represents this situation with considerable irony and humour through the relationship between the South Asian protagonist and a North American academic whose interest in the consumable other includes his sexual interest in her. That Narayan makes her consuming figure an academic is not surprising: according to Bahri and Vasudeva, the orientalist legacy continues to influence South Asian studies programs in North America. "Although the number of South Asian Studies programs in Anglo-America remains small, those in existence share in this legacy, which continues to pose persistent challenges for students and scholars attempting to transcend Orientalist visions of South Asia" (Bahri and Vasudeva 3). My work is concerned with showing how different women resist these challenges in their writing.

Another version of this orientalist formulation can be found in the South Asian diaspora outside Anglo-America. Salman Rushdie claims that Indian and diasporic Indian writing in English is superior to all the writing produced by Indians in all of the other

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languages of India.[17] Rushdie insists that prose writing, fiction and non-fiction, in English, produced in the last 50 years, "is proving to be a stronger and more important body of work than most of what has been produced in the 16 'official languages' of India, the so-called 'vernacular languages', during the same time; and, indeed, this new, and still burgeoning, 'Indo-Anglian' literature represents perhaps the most valuable contribution India has yet made to the world of books" (Rushdie viii). He makes this statement despite the fact that he is not fluent in all of these languages and does not provide any reasons why he feels this way about works that have been translated into English. The fact that his statement has been questioned more in South Asia than outside of it seems to be the result of his considerable cultural capital[18] and his position as a native informant.[19] Thus, orientalist formulations of South Asia abound outside of South Asia in the diaspora.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's work on the representation of the Rani of Sirmur[20] in historical texts of western imperialism and native patriarchy conclude that the subaltern is silenced by the relationship between power and representation. Spivak's purpose is to show "the fabrication of representations of so-called historical reality" (*Critique* 244). In the end, she finds that the Rani "cannot speak to us because indigenous patriarchal 'history' would only keep a record of her funeral and colonial history only needed her as an incidental instrument" (*Critique* 308). Even though Spivak's groundbreaking work was set in a different

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[17] I am indebted to Pallavi Rastogi for pointing out the orientalist nature of Rushdie's claim in a paper titled "Midnight's Stepchildren."

[18] I get this term from Pierre Bourdieu and discuss it in detail in chapter one. Suffice it to say here that Rushdie's cultural capital consists of the literary awards as well as the praise from fellow-creative writers that he has received in the last 15 years.

[19] In making the statement I discuss here, Rushdie is acting as a native informant. As a diasporic Indian living in the U.K., he publishes an anthology on Indian writing and condemns non-English writing from India to his international audience. See Gayatri Spivak's *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* for more on the native informant.

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historical and geographical context than mine and despite a difference in methodologies, it is a classic study of the ways in which a South Asian woman is silenced.[21] Even though South Asian women write the texts I study, Spivak's work reminds me to be attentive to silences within these texts. For instance, in *Tamarind Mem*, despite the fact that Saroja's dismissal of her affair with a lower caste mechanic is shrouded in the novel's theme of unknowability, I argue that this theme succeeds in silencing issues of class and desire and simultaneously helps Badami attain popular legitimacy with her readers.

While "The Rani of Sirmur" concludes that the subaltern is silenced between western imperialism and native patriarchy, Chandra Talpade Mohanty's "Under Western Eyes" concludes that representations of third world[22] women in contemporary western feminist research commodifies them as other to the self of western feminism. She finds that the production of the third world woman in the discourse of international development studies locates them in terms of underdevelopment, oppressive traditions, illiteracy, poverty and overpopulation (Introduction 5-6). Mohanty writes, "in the context of a first/third world balance of power, feminist analyses which perpetrate and sustain the hegemony of the idea of the superiority of the West produce a corresponding set of universal images of the 'third world woman,' images such as the veiled woman, the powerful mother, the chaste virgin, the obedient wife, etc" ("Under Western Eyes" 73). Mohanty finds discursive representations of

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[20] Spivak originally published "The Rani of Sirmur" in 1985 but has discussed the representation of the Rani in "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1988) and also in her new book, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason* (1999).

[21] See Lata Mani's "Contentious Traditions: The Debate on Sati in Colonial India" for an analysis of nineteenth century debates about sati between the British and Indian male elites. Like Spivak, Mani concludes that the widow herself remains completely marginal to these debates.

[22] "*Third World* is defined through geographical location as well as particular sociohistorical conjunctures. It thus incorporates so-called minority peoples or people of color in the U.S.A" (Mohanty, Introduction 2). To this definition of third world, I would add that for me it also incorporates minorities in Canada.

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third world women in western feminist writing debilitating to third world women because they are the objects while western feminists are the subjects of their own writing. Spivak comes to a similar conclusion when she discusses the 'worlding' of the other woman by the female individualist. "As the female individualist, not-quite-not-male, articulates herself in shifting relationship to what is at stake, the 'native subaltern female' (*within* discourse, *as* a signifier) is excluded from any share in this emerging norm" (Spivak, *A Critique* 116-7). By making this point about the exclusion of the non-white woman, Mohanty and Spivak both insist that this discourse assumes that the category women is coherent when in fact it is not.

In my fifth chapter, I argue that Sara Suleri succeeds in representing Pakistani women as incoherent subjectivities by doing exactly what Mohanty argues western feminists do not do. *Meatless Days* does not assume that the category woman is coherent nor even that it can be taken out of the context of other categories such as nation or history. Caren Kaplan and Inderpal Grewal have shown this in their work on transnational feminist cultural studies. "As poststructuralists, we recognize the power relations that are a part of representational practices. Thus, gender must be viewed as intersected by numerous interests, including class, race, and sexuality" (Kaplan and Grewal, "Transnational" 358). The subjectivity of Suleri's text is relational and succeeds in exploding universal images of third world women. While Mohanty's work discusses representations that can easily be made to fit orientalist stereotypes, *Meatless Days* represents a relational subjectivity that defies orientalism by critiquing all categories, including that of women. Suleri's representations are worthy of study because they question the binaries of east and west, male and female, that orientalism is based on. In the end, context becomes the most important issue in *Meatless Days*. While both Mohanty and Spivak make excellent points about western feminism silencing the other woman, my work finds most useful Grewal's statement about historically

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contextualizing feminisms everywhere. "Rather than debate feminism's collusions or resistances, I argue that nationalism, imperialism, and colonial discourses shaped the contexts in which feminist subjects became possible in both England and India" (Inderpal Grewal, *Home* 11). This is crucial to my analysis of Rachna Mara's fiction. The most important reason why Mara's work resists orientalism more strongly than Badami's fiction is that she contextualizes racism in Canada against a South Asian character as well as racism in India against an English character. Like Grewal, Mara and Suleri, I am interested in mapping out the specific contexts of orientalism, diaspora, patriarchy and nationalism within which all of these representations are produced.

Rajeswari Rajan's work is also concerned with resisting orientalist representations of South Asian women. When she discusses these representations in her book *Real and Imagined Women*, Rajan focuses on "the *abjectness* of the subject-status of the female victim, of widowhood, rape, or wife-murder" (12). Her goal is to explore alternative subjectivities for these women in order to displace the passive victim. Thus, she finds and discusses historical representations of widows who choose to live and fictional representations of life after rape as well as representations of Indira Gandhi and of South Asian women in South Asian popular culture. Even though my work does not centre on the context of South Asia and even though my work is focused more on literary texts, I find her work invaluable to mine because of her interest in representations that resist orientalist stereotypes.

Whereas Rajan's work in South Asia is quite relevant to mine even though it is located in India and not in North America, in my work, I am unwilling to disregard national boundaries altogether. In looking at diasporic South Asian literary criticism in Canada, I have found that two critics question the importance of national boundaries. M.G. Vassanji argues that there is no South Asian Canadian literature. Although he finds that South Asian

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immigrants in Canada write about common themes, he doesn't feel that this is enough to comprise an identifiable literature. "We suffer from the Canadian problem – sparseness of population and isolation. There appears to be no cross-cultural movement in the writing; no borrowing, no cross-reference *as* South Asian and *as* Canadian. The world of the fiction writer is larger than national boundaries" (Vassanji 807). Thus, according to Vassanji, some South Asian Canadian writers have larger audiences in South Asia than in Canada. They don't look to each other for inspiration but rather to other South Asian writers elsewhere in South Asia or other parts of the diaspora. The issue of national boundaries is brought up in a slightly different way by Arun Mukherjee, who insists that South Asian writers in Canada have more in common with South Asian writers in the U.S. than with mainstream writers in Canada or the U.S. This does not mean that diversity among South Asian women writers in North America does not exist. Mukherjee's point is simply that literatures of the diaspora shouldn't be confined to national agendas that are often illegitimate. "Unstated nationalist assumptions of teachers, theorists, and publishers of literature ensure that literary boundaries do not transgress the political boundaries that modern-day nation states created through war, colonialism, outright theft, and only rarely through consensus" (Arun Mukherjee ix). Even though my project discusses South Asian women writers in both Canada and the U.S., and even though I agree that national boundaries are sometimes less relevant to our literary affiliations, I am less willing to ignore national boundaries than both M.G. Vassanji and Arun Mukherjee. The reason for this is that one of the authors I study, Bharati Mukherjee, uses and engages with both Canadian and American national myths. As I mentioned earlier, my project does not try to remove the authors I study from their contexts. Thus, nationalist discourses cannot be ignored on the grounds that they may be illegitimate.

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It is difficult to say whether Mukherjee's real location in the nation, her real condition of existence, leads to her nationalism or vice versa since she did have a strong sense of a mythical America before she physically moved to the U.S. Thus, I agree with Rajan that representation is a contested realm. "The concept of 'representation', it seems, is useful precisely because and to the extent that it can serve a mediating function between the two positions, neither foundationalist (privileging 'reality') nor superstructural (privileging 'culture'), not denying the category of the real, or essentializing it as some pregiven metaphysical ground for representation" (Rajeswari Rajan 9). As I mentioned earlier, despite Mukherjee's alignments with the American nation in her texts, her books are still marketed as exotic and different, other to American popular culture. These two representations of South Asian women in American contemporary culture (one nationalist and the other exotic) sit side by side heterogeneously contesting each other.

In this section, I have briefly listed the critical work that has been most useful to my project. Even though it may appear that I want simply to celebrate the resistance of South Asian women's literary production in Canada and the U.S., my project is complicated by the diverse ways in which these women negotiate varied discourses of diaspora, nationalism, gender and orientalism within the cultural field. Their negotiations consist of multiple discursive practices, which I am careful to contextualize in my work. For instance, Badami's anti-orientalism is contradicted by her orientalist use of nostalgia and stability. She ends up using both orientalist and anti-orientalist tropes and strategies that garner a larger audience for her work. Mukherjee's anti-orientalism is limited by her nationalism, which is a result of her avoidance of diaspora. Mara's strong critique of orientalism lacks circulation. Without a mainstream publisher, even the most resistant representations cannot lead to change. Thus, my project is careful not to replace one orientalist binary with another anti-orientalist binary.

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I find Inderpal Grewal's articulation of this issue most useful in my work. "Another problematic of essentialized binaries is that women are seen as victims rather than as complex agents interpellated by various discourses. This leads to a tendency to equate all oppressed groups as similar, to neglect the specific hegemonic formations and oppressions that create agency in various contexts, or to see agency in terms only of celebrations of 'voices' of resistance" (*Home* 13). Thus, my project is more than just a celebration of resistance to orientalism because I locate these resistances within other contexts, discourses and oppressions.

Coomi S. Vevaina and Barbara Godard have shown how even the tendency to think in terms of oppressed others can lead to a reinforcement of the status quo. They write, "an investment in social oppression, victimization and the silencing of the unprivileged may produce a conscious representation of the 'minor' subject locked into opposition to a hegemonic formation in a permanent bond where the position of minority is the only status giving legitimacy. Support for the minor then becomes support for the centre, that is, for the status quo" (Vevaina and Godard 31). My project does more than simply support the minor in her oppositional stance to orientalism. I track the ways in which five South Asian womens' fiction resists and colludes with discourses of orientalism, nationalism, gender and diaspora. My conclusions about each author include not only the ways in which they interrupt orientalism but also the ways in which they don't. I do not neglect their implication in multiple and varied dominant discourses. As a result, I do not define resistance as simply an oppositional strategy that replaces one binary with another. In fact, I find Michel Foucault's notion of power helpful to my work because it theorizes resistance beyond binaries. "Power comes from below; that is, there is no binary and all-encompassing opposition between rulers and ruled at the root of power relations, and serving as a general

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matrix – no such duality extending from the top down and reacting on more and more limited groups to the very depths of the social body" (Foucault, *History* 94). When I consider the mechanisms of power in a "sphere of force relations" (Foucault, *History* 97) then I am able to see the authors I study as Grewal sees them, namely as "complex agents interpellated by various discourses" (Grewal, *Home* 13). Again, Grewal is most helpful in articulating resistance as more complex than a binary of east and west where one opposes the other. "Resistance is articulated by showing these to be infiltrated by each other rather than being inviolate and reveals that inviolate spaces are created by authoritarian and patriarchal forces so that women become not the subjects but the objects of the nation" (Inderpal Grewal, *Home* 230-1). Here Grewal is specifically discussing nationalism but her conclusions are relevant to orientalism too. Inviolate spaces and inviolate thinking are dangerous even when they are used to resist hegemony. Thus, the only way to avoid the reinscription of binaries, which have in the past merely objectified women, is to complicate hegemonic forces even of opposition and resistance.

Ideology, Agency and Theorizing Resistance

In the previous sections, I discussed the discourses of orientalism and diaspora in detail to show the ways in which the writings of the authors I study resist and negotiate with them. I also described the literary critical work that has most influenced the way in which I situate my project amidst these discourses as well as those of patriarchy and nationalism. In this section, I theorize discourse as ideology to provide a materialist feminist method for my analysis.[23] I show that culture is a contested realm where different ideologies are in conflict

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[23] While I agree with the fact that "All discourses are ideologically positioned; none are neutral" (Macdonell 59), my point in this section is a little different. Specifically, I am aligning my work with materialist feminists who combine Foucauldian concepts of discourse with marxist, post-Althusser concepts of ideology. "Conceptualizing discourse as ideology allows us to consider the discursive

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to interpellate subjectivities that are "theorized as an ensemble of discursive positions" (Hennessy 95). I rely on materialist feminism to show how dominant ideology pervades culture and how the authors I study contest the ideology of orientalism. According to Susie Tharu and K. Lalita, women do not speak from outside ideology. "Women articulate and respond to ideologies from complexly constituted and decentered positions within them" (Tharu and Lalita 38). As I mentioned in the previous section, my aim is to resist hegemony, but my project is not interested in simply seeking positive images of South Asia and South Asian women. Here, I will show that materialist feminism is the most appropriate method for theorizing in the relational, contextual and partial ways that I have alluded to in the previous sections.

Althusser defines ideology as a discourse that brings subjects into being.[24] He insists that "all ideology has the function (which defines it) of 'constituting' concrete individuals as subjects" (244). People think of themselves in certain ways because of their ideologies, their imaginary beliefs about their relationship "to their real conditions of existence" (Althusser 241). Althusser goes on to point out that since ideas exist in actions, ideology exists in ideological state apparatuses, which govern the rituals and practices of interpellated subjects. He writes "these practices are governed by the *rituals* in which these practices are inscribed, within the *material existence of an ideological apparatus*, be it only a small part of that apparatus: a small mass in a small church, a funeral, a minor match at a sports' club, a school day, a

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construction of the subject, "woman," across multiple modalities of difference, but without forfeiting feminism's recognition that the continued success of patriarchy depends upon its systematic operation - the hierarchical social relations it maintains and the other material forces it marshals and is shaped by" (Hennessy xv).

[24] Here, I use the word discourse to describe ideology in order to emphasize a point made by Terry Eagleton. "Ideology is a matter of 'discourse' rather than of 'language' – of certain concrete discursive effects, rather than of signification as such. It represents the points where power impacts upon certain utterances and inscribes itself tacitly within them" (Eagleton 223).

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political party meeting, etc." (Althusser 243 emphasis original) Himani Bannerji has argued that an example of an ideological state apparatus in Canada is official state-sanctioned multiculturalism.[25] This ideology may be dominant but its dominance doesn't preclude resistance. In fact, according to Donna Landry and Gerald MacLean, materialist feminism provides a way to resist through critique. "Our notion of materialist feminism . . . takes the critical investigation . . . of the artifacts of culture and social history, including literary and artistic texts, archival documents, and works of theory, to be a potential site of political contestation through critique, not through the constant reiteration of home-truths" (Landry and MacLean xi).

Even though my project continually returns to the ways in which the authors I study contest orientalist ideology, I also read the ways in which these authors negotiate with other ideologies, such as those of diaspora, patriarchy and nation. As I mentioned in the previous section, Rajeswari Rajan's work is useful to me because like my work hers also explores discursive constructions of South Asian women that are not orientalist. In addition to this, her work usefully articulates the intersections of representation, ideology and culture. In line with her work, I acknowledge "(a) that femaleness is constructed, (b) that the terms of such construction are to be sought in the dominant modes of ideology (patriarchy, colonialism, capitalism), and (c) that therefore what is at stake is the investments of desire and the politics of control that representation both signifies and serves" (Rajeswari Rajan 129). With Landry

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[25] Bannerji explains that official multiculturalism is an ideological state apparatus in Canada and works by continuing orientalist binaries of east and west, white and non-white. "If we consider this official or elite multiculturalism as an ideological state apparatus we can see it as a device for constructing and ascribing political subjectivities and agencies for those who are seen as legitimate and full citizens and others who are peripheral to this in many senses. There is in this process an element of racialized ethnicization, which whitens North Americans of European origins and blackens or darkens their 'others' by the same stroke" (Bannerji 6).

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and MacLean, I would extend Rajan's contention that femaleness is constructed to include that ideology is constructed. This is important because "[e]xposing the history, the constructedness, of something opens it up to the possibility of change" (Landry and MacLean 185).

However, the problem with Althusser's concept of ideology for my work is twofold. First, as a marxist, Althusser's concern with class supersedes any other concerns such as gender, race or orientalism. Second, it is extremely difficult to ground a theory of resistance in his work because he doesn't provide a way for individuals to avoid interpellation. According to Althusser, when "ideology interpellates individuals as subjects" (244), it does so by presenting its interpretation of reality as absolute truth. Inside ideology people's beliefs seem to them to be inevitable and obvious, as if there is no other way of understanding reality. If there is no other way of understanding reality how can individuals resist interpellation? Even Althusser's fellow marxist Terry Eagleton finds this to be a problem. "For him, as even more glaringly for Michel Foucault, subjectivity itself would seem just a form of self-incarceration; and the question of where political resistance springs from must thus remain obscure" (Eagleton 146). Thus, even though I find Althusser's concept of ideology useful, I am aware of its limitations.

Unlike Althusser's concept of ideology, Foucault's concept of discourse does not have a class bias and does provide a theory of resistance. "We must make allowance for the complex and unstable process whereby discourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling-block, a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy. Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it" (Foucault, *History* 101). Discourse is both power and resistance. "We might thus posit something like a

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Newton's Third Law in the discursive realm: for every dominant discourse, a contrary and transgressive counter-discourse" (Terdiman 65). However, even though I find Foucauldian notions of power and discourse useful, I agree with materialist feminist critiques of Foucault's focus on the local. According to Rosemary Hennessy, "Foucault's emphatic regionalism forestalls any possibility for understanding how the emergence of feminism and the category of the 'independent woman' in social formations in the industrialized west is inextricably bound to colonial expansion and the reconstruction of an 'other' woman 'elsewhere'" (21). Because I cannot ignore these feminist concerns with orientalism, I align myself with materialist feminists who prefer to pursue a more systemic analysis of global power relations.

According to Rosemary Hennessy, a wider global systemic analysis is possible because materialist feminism sees discourse as ideology. "Drawing upon a theory of discourse as ideology, materialist feminists have extended the concept of 'reading' to include all those meaning-making practices which enable one to act and which shape how one makes her way through the world" (Hennessy, *Materialist* 91). Since all sense-making practices are ideological, I recognize that I read the discourses of culture in literary texts, interviews, essays and reviews in an ideological way. "Reading, then, is the ideological practice of making a text intelligible. And as such it is much more than simple deciphering. It is the necessary and inescapable process of *making sense* by negotiating the discursive materiality of one's lived reality" (Hennessy, *Materialist* 14). Reading, in the sense that Hennessy defines it, is ideology critique in materialist feminism. According to Landry and MacLean, this sense of reading comes from ideology critique in marxism and feminism. "For what appears natural and unchangeable, Marxism would substitute a notion of the historical, while feminism would substitute the constructed or the coded, recoded, and represented" (Landry and

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MacLean 9). As materialist feminist ideology critique, my work pays attention to both of these aspects: history and constructionism rather than essentialism. I will pay particular attention to historical context in my discussions of Mara's and Suleri's literary texts. Landry and MacLean illustrate the importance of ideology critique in materialist feminism by relating it to the social. "The de-fetishization of concrete experience . . . is one of the most powerful tools of Marxist and feminist ideology critique, for through this process social and political impossibilities become thinkable as possibilities" (Landry and MacLean 9). Thus, within ideology, I read the critiques of five South Asian women writers as historical and constructed.

As I have already mentioned, I locate agency in the contradictions in ideology.[26] This is in keeping with materialist feminism because, according to Hennessy, materialist feminism's "reading practice is critique" (91) which also focuses on these contradictions. Hennessy writes that critique constructs alternative narratives by contextualizing the contradictions in ideology. "In that the dominant ideology continually works to seal over the cracks in the social imaginary generated by the contradictions of patriarchal and capitalist social arrangements, it is continually engaged in crisis management. As an ideological practice, critique issues from these cracks, historicizes them, and claims them as the basis for alternative narratives" (Hennessy, *Materialist* 92). Landry and MacLean also stress the importance of historicizing these cracks and contradictions within ideology. "The practice

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[26] Here I am not referring to the contradictions in ideology in marxism. Materialist feminism does not emphasize class more than gender or race. Thus, here, I'm referring to any hegemonic ideology such as orientalism, patriarchy or nationalism. "The dominating ideology never dominates without contradiction. Therefore it cannot exhaust all social experience. It potentially contains space for alternative discourses which are not yet articulated as a social institution or even project. As a result of the articulatedness of the hegemonic ideology, there will never exist any hegemonic discourse without slips or cracks in its coherence. And it is the potentially subversive force of these slips that constitutes the epistemological basis or the authority of ideology critique" (Hennessy 76-77).

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of ideology critique therefore historicizes and rematerializes ideology by disclosing how it works to conceal the very means of its own production; to show, in other terms, that what ideology offers as natural or given or real has been constructed in particular and interested ways" (Landry and MacLean 66). Thus, my project historicizes five authors' texts to read their critiques of orientalism in their own context of negotiating multiple ideologies.

The complexity of my project is best captured by the questions that frame Susie Tharu and K. Lalita's project in editing their anthology *Women Writing in India*. "These include questions about the *contexts*, structured and restructured by changing ideologies of class, gender, empire, in which women wrote, and the conditions in which they were read; questions about the *politics*, sexual and critical, that determined the reception and impact of their work; questions about the *resistances*, the subversions, the strategic appropriations that characterized the subtlest and most radical women's writing" (Tharu and Lalita 15). These are the questions that I ask of the representations that I find in the works I study. For instance, in the first chapter, I ask why orientalist images are used to sell books. What are the ideologies of class, gender, and diaspora that structure the context in which these images are used? What are the politics behind the reception of this fiction and how does that relate to its book covers? In the following four chapters I ask, what are the subversions of orientalism in these women's fiction given the context in which they write and the politics of their reception in North America?

My method in this project will critically read five South Asian women writers' literary texts, essays, reviews and interviews to determine the extent to which each of them refutes the kind of latent orientalism that I have described. My concern is not only with the representations in the books but also with their context and reception in this culture. My approach is mainly materialist feminist because I read texts as historical and constructed but

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cultural materialist because of my focus on the materiality of culture. Thus, I "read fictional texts against other kinds of texts" (Smith 320), essays, interviews and reviews, to arrive at meaning, however contested it may be. Unlike some literary critics, I assume that "fictional texts are in no way privileged over other kinds of texts. All function as data" (Smith 321) to describe contemporary culture. My goal is not to determine a causal relation between the texts I study and actual social practice although I do believe that there is a correlation between the two. I would like to investigate the complicated, culturally specific ways in which the fictional texts negotiate with and resist ideologies of orientalism, diaspora and gender.

Because I study the formal properties of the texts in close readings and I analyse the reception of these texts in contemporary culture, my reading strategies do change from chapter to chapter and from text to text. For instance, in the first chapter I focus on the commodity status of *Tamarind Mem* and read critically the conditions of its reception without reading the content of the novel. In the second chapter, I deconstruct the contradictions within the formal properties of *Tamarind Mem* to show how its critique of orientalism is unstable. The chapter on Narayan is the most conventional because I focus on the formal properties of the text to put the novel's argument about diasporic subjectivities in dialogue with theories of diaspora. The chapter on Mukherjee is the most cultural materialist because I compare the literary texts with interviews, and reviews to ascertain Mukherjee's imbrication in ideologies of nation. There are differences from chapter to chapter in my method because materialist feminism emphasizes a practice that is contextual and provisional. "Materialist feminist theory embraces the authority of its narratives in the knowledge that its mode of reading, like any revolutionary practice, is *in* history and so provisional, always

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circulating in a field of contesting discourses that challenge and redefine its horizons" (Hennessy, *Materialist* 138).

This Project

In the previous sections I showed that even though latent orientalism is ongoing in its influence on our culture, diasporic perspectives can resist orientalist ideology. I also discussed the literary critical work that has most influenced mine and the method that is most appropriate for my work. Through this project, I hope to continue the work of material feminists. I am afraid that my analysis of five South Asian women writers' subversions of contemporary orientalism has focused on issues of class and capital only slightly and completely ignored issues of sexuality. Nonetheless, I am certain that the representations I discuss construct meaning and create culture that is resistant and oppositional in ways that are not less important because of their limited scope. I selected literary texts by authors because of their engagements with and rebuttals to orientalism. The authors I have chosen for this project are diasporic with varied North American and South Asian national affiliations: India/Canada (Anita Rau Badami), India/England/Canada (Rachna Mara), India/U.S. (Kirin Narayan), India/Canada/U.S. (Bharati Mukherjee), and Pakistan/U.S. (Sara Suleri). This is not an exhaustive list of authors; there were many other literary texts I could also have chosen but didn't due to lack of space.

In the first chapter, "Marketing the Mem: Book Packaging, Bourdieu and Legitimation," I use the theories of Pierre Bourdieu to explain the orientalist book covers and marketing of South Asian women's texts. According to Bourdieu, the field of cultural production forces writers to struggle for different kinds of legitimacy to gain both economic and cultural capital. Given the latent orientalism of our culture, orientalized packaging helps sell books and this leads to popular legitimacy and greater economic capital for the author. I

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use the marketing and reception of Anita Rau Badami's *Tamarind Mem* as a case study to investigate this issue and explore the positive and negative aspects of what I consider a generalizable phenomenon: the commodification of difference. On the one hand, orientalized images perpetuate stereotypes about an exotic India in our mainstream culture. On the other hand, this particular type of marketing provides the authors with popular legitimacy, which helps them disseminate their works more widely in the public sphere. At the end of this chapter, I resolve to read a number of texts by South Asian women to determine the extent to which they resist the latent orientalism to which this marketing appeals.

Chapter two, "Popular Legitimacy Through Storytelling," compares Anita Rau Badami's *Tamarind Mem* with Rachna Mara's *Of Customs and Excise* to delineate the ways in which both writers offer their textual resistance to orientalism. In order to determine the narrative and thematic reasons for Badami's economic capital, I compare her with a writer who lacks popular legitimacy. While both Badami and Mara resist orientalism in their writing, Badami's critique is less hard-hitting than Mara's in dislodging the assumptions of orientalism because of her reliance on nostalgic and stable images of South Asia and South Asians. This aspect of Badami's work could be the second reason for her popular legitimacy in addition to the marketing that I discussed in the first chapter. Mara's critique of orientalism is stronger because she carefully contextualizes race and class conflict within the histories of multiple locations. Badami is less consistent than Mara and at times resorts to victimized images of South Asian women, and easily resolved historical and racial conflict. Unfortunately, Mara's stronger critique of orientalism is limited because her book doesn't circulate as widely as Badami's does. For this reason, in the rest of my project, I continue to examine books produced by major presses.

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Chapter three, "Artificial Authenticity," focuses on Kirin Narayan's novel, *Love, Stars and all that*, to subvert the orientalist notion that authentic and coherent subjectivities and cultures actually exist. Narayan constructs contradictory diasporic subjectivities to reveal the artificiality of the notion of authenticity. Her representation of exoticization is useful for discussing strategic essentialism in diaspora because there is a strong case for the political use of authenticity to critique dominant culture. But authenticity has been used to show how cultures are timeless, static and inferior. In order to avoid orientalism, difference cannot be displayed as authentic even when the ends justify the means. Thus, despite its political usefulness, I argue, in this chapter, against strategic essentialism and for Narayan's contradictory subjectivities, which can and should be used for political change in the diaspora.

My fourth chapter, "Shifting Allegiances" examines the books, essays and interviews of Bharati Mukherjee to show how each of her three countries of residence are reflected in her writing and add to or diminish her attempts to resist orientalism. Mukherjee has been publishing fiction for the past 30 years with both economic and cultural capital along with essays that discuss the problem of orientalism. She attempts to avoid the state of diaspora by rooting subjectivity in the national myths of the country she inhabits. Her early writing creates mythical Indias while her later writing in Canada opposes official multiculturalism. In this chapter, I show how her stance towards Canada is less orientalist than her stance towards India. After struggling for legitimacy in India and Canada, Mukherjee's relationship with the idea of America leads her to embrace American nationalism over all others and disavow her links with the other countries she has lived in. Her later interpellation into the discourse of American individualism, however, keeps her from opposing institutional and

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systemic racism in the U.S. as effectively as she did in Canada. In this chapter, I show how she works against orientalism least effectively in India and most effectively in Canada.

My final chapter will more explicitly turn to the question of categories of difference. In *Meatless Days*, Sara Suleri resists orientalism by critiquing such categories as woman and third world while simultaneously creating a relational subjectivity at the intersections of these categories. By representing the individual embedded in community, the insignificance of familiarity, culturally and historically situated contradictions, and a critique of nationalism, Suleri is able to avoid both orientalist binaries and an essentializing humanism. I end this chapter in the same way as I began this project: by reading book covers. Thus, I find that the figure of the South Asian woman on the cover of *Meatless Days* is not fixedly presented. Despite the fact that it is a photograph, and therefore quite realistic, it nonetheless manages to critique the notion of a unified subjectivity by showing a woman who is about to move in two different directions. Since it shows a child tugging the woman in one direction as she is about to move in another, it depicts the relationality of subjectivity. The woman must consider the child before she acts. Even though (or perhaps because) *Meatless Days* is published by a university press instead of a mainstream press like most of the other texts I study in this project, I find its work against orientalism to be the most convincing. And even though it doesn't have popular legitimacy it has stayed in print for a decade and is continually taught in postcolonial and feminist classes. When Suleri critiques the categories that orientalism is based on, she forces us to think through overlapping layers of significance that leave no room for racist stereotypes.

Throughout this project, I am aware of the way in which these texts have been marketed to sell precisely because South Asian women write them. As Amal Amireh and Lisa Suhair Majaj have written, "Third World women's texts are thus commodified, as

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literary decisions come together with marketing strategies and assessments of audience appeal (ranging from interest in the 'exotic' to feminist solidarity) to foreground certain texts and repackage or silence others" (Amireh and Majaj 4). I am concerned with examining these women's gains and accomplishments in circulating their constructions of culture in the context of hegemonic ideologies such as orientalism and patriarchy. As well, I situate these gains in a context that makes visible their losses. Since the mainstream appetite for the exotic may partially explain some books' popularity I consider this a loss for the writers of these books. On the other hand, if selling books is the only criterion by which one judge's gain and success, then perhaps it is not entirely a loss. Although this project is critical of many images of South Asia and South Asian women found on book covers, I am not suggesting that marketing executives are trying to pervert the truth about an authentic South Asia or South Asian woman. The literary texts, essays and interviews I study construct multiple representations that negotiate with and are implicated in a number of different, sometimes overlapping, ideologies. Rather than look for an individual or group to blame (for exoticization, for instance), I would prefer to describe the complexity of the field in which all this occurs. We are all complicit in these varied struggles for legitimacy within late capitalism. I am aware that by discussing orientalism at such length my project runs the risk of reinscribing this ideology even as I purport to engage in resistance. Nonetheless, I believe that my complicity is justified by the possibilities this project opens up, possibilities of changing our culture by subverting dominant ideologies of orientalism and patriarchy. I hope that, despite the engagement with and imbrication in various hegemonic ideologies that this project relies upon, this work is able to continue to struggle against oppression in its many forms.

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I

Marketing the Mem: Book Packaging, Bourdieu and Legitimation[27]

In this chapter, I use Pierre Bourdieu's theories to explain how and why mainstream presses package minority women writers' works in a blatantly orientalized way. I will focus on the packaging of the best-selling[28] novel *Tamarind Mem*, which was written by a South Asian woman writer and published by a large press in 1996 when most other South Asian women writers in Canada were published by small presses. I will consider the orientalized packaging of this novel in light of what Bourdieu has called a struggle for legitimacy in the field of cultural production. According to Bourdieu, writers struggle for both cultural and economic capital. While cultural capital is the possession of academic knowledge and literary accomplishments by which a writer secures a position in academic and literary circles, economic capital is measured by income generated from the selling of books. The orientalized packaging of this novel as well as others can be explained by pointing to the economic capital to be gained by selling a lot of books through an appeal to our culture's latent orientalism. I will also describe not only the context of the publication of this novel, but also the context of its reception. In doing so, I hope to show that even though this type of marketing engages in the commodification of orientalized women, it also provides an important way for writers to disseminate their works in the mass market and is, thus, of great significance.

For the past 30 years, most South Asian women writers in Canada have been publishing with smaller, alternative publishers such as TSAR, Second Story, Lugus, Goose

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[27] Parts of this chapter have been published. Rahman 1999. *The Toronto Review*. 18.1: 86-99.

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Lane, NeWest and Press Gang. Lakshmi Gill was the first South Asian woman to publish in Canada. She published *During Rain I Plant Chrysanthemums* in 1966 with Ryerson in Toronto. However, in recent years, Ryerson's focus has changed. Since small publishers often don't sell their books through large chain bookstores, South Asian women writers have been unable to gain the commercial success or economic capital that comes from the sheer numbers of books sold. While chain bookstores are able to sell more books than independent bookstores, writers who publish with these lesser-known presses are able to gain a certain amount of cultural capital or prestige and success in smaller literary and academic circles.

An exception to this trend is the writer Bharati Mukherjee who in the mid to late eighties was the first and only South Asian woman in Canada to gain economic capital by publishing *The Middleman and Other Stories, Darkness,* and *Jasmine* with the prestigious international publishers Penguin and Random House. Cultural capital accrues from other sources, however, such as literary awards and recognition from fellow writers and academics. Mukherjee attained cultural capital because of awards such as the American National Book Critics Circle Award in 1989 for *The Middleman and Other Stories*. Additional cultural capital was gained when two short stories from this collection, "The Tenant" and "The Management of Grief", were anthologised in two major textbooks for first-year undergraduate students: *The Harbrace Anthology of Literature* and *The Norton Introduction to Literature*, respectively. Other South Asian women in Canada haven't published on such a large scale before or since Mukherjee's departure to the United States in 1980. On the other hand, South Asian male writers in Canada, such as Michael Ondaatje, Rohinton Mistry, M.G.

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[28] According to Ashok Chandwani, *Tamarind Men* has sold 80,000 copies in four years and continues to sell well.

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Vassanji, and Shyam Selvadurai, have enjoyed mass distribution of their works by publishing with large presses like McClelland and Stewart.

This is the context within which Anita Rau Badami's first novel, *Tamarind Men*, was published by Viking Penguin in the spring of 1996. Since it is one of the first novels by a South Asian woman in Canada to be marketed by a major house on such a large scale, this novel brings to the fore a series of questions that pertain to most minority writing: what negotiations with the mainstream publishing industry do minority voices undertake in order to be heard? What do they give up in order to speak? How do book publishing, distribution and the academy -- or the methods of circulation and modes of production -- engage with, interrupt, subdue or enhance their voices?[29]

Struggling for Legitimacy

At stake in all these questions is the matter of legitimacy. The inequalities of capitalism create situations in which writers must compete for recognition, authority and legitimation. In keeping with Bourdieu's idea of legitimacy as "cultural consecration" (*Field* 121), I define "legitimacy" as that quality which increases a writer's ability to continue to publish because her "merit" has been established and justified by certain groups of people in the publishing industry and/or in academic circles. This kind of merit or legitimacy can only be established by prior publications and writers attempting to publish for the first time often find themselves trying to establish their legitimacy or their right to speak. I would like to argue that South Asian women who are first-time novelists, like Anita Rau Badami, are engaging in a struggle for legitimacy in order to get their work published.

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[29] While some aspects of this chapter on *Tamarind Men* will be relevant to other minority writers, I have decided to focus on its implications for South Asian women writers in order not to subsume some important ethnic, cultural and gender differences.

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Following the work of French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, the question of legitimacy requires us to study the structural relations between individuals, groups and institutions to discover all the factors involved in the writing, publishing and dissemination of a work. In "The Field of Cultural Production, or: The Economic World Reversed," Bourdieu writes that "[t]he literary or artistic field is a *field of forces*, but it is also a *field of struggles* tending to transform or conserve this field of forces" (*Field* 30). Each of the occupants of the various positions in a field applies force in order to struggle for legitimacy. The occupants of dominated positions try to transform the field of forces in their favour while the occupants of dominant positions tend to conserve or maintain their dominant positions. The position that one writer holds in such a network could include, for instance, the writer's relation to the publishing industry as well as to an academic institution such as a university. These relations will have a direct influence over the way in which that writer struggles to defend or improve her economic and/or cultural position. We can assume that a South Asian woman writer like Badami can struggle to improve her position in several ways. For example, if her books were to sell well, she would improve her economic position, whereas if her books did not sell well but were taught in University classes and were discussed at academic conferences, she would improve her cultural position.

The advantage of thinking through a literary work in terms of a network of positions and relations is that it avoids theorizing literary works as either isolated works of art lacking any connection to a social context (i.e., merely cultural artifacts) or books produced to fill a demand by the book-buying public (i.e., only commodities). After all, if we ignore the relationship between a book's economic capital and its cultural capital we risk isolating the work of art from the social forces that determine its existence and reception.

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> In defining the literary and artistic field as, inseparably, a field of positions and a field of position-takings we also escape from the usual dilemma of internal ('tautegorical') reading of the work (taken in isolation or within the system of works to which it belongs) and external (or 'allegorical') analysis, i.e. analysis of the social conditions of production of the producers and consumers which is based on the – generally tacit – hypothesis of the spontaneous correspondence or deliberate matching of production to demand or commissions. And by the same token we escape from the correlative dilemma of the charismatic image of artistic activity as pure, disinterested creation by an isolated artist. (*Field* 34)

Thus, a field of positions in which each writer or artist is attempting to improve his or her position or standing in society better accounts for the realities of cultural production than the idea of a work written in isolation or a work written solely to fill a demand. Art is no longer assessed in a vacuum. What the author writes is part of a social context and the way in which it is marketed is part of an economic context. Bourdieu's field of positions accounts for both of these contexts while simultaneously acknowledging the author's struggle to gain legitimacy.

Ethnic Authorship

As part of a general move towards globalisation, increasingly large Canadian publishers are being bought out by American commercial publishers that in turn are being bought out by huge entertainment conglomerates. According to Charles Harris,

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> Until only a few years ago, we could count on [American] commercial publishers to put out superb, challenging literary books on a regular basis. There are disturbing signs, however, that this situation is changing. Most of the famous New York publishing houses – Random House, Simon and Schuster, Harcourt Brace, Putnam's, Little-Brown, for example – which remained independent throughout much of their histories, have in recent years been bought up and consolidated by huge entertainment conglomerates. Time/Warner, General Cinema, Viacom (Paramount), MCA (Universal Studios) – these are the corporations running the book business today. Not only do these corporate giants compete for the same books and seek to serve all the same markets, but they have begun to downsize, in the process concentrating on the publication of those books most likely to sell. (Harris 164)

With profit as the bottom line every book that is published has to sell well. For minority writers and specifically, South Asian women writers, this has meant, among other things, increasingly "eye-catching" or exoticized book covers which depict the body or the figure of a recognisably South Asian woman[30] whose ethnicity is marked by South Asian clothing

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[30] See "Arms, Charms and Sexy Peril: Spy Novels and Pin-Up Book Covers" by Danielle St-Laurent for an excellent discussion of the use of images of women in various states of undress to market spy novels to straight men.

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and/or accessories. The idea behind such marketing strategies appears to be that an exotic or different woman supposedly catches the eye[31] of mainstream consumers.

Before I discuss these covers, I would like to point out that even though literary critics usually do not engage in extensive readings of book covers, according to industry analyst John Sutherland, in the marketplace, the covers actually carry more weight than the text of the book. To prove this Sutherland gives these examples: "When company salesmen circulate their wares to the retail trade they carry with them not the latest bound books, but only their jackets. When paperback retailers wish to destroy or render unsaleable a book, they rip off the front cover, assuming that a copy thus mutilated no longer exists commercially" (3). The importance of the cover can also be seen from statements such as this often found in paperbacks. "Except in the United States of America, this book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not . . . be lent, re-sold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form or binding or cover other than that in which it is published." This particular statement is taken from *Tamarind Mem* but it is a standard warning found in some form in most books. Thus, one can assume that the book cannot be separated from its cover and still remain the same book.

As I mentioned earlier, a key component of my analysis in this chapter is the cover of *Tamarind Mem*. My interest in packaging stems not only from its ability to reveal

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[31] Eye-catching marketing strategies that rely on exotic-looking women may become less common if there were more minorities in the publishing business. According to an article in *Quill & Quir*, minorities are still missing from the publishing business: "there is a widespread acknowledgement that, when it comes to skin colour, diversity among editors, publishers, sales reps, marketers, and publicists is plainly lacking" (Lahey 16). If the person marketing a South Asian woman's novel were also South Asian, perhaps the book cover she would choose might represent the content of the book rather than simply emphasize exotic difference. Lahey's article concludes, "a more diverse publishing community might do better by authors of colour, both in terms of how they are edited and how their books are promoted and sold" (Lahey 20).

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marketing strategy and therefore the position of the book within the field of cultural production, but also from the fact that literary critics have long ignored covers.

> Literary criticism – the serious reading of serious books – has a puritanical prejudice about the object of its attention. The serious reader is trained to regard value as something essential, so far within any text as to be immaterial. Practically this attitude expresses itself as a virtuous disdain for externals – a disdain which dogmatically ignores the book dimension of books. 'You can't judge a book by its cover' is a lesson that is drummed in from first grade to postgraduate level. (Sutherland 3)

As a literary critic, I will remedy this situation by discussing the material aspects of the book in this chapter.

I emphasize the material aspects of the book because it is more than a text written by an author. It is a commodity situated in a marketplace situated in a culture. How that commodity is marketed to that culture sheds important light on the culture because marketing always assumes an imaginary audience to whom the marketing is directed. Even when one assumes that all actual cultures are more complex than the imaginary cultures that marketing executives create, these imaginary audiences can still tell us about our assumptions about difference. For instance, when a text is marketed with an illustration that emphasizes the exotic, the marketing executives are creating an imaginary audience that is fascinated with the exotic. To ignore the cover is to ignore these ideologically based assumptions about the marketplace. Besides, according to John Sutherland, "The 'trade', by contrast, is grossly materialistic in its attitude to books and the wrapping around them. They *do* judge books by

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their covers – and by nothing else, often" (3). The reason why covers are so important to publishers is that they cost a lot to produce. "This fetishistic reverence for the packaging of the article . . . has a sound basis in the economics of production. A four-colour jacket (how many academics know what that means, technologically?) will cost up to twenty-five per cent of a hardback novel's production cost. With a paperback novel – whose jacket may be dazzlingly glazed, stippled, and cut, the proportionate cost of the packaging is even higher" (Sutherland 3-4). The expense of the covers only serves to emphasize their importance. Publishers would not spend so much money if they didn't believe that the covers would succeed in attracting buyers.

Because some critics analyze covers by holding the author responsible for them, Corrine A. Kratz finds fault with critics who attribute the cover of a book "primarily to a single source, the author(s)" (182). I do not hold the author solely responsible for the cover. I am aware that the process by which a publishing company decides on a book cover involves numerous people. I am also aware that usually authors cannot control the process of image selection. "Within a press, cover designs usually involve some consultation among designers, marketing specialists, and editors. Authors may not be, and often are not, involved at all" (Kratz 187). Another aspect of my thinking involves associating the book cover with the marketing of a book. This is because I am most interested in trade paperbacks. "For trade books . . . the right cover is essential 'so that someone will pick it up,' and for that reason, marketing will almost certainly have the final say" (qtd. in Kratz 187). Thus, I am well aware of two things: first, that neither the author nor even the cover designer makes the final decision about a book cover, and second, that the role of marketing in the material aspect of a book is far greater than considerations of text and design.

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Even a cursory glance at covers of books published in the 1990s suggests that exoticized images of South Asian women sell. In 1991, Fawcett Books, which is a division of Random House and is owned by Advance Publications Inc., the company which publishes *GQ*, *Glamour*, and *Vogue*, published Bharati Mukherjee's fifth work of fiction, *Jasmine*. Another major publisher, Viking-Penguin, had previously published this novel in 1989. Unlike Mukherjee's other works, *Jasmine* contains a picture of a South Asian woman looking out a window on the front cover. This picture is repeated in the spine of the book. In 1994, Pocket Books, a division of Simon & Schuster Inc. and owned by National Amusements, Inc., the company which owns Paramount Pictures and MTV, published Kirin Narayan's novel, *Love, Stars and All That*. The front cover of this novel depicts a sari-clad torso of a woman from her breasts to her hips. The back cover presents a two inch by three and a half inch photo of the South Asian woman author. In 1996, Viking-Penguin, which is owned by Pearson PLC the company that owns Amusement Park and Tourist Attraction Operations, published Anita Rau Badami's *Tamarind Mem*. The novel's entire back cover is a picture of the South Asian woman author wearing South Asian dress. In 1997, Anchor Books, which is a division of Bantam Doubleday Dell and owned by Bertelsmann AG, the company which owns RCA and Arista, published Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Mistress of Spices*. Not surprisingly, a stylised painting of a sari-clad South Asian woman graces its front cover and its spine. The two inch by one and a half inch photo of the author is on the inside back flap. Each of these four commercial publishers has chosen cover designs depicting figures of South Asian women. Given that cover designs are used to market books, these designs presumably do two things. First, they attract South Asian women readers who may want to read books about and books by South Asian women. Simultaneously, however, they succeed in exoticising South Asian women for the mainstream reading public.

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According to Roy Miki, "[t]he old truism, 'you can't tell a book from its cover,' may once have been true, but in this design-obsessed consumerist era, the cover is often a tell-tale sign of power relations, stereotypes and expectations" (Miki 147). Given Miki's claim and the fact that the cover of a book often illustrates the way in which it is marketed and, therefore, has an effect on its economic capital, I would like to begin my discussion of *Tamarind Men* with a reading of its cover. Badami's novel is marketed with romanticised photographs on the jacket which may lead a prospective book-buyer to believe that a South Asian woman will present an exotic tale set in an exotic land: India.[32] The photograph on the front cover displays the misty outlines of an Indian mosque's domes and minarets in the background while the foreground shows the tops of three trains at an Indian train station. It's either sunset or sunrise and the sky is yellow-orange even though the mosque and the trains are in partial darkness. Although one cannot see any details of the photograph, one is likely to get a vague sense that it's South Asia. Opulent front and back flaps, which fold inwards, contain a summary of the novel. The back cover is striking for both what is present and what is absent. The usual praise from reviewers and other writers is completely absent. In its stead one finds a full-page black-and-white picture of the glamourous author with no written text whatsoever. If it isn't immediately clear that the author is South Asian, her attire soon makes it obvious. This photograph specifically locates the author as a South Asian woman and, as a result, gives an air of authenticity to the novel.[33]

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[32] See Purnima Bose's "The Scent of a Conflict: Kashmir, Transnationalim, and the National Imaginary" for an excellent reading of the advertising campaign for the perfume Casmir and its commodification of an exotic South Asia.

[33] Badami's latest novel, *The Hero's Walk*, also displays a South Asian theme on its cover. A South Asian shawl with a red and gold paisley design is superimposed onto the face of a child who is looking downwards. *Tamarind Men* is described as a national bestseller on the front cover while praise for *Tamarind Men* appears on the back. The author's colour photograph in South Asian attire

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Labeling can be seen as both positive and negative. If South Asian women writers have been excluded from the public sphere, then perhaps there are times when they should be labeled and it should matter. Even though Badami has made her distaste for the label of "ethnic writer" clear, she admits in an interview with *Quill & Quire* that the title and the cover illustration of the book promise an exotic India. "Badami snorts at the label 'ethnic writer,' even while acknowledging that the title of her book – named for the sour tasting tamarind and the Hindi word for a married woman of upper class – and its cover will lend an exotic spin to Penguin's national marketing plans" (30). Regardless of Badami's desire not to be labelled, she is publishing in a western country that is likely to have been affected by a western tradition: the monolithic construction of "the author."

In "What is an author?," Michel Foucault shows that the idea of the author is more complex than merely someone who writes books. Authors can be initiators of entire discursive practices such as marxism, for instance. He delineates the way in which our (western) culture limits the proliferation of ideas by limiting the notion of the author to a fixed, stable subjectivity. Labelling and categorising the author reduces the possibilities of meaning that may arise from her book or body of work.

> How can one reduce the great peril, the great danger with which fiction threatens our world? The answer is: One can reduce it with the author. The author allows a limitation of the cancerous and dangerous proliferation of significations within a world where one is thrifty not only with one's resources and riches, but also with one's discourses and their

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is on the inside back flap. Thus, in my opinion, an air of authenticity is also to be found in the covers of her new novel.

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> significations. The author is the principle of thrift in the proliferation of meaning. (Foucault, "What is an Author?" 209)

According to Foucault, western culture has a tradition of limiting the multiple, contradictory ideas and writings of human beings by naming them authors and thus fixing them within stable boundaries. The cover design of Badami's book similarly fixes the author's subjectivity by reducing her to her photograph. Sunaina Maira and Rajini Srikanth have commented, in their introduction to their anthology *Contours of the Heart*, that publishers engage in pigeonholing writers. "Multiculturalism, while fostering the expansion of the literary canon, has, [*sic*] nevertheless created a narrow genre of ethnic literature to be consumed by voyeuristic readers sampling from different ethnic experiences. Moreover, the publishing world has reinforced these constricted spaces for ethnic writing" (Maira and Srikanth xix). Badami is reduced to her photograph, which labels her as ethnic and labels her writing ethnic writing. *Tamarind Men*'s book covers announce this information, thereby constricting the author's subjectivity. Thus, this marketing strategy functions by capitalizing on the author's status as an ethnic woman writer to sell the book by promising a stable ethnic subjectivity that will narrate an exotic story about a misty, faraway land.[34]

Another aspect of marketing involves sending expensive advance copies to newspapers across the country to review before the book officially comes out. According to Bourdieu, the model intended to explain the field of cultural production must have a place for collective belief. "The work of art is an object which exists as such only by virtue of the (collective) belief which knows and acknowledges it as a work of art" (*Field* 35). Since this

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[34] As I will show in the following chapter, this marketing strategy is in direct conflict with the book's actual argument, which posits mobile, diasporic, and feminist subjectivities.

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collective belief is part of the marketing of the book, Penguin insured that mainstream papers such as *The Calgary Herald*, *The Winnipeg Free Press*, *The Montreal Gazette*, *The Toronto Star*, and *The Vancouver Sun* all reviewed the novel in the Spring of 1996 when it came out. *Tamarind Men* has been reviewed once in *Maclean's*[35] and twice in *Quill & Quire*;[36] it was even mentioned in *The Financial Post*. Moreover, Penguin flew Badami across the country on a national book tour. Such treatment of a novel and its author by a publisher is usually reserved only for a novel that the publisher expects to sell well. And so it has; already in its fourth printing, the novel was released as a pocket size for the mass market in January 1998. One cannot help but notice the popularity, the fact that the novel is in its fourth printing, as well as the praise that has been lavished upon it. Reviews focused on the delight with which one can consume the novel. This image of consumption is tied closely to the idea of consuming the exotic. Thus, the reader visits an exotic place and consumes its sights and sounds through the act of reading. "*Tamarind Men* is a delectable book, filled with pungent sights and sounds and poignant memories" (Rev. in *Q & Q* 50). The novel comes across as a book that can easily be placed in the context of South Asian writing in Canada: "overall the novel is a solid accomplishment – an exciting addition to the burgeoning tradition of Indo-Canadian writing that includes Rohinton Mistry, M.G. Vassanji and Shyam Selvadurai" (Nurse 53). As mentioned earlier, this "burgeoning tradition" is decidedly male. But what is it about this particular novel that captured Penguin's interest and led them to market *Tamarind Men* on such a large scale with a national book tour? And why has it received so much praise from major newspapers across the country? Certainly Penguin's marketing strategy is key in accounting for the praise.

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[35] See Donna Nurse, "A Sweet and Sour Life."
[36] See John Burns, "Railway Child" and Rev. of *Tamarind Men*, by Anita Rau Badami.

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Instead of comparing Badami's book to those written by South Asian men, we could compare it to books by other non-white women. Perhaps the impetus behind Penguin's marketing campaign is the influence of East Asian women writers like Amy Tan and her best seller *The Joy Luck Club*. After all, it is possible that Badami's novel presents something decidedly female to the reader. According to Marnia Lazreg, the popular demand for books and stories by ethnic women is related to the demands of global feminism. Speaking mainly about women's studies programs in North America and Europe, Lazreg lists three reasons why the other woman is necessary to the enterprise and discourse of feminism.

> First, the feminist discourse cannot maintain itself by focusing on the Western experience alone. For its theorizing, it needs to study and confront Other women's experiences to gauge its explanatory power. Second, its institutionalization as a normal discourse (in Thomas Kuhn's sense) requires information about Other women by Other women themselves in order to sustain students' and funders' interests. Documenting, studying gender practices that are sensational, or simply different, is often at the heart of funding proposals. Third, the field of research for students and professors needs to be kept large and varied to permit an ever-increasing production of books. (33)

The second reason she provides gets at the heart of the interest in ethnic women's fiction in North America. Just as sensational or different cultural practices arouse public interest due to latent orientalism, this interest easily becomes sexually charged when these practices involve women. This is why Lazreg refers to the mainstream public as "hungry for tales

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about women" (35). That these tales come from native informants is also critical for the public because it is "in need of native support for its own prejudices" (Lazreg 36). Lazreg's argument not only provides an explanation for *Tamarind Men*'s success in Canada but it also asks an important question. "Given the politics of reception of Other women's work and speech, it is crucial to ask whether "Western" audiences, feminist or otherwise, should insist on the knowability of these women" (37-38).

Consecration and Agency

In the previous sections, I have shown how the orientalized packaging of their books has allowed South Asian women to reach a wider audience with their works. The marketing of *Tamarind Men* probably did result in more people buying the book. In the next section, I will show how the economic capital that is directly related to marketing is merely one of three principles of legitimacy in the field of cultural production. The other two types of legitimacy, both amounting to cultural capital, are granted to the novelist by academics in universities and by fellow-creative writers. One of the ways in which *Tamarind Men* has the potential for cultural capital is the fact that its themes are theoretically familiar to academics because they are influenced by poststructuralism, theories of diaspora and mobility. As Saroja, the mother asks, "what is one to do with a life like mine, scrawled all over the country, little trails here and there, moving, moving all the time, and never in one fixed direction" (Badami 155). This mobility is immediately recognisable to the postcolonial theorist as the mobility of diaspora. The content of the book makes no claims with capital C certainty because the movement insists that one constantly change positions and perspectives.[37] The ways in which *Tamarind Men* adheres to academic theories may appear to

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[37] Badami's new novel, *The Hero's Walk*, continues this theme of uncertainty by describing a number of characters that are difficult to judge morally. One reviewer has called the new novel "a satisfying,

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challenge any voice that the writer may have. However, despite the orientalist images on book covers and the qualifications of cultural capital, these writers still have voice and agency.

Bourdieu's field of class relations contains a contradiction that is useful to understanding Penguin's marketing and Badami's writing of *Tamarind Mem* in terms of a struggle for legitimacy:

> The literary . . . field is at all times the site of a struggle between the two principles of hierarchization: the heteronomous principle, favourable to those who dominate the field economically and politically (e.g. 'bourgeois art') and the autonomous principle (e.g. 'art for art's sake'). (*Field* 40)

The heteronomous principle is favourable to those who make economic profits while the autonomous principle is favourable to those who can afford to be independent of mainstream culture. Usually the culture that is produced outside of mainstream tastes has cultural capital because it appeals to smaller alternative groups of people. The contradiction lies in their measures of success. Economic profit can lead to the failure to acquire cultural capital because in smaller circles of writers, this may be regarded as "selling out" or giving up artistic independence to the tyranny of the supply and demand economy. The ability to gain cultural capital can lead to economic failure because often "art for artists" (*Field* 51) does not have the wider appeal necessary for making a monetary profit.

Bourdieu's model of the field of cultural production is even more complex than the struggle for the dominant principle of hierarchization lets on. He goes on to identify three

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if not brilliant, morality play; one with an ending but, to its credit, no overwhelming conclusion" (Deachman C15).

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"competing principles of legitimacy" (*Field* 50). The first principle is the "specific principle of legitimacy," in which recognition comes from other artists – "the autonomous self-sufficient world of 'art for art's sake'" (*Field* 50-51). This is the legitimacy that comes from positive book reviews from other creative writers. For instance, in Badami's case, Robbie Clipper Sethi, who has written her own novel, *The Bride Wore Red*, reviewed *Tamarind Mem* in *IndiaStar*. Sethi writes that Badami's book is "more concise and focused than Rohinton Mistry's *A Fine Balance*, more accessible than M.G. Vassanji's *The Gunny Sack*. The feminine of these Canadian authors to which she is compared, Badami makes a brilliant debut with *Tamarind Mem*, and by it she enriches not only Canadian literature but the literature of the boundless world we live in" (Sethi 3). This flattering review from a fellow artist demonstrates one of three ways in which Badami can gain legitimacy.

Bourdieu's second principle of legitimacy is one "corresponding to 'bourgeois' taste and to the consecration bestowed by the dominant fractions of the dominant class and by private tribunals, such as *salons*, or public, state-guaranteed ones, such as academies, which sanction the inseparably ethical and aesthetic (and therefore political) taste of the dominant" (*Field* 51). This is the legitimacy that comes from institutions like the University. For instance, publications associated with the University of Calgary and Simon Fraser University interviewed Badami (*Filling Station*, *The Peak*). Also, a website associated with Emory University contains Badami's biographical information as well as a discussion of her novel, what she teaches the reader, related links, and a list of works cited (Mickley). The content of the book, which includes themes of unknowability, is in keeping with this principle because theoretical frameworks that propound uncertainty are familiar to most academics in the humanities. And lastly, the fact that the novel was written as an M.A. creative writing thesis definitely means that it corresponds to 'bourgeois' taste.

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According to Bourdieu, there is one more "principle of legitimacy which its advocates call 'popular', i.e. the consecration bestowed by the choice of ordinary consumers, the 'mass audience'" (*Field* 51). It is this legitimacy which publicity departments try to appeal to. The marketing of the book using orientalized covers along with Badami's statement that she needs deep knowledge of a place to write about it[38] is in keeping with this principle because the romanticised, sanitised view of India along with a fixed, authentic, and knowing author is likely to have mass appeal in our western culture. This last principle of legitimacy competes with the first two because popular success sometimes precludes success amongst one's fellow creative writers or success in the academy. It is possible that academics may like a book and teach it while it never becomes a best seller.[39] Or, creative writers may love a book that no one teaches and fewer people read. Or worse, a book that becomes a best seller is not even considered worthy of teaching merely because of its best seller status. Thus, success in attaining one principle of legitimacy may contradict the possibility of success in attaining another. Regardless of which of these three principles or combination of principles of legitimacy Badami attains, her position is improved by their functioning. It is still a worthwhile endeavour for her to try to attain all three.

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[38] In an interview with *Quill & Quire*, Badami has stated that the reason why her first novel is set in India rather than Canada is because she hasn't lived in Canada very long. She implies that the longer she remains in a place the deeper her knowledge of that place becomes and the greater her ability to write about it. Even though the novel seems to claim that we cannot know anything, Badami claims that she needs to know certain things. I will return to this point in the next chapter.

[39] The ability of best seller lists to tell us which books are selling 'best' has recently come under fire. According to Laura J. Miller, best seller lists are actually marketing tools, which might include some books that are selling well but might also, quite easily, exclude other books that are selling just as well. Miller argues "that despite general agreement in the industry that the lists do not accurately reflect what books are the country's top sellers, major publishers and booksellers have an interest in maintaining the authority of the lists" (Miller 287).

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Another aspect of this struggle for legitimacy is connected with who has the power to define an economically and/or culturally successful writer.[40] The dominant definition of a writer in Canada is not an ethnic writer. Miki writes "Assimilationist assumptions, mostly unspoken, continue to saturate the mass media, and the ideology of white, male, European-based values still reigns in literary institutions, in granting bodies, and in decision-making areas of publishing. In a climate where difference is pressed into sameness, and where 'universality' implies white perceptions, many writers and artists of color internalize the propaganda of dominant aesthetic and cultural norms and never reach that critical threshold of having to decolonize themselves" (Miki 139). Badami is not the first writer of colour in this country to disparage the label 'ethnic writer.' Writers of colour such as Neil Bissoondath and Jan Wong have also refused to be labelled 'ethnic writers.' They all believe that in order to improve their positions they must be writers first and ethnic only by twist of fate. "Like her characters, Badami's position may seem precarious, but she is confident that the power of the imagination can efface the tensions between ethnic and writer" (*Quill* 30). The tension between ethnic and writer may be created by a dominant definition of writer if it insists that writers are just writers, that they are devoid of gender, race, sexuality, class, etc.

In the end, it is important to remember the complexity of the field of production. Dominance and legitimacy exist but they do so in the context of struggles that can and do lead to change. Bourdieu writes "what 'makes reputations' is not . . . this or that 'influential'

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[40] Bourdieu insists that within the field of literary production, everyone is struggling for the power to consecrate. "[T]he field of cultural production is the site of struggles in which what is at stake is the power to impose the dominant definition of the writer and therefore to delimit the population of those entitled to take part in the struggle to define the writer . . . In short, the fundamental stake in literary struggles is the monopoly of literary legitimacy, i.e., *inter alia*, the monopoly of the power to say with authority who are authorized to call themselves writers; or, to put it another way, it is the monopoly of the power to consecrate producers or products" (*Field* 42).

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person, this or that institution, review, magazine, academy . . . or publisher; . . . it is the field of production understood as the system of objective relations between these agents or institutions and as a site of the struggles for the monopoly of the power to consecrate in which the value of works of art and belief in that value are continuously generated" (*Field* 78). When Badami's novel came out, she was the only South Asian Canadian woman writer published by a major publisher. Now Shani Mootoo has moved from her small publisher, Press Gang, to McClelland & Stewart, a major Canadian publisher. Badami's second novel, *The Hero's Walk,* was published by Knopf Canada, another major publisher. This shows that change does occur. South Asian women writers will not always be limited to smaller publishers.

On the other hand, being limited to smaller publishers who don't give in to the demands of the market economy may not be considered a limitation. It is possible that even Bourdieu himself would not consider this a limitation. After all, his larger purpose, beyond describing the field of cultural production, is to call on intellectuals, scholars, writers and artists to fight for the maintenance of autonomy from the market and economic forces. He believes that autonomy will lead to political freedom. "[I]t is by increasing their autonomy (and thereby, among other things, their freedom to criticize the prevailing powers) that intellectuals can increase the effectiveness of a political action whose ends and means have their origin in the specific logic of the fields of cultural production" (*Rules* 340). He claims that this autonomy is threatened because the boundary between commercial literature and non-commercial literature has become increasingly blurred. "This blurring of boundaries to which so-called 'media-oriented' producers are spontaneously inclined . . . constitutes the worst threat to the autonomy of cultural production" (*Rules* 347). Badami's novel is an example of such blurring because it contains aspects of both autonomous and

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heteronomous production. I am inclined to ask 'why not?' Given that minority writers, and especially South Asian women, haven't had larger audiences in the past, why not blur the boundaries and try to attract the academics *and* the wider public?

In order to be heard, some of the negotiations that minority voices undertake include having their books marketed as exotic and using theoretically familiar tropes such as mobility and uncertainty in their writing. While these negotiations of the field of cultural production sometimes contradict one another, they must be evaluated as inevitable given the struggle for legitimacy that ethnic writers in Canada must undertake. Just because a writer has written in the language of diaspora and been marketed in this way doesn't necessarily mean that she has given up her own voice entirely. Emerging ethnic writers' voices can be found in the texts they write. Even when the packaging is exoticized and orientalized, these writers often subvert the packaging of their own books. In the next chapter, I will discuss the narrative aspects of *Tamarind Men* and Rachna Mara's *Of Customs and Excise* to determine the extent to which they work against orientalist stereotypes of South Asian women.

The Authentic Body

In this chapter, I have explored the various struggles for legitimacy that are waged by minority women writers in the world of mainstream publishing. By exploring the effects of consumerism on a text like *Tamarind Men*, I have tried to answer the question: What is the relationship between the text and the paratext?[41] What evidence of exoticization can be found in the paratexts that inevitably accompany these texts? *Tamarind Men*'s paratext, a glossy back cover image which displays an "unreal," almost mythic South Asian woman, is

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[41] The term paratext comes from Gerard Genette. He writes that the "text is rarely presented in an unadorned state, unreinforced and unaccompanied by a certain number of verbal or other productions, such as an author's name, a title, a preface, illustrations." He calls these accompanying productions the work's paratext.

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supposed to be the authentic author. The image of Anita Rau Badami on her novel *Tamarind Mem* has taken on mythic proportions where, paradoxically, the myth is one of authenticity. An "authentic" Indian woman is telling a story about an "authentic" Indian woman in India. The presence of the South Asian woman's body on book covers serves simply to prove the authenticity of these narratives, to exoticise these women, and to commodify their work.

In their book *Materialist Feminisms*, Donna Landry and Gerald MacLean discuss the commodification of feminism in universities, and in novels. They write that the "work of commodification . . . involves unlimited divisibility, homogeneity of the parts, uniform quality, durability, and the privatized labor of the producers" (Landry 99). I would argue that the commodification of South Asian women is occurring in novels like *Tamarind Mem*, *Jasmine*, *Love, Stars and All That*, and *The Mistress of Spices* because they fulfill some of these processes. The figure of the South Asian woman appears on all the covers and this creates a homogeneity of the part that is the cover. These women on the covers usually wear 'traditional' South Asian dress and this creates a uniform quality to the material texts. Lastly, these novels are usually written or produced independently so that their value is constituted when they are ready to be exchanged, showing that their labour is privatized. My point here is not so much about the writing but more about making the connection between the covers of these particular texts and the commodification of the body or figure of the "authentic" South Asian woman.

Of course, this need not always have solely negative effects. If publishers foreground the gender and ethnicity of a South Asian woman writer on her book, it is possible that South Asian women readers would benefit from this, especially if they were specifically looking for a novel written by another South Asian woman. Thus, the same marketing practice can be construed as exoticising for a mainstream audience, on the one

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hand, yet useful to other South Asian women who might want to read the voices of those with similar experiences. Even though some South Asian women writers publish texts which contain paratexts that obviously enhance their marketability by exoticising[42] them, these activities do not necessarily have to be seen as regressive.

If publishers commodify ethnicity in their attempts to sell more books, why not celebrate that their interest in different ethnicities has led to more South Asian women getting published? After all, marketing these books with exotic covers actually makes it possible for South Asian women to distribute their writing and their voices to the public. Like Donna Landry and Gerald MacLean, I would "argue that it is useless simply to protest against . . . commodification . . . because the commodification of cultural developments is inevitable within capitalist societies. Rather than declaim against consumer society, we see new forms of consumer practices as potentially new sites of political activity" (Landry and MacLean 50). If the commodification of South Asian women writers and their books leads to any homogenizing, then, as critics, we can examine and resist this by pointing to the homogeneity whenever we see it and teaching diversity regardless of such representations. What matters, in the end, is the way in which we read these texts. According to Chandra Talpade Mohanty, "the existence of third world women's narratives in itself is not evidence of decentering hegemonic histories and subjectivities. It is the way in which they are read, understood, and located institutionally which is of paramount importance" (Introduction 34). Thus, in keeping with Mohanty, I would argue that the political activity that Landry calls for involves critically reading and writing about these texts, as I will do in the following four chapters. Even when visual representations on covers are static and homogenized, the

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[42] Arundhati Roy's first novel, *The God of Small Things*, fails to mention her name Margaret and contains a beautiful picture of the author.

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representations and voices within these texts often are not. In the next chapter, I will read *Tamarind Men* and Rachna Mara's *Of Customs and Excise* to determine the extent to which each of these, very different, authors works against the orientalist stereotypes that are used to market fiction by South Asian women. Even though *Tamarind Men* depicts subjectivities that are mobile and incoherent, the novel is nostalgic in ways that make its critique against orientalism weaker than one would expect. Rachna Mara's book, on the other hand, provides a much more sustained critique of orientalism, especially in the way it deals with issues of class and race.

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II

Popular Legitimacy through Storytelling: Anita Rau Badami and Rachna Mara

Orientalism assumed an unchanging Orient, absolutely different (the reasons change from epoch to epoch) from the West.

-- *Edward Said,* Orientalism

In the previous chapter, I used Pierre Bourdieu's theories to explain how and why fiction written by South Asian women in North America is marketed with orientalist images on its book covers. I showed that struggles for different kinds of legitimacy are taking place in the field of literary production and that orientalist images on book covers lead to popular legitimacy and more economic capital for the author and book. I also demonstrated that bourgeois and specific legitimacy correspond with cultural capital and can be acquired through literary prizes and favourable reviews from academics and fellow creative writers. In this chapter, I will analyze two works of fiction to determine what narrative qualities appeal to the public and provide popular legitimacy to the author. While the previous chapter explained popular legitimacy by pointing to marketing that uses orientalist images, this chapter will explain popular legitimacy by pointing to the handling of various thematic issues. In order to determine exactly which kind of writing and ideas correspond most closely with popular legitimacy, I will consider in relation to each other an author who has gained popular legitimacy and another who has not. By doing so, I can find out precisely not only the types of issues that are most appealing to the public but also the way in which they are handled so that they accrue the most popular legitimacy.

As I pointed out in the last chapter, Badami's *Tamarind Mem* is packaged and commodified in ways that draw attention to orientalized ideas of an unchanging, exotic

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land[43] containing static, unified subjectivities. In this chapter, through close readings of Badami's *Tamarind Mem* and Rachna Mara's *Of Customs and Excise*, I will examine the strategies of textual resistance deployed by each writer against orientalist stereotypes of South Asian culture. Ultimately, I will show that Badami struggles against this commodification of her work in ways that may not be altogether successful.[44] Despite her themes of unknowability and uncertainty, Badami's novel sometimes provides descriptions that are nostalgic and stable. In comparison, Rachna Mara's collection of short fiction, *Of Customs and Excise*, provides a critique of orientalism that is far more hard-hitting because there is no nostalgia in these pages, only women negotiating the conflicting intersections of race and class within carefully delineated historical contexts. Because Badami has popular legitimacy and Mara does not, we can assume that there is a correlation between nostalgic and stable images in fiction and popular legitimacy for the author.

In this chapter, I will compare Badami's *Tamarind Mem* and Mara's *Of Customs and Excise* by looking at how they handle a number of topics. I will divide the chapter into two parts. While the first section will catalogue the apparent similarities between the two books, the second section will reveal the differences, which depict the reasons why Mara's book is better than Badami's at fighting orientalism but Badami's is better at gaining popular

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[43] According to Purnima Bose in "The Scent of a Conflict: Kashmir, Transnationalism, and the National Imaginary," the advertising campaign for a new perfume named Casmir "features images of the Taj Mahal and the river Ganges, which have become a familiar visual shorthand for India, along with ad copy that relies on an orientalist construction of the subcontinent as static and eternal" (151).

[44] Here I don't mean to argue that all such struggles are doomed. I theorize that successful resistance emanates from the contradiction between a simplistic orientalist binary of east and west and the fact of complex and diverse groups of people. "These contradictions which inform the 'lived reality' of an alienated existence are embedded in the various and contesting ways of making sense available in any historical moment. They leave their mark in the form of textual in-coherences in the narratives of the dominant culture. These textual crises – gaps, contradictions, *aporias* – indicate the failure of the hegemonic discourses to successfully seal over or manage the contradictions displaced in the texts of culture" (Hennessy 92). In this chapter, I argue that Mara's text resists orientalism more successfully than Badami's.

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legitimacy. Despite the similarities between these two books, such as mother-daughter themes and depictions of uncertainty and ambivalence, there are five major ways in which Badami's book is different from Mara's book. First, a mainstream press published Badami's book while a small feminist press published Mara's book. Second, while Badami describes recognizable difference, which is more in line with orientalist expectations, Mara describes disruptive difference. Third, decolonization in 1947 is depicted as changing very little in Badami's book, whereas Mara's book depicts all the complications of traumatic change. Again, Badami's perspective is in keeping with an orientalist and colonizing perspective because she refuses to deal with colonization in an oppositional way. Fourth, while both books focus on the ways in which marriage can oppress women, Badami's depiction is more in line with orientalist assumptions that expect third world women to be more victimized than their western counterparts. Lastly, Badami's depiction of race avoids conflict by erasing these contexts from her narrative. Mara shows how deep racial conflicts run by focusing on multiple contexts and avoiding easy resolutions. These differences make *Tamarind Mem* a more orientalist novel because it provides stable, nostalgic images of India, Indians, and Indian history. Badami reinforces orientalist ideas that the third world woman is a victim, that colonization changed little, and that racial conflict can easily be avoided. The aspects of *Tamarind Mem* that make it different from *Of Customs and Excise* are those that also make it appealing to the public. Thus, in this chapter I illustrate the reasons why Badami has popular legitimacy and Mara does not.

Badami's book critiques orientalism by positing mobile, diasporic, and feminist subjectivities. The novel is divided into two parts. The first half provides a narrative by a daughter, Kamini, chronicling the events of her life, from her childhood to her present adulthood. In describing her life, she tries to use her memories to weave a coherent story

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about coherent characters in her life: her mother and her father. But her memories about them contradict each other, and she is frustrated by her inability to "know" them. The second half of the novel is a narrative by her mother, Saroja, chronicling the same events from a different perspective. The reader is led to believe that the daughter's questions will be answered, that Saroja's perspective will shed more light on the events of the past, making the story and the characters more coherent. But the reader is frustrated because no such coherence is offered. Since the father and husband of these two women works in the railways, the family is constantly moving. Badami uses this motif of mobility to emphasize the instability of memories. As a result, the past as well as the present are both rendered unstable: "we moved so frequently that my memories have blurred and melded together, a bit like the landscape viewed through the windows of a speeding train" (Badami 16). Out of the mutability of memory, the characters that surface are shifting, and incoherent, completely contrary to orientalist assumptions. By writing a dual narrative that still doesn't provide the reader with unified characters, Badami disproves the notion that there is only one unified subject or only one narrative. The multiplicity of subjectivities and narratives subverts the orientalist marketing of the novel but the instability of past histories also troubles attempts to contextualize and ground the stories. Thus, the uncertainty that critiques orientalist notions of South Asia also makes that same critique weak.

Mara's collection of ten short stories goes a step beyond Badami's dual narrative. Mara provides first-person narratives by a mother and daughter, Parvati and Mala, respectively, as well as Parvati's mother-in-law, Mrs. Ungoli, Parvati's doctor, Bridget, and Bridget's servant, Asha. These five mothers and daughters have lives that are so joined and intertwined that this book could have been written as a novel. By choosing to write it as a collection of short stories, Mara gives ample space to differing and multiple subjectivities,

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especially because the stories traverse space (from England to India to Canada) and time (from colonial England and India to contemporary Canada) with close attention to each of these contexts. These stories critique orientalism even more than Badami's novel because they deal with race and class conflict more openly not only in the context of India but also in England and Canada. Badami merely touches on these issues and restricts most of her narrative to India. Kamini's life in Canada is slightly and superficially alluded to while her life in India along with her mother's life in India comprises most of *Tamarind Mem*. This emphasis on India could be read as a privileging of origin in Badami's novel despite the emphasis on mobility. Mara's narrative does not foreground India over Canada in the same way.

The packaging of *Tamarind Mem* reveals an intent by the publisher to appeal to the public in a particular fashion. This packaging does not necessarily evoke the "intended" response from the reader but it is still worth exploring. For instance on the jacket we read "A wise and affectionate portrait of two generations of women in an East Indian family, *Tamarind Mem* is a beautifully evocative novel that . . . unravels the deep ties of love and resentment that bind mothers and daughters everywhere" (back flap). Thus, the packaging is geared to offer a novel that will provide a matrilineal narrative with an exotic twist. In fact, the interest in *Tamarind Mem* may grow out of its exploration of a mother-daughter relationship at a particular historical moment in North American feminism, where the matrilineal discourse seeks to bond women together. According to Marina Heung, "[t]he critical literature on matrilineage in women's writings has already achieved the status of a rich and evolving canon" (Heung 597).[45] Recently, mother-daughter relationships have been increasingly explored in books, film, and scholarship alike. According to Sau-Ling Cynthia

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Wong, "[t]he white feminist reading public appears to have an unusually keen appetite for mother-daughter stories by and about people of color" (Wong 177). Although she may be making a dangerous generalisation that assumes that white feminists are interested in eliding differences by focussing on their commonalities with women of colour, Wong points to Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* as well as Rachna Mara's book of short fiction *Of Customs and Excise* for examples of this. Wong writes that Mara's book "places the story of the 'immigrant daughter's revolt' in a multigenerational, postcolonial global context to deepen one's understanding of matrilineage" (Wong 179). Her description of Mara's book, especially the words "multigenerational" and "postcolonial," might lead one to believe that it must be similar to Badami's novel. However, while Badami's novel is restricted to the mother-daughter pair of Saroja and Kamini, in Mara's book, three other women accompany the mother-daughter pair of Parvati and Mala. Bridget's relationship with her mother, Imogene, is cold and distant, Asha refuses to become a mother, and Mrs. Ungoli's status is dependent on her being the mother of three sons.[46]

To a certain extent Badami does disrupt orientalized and stable notions of an exotic India. By linking the tropes of uncertainty in *Tamarind Men* to mobility, Badami is able to call into question the stability of what is usually considered firm ground: the land itself. Nostalgic images of South Asia can be seen to rely on the idea of a stable land, available to us geographically as a place on a map. We can touch this map, this land and be certain of its concrete stability. In Badami's book the mobile mother-daughter narrative comes from the fact that the father/husband works for the railways. The reason the family moves frequently

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[45] For a survey of the literature on this subject, see Marianne Hirsch, "Mothers and Daughters."
[46] For a discussion of kinship systems in Indian culture and their relation to mother-son relationships, see Radhika Mohanram, "The Problems of Reading: Mother-Daughter Relationships and Indian Postcoloniality."

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is because of Dadda's work. Although the mother, the tamarind mem, complains incessantly about moving, upon her husband's death she picks up his maps and follows them.

> A long time ago, Dadda had pinned a map on my wall. It was to stop me crying every time he left on tour. "This is where I will be," he had said, drawing a line of red ink on the map. Over the years, the map grew crimson with Dadda's routes, marking out stretches of land that he had helped to capture and tame, setting them firmly on maps and timetables, dots connected by iron and wood and sweat. Ma had the map now, and she was following the lines of faded ink. (Badami 51)

Even though Saroja does not initially choose the mobile state of her existence, once Dadda dies she is unable to remain in one place. She uses her railway pass to travel by train. At the conclusion of the novel, she has not reached a final destination. Instead, she is leaving one train for another because she realises that stability is an illusion. "Just as my feet settle into the soil, the ground itself starts shifting . . . It is only when you reach my age that you notice the slight tremors, the nervous shifts that the earth makes beneath your tired feet. Or perhaps, like a sailor, I still feel the rocking of the trains on firm land" (Badami 255). Thus, the land isn't really firm at all and therefore we can assume that any nostalgia related to this land is also uncertain and unstable.

In *Of Customs and Excise*, the incessant rocking of the trains disturbs Bridget because, like Saroja, it also reminds her that stability is an illusion. She feels this most when she is alone in her train compartment. After living in India until the age of six and then returning for four years as an adult to work as a doctor in a village, Bridget returns for a holiday in

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India twenty years after she stopped working there. While travelling by train she reminisces about three women in her life: Sylvia, the dorm monitor at her boarding school in England, Imogene, her mother who sent her to boarding school, and Mrs. Ungoli, the controlling mother-in-law of Parvati, Bridget's patient. "Sylvia, Imogene, Mrs. Ungoli, I don't want to know. It's easier just to hate them" (Mara 80). In this text, Mara doesn't try to claim unknowability as a recurrent theme in her book because that is not her mode of resistance to orientalism. Instead, Mara focuses on race and class conflict. Bridget may not want to know or understand why these three women behave cruelly, but Mara's writing of this book allows the reader to glimpse the many complicated reasons for conflict in a postcolonial context. In the train, as the sun goes down, Bridget doesn't even want to see her own reflection in the train windows. "I pull down the blind. Reflections from the compartment are disconcerting. I hope the other occupants return soon. When there's no one to talk to, the clacking of the train and the continuous motion seep into every cell. It'll reverberate through me for days" (Mara 80). Not only does Bridget want to avoid understanding the women she hates and seeing her own reflection in the train window, but she also wants to avoid feeling the continuous motion of the train. Mara doesn't deny this motion, this mobility and instability; it is repeatedly used in the book. Rather, she portrays a character who is so unsettled by it, she wants to ignore it even though she knows she can't. Each of the conflicts between Bridget and these three women provide separate ways of resisting orientalism because they counteract the notion of a static, eternal and peaceful culture.[47] The clacking, continuous motion of the train represents change that subverts orientalism whether

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[47] Moreover, Mara's text counteracts stability by providing a first-person narrative by Mrs. Ungoli, the woman Bridget hates, in a later short story titled, "Seed Pearls". Thus, even Bridget's hatred is destabilised.

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Bridget pays attention to it or not. Thus, both Mara and Badami use the movement of the train to signify change.

Another similarity between *Tamarind Men* and *Of Customs and Excise* is the way both depict contradictory and uncertain subjectivities and cultures. The contradictory subjectivities in Badami's novel critique orientalist, unified subjects. Kamini's descriptions of her parents reveal that they are both written to be complex and shifting subjectivities. She both loves and hates her father: "I adored my father for his gentleness, for his willingness to listen to me, to tell me those wonderful stories when he was home. And yet I hated him for making Ma so angry all the time" (Badami 45). Her father's identity shifts and she cannot place him. Similarly, her mother is portrayed as contradictory: "Ma was a two-headed pushmi-pullyu from Dr. DoLittle's zoo, or the Ramleela drama woman with a good mask on her face and a bad mask on the back of her head, changing her from Seetha to Soorpanakhi in a single turn" (Badami 48-49). By using metaphors from both western and Indian culture Badami is identifying both her audiences.[48] Kamini's mother's identity continually shifts, not just from "good" to "bad," but also across cultural boundaries. These descriptions succeed in both producing complex, uncertain relations between characters and using metaphors that South Asian and non-South Asian readers can identify with. They point to fluid cultures and contexts within the text as well as outside it, in the world of the reader.

In *Of Customs and Excise*, Mara also describes contradictory sensations that critique orientalist notions of South Asia. When Bridget arrives in India to work as an adult she is amazed to find that the nostalgia she has towards India is completely unfounded. "Her

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[48] Because *Tamarind Men* was published in India, Canada and the U.K., one can assume that Badami saw her audience as both western and Indian. One can also assume that her audience includes diasporic South Asians in the west. Only with her second novel is she becoming known in the U.S. where her first novel was never published.

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memories of those years had been hazy, based more on general impressions, stories repeated by her parents than on actual recall. It wasn't until her arrival here that she'd fully understood how little those shadows reflected reality" (Mara 7). Bridget's understanding of India doesn't replace one stable view with another. Rather, it replaces her stable nostalgia with contradictions. "Even now, the sights, sounds, and smells evoked contradictory sensations – distaste, frustration at the poverty, the fatalism; admiration for the resilience, the exuberance" (Mara 12). Thus, like Badami's novel, Mara's book works against orientalism by pointing out contradictions within a supposedly stable and unchanging culture.

Tamarind Men illustrates the shifting nature of all things thought stable and fixed by orientalists. Badami dislodges the notions of reality and truth through storytelling. For instance, as a girl, Kamini remembers asking her nanny, "'Is it true, is it real?' 'Everything is true, and everything is false. It is the storyteller and the listener who decide what-what is what,' said Linda Ayah" (Badami 58). This statement creates room for multiple interpretations. The storyteller may emphasise one meaning while another meaning moves and compels the listener. Badami uses the trope of storytelling to dismantle some of the orientalist assumptions found in the *Arabian Nights*, as published in the west for westerners in the eighteenth century.[49] In her discussion of Antoine Galland, who published the *Arabian Nights* in 1704, Rana Kabbani describes him as being most influenced by Chardin's

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[49] Here I am differentiating between the *Arabian Nights*, which were oral folktales emerging from the "tradition central to India, Persia, Iraq, Syria and Egypt" (Kabbani 23) and the texts created out of this tradition by European 'storytellers' such as Antoine Galland, E.W. Lane and Richard Burton. "The *Arabian Nights* was manipulated into an occasion for a sexual discourse, and the tales became valuable as text to be annotated and augmented. From being the *belle dame* of Galland's *salon*, Scheherazade changed into the gay woman of Burton's club, for private subscribers only. The Orient of the Western imagination provided respite from Victorian sexual repressiveness" (Kabbani 36). Thus, western storytellers and western audiences decided, according to orientalist assumptions, "what-what is what" (Badami 58) about the orient.

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writings that stressed the orientalist assumption that eastern women were much more oppressed than western women were because of the harem or seraglio. "He could not succeed in eluding the obligatory *topos* of the seraglio which Europe held so dear. Chardin emphasised the severity prevalent in the seraglio, enumerated the restrictions against women, provided examples of the capricious punishments that they were obliged to endure" (Kabbani 26). These assumptions are repeated in *Tamarind Mem* when little Kamini is told the story of the Thithali Rani by the Muslim barber who cuts her father's hair.[50]

> Rumour had it that she had been chasing a butterfly when the Nawab came upon her and ever since he had called her his *thithali*. But so possessive of her was he that she was allowed none of the finery the other queens had . . . The Nawab Sahib was afraid that the evil eye might touch her, you see. He also insisted on her wearing heavy black robes, even in the privacy of her apartment, so that nobody would see her beauty but him. (Badami 79-80)

This story draws on the same orientalist assumptions that we would expect from Chardin, in whose stories a beautiful young woman inevitably languishes in the harem of an evil man. Badami includes this orientalist story within a larger narrative that includes feminist interventions into this story. For Basheer the barber, what is important about the story is that the Thithali Rani escapes and roams the city wearing a veil and continues to be beautiful: "such beauty never grows old, she is still young and glorious as a star, the poor

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[50] It is worth noting at this point that Kamini is raised in a Hindu household in India where Muslims are a minority. Thus, the Muslim woman is the other of Hindu society. For an excellent analysis of this situation see Zakia Pathak and Rajeswari Sunder Rajan's "Shahbano."

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Thithali Rani" (Badami 80). Kamini's narrative intervenes in this story because when Kamini becomes convinced that her Muslim friend's mother, Mrs. Bano, is the Thithali Rani because she is veiled in black, she eventually finds out that Mrs. Bano has grown old and is not beautiful at all. When Kamini cries that Basheer's story was not true, her mother tells her, "Stories are a waste of time" (Badami 97). On the one hand, storytelling in *Tamarind Mem* refutes the orientalist assumptions that it parodies because Kamini retells Basheer's story. On the other hand, Saroja questions the basis and validity of that critique through storytelling. In the end, storytelling is treated ambivalently in this novel even though Badami and the reader are the ones "who decide what-what is what" (Badami 58).

Orientalist depictions of eastern women were not simply those of beautiful, victimized women. According to Rana Kabbani, there was and is also an element of revulsion.[51] The other woman is both evil and desirable. "Europe's feelings about Oriental women were always ambivalent ones. They fluctuated between desire, pity, contempt and outrage. Oriental women were painted as erotic victims and as scheming witches" (Kabbani 26). In Mara's book these opposites are depicted in Mala's dating in Canada. "There were guys who'd never go out with her because of her colour and others who wanted to because of it, anticipating an exoticism she didn't have" (Mara 39). Both situations can be traced back to the assumptions of orientalism and its debilitating effects on Mala are chronicled by Mara. Mara's style is subtle, sometimes conveying through irony the difficulty of Mala's

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[51] In the most recent preface to her book, Kabbani insists that the status of Muslim women today is directly related to much older orientalist assumptions about the other woman. "It has become intellectually fashionable for American women-writers – with little or no experience of the Muslim world, with no knowledge of Muslim history – to spew forth, in books and articles, on the 'pathetic' state of women under Islam. What is worrying about this growing literature – which is always popular with a Western readership that can never get enough about the 'horrors' of Islam – is that it re-establishes the old racial stereotypes at a time when it is quite disastrous to do so, given an already taut situation between the Muslim world and the West" (Kabbani ix-x).

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situation. During a meeting with her best friend after many years, Mala tries hard not to admit how difficult dating has become for her. While she hints to her friend of casual lovers, she thinks to herself about how long it has been. "Actually, it's been a while; the last one was Brad, who said the morning after how he loved dark girls, really he did" (Mara 57). Mala eventually finds happiness with a lover who does not exoticise her in this way, but Mara's narrative makes it clear that her early dating disasters are related specifically to her race. Thus, both Badami and Mara depict ways in which orientalist stereotypes about other women as victims, desirable and repulsive have contemporary repercussions.

In order to subvert the stereotypes, both Badami and Mara create complicated and uncertain characters and situations. For instance, madness is one of the ways in which *Tamarind Mem* explores the trope of uncertainty in characterisation. During the summers, Kamini's Auntie Meera, who was "straight from the lunatic asylum" (Badami 60), visits the family. Her madness makes it very difficult to determine her intentions.

> "Knitonepurloneknitknitknitonepurl," murmured Aunty Meera non-stop for an entire day, a droning bee pausing only to slurp in the spit that filled her mouth. If the burps annoyed Ma, this knitting drove her into a frenzy. Meera was obviously imitating her, for Ma enjoyed knitting, her fingers busy twirling the wool around the needles as she supervised the servants or sat in the sunny verandah enjoying a gossip with Linda Ayah. What infuriated Ma was not knowing if Aunty was doing it deliberately or if it was part of her madness. (Badami 60-61)

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Saroja cannot be certain whether Meera is making fun of her. She simply has no way of determining Meera's intentions or even Meera's madness. As Saroja tells her daughter, "See that Meera out there in the verandah? Is she really crazy? Who knows? Not even those clever doctor *wallahs* with big-big books under their armpits" (Badami 66). Saroja goes to great lengths to teach her children that "nothing in the world was a fact" (Badami 66).

While Badami questions facts to critique orientalism, Mara questions the possibility of understanding across families, cultures, races and classes due to conflicts. In *Of Customs and Excise*, there are repeated situations in which people either fail to understand each other or don't even attempt to communicate. Mala is born in India and raised in Canada. Flying from London to Toronto she meets a new bride from India on her way to Canada to join her husband. Mala wants to tell the new bride of what lies ahead for her children but chooses not to. "How can she understand what it'll be like having children there? Watching them fit in, spat upon, rejected, rejecting their parents to fit in. Set apart, little brown tiles in a mosaic, twirling with the other tiles, exotic costumes, dances, food. *Gee I love your culture. What country are you from?*" (Mara 104). Because she was raised in Canada, Mala is aware of the context of Canadian multiculturalism and the varied conflicts arising from it. The new bride is coming from a different context and Mala does not feel that she can connect with her yet. The distance between them is too great.

Similarly, when Bridget goes to India to work, she is plagued by nightmares because the Indian doctor she works with despises her.[52] "She sat up, wet with perspiration, heart

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[52] The description of this nightmare, like the later description of the chowkidar, is quite disturbing. "She climbed the stile separating the field from the road, and there she was, in Barundabad. Dust swirls, scratching hands, dark faces. Amongst them was Dr. Kamla Naigar, listening to the heartbeat of a cow. Huddled under the cow, a purple-clad figure, face covered in the *pulloo* of her sari. Dr. Naigar turned towards Bridget, held out a dish of *gulab jamun*. 'Here, Bigshot White Sahib. Eat this.'

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pounding. Wisps of the nightmare lingered; Dr. Naigar's dark face, the veiled hostility replaced with open anger" (Mara 7). Both try to understand each other, try to communicate, but their relationship never develops warmth. While Bridget is aware of Dr. Naigar's hostility towards her, she is completely unaware of the hatred her servant, Asha, has towards her. At one point Asha thinks to herself, "What a fool, this Doctor-sahib, a slug with weeping eyes, pathetic" (Mara 35). Both Dr. Naigar and Asha hate Bridget because she is white. Dr. Naigar tells her to leave because her people have done enough damage to the country. Asha's dislike stems from a similar prejudice; she believes that "Angrezi-log . . . never trusted anyone" (Mara 31). And she is convinced that the British were responsible for the fact that her family had to flee from Sind when it became a part of Pakistan. Bridget is kind to Asha and polite to Dr. Naigar but the history of British colonialism in India cannot make her good intentions clear or even relevant to these women. And in the case of Asha, Bridget cannot know the resentments of class combined with those of race. Mara's attention to the contexts of these conflicts subverts sugar-coated orientalist nostalgia.

Badami's novel questions the notion that one can know anything about the world in which one lives. When Kamini attempts to discover what her mother was like as a child, she is confronted with contradictory stories. "What was I to make of her when half her relatives claimed that my mother was such a nice, well-behaved child and the other half insisted that she was a stubborn fusspot?" (Badami 11) The reader is led to believe that the second half of the book, which is narrated by the mother, Saroja, will provide some answers. But in the end, Saroja herself does not know: "I couldn't recollect why I was so unhappy those first years of marriage. Why I had liked a car mechanic so much" (Badami 265). The land,

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Bridget shook her head, but Dr. Naigar forced her face upwards, dropped towards her mouth a blob of feces" (Mara 7).

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Saroja's memories and by extension, her sense of self are all in a state of flux. This changeability makes it difficult for both Saroja and Kamini to know anything for certain.[53] The novel itself claims that no one can know anything. Thus, whereas Mara works against orientalism by carefully depicting the historical and political contexts of conflicts, Badami works against it through her theme of unknowability. Both strategies subvert simplistic stereotypes with complicated depictions of characters and situations.

Differences That Matter

However, despite these similarities, the differences between these two books are better indicators of the reasons why Badami has popular legitimacy and Mara does not. Interestingly, these differences also illustrate the ways in which Mara's critique of orientalism is stronger than Badami's. In this section, I will list five major differences between *Tamarind Mem* and *Of Customs and Excise* that account for Badami's appeal to the public. The difference between the two books that accounts for Badami's inability to sustain a strong critique of orientalism has to do with her theme of uncertainty and unknowability.

As I mentioned in the previous section, this theme is crucial to her critique of orientalism. However, Badami is not consistent in the way she handles it. Even though the novel claims that one cannot know anything, Badami is using her knowledge of India, among other things, to write this novel. When asked why so much of her novel takes place in India rather than, say, Canada, Badami responds by pointing to her current lack of familiarity with Canada: "I feel you have to live in a place, breathe it in, get it into your bloodstream," she says. "The first novel I wouldn't have been able to set entirely in Canada,

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[53] One reviewer finds Saroja even more of a mystery than Kamini. "The reader is never quite sure where Saroja is leading her audience. And that is what makes her a much more interesting character than her daughter" (Rustomji-Kerns 119).

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because it would [have meant] writing on the surface" (*Quill* 30).[54] Despite the fact that the novel claims a certain unknowability, its writer claims knowledge of the country in which it is set in order to write it. Badami's distinction between surface knowledge and depth of knowledge appears to be in direct conflict with the themes of mobility and undecidability in her novel. Despite the fact that her novel supports movement over stasis, Badami appears to support remaining in one place long enough to gain deep knowledge of it. This idea of deep knowledge, mentioned casually in an interview, shows why Badami's *Tamarind Mem* offers only limited resistance to the orientalism of its cover art.[55] Behind the writing of this book is a belief in a deep and stable knowledge of a place. This is nostalgia;[56] this is belief in authenticity.

It is possible that this is the reason why *Tamarind Mem* is so much more successful than *Of Customs and Excise.* The first and most obvious difference between the two books is that they have been published and marketed differently, so that one promises an "India" that is more palatable than the other. Of course, there is a direct correlation between mainstream publishers and the mass consumption of books. Instead of being published by a large international mainstream company like Penguin, Mara's book is published by Second Story, an alternative Canadian feminist press. This may mean that Second Story is less interested in mass appeal and therefore less interested in the figure of the exotic South Asian woman

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[54] This statement by Badami implies that her second novel will be set in Canada because by the time she writes it, she will have lived in Canada long enough to write deeply about it. However, her second novel, *Hero's Walk*, is also set almost entirely in a fictional India.

[55] In his work on nostalgia, John Frow writes, "Nostalgia for a lost authenticity is a paralysing structure of historical reflection" (79). If Badami is nostalgic for India, her ability to subvert the binary of authentic and inauthentic is greatly curtailed.

[56] Phinder Dulai, a poet writing for the *Vancouver Sun*, has commented, "It's hard to tell whether the narrator is imprisoned by the system or offering a critique of it. Either way, the novel is marinated in nostalgia" (Dulai).

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story-teller. Since Penguin is bound to be more interested in mass appeal than Second Story, *Tamarind Mem* is an easier read than *Of Customs and Excise.* Also, Badami's book is more easily contained than Mara's book because the trains and misty outlines of a mosque's domes and minarets on the cover photograph situate *Tamarind Mem* specifically in India, while the cover illustration of Mara's book doesn't specify its settings, or the ethnicity of its characters or author. Moreover, Mara's book is obviously a less expensive design. Whereas the illustration of Badami on the back situates her specifically as South Asian, there is no illustration of Rachna Mara on her book. Lastly, whereas Badami and her book were widely interviewed and reviewed, Mara's book received only two reviews: one in *Books in Canada* and one in *Quill & Quire.*[57] Out of these two reviews only one praised the book. The other reviewer wrote, "[w]hen a book is already burdened with a pretentious title and the nonsensical blather of a blurb by Aritha van Herk, it may seem churlish and redundant to point out that it is also almost unreadable" (James-French 46). This reception of Mara's book is quite different from reviews of Badami's book, which focussed on the delight with which one can consume the novel.[58]

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[57] In a telephone interview, Rachna Mara told me that her small feminist press simply did not have the money to do marketing for her book.

[58] Here are some examples. "*Tamarind Mem* is a delectable book, filled with pungent sights and sounds and poignant memories" (Rev. in Q & Q 50). "Like the sour chutney that whets the appetite, Kamini's account of the mysteries of her childhood – her father's official absences, her mother's dark moods and unexplained escapes, sari starched and fresh, from the Ratnapura house, made this reader hungry for Saroja's own story of disappointment, dependence and dreams" (Sethi). These reviews of *Tamarind Mem* are actually picking up on culinary themes in the novel itself. Phinder Dulai has critiqued the distressing lack of substance in culinary themes in works of fiction by the South Asian diaspora ranging from *Midnight's Children* in the U.K., and *Interpreter of Maladies* and *The Mistress of Spices* in the U.S. to *Tamarind Mem* and *Such a Long Journey* in Canada. "In the North American-style Indian novel, the focus is on domestic family prattle while larger themes of migration, racism, caste and generational conflict are barely touched . . . . The hyphenated Indo-Can-American novel is a consumer's delight, offering comfortable food, relationships and more food" (Dulai).

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The second difference between these two works of fiction has to do with the way in which each author describes characters and situations. The implications of the photographs on the covers of Badami's book coincide, to some extent, with the content of *Tamarind Men*. Even though uncertainty is one of the central ideas of *Tamarind Men*, compared with Mara's book, Badami's book abounds with stable, nostalgic and romanticised views of life in India that appeal to the same latent orientalism that the book's marketers assumed still exists in our culture.[59] Phinder Dulai has written that in Canada and the U.S., South Asian fiction, especially the fiction that sells like *Tamarind Men*, tends to be sugar-coated. "The trend is to romanticize India and create nostalgia for a place where endless curries boil and sugary chais are served to wash it all down. A kind of culinary alchemy dresses up what could be gritty reality and betrays an unfortunate middle-class romanticism about the country left behind – even when the novel's subject is ostensibly class relations" (Dulai). Both protagonists of *Tamarind Men* are affluent people who sometimes describe working-class people. But because the protagonists are not poverty-stricken themselves, the novel is less likely to raise any guilt about the privilege that most mainstream Canadians have over most Indians.

For the most part, these nostalgic descriptions would not startle a mainstream Canadian audience, not even this 'abject' portrait of a man:

> Ma found Theli Ram disgusting, for he had a habit of
> scratching vigorously at his sweaty armpit while he repeated
> her grocery list to the scuttering assistants . . . when we

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[59] In an interview with *Mehfil* magazine, Badami acknowledges her nostalgia for India. "'There's something about being away from your country of birth that sort of generates all these nostalgic feelings and nostalgic images,' she says. 'Perhaps it's the perspective, that distance. Sometimes it's heightened perception. You move away and something that was fairly a normal smell or sound when you were living there suddenly becomes very important and very overwhelming, so you feel obliged to write it down'" (Saeed).

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> arrived he would be finishing off food from a tiffin-carrier which looked like it had not been washed in years . . . he swiftly wiped the yellow oil from his fingers on to his fleshy calves . . . the movement making his loose, pouchy breasts quiver, his belly jiggle up and down. (Badami 87)

This description of Theli Ram, the grocer, is certainly disgusting but not unbearably so. Like the marketing of the book – the misty outlines of mosques on the cover – our Indian grocer is just Indian enough for the reader to recognise him, but not Indian enough to truly disrupt, to announce his difference. If his difference were disruptive, it would lessen the book's mass appeal. Penguin has chosen to publish this stable, certain description of India to contain the Other and, thus, make mass consumption possible.

While *Tamarind Men*'s descriptions of India are easily consumable, the descriptions of India in *Of Customs and Excise* are a little harder to swallow. A security guard from *Of Customs and Excise* contrasts with the grocer from *Tamarind Men* to illustrate how a description of difference can disturb a reader:

> The small, thin *chowkidar* looks at them and sniffs. He puts finger and thumb on either side of his nose, blows expertly. His snot, greenish-yellow, globular, lands in the dust by Asha's bare foot. Her mother moans, clings to the gate of the hospital, knuckles white. 'Open the gate, you *sala gandoo*,' screams Asha. 'Open it, you motherfucker, or I'll cut your dick off.' (Mara 33)

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Unlike that of *Tamarind Men*, the prose in *Of Customs and Excise* is harsh. The images startle the reader. The picture that it paints of India is not sugar-coated in any way.[60] Thus, the differences in the texts, *Tamarind Men* and *Of Customs and Excise*, to some extent, produce the differences in reception from publishers and reviewers.[61]

The third way in which these two books differ has to do with their references to the events of 1947. Both texts refer to these events through the eyes of young girls: Kamini in *Tamarind Men* and Asha in *Of Customs and Excise*. Kamini recalls what her great-aunt Chinna said of the time. "When that Independence happened, explained Chinna, all the pink people with hats packed their *pettis* and sailed for England. Then the Indian politicians said 'Ho! Ho! Ho! The kingdom of Lord Rama will be restored to its glory!'" (Badami 13) But Chinna's description of decolonization doesn't mention the violence, uncertainty and paranoia of those times at all. " 'But what difference whether the politicians were pink or brown?' remarked Chinna. 'I still had three saris to wear, your grandmother chewed six *paans* a day, and your Thatha's money now bought one kilo of mangoes instead of ten!'" (Badami 13-14) This emphasis on the relative insignificance of decolonization might be read as collusion with orientalist notions of South Asia as static. Purnima Bose has found a similar insistence on a static South Asia in the advertising campaign for a perfume named

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[60] According to Mara, the major publisher HarperCollins did see *Of Customs and Excise* but told Mara that "it wasn't what they were looking for." Mara grants that perhaps she sent them the manuscript too early, implying that if she had sent it later it would have been more polished. But the response from HarperCollins did not mention polish and therefore it is possible to assume that it was the content of the manuscript that was rejected.

[61] Publishers, reviewers and the general public may have ignored *Of Customs and Excise* but academics have not. It is being taught at UCLA in Women's Studies and mostly by women academics. Petra Fachinger gave a paper on it at the 1993 Learneds titled, "Breaking Loose and Making Connections: Personal and Communal Connections in Rachna Mara's *Of Customs and Excise* and Sandra Cisneros' *The House on Mango Street*." Also, *Of Customs and Excise* won the Ottawa Carleton Book Award in 1993 and was shortlisted for the Commonwealth best first book award for the Canada and Caribbean region in 1992.

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Casmir. She shows that the reasons for this insistence have to do with selling perfume by reifying orientalist constructions of South Asia as eternally peaceful and unchanging so that the Indian government can encourage foreign investment in India that would otherwise be diminished if the violence of Kashmir's struggle for independence from India were to be emphasised. Thus, both the multinational corporation and the nation state win. Badami's novel may work to provide consolation for first world historical guilt over colonialism because if she depicts South Asia as relatively unchanged by colonialism, then the million people who died during the mass migrations in South Asia in 1947 are erased.[62]

In 1947, India gained independence from the British. At the same time, a homeland for Muslims was created from the land that the British once ruled. Indians often refer to this as Partition, to emphasise that the British are responsible for the ensuing violence because they cut India into pieces to create Pakistan. However, Pakistanis think of it as their independence not only from the British but also from the Hindu majority in India. Unlike what Kamini hears, in *Of Customs and Excise*, Asha is made aware of a decidedly anti-British and Hindu Indian viewpoint because the British, rather than the persecution of a Muslim minority under a Hindu majority, are blamed for Pakistan's creation. Asha's hatred of the British provides the basis for her later hatred of Bridget. "The Angrezi-log are leaving the country at last, but they're determined to make Muslims and Hindus fight each other; they have broken the country in two" (Mara 31).[63] This could also be considered an

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[62] A more sympathetic reading of *Tamarind Men* would be that it is merely an oversimplification of complicated times. There must have been ways in which things did stay the same, especially for the middle classes, but things also changed. Even so, one would expect a novel about uncertainty to be more consistent in its themes and therefore more willing to explore the differences as well as similarities that led to the uncertainty that Badami uses so well to counteract orientalist assumptions.
[63] According to Peter van der Veer in "The Foreign Hand: Orientalist Discourse in Sociology and Communalism", "conflicts that are contingent on social and economic circumstances are understood in terms of a communal discourse, fed by orientalism, that did not exist in that way before the

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oversimplification because there were historical reasons for animosity between Hindus and Muslims that predated British colonialism, but Mara is quick to trouble it. "Asha doesn't understand. She's seen many Angrezis, but none seem so strong that they can break the land. Do they snap it like a biscuit?" (Mara 31) Asha's Hindu family has been helped by her father's Muslim friend, Aziz, to leave before the violence begins but her mother questions Aziz's integrity, insinuating that Aziz has helped them leave so that he can keep the things they leave behind. "Asha, jolted, parched, clings to her doll. The world has gone mad" (Mara 31). Are the British solely responsible for Asha's mother's suspicion of Aziz? Has Asha's father been too trusting of his friend? These questions are not answered and instead the reader is made privy to the madness and chaos of the times in a few short sentences. It is a far more complicated picture of South Asia in 1947 than Chinna's orientalist assertion that decolonization changed very little.

The fourth difference between *Tamarind Mem* and *Of Customs and Excise* has to do with the way they depict patriarchy, marriage, and women in India. Asha in *Of Customs and Excise* and Saroja in *Tamarind Mem* can be compared in terms of their perceptions of marriage as oppressive to women. But these depictions have to be read in the context of orientalist stereotypes. In "Under Western Eyes," Chandra Mohanty has critiqued an image of third world women that develops in the feminist scholarship that she studies. "This average third world woman leads an essentially truncated life based on her feminine gender (read: sexually constrained) and being 'third world' (read: ignorant, poor, uneducated,

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nineteenth century" (36). Veer's essay reminds us of the collusion between orientalist discourses, precolonial Hindu discourses and Muslim discourses, all of which insist on the otherness of Muslims and therefore the supposed inevitability of communal conflict and violence. By showing how orientalism builds on older discourses, Veer emphasizes the fact that the British did not make Muslims and Hindus fight, the reasons for this violence are a complicated combination of economics and pre-existing discourses of otherness that were exaggerated by Hindus, Muslims, and the British.

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tradition-bound, domestic, family-oriented, victimized, etc.)" (337). The last four stereotypes about third world women are especially prominent and can be traced back to nineteenth century ideas about the colonised woman. "The figure of the colonized woman became a representation of the oppressiveness of the entire 'cultural tradition' of the colony" (Uma Narayan 17).[64] The assumption from the colonisers' standpoint was that the colony's cultural tradition was so oppressive that patriarchy victimised women in the colony more than in Europe.

Given these preconceived ideas about marriage as more oppressive to women in India, Badami's depiction of Saroja, as confined in marriage until widowhood frees her, can be seen as reinstating orientalist ideas. Saroja feels confined because her railway engineer husband's servants watch her every move. "They watch me, discuss this new memsahib, make sure I do not stray from the correct lines of behaviour. They keep an eye on me for their sahib, for Dadda, the man to whom my parents hand me like a parcel wrapped in silk and gold" (Badami 221-2). Saroja has an affair with an Anglo car mechanic but is unable to leave her children and husband to be with him permanently. He hangs himself in the railway officers' club as a result of her decision to stop seeing him. Saroja is aware that her marriage oppresses her but she won't leave it. Despite the fact that she is called the Tamarind Mem because she speaks her mind, she is still a victim of cultural tradition, handed to her husband

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[64] It is ironic that in *Tamarind Mem* the characters live in railway colonies and Dadda is described as a man taming/colonizing the land to lay down more railway tracks. He even narrates the river Ganga as a beautiful woman's body. "This is where Lord Shiva dances, this is where Parvathi performed her wild penance, and here River Ganga lay waiting for Bhageerathi to summon her down to the plains . . . We tried to fling a bridge across the Ganga at this point, but she is a creature of moods. She was annoyed that we mere humans had not appeased her first with flowers and song . . . So the engineers and workers held a grand *pooja*, offered the milk of a hundred coconuts to Ganga, showered pink rose petals on her body, called out paeans in praise of her beauty, and finally the river was appeased, charmed out of her sulks" (Badami 42-43).

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by her parents, unable to gain the freedom of travelling on the trains until after she is widowed.

In *Of Customs and Excise,* Asha is aware of the restrictions on movement that can result from marriage because she watches her sister, Sundri. Preferring a career to marriage, she decides, "she'd go to Najgulla where plenty of families needed servants. She'd never be forced into marriage, have children. Look at Sundri now, so worn" (Mara 33). Not only does Sundri lack the freedom to come and go, but she is also tied to her children in the way that Saroja was. Asha considers herself sly for avoiding marriage. "*Chalak*, she was, sly. You had to be in this world. Look at her, free to come and go, and look at Sundri, already big with her third child. Sundri had the same glazed eyes their mother used to have, worrying, worrying, over children" (Mara 23). Asha not only refuses to marry herself, but also kills her sister's husband Tilak because his alcoholism is keeping them from saving money. Moreover, she keeps her sister from remarrying after Tilak's death because she refuses to raise the children her sister already has. Asha's awareness of marriage as oppressive leads her to murder her brother-in-law, not in self-defence and not even because it is her sister's wish. She simply disregards Sundri's wish to have a living husband. Thus, compared with Saroja, Asha is less like the average victimised third world woman described by Mohanty.

Saroja fits, to some extent, the image of the orientalized South Asian woman who is desired for her beauty. Her daughter Kamini describes her as luminous. "She sang as she wrapped a rustling cotton sari around herself and then came out to dry her hair on the verandah, where the sun roared out of a blue, blue sky. I remember how she smiled at me upside down, through a flying sheet of hair, and I stared in awe at my luminous mother" (Badami 47). She is beautiful and trapped in a loveless marriage to an older man. Her

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dreams of further education and financial independence have been thwarted by an arranged marriage that she could not reject. But Asha's character is not so easily recognisable. She cuts herself repeatedly to feel alive. " 'You must stop doing that,' Dr. Kamla Sahib says, bandaging the gashes on Asha's arms and legs. Asha says nothing, later, does it again. She feels only a fierce exultation as the knife cuts her skin" (Mara 21). Asha trusts no one and is willing to do anything to get what she wants. She doesn't fit any preconceived images of South Asian women. She cuts herself, not because she is a victim and suicidal, but because she is alive. She lives by her wits, actively not passively, and she is never described as beautiful or luminous. On the contrary, self-mutilation would be considered the opposite of oriental beauty.

Just as Saroja fits the stereotype of desirability while Asha doesn't, Saroja fits the stereotype of victim while Asha again does not. Even though Saroja's love affair and refusal to leave her husband result in the suicide of her lover, she is a thoroughly sympathetic character. "When Dadda leaves on line and Paul da Costa creeps onto the shadowy verandah of the Ratnapura house like a thief, I tell him that I cannot destroy my life for a half-breed man, a caste-less soul . . . I tell Paul that I will not leave my children. I don't want to cut myself off, become a pariah, have other children who will be bastards" (Badami 229).[65] Her love for her children and the class difference between herself and Paul are both portrayed as good reasons for refusing to leave her marriage. The possibility of taking the girls with her never comes up in the novel. And because this possibility is never mentioned,

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[65] Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*, which was published a year after *Tamarind Mem*, also depicts a mother's affair with a lower caste man through the eyes of her daughter. Both novels give these affairs quite a lot of space in what could be argued is an exoticization of lower caste men by upper caste women.

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her decision to stay, though difficult and heartrending, is depicted as a good decision, the right thing to do. She comes across as a victim of arranged marriage.

Asha is definitely not a victim. Her motivation for killing Tilak is that he creates the situation where Sundri and her children need money from her. "How sick is Tilak this time? If things don't get better soon, Sundri and the children will suck me dry" (Mara 91). Knowing that Tilak is an alcoholic, Asha insists on taking care of him and sends the children to the wedding that Sundri is working at. She spends all her money on alcohol and then forces him to drink it all with food after he passes out. She wraps him tightly in blankets and waits for him to die while she eats the food from the wedding. "At last, my turn to eat . . . Tilak is making strange noises, gurgling. At least he isn't coughing. A tender piece of mutton . . . Wheezing noises from Tilak. He must have something in his chest. Cauliflower *bhaji* . . . Less wheezing now. I save a piece of *jallebie* for last . . . No more wheezing. Praise God, Tilak is cured . . . Delicious" (Mara 96). The juxtaposition of Tilak dying with Asha's enjoyment of her meal makes it seem as if Asha is killing him by eating him herself. As readers, this makes our 'consumption' of the book a little more difficult than the easy consumption we find in *Tamarind Men*. Despite this Asha's character is as sympathetically drawn as Saroja's. The difference is that while Saroja could be read as an average victimized third world woman and as the desirable orientalized South Asian woman found on the book covers, Asha could not.

While the previous difference between these two books was related to depictions of gender, this final and fifth difference is related to depictions of race. Unfortunately, *Tamarind Men* deals with race in a very non-threatening way. *Of Customs and Excise*, on the other hand, portrays characters and situations that don't trivialise the issues. In *Tamarind Men*, Kamini asks her neighbour from Africa why he is black. "The man smiled and asked

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quizzically, 'Why are you brown, little girl?' I shrugged. 'I don't know.' He shrugged too and said, 'And I don't know either'" (Badami 28). This scene appears to erase racial difference on the grounds that no one knows why there are different colours. Moreover, Badami seems to turn racial conflict into an issue of mere politeness. "Linda Ayah called him a *hubshi* but Ma got angry with her for saying such rude things" (Badami 21). There is no mention of anything as distasteful as real racial conflict in Badami's novel.[66]

In *Of Customs and Excise*, racial conflict is not so easily diminished. In fact, these issues are shown to run very deep indeed. When Parvati, Mala's mother asks her husband Mohan if Mala can go to Montreal to major in French, Mohan's refusal to allow it is based on race. His own inadequacies about living in Canada as a man of colour are the real reason for his refusal. He holds Mala's friends responsible for her lack of respect for her parents.

> 'Her friends, her friends. I don't want to hear about her friends. They are the problem. Teaching her to look down on us.' His voice rose to a shriek. 'What is Mala thinking? She should be going out with white boys? Does she think she is too good for a *kala admi*?' There was a long silence. Mala leaned her head against the window sill. *Kala admi*, black man. She picked at a grimy, dark fuzz ingrained in the corner of the window frame. Mould. It was too deep. (Mara 45)

The mould is deep, just like the conflicts arising from race, conflicts that aren't diminished or erased in this book. Mala's father's over-protective and controlling behaviour is placed in

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[66] In fact, the appearance of the man from Africa serves merely to provide Kamini with yet another story, this time originating in Africa. "He stared out at the garden. 'In a river lived a wicked crocodile and across the river lived Nubi the Mighty Who Ruled the Land,' he began, and I was instantly entranced" (Badami 27).

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the context of his diminished status, as a man of colour, in Canada. I would argue that just as Badami uses themes of uncertainty and unknowability to resist orientalist notions of a static South Asia, Mara uses historicised and contextual conflict for the same purposes. By delving into the layers of significance behind of racial conflict, Mara complicates stereotypes and provides causes that can be understood.

In general, then, Mara's book depicts much more historicized characters and situations than Badami's novel. Both writers describe conflict but resolutions are easier in *Tamarind Men.* For instance, Saroja's grandmother discovers that her husband has a lower caste mistress but, because of her caste, he can't bear to eat with her. "For more than twenty years, ever since Rayaru found himself a lower-caste mistress, Putti Ajji has charged him a rupee for every meal he eats at her house" (Badami 171). Saroja's grandmother chuckles as she tells Saroja about the money she has collected over the years. The situation contains conflict that is too easily resolved. Badami doesn't allow us access to Saroja's grandmother's inner turmoil. Likewise, Saroja's turmoil over her loveless marriage is also easily resolved when Dadda falls ill, and she works "herself into a frenzy trying to keep Dadda alive" (Badami 140). Badami doesn't provide any believable reason why the mostly absent man who caused Saroja so much pain becomes someone whose death she won't accept. The affair with Paul da Costa is forgotten, Dadda dies, and Saroja moves from train to train telling stories even though she told Kamini not to listen to stories. As one of the novel's reviewers comments, "Ultimately, however, Saroja becomes somewhat reconciled with her past. That strikes a false note" (Nurse). The ending is a little too pat.

In comparison, Bridget's story is not so neat and tidy. For instance, as a child in India, she is very attached to her ayah, Heera, who is so different from her mother. "I'm big now but Heera still holds me when I need her, never says I'm too old. My mother is kind

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but remote" (Mara 67). When her mother sends her to boarding school in England she tells her dorm monitor, Sylvia, that she cries at night because she misses Heera. The torment that follows includes everything from the boarding school girls chanting, "Bridget Parkinson was suckled by a wog" (Mara 71) to Sylvia actually bringing her a golliwog and insisting Bridget will grow up to be an ayah. "See, it's starting already. You were suckled by a wog so you've got black milk inside you. When you grow up, you'll be all black and you'll be an ayah" (Mara 75). Bridget's childhood tormentors, their cultural context, and Bridget's own background combine to create the kind of racial conflict that succeeds in erasing Bridget's love for Heera. "That night I creep out of bed, run to the lavatory, and vomit. I've had a horrible dream. A dream that will recur throughout my childhood. I'm whipping someone while they scream. I don't want to see the face of the person I'm whipping, but occasionally I catch a glimpse. Sometimes, it's a thin face with pink-rimmed eyes, strangely familiar, sometimes unknown. But usually it's Heera" (Mara 75). Even though Bridget reconciles with her mother before Imogene's death, when she hears of Heera's death she realises, "For me, she died long ago" (Mara 78). There is no easy resolution to the love and conflict caused by Bridget's attachment to Heera. The contexts of colonialism and racism are present in Mara's book in disturbing and thought-provoking ways that subvert orientalist assumptions. As the only white character in the book, Bridget could have become someone who, along with the mainstream reader, learns about India from various native informants. Mara avoids this kind of plot entirely, giving Bridget her own demons, misunderstandings and conflicts.

Even though both Anita Rau Badami and Rachna Mara critique orientalism in their works of fiction, in the end, Badami's critique is limited because her novel is not consistent in its theme of uncertainty. On the one hand, characters such as Saroja and Dadda are

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depicted with contradictory and uncertain characteristics. On the other hand, decolonization is depicted as an event that changed very little. Mara's collection of short stories depicts characters and situations that disturb and dislodge the assumptions of orientalism through conflict that is always contextualized in histories of colonialism and racism in India, England and Canada. Badami's emphasis on mobility destabilises orientalist assumptions to some extent because constant travel adds to the uncertainty about people and places but this mobility also de-emphasises historical contexts of colonialism and racism.[67] Thus, Badami's novel is less disturbing to the reader because the mobility decontextualizes it to some extent.[68] Even though Mara's book contains a stronger critique of orientalism, it is published by a small press and therefore doesn't circulate as widely as Badami's book.

Without the wide circulation of *Tamarind Mem*, *Of Customs and Excise* cannot achieve mass appeal or popular legitimacy. Its strong anti-orientalist critique reaches a limited audience because a mainstream publisher didn't pick it up. One could speculate that it wasn't picked up because of its strong anti-orientalist critique. Had it provided a critique like Badami's which contains aspects that are oppositional combined with aspects that reinforce stereotypes, it would have garnered a larger audience because it would have appealed to orientalists and anti-orientalists alike and sold well. The importance of popular legitimacy lies in its mass appeal. *Tamarind Mem*'s wide international circulation makes its critique,

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[67] Sau-ling Cynthia Wong has argued that texts which contain both orientalist and anti-orientalist interpretive possibilities are more likely to sell well. "On this score Amy Tan fits the bill well. Again, whether by design or not, she manages to balance on a knife edge of ambiguity, producing texts in which Orientalist and counter-Orientalist interpretive possibilities jostle each other, sometimes within the same speech or scene. The complex, unstable interplay of these possibilities makes for a larger readership than that enjoyed by a text with a consistently articulated, readily identifiable ideological perspective" (Wong 191).

[68] According to Wong, orientalists enjoy cultural tidbits that are "decontextualized, overgeneralized, speculative, and confirmative of essential difference" (Wong 198).

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however limited, read by more people. In order to be effective, as an anti-orientalist critique, as a representation of South Asian women's experiences, and as a text to be read, analysed and discussed for its possible ability to de-centre hegemonic histories and subjectivities, a work of fiction has to be distributed widely. For this reason, I will continue to examine books produced by major presses in the rest of my project. Popular legitimacy is always a result of wide distribution but wide circulation does not always result in popular legitimacy. Presumably, it would be possible for a book to be circulated widely and therefore read, taught and discussed widely for its critique and yet be unable to gain popular legitimacy. I would argue that its effectiveness would not be compromised if it was distributed widely but didn't gain popular legitimacy.

In the next chapter, I will discuss such a book. *Love, Stars and all that* was published by a mainstream press and therefore distributed more widely than a book by a small press. However, it did not become a best-seller and the author, Kirin Narayan, did not gain popular legitimacy. Nonetheless, I would argue that its critique is quite effective. Despite the fact that this novel reads like a light romantic comedy, its humour is effective in illustrating the artificiality of the orientalist notion of authentic identity. Moreover, its engagement with the theme of exoticization in diaspora makes it useful for discussing postcolonial issues such as strategic essentialism. In the following chapter, I will argue that Narayan critiques the orientalist binary of self and other by showing how all identities are unpredictable and contradictory.

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III

Artificial Authenticity: Kirin Narayan

At this point the finite and closed consolation once associated with the presumed uniqueness of a community can either withdraw into the dead husk of blind cultural conceits or else fruitfully fragment and remake itself under the weight of a multiple inheritance.

- *Iain Chambers*, Migrancy, Culture, Identity

The focus of this chapter is the content and the covers of the novel *Love, Stars and All That*, which was written by a South Asian woman writer, Kirin Narayan, and published by a large press in the United States. As in the previous chapter, I am interested in this novel because of its subversion of orientalism. Unlike the previous chapter, however, my focus will not dwell on popular legitimacy but rather on the novel's relation to theories of diaspora. I have chosen a novel published by a large press in the U.S. to show that marketing executives there are just as likely to display the figure of the South Asian woman on book covers as marketing executives working for a large press in Canada. Like *Tamarind Mem*, the content of *Love, Stars and All That* contradicts its covers – but far more forcefully.

Narayan's novel is concerned with issues of authenticity in the diaspora relating to the exoticization of the female protagonist. Whereas the cover depicts an attempt to strive for authenticity by depicting a sari, the content disavows this notion all together, partly by showing how a sari need not always be associated with South Asia. In the end, the content of this novel shows that the notion of an authentic identity is merely artificial. By showing the artificiality of authenticity, Narayan is resisting orientalism because orientalism is based on the notion that there is an authentic other culture/woman.

This chapter will begin with a discussion of authenticity and its political usefulness in strategic essentialism. Even though theorists of diaspora such as Ien Ang and Gayatri

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Spivak find it politically useful, Stuart Hall, Caren Kaplan and Inderpal Grewal separate themselves from this strategy in diaspora. I go on to argue in favour of Gloria Anzaldúa's mestiza consciousness as a way to theorize diasporic identity in a way that doesn't subsume contradictions and tensions. My readings of *Love, Stars and All That* show that the novel continuously depicts situations which contest and combat essentialist, authentic and orientalist identities.

Diaspora Politics

Now, I am . . . encouraged to express my difference. My audience expects and demands it . . . We did not come to hear a Third World member speak about the First (?) World, We came to listen to that voice of difference likely to bring us what we can't have *and to divert us from the monotony of sameness. They . . . are in a position to decide what/who is "authentic" and what/who is not. No uprooted person is invited to participate . . . unless s/he . . . paints her/himself thick with authenticity. Eager not to disappoint, I try my best to offer my benefactors and benefactresses . . . the possibility of a difference . . . or an otherness that will not go so far as to question the foundation of their beings and makings.*

--*Trinh T. Minh-ha,* Woman, Native, Other: Writing Postcoloniality and Feminism

In this section I will define authenticity and show the ways in which it can be debilitating as well as the ways it can be politically useful. After discussing the views of a few theorists of diaspora, I will argue that despite its strategic usefulness, I prefer to theorize diaspora identities in a way that includes contradictions and ambiguities. These ambiguities are important because they work against orientalism.

Authenticity in culture or cultural identity can be defined as a belief in an undisputed purity of origins. This nostalgia insists that certain aspects of a culture are more authentic or coherent than other aspects. Deborah Root has argued that western tropes of exoticism function to "structure our perceptions of cultural difference" (34). She looks at representations of non-western cultures in both popular and high culture and finds that we in the west have preconceived notions of what is authentic or coherent in these other cultures. We also think that these authentic and coherent aspects of other cultures are

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timeless and static. "The notion of timelessness can be valorized and used to underpin a romanticized view of non-Western people, but more commonly it appears as a sign of inferiority and stasis" (Root 38). Thus, according to Root, when the west depicts aspects of non-western cultures as authentically coherent, it is doing that culture a great disservice.

Sometimes people from within a culture will also argue that certain aspects of a culture are authentic or coherent. For instance, after living only in cities, they may consider rural culture to be more authentic than urban culture because they may be nostalgic for a rural historical past. If they live in diaspora, they may cling to an authentic, coherent notion of the culture of their original homeland in order to use the notion of an authentic culture to critique the culture of their new home. "The notion of the pure, uncontaminated 'other', as individual and as culture, has been crucial to the anti-capitalist critique and condemnation of the cultural economy of the West in the modern world" (Chambers 81). Thus, people living within a culture may also have reasons for claiming that aspects of their own cultures are authentic. In this chapter, I will argue that such a politically useful essentialism of identity need not be seen as the only form of critique of dominant society. In fact, I will argue that it is no less a disservice than when people from outside a culture claim it is authentic.

In the epigraph to this section, Trinh T. Minh-ha describes a situation in which the dominant first world demands essentialist difference and authenticity from third world peoples. The gist of her anecdote is that the authenticity that they expect is meant not to be critical of the dominant. Even if the third world participants in this scenario, say in the diaspora, strategically essentialize their identity for the purpose of critiquing the dominant, there is no guarantee that the dominant will even register it as a critique. Trinh is warning that they may simply take the authentic difference displayed before them in the manner of tourists who seek unspoiled images of difference while ignoring "issues of hegemony,

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racism, feminism, and social change" (Trinh 88). Thus, I will argue that strategic essentialism may not be as useful as theorists assume it is.

As I mentioned earlier, despite the sari on the cover, the content of this novel strives against the notion of an authentic cultural identity. It tries to show that all cultures are impure, incoherent and contradictory. Nonetheless, some theorists of diaspora feel that a coherent cultural identity can be politically useful. Ien Ang, for instance, stresses the coherence of diasporic identities in order to enable "strategic coalitions." In "On Not Speaking Chinese: Postmodern ethnicity and the Politics of Diaspora," Ang writes that she "would like to consider autobiography as a more or less deliberate, rhetorical construction of a 'self' for *public*, not private purposes: the displayed self is a strategically fabricated performance, one which stages a *useful* identity, an identity which can be put to work" (Ang, "On not" 4).[69] Thus, political efficacy guides the public manifestation of her cultural identity. This "strategically fabricated" coherent identity needs to be complicated for two reasons. Firstly, because its implied coherence does not reflect reality. Identities are contradictory and do not cohere. The need for fabrication implies that Ang's displayed identity is impossibly coherent and unified; it does not exist unless she wills it into existence for display purposes only. Secondly, even if one assumes a coherence in diasporic cultural identity, say for political purposes, this coherence can be reductive and, therefore, dangerous. Kirin Narayan's novel *Love, Stars and All That,* shows that coherent identities are impossible because human beings simply cannot escape the contradictions within themselves nor can they escape the contradictions in the worlds which they occupy. Even if coherent identities

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[69] In this chapter, I engage solely with one essay by Ien Ang published in 1994. In her later published works, especially "I'm a feminist but . . . " and "Can one say no to Chineseness," I have found her perspective on diaspora to be more in keeping with my argument in this chapter.

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are possible and, therefore, politically useful, Narayan's novel suggests that incoherent identities can be just as useful.

R. Radhakrishnan is a theorist who, like Ang, agrees that even though people in the diaspora are sometimes likely to venerate essentialized identities originating from a previous "homeland," this can be dangerous. For instance, Ang is often expected to speak Chinese because she happens to look Chinese. She rejects her "urge to apologize" (Ang, "On Not Speaking" 11) for not speaking Chinese because it assumes an essential Chinese identity consisting of physical Chinese attributes along with knowledge of the Chinese language. Similarly, in his book *Diasporic Mediations*, Radhakrishnan explains why nostalgia for an essential originary identity is not the answer: "It is precisely this obsession with the sacredness of one's origins that leads peoples to disrespect the history of other people and to exalt one's own. Feeling deracinated in the diaspora can be painful, but the politics of origins cannot be the remedy" (Radhakrishnan 212). Since Ang rejects originary essentialism, one expects her paper to end with the recognition that incoherent, contradictory postmodern identities can be useful because they blur the categories and containment around notions of citizenship. All essentialisms are questioned in the form of checks and balances.

On the contrary, Ang's paper ends, surprisingly, with support for yet another type of essentialism. She writes, "diasporic identifications with a specific ethnicity (such as 'Chineseness') can best be seen as forms of what Gayatri Spivak calls 'strategic essentialism'" (Ang, "On Not Speaking" 18). She is referring to Spivak's essay "Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography" (Spivak, *In Other Worlds* 197). In this essay, Spivak applauds the work of the subaltern studies group, whose goal is to rewrite the history of colonial India from the point of view of peasant insurgency. Since the colonial archives do not reveal the

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diaries or memoirs of peasants, the group reads the documents in the archives against the grain to illuminate a subaltern consciousness. Even though this consciousness could be described as essentialist, Spivak feels that its strategic or political purpose, to give voice to those who have been written out of history, justifies the means. "Reading the work of Subaltern Studies from within but against the grain, I would suggest that elements in their text would warrant a reading of the project to retrieve the subaltern consciousness as the attempt to undo a massive historiographic metalepsis and 'situate' the effect of the subject as subaltern. I would read it, then, as a *strategic* use of positivist essentialism in a scrupulously visible political interest" (Spivak, *In other worlds* 205). Spivak's language implies that the ends, political and worthy as they are, justify the means, which are essentialist and unworthy.

Even though Ang credits Spivak with the idea of strategic essentialism, Bart Moore-Gilbert insists that Frantz Fanon and Chinua Achebe had anticipated this notion long before. Moore-Gilbert writes,

> some of the apparently distinguishing tactical procedures and concept-metaphors of postcolonial theory are also anticipated by earlier critics in the field. For instance, Spivak's notion of 'strategic essentialism' . . . is prefigured in Fanon's defence of *negritude* in *Black Skin, White Masks* and *The Wretched of the Earth*. Both texts insist that the construction of essentialist forms of 'native' identity is a legitimate, indeed necessary, stage in the emergence from the process of 'assimilation' imposed by colonial regimes to a fully decolonized national culture. A related version of this argument recurs in Achebe's attempt to negotiate a way between the essentialism

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> of *negritude* and the simultaneously abstract yet highly context-specific, indeed often blatantly ethnocentric conception of the human in Western liberalism. (Moore-Gilbert 179)

Fanon and Achebe may have discussed the idea of strategic essentialism before Spivak but the similarity among all of them lies in the fact that each is theorizing the problem of identity for colonized or previously colonized peoples. Ang is using this theory of identity in a diasporic situation where domination may be similar to colonization and therefore the creation of an imaginary coherent identity is desirable.

Moore-Gilbert goes as far as to write, in the conclusion to his book, that strategic essentialism "has historically proved singularly ineffective" (202). Thus the ends may be noble and worthy but if they are not really being met, then there is no reason to take on an unworthy essentialism, given that identities and situations are bound to be complex and contradictory. Moreover, theorists such as Caren Kaplan and Inderpal Grewal, who combine poststructuralist and Marxist theories with their transnational feminist practices and strongly affiliate their work with that of Spivak, are quick to separate themselves from strategic essentialism. "Our points of affiliation with Spivak's project . . . reside most clearly in muddying the pure positions of institutional divides rather than in consolidating anything pristine or authentic . . . Where we differ may be in moving away from . . . her utilization of notions of strategic essentialism" (Kaplan and Grewal, "Transnational" 359). Kaplan and Grewal want to move away from this particular strategy because they do not want to use essentialism in any way for any reason. They also insist that it is Spivak, herself, who has taught them to do this. "Yet, despite these moments of disagreement with some aspects of Spivak's argument, it is Spivak's own methodologies that enable us to question any emphasis on similarities, universalisms, or essentialisms in favor of articulating *links* among the diverse,

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unequal, and uneven relations of historically constituted subjects" (Kaplan and Grewal, "Transnational" 359). Kaplan and Grewal are, therefore, just as aware of the diversity to be found among and between subjectivities and situations as Ang is. Despite this awareness, Ang chooses strategic essentialism.

She relies on another theorist of diaspora, Stuart Hall, to justify her use of essentialism for a political purpose. Ang writes that "the politics of self-(re)presentation as Hall sees it reside not in the establishment of an identity *per se*, full-fledged and definitive, but in its use as a strategy to open up avenues for new speaking trajectories, the articulation of new lines of theorizing" (Ang, "On Not Speaking" 4). Ang reads Hall as a theorist who urges and commends the search for "new kinds of subjects" that "enable us to discover places from which to speak" (Hall, "Cultural Identity" 402). To Ang, Hall's insistence on political strategy in his essay "Cultural Identity and Diaspora" supersedes the aspect of his work that critiques essentialism. But I read Hall's essay differently. Hall is insisting on a political strategy, as Ang agrees, but he sees that strategy as a theory of identity that debunks essentialism. His introductory paragraph clearly states this. "Perhaps instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact, which the new cultural practices then represent, we should think, instead, of identity as a 'production' which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation. This view problematises the very authority and authenticity to which the term 'cultural identity' lays claim" ("Cultural Identity" 392). Thus, even though Ang claims to be doing what Hall says, she is doing it in a way that he would critique. Identity as process is the strategy that he finds politically useful, not strategic essentialism. More importantly, identity as process explains and accounts for contradictions that strategic essentialism does not.

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Regardless of whether Ang finds contradictions useful in theorizing diasporic subjectivities, she is nonetheless aware of their existence among diaspora. For instance, in speaking about official policies of cultural assimilation, she recognises that "there is . . . among many members of minority groups themselves a certain *desire* to assimilate, a longing for fitting in rather than standing out, even though this desire is often at the same time contradicted by an incapability or refusal to adjust and adapt completely" (Ang, "On Not Speaking" 9). But instead of elaborating the usefulness of this tension she goes on to attempt a reconciliation or union of these two opposing identities by introducing what she calls a "creative syncretism" (Ang, "On Not Speaking" 16). Unfortunately, the only way to reconcile opposing identities is to create a totalizing system that subsumes tensions.

One way to maintain the tension is in a plurality, which is in the process of becoming. In *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, Gloria Anzaldúa writes about life along the Texas-Mexico border and describes not only her own experiences but a new consciousness, a way of thinking that maintains the tensions, contradictions and ambiguities between and within cultures and genders. She writes, "The new *mestiza* copes by developing a tolerance for contradictions, a tolerance for ambiguity. She learns to be an Indian in Mexican culture, to be Mexican from an Anglo point of view. She learns to juggle cultures. She has a plural personality, she operates in a pluralistic mode – nothing is thrust out, the good the bad and the ugly, nothing rejected, nothing abandoned" (79). Thus, the "mestiza consciousness" is all-inclusive without losing the tensions.

Moreover, Anzaldúa describes images and symbols that have meaning for people of the borderlands, Chicano/*mexicano* people on both sides of the Texas-Mexico border. "*La Virgen de Guadalupe* is the symbol of ethnic identity and of the tolerance for ambiguity that Chicanos-*mexicanos*, people of mixed race, people who have Indian blood, people who cross

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cultures, by necessity possess" (Anzaldúa 30). The Goddess *Coatlicue* is another image Anzaldúa uses to describe the state of consciousness she prizes most. "Simultaneously, depending on the person, she represents: duality in life, a synthesis of duality, and a third perspective – something more than mere duality or a synthesis of duality" (Anzaldúa 46). It is this third perspective that I find most useful for my project because it acknowledges duality and synthesis or creative syncretism but it goes beyond it to also acknowledge the tension. "*Coatlicue* depicts the contradictory" (Anzaldúa 47). The reason I think it important to move beyond syncretism is that contradictory tensions can actually drive people to transform themselves and their worlds. As a writer, Anzaldúa recognises this. "I recognize that the internal tension of oppositions can propel (if it doesn't tear apart) the mestiza writer out of the *metate* where she is being ground with corn and water, eject her out as *nahual*, an agent of transformation, able to modify and shape primordial energy and therefore able to change herself and others into turkey, coyote, tree, or human" (Anzaldúa 74-75). This idea of change and transformation through tension and contradiction is the most important way in which I find Anzaldúa more useful than Ang for this project. In attempting to achieve syncretism, Ang is creating a unified identity, which is just as problematic as the originary unity that she rejects. The plurality of mestiza consciousness would not need to be syncretic or unitary.

Novel Identities

In this section, I will critically read a number of depictions of diasporic subjectivity in *Love, Stars and All That.* Even though Narayan describes characters that engage in strategic essentialism, she is careful to trouble most issues relating to identity by showing the ways in which authenticity, no matter how artificial, can be construed as exotic and orientalist in diaspora. Thus, I argue that Narayan's novel combats orientalism and strategic essentialism.

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The cast of characters in Narayan's novel provides a number of examples of contradictory as well as syncretic identities. One of them, Firoze Ganjifrockwala, finds it increasingly difficult to reconcile or make sense of his position in the diaspora: "Being at the crossroads of all these cultures it becomes harder and harder to find anyone who remotely understands" (Narayan 181). In the U.S., Firoze is positioned as an Indian. However, after completing a Ph.D. at Berkeley and returning to India, Firoze discovers that he is, again, positioned as a foreigner. Essentialized notions of citizenship operate in both countries to exclude him. Just as in the States, the racial markers of his body continue to trouble his attempts to feel at home in India.

> There were days when I just felt like getting some pigmentation injected into my skin. Currently there are these racist contact lenses available to make brown eyes blue or green, but I frankly wouldn't have minded some contacts that would have made my light brown eyes a penetrating black. Well, there are other Indians as fair as me: Kashmiris, or Saraswat Brahmans; I still can't put my finger on why everyone treated me so much like a foreigner. (Narayan 199)

Firoze's dilemma concerns essentialized racial definitions of identity. By wishing that his eyes and skin were darker he is calling our critical attention to extremely stereotypical notions of what Indians look like. He is too dark to be American and yet too fair to be Indian. The situation of diaspora is always marginal. But this marginality is contradictory because it implies that people do belong somewhere, even if that somewhere is always elsewhere. Based on Firoze's physical appearance, he doesn't look like he belongs in India or the U.S.

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Coherence, as strategy in diaspora, has its dangers. This is illustrated at a moment in the text where Firoze faces physical limitations that make it impossible for him to remain in India in any capacity: as a citizen or foreigner. His supposed South Asian identity contradicts itself in that while his mind claims the status of a citizen, his body refuses to adjust to India. Firoze could, ostensibly, decide that he wants to remain in India as an Indian. However, the body, his body is inescapable. No matter what decision he makes about the nature of his identity, it is or can be overruled by the body.

> What I really wanted to do when I finished my degree was activist work. But those bloody amoebas just about wiped me out. You can't have a stomach raised on boiled water and expect to mingle easily with the proletariat . . . Just when I was beginning to get more comfortable, beginning to blend in, beginning to operate through my anger over the hopeless exploitation; just when it was all falling into some sort of productive rhythm, then wham, I'd bloody get sick. Jaundice. Malaria. Cycle after cycle of what my father calls Amoe-Baba and the Forty Pills. (Narayan 199-200)

In all the years that Firoze was in the United States he identified himself as an Indian. Once in India, he realised that he could not even remain in the country, let alone do the work he was preparing for. His identity as an Indian is contradicted by his body's inability to adapt to the country he calls home. He is unable to create a syncretism that will reconcile his mind and his body to create a South Asian identity that works.

But if we were to reject the essentialist notions of identity which maintain some people as citizens and others as foreigners and if we were to face the contradictions that

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make these essentialist notions unworthy, then perhaps we can "blur the meaning of 'citizen.'" When Firoze returns to the United States, he decides to work as an immigration lawyer.

> Was I being a coward when I came back to the U.S. by the end of the year and went to law school instead? I can make all these rationalizations for how political action shouldn't take a nationalist cast so that caring for people like ourselves is all that counts. But I know this isn't the real reason I returned. Sure, it's the usual thing for political activists to confuse the boundaries of social responsibility with nationality . . . The work I'm doing with refugees who are too powerless even to document that they've been politically persecuted turns out to be for no country at all but for very specific people. In a way, you could say that my work is to chisel holes in the borders between nation-states, to blur the meaning of "citizen." (Narayan 200-201)

In the face of his inability to become a "citizen," Firoze realises that if he chisels "holes in the borders between nation-states," then the idea of a "citizen" will be able to incorporate a plurality of contradictory identities. In his own way, as an immigration lawyer, Firoze is creating a mestiza consciousness, refusing to abandon the refugees he works for, tolerating the contradictions and ambiguities that keep people from belonging.

Narayan's novel also contains characters who exemplify Ang's creative syncretism. For instance, in keeping with the image of the sari on the cover of *Love, Stars and All That*, a politically active scholar, Kamashree, gives a talk wearing a sari, leather boots, and a Nehru

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jacket with a button reading "PREM SE KAHO HAM SAB INSAAN HAI" (Narayan 152).[70] Kamashree has carefully constructed a public South Asian identity that is pronounced by her sari and the button in Hindi. Because the novel is very self-conscious about academic theorizing, the reason for Kamashree's public identity is her talk on "an analysis of power juxtaposing Foucault, the Dharmashastras, and pronouncements by Angela Davis" (Narayan 149). Her public persona has the specific political function of making a space for South Asian activists by combining South Asian attire with buttons that represent her political ideas in an academic setting for the dominant western culture. This is the syncretism that Ang puts forth. Kamashree wears her sari as a political statement in the context of the U.S. while simultaneously maintaining her cultural capital as an academic. The novel does not openly fault this stance, but certainly makes light of the way in which academics sometimes take themselves and their work too seriously.

On the other hand, Najma, another character in the novel, wears saris in private, at home. "Najma's hair was a wet circlet of snakes around her shoulders, and she was wearing a cotton Bengali sari. ('I like to at home, you know. It's a different sort of feeling about being myself,' she had once told Gita)" (Narayan 128). The novel is implying that wearing a sari in public in the U.S. is different from wearing a sari in private. Kamashree is acting in the way that Ang has outlined. She is deliberately constructing herself for strategic public purposes. Obviously Najma's "different sort of feeling" has no strategic purpose. In fact, Najma's "different sort of" self implies that she also engages in Kamashree's public displays because when she wears saris at home, this is different from what she does in public.

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[70] This means "Say with love that we're all human" and is an inversion of the slogan touted by political parties who want a religious rather than secular Indian state: "Say with pride that we're all Hindus."

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Wearing a sari in private is not only different from wearing a sari in public; it points to a disjuncture between public and private identities. A plurality of contradictory identities would locate both of these rather than only focussing on the public one.

Even though the cover of this book displays a traditional sari, which seems to imply that the novel contains an authentic Indian story, one of the characters in this novel, Saroj Shah, undercuts this association between saris and India by giving each of her silk saris an identity of its own. "Some of her saris had names of poems she liked. Meghaduta was a smoky blue silk, Waste Land was printed lilac, gray, and blood red" (Narayan 21). Interestingly, one poem is Indian while the other is not. She also doesn't restrict the naming of her saris to poems. Sometimes they are named after a film song or an event or a place or even a tree. She gives all languages and cultures equal weight. "She stood beside her open cupboard, reading along the line of boxes. 'Nefertiti, Liv Ullman . . . Flame of Forest, Meena Kumari, Pied Beauty'" (272). Thus, even though the sari on the cover seems to signify an authentic Indian woman, the content of the novel makes saris signify anything at all. The reader realises that authenticity itself is artificial.

The protagonist, Gita, is quite aware of the way in which she uses the notion of authenticity, or at least what people around her consider authentic, to get what she wants. Early in the novel, she mentions that she uses artificial authenticity to create a wall of difference around her, to keep other people out.

> Gita didn't know the Hindu calendar beyond the date that Ganeshan Kaka, the astrologer, had authoritatively declared. To say Chaitra 2040 instead of the March 1984 that came far more readily to her lips was to claim a cultural authenticity that she knew was fake. But in America, it seemed the only

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> thing that would shield her difference, protect her
> boundaries, so she could do the work she had taken on in
> coming here; to be alone and to study. (5)

Gita knows that the authenticity that she displays is artificial but it keeps people away from her and she uses it to be alone.

But her state of loneliness does not last long because the fake authenticity she creates attracts people who see her as exotic. For instance, the man she eventually marries, Norvin, sees Gita wearing a sari at a party and refers to it as a "costume" (92) thereby emphasizing the fact that he sees it as performative public display rather than simply her clothing. His desire for her is inextricably linked to her difference and he notices the sari not only as a display in itself, but also as something that displays or reveals her body.[71] "I just love the way that area around the waist is revealed by saris" (92).

Norvin's desire for Gita is orientalist, as Edward Said describes it, and is based on "an ontological and epistemological distinction made between 'the Orient' and (most of the time) 'the Occident'" (Said 2). Thus, Norvin sees Gita as inherently mysterious, different and eastern. When Gita tells everyone about the way her Aunty Saroj names her saris, her friends each try to name her sari. "'A name,' repeated Norvin, quite mesmerized as he stared at the folds of the sari. This meant that his vision was trained somewhere near Gita's crotch. 'Ineffable, deep, and inscrutable, singular name'" (93). Here humour serves as subversive social critique that makes light of Norvin's orientalism by drawing attention to it and simultaneously undercutting it. Edward Said has written that an orientalist would describe the orient as other in ways that create distance between east and west. "This cultural,

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[71] See MacMaster and Lewis for an article describing Europe's and specifically France's obsession with unveiling eastern women as shown in nineteenth-century orientalist painting.

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temporal, and geographical distance was expressed in metaphors of depth, secrecy, and sexual promise: phrases like 'the veils of an Eastern bride' or 'the inscrutable Orient' passed into the common language" (Said 222). As Meyda Yegenoglu has pointed out, orientalist assumptions about difference are inextricably linked to sexist assumptions about women's inscrutability.[72] Thus, Norvin's sexual desire for Gita is based on his preconceived notions of her racial and gender difference.

His desire to label and categorize is evident in the way he responds to Gita's friends who come up with a number of non-South Asian names for Gita's sari. "'Why go cross-cultural?' Norvin asked. 'Why not be consummately Orientalist and Indian? How about Shakuntala? Think of the effect of those early translations on the German romantic imagination! Or Kalidasa; can't you just see the poetry, the swimming sensuosity in that sari?'" (93). Thus, even though Gita knows that authenticity is always artificial, that one can never be purely authentic because there is no pure culture, others, like Norvin, respond to her by focussing on her difference and exoticising her as if pure cultural authenticity did exist.

Another example of Norvin's exoticising of South Asian women occurs later in their relationship when he tells Gita that he admires Indian women because they throw themselves onto their husband's funeral pyre. "How about Sati? The luscious wife with streaming hair and rolling eyes, arms raised as she prepares to jump onto her husband's funeral pyre? I've got to say I've always admired Indian women for courage like that" (Narayan 138). Gita quickly informs Norvin that there is evidence that their in-laws drugged them but Norvin's description includes the word luscious, which implies that his admiration is linked to erotic desire. He is linking sati to the appeal of Giacomo Puccini's 1904 opera,

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[72] See Yeğenoğlu's *Colonial Fantasies: Towards a Feminist Reading of Orientalism.*

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Madama Butterfly. Deborah Root has argued that the story of a foreign woman committing suicide "continues to absorb and enchant Western audiences" (Root 27) because they exoticise or focus on the foreignness of the woman.[73] The "autosacrificial event does not float in time and space but is given meaning through its fictional context, its essential foreignness: This death makes sense to the Western spectator precisely because the woman is coded as Japanese" (Root 29). Norvin would not think of the woman committing sati as luscious if she was white. Her difference, the fact that she is South Asian makes the event of her sati more splendid in his eyes.

In fact, the South Asian academic mentioned earlier, Kamashree, who is an old friend of Norvin's, describes him as particularly turned on by Indian women in general. Again, the novel self-consciously pokes fun at the theoretical jargon used by academics. "The lacunae in your language suggests you are still turned on to Indian women. Haven't as yet got rid of that Orientalist idea of us all as custodians of *Kamasutra* secrets, is it?" (156). Needless to say, Norvin and Gita's eventual marriage ends in divorce because it appears his academic, jargon-using friend was right: he only married her because he perceived her as culturally different. Because his perception of cultural difference is not rooted in the specificities of certain traditions but rather in orientalism, which doesn't differentiate between the others it creates, he eventually moves on. Disturbingly, his academic interests

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[73] Root lists a number of different instances of this current form of orientalism. "We can trace this enduring fascination in a wide range of venues; for instance, in pop culture in Malcolm McLaren's 1980s dance tune that featured Puccini's famous death aria, a perennial favorite of opera companies large and small; in David Henry Hwang's play *M. Butterfly*, which turns the story on its head by revealing the Butterfly character to be a Chinese man; and in David Cronenberg's 1993 movie version of the play, which transforms Hwang's script into a relatively straightforward narrative of romantic betrayal. Recently Madame Butterfly has been relocated to Vietnam in the blockbuster musical *Miss Saigon*" (Root 27).

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are closely associated with his sexual interests. Norvin had started new research on Japanese avant-garde drama.

> Now that his book on American images of India was safely under contract with a university press, his new dinner-party line was, "India is over . . . all the jobs these days are for China and Japan." . . . he hired a Japanese graduate student . . . At a Drama Department reception, she observed Norvin drawn to where Ryoko stood. (Narayan 190-191)

Norvin replaces South Asian women with East Asian women. His attraction is to difference and so once South Asia becomes too familiar, he is attracted to people and cultures that continue to be foreign to him.

In a review of *Love, Stars and All That*, Narayan is quoted to have said of the character Norvin, "the rumors are rife as to who this person is. This is what happens when you create a self-important academic – many, many people think they recognize him" (Madrigal). She goes on to insist "I didn't have anybody in mind" (Madrigal). But the fact remains that Norvin and his way of viewing Asian women are instantly recognizable. People like him exist and, as a result, they trouble all notions of identity on display whether for strategic political purposes or not. Ang's creative syncretism and Kamashree's public and political wearing of saris could both become instances of exoticization for characters such as Norvin who keep reinscribing the self/other, male/female and east/west binaries in everything they say and do.

The strength of *Love, Stars and All That* lies in its ability to break these binaries and resist orientalism. Narayan's novel refutes notions of authenticity and orientalist divisions between east and west through the characters of Gita's mother, Kookoo and her Saroj aunty.

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One reviewer has found sharp differences between the way these characters were written. "Aunt Saroj . . . is delightful to imagine. Gita's wicked mother, Kookoo Das, is, however, a flattened caricature" (Sidhwa). While it may be true that one character is less rounded than the other, the similarities and differences between them as characters are worth noting. Firstly, both reside in India. Often simply denoting one character more eastern or more western than the other explains away the differences between the two. This does not happen in Narayan's novel. Instead, the reader is given detail after detail, which succeeds in complicating stereotypical notions of east and west. Early in the novel, Gita herself muses about the differences between Kookoo and Saroj.

> Gita thought about her mother's imported nylon saris and Saroj Aunty's starched, hand-printed handlooms. Kookoo arranged gladioli and tuberoses in tall vases; Saroj Aunty ordered the servants to float fleshy *champa* blossoms in bowls of water or to string jasmine into fragrant garlands for the hair . . . Kookoo's "staff" all spoke some English and wore monogrammed white uniforms . . . The Shahs' servants, on the other hand, shouted in Marathi and chewed tobacco . . . Gita was unable to name the exact underlying difference between these two households, but she knew for sure it wasn't a simple matter of "Westernization." (8)

Thus, even though this description of two women living in India seems to portray Kookoo as more western while Saroj appears to be more eastern, Gita is sure that they are different from each other for other, more complicated reasons.

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As the novel progresses, we learn that when Saroj was younger, her "mother had strict ideas about menstrual taboos" (104). For three days every month, Saroj "couldn't touch anyone" and "had to sit on a low, rectangular wooden stool out on the balcony" (104). During these three days of conforming to supposedly eastern values, Saroj read many western novelists. "I tell you, I went through a novel a day. I read most of Dickens, the Brontes, Hardy, lovely Jane Austen this way" (104). To Saroj, these events are not incompatible. The fact that her mother's taboos coincide with her reading of western authors is presented as something natural, something that's bound to occur in a world without binaries. Moreover, the fact that Saroj names her saris after words, poems and ideas in all languages and cultures rather than just South Asian makes her seem less stereotypically eastern. Lastly, even though Saroj has always been extremely wealthy, her earlier involvement in India's independence movement and her own brand of communism make her ideas about how to live life decidedly different from Kookoo's. Whereas Kookoo would prefer to have her chauffeur drive her into town, Saroj would prefer to take the train "traveling by Ladies' Third Class" (281). The difference between the two women has more to do with their attitudes to class and race[74] than with the simplistic binary of east and west.

Narayan's novel also contains an example of an attempt to contain diasporic identity, which does not work. Gita, who has come from India to the U.S. to do her Ph.D. at Berkeley, is introduced to Ajay, another Indian living in the U.S. Gita's Saroj aunty and her friend Kalpana in India assume that they should understand each other: " 'Both NRIs,' Kalpana stated. 'So many nonresident Indians out there in the States just now. I don't

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[74] Gita's friend Ravindran recounts having dinner with Kookoo. "I have survived an entire evening with this dreadful woman, her mom. She let me know that Dravidians like me are of inferior racial stock – not quite Aryan enough, you see. Then too, when I spoke, you could see her cringing because I don't have the correct British-style accent" (Narayan 178-9).

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know about your Gita's caste and all, but anyway, Ajay has always said he is against casteism. Living abroad, I suppose, makes a new caste. They should understand each other'" (Narayan 211). This attempt to contain identity fails because it assumes that diasporic subjectivities will be similar if the "homeland" and place of residence are the same. Thus, if Gita and Ajay are both Indians living in the U.S. they will automatically have a lot in common with each other. But if diasporic identity is a plurality in the process of becoming, as Anzaldúa has shown, then points of similarity will not be based on the countries of origin and residence but rather on specific experiences and situations. Gita and Ajay are unable to understand each other because their selves are more complicated than their well-meaning aunts allow. When Ajay realises the contradictions in Gita, he feels as if his universe is cracking: "He looked into her open mouth with its archly pointed uvula, and he saw his universe cracking. The continents were disintegrating into many Indias and Americas. People were falling apart into many selves. Objects were scattering, colliding, coming together only to separate again and form new combinations. Being Indians in America wasn't enough to make a choice. In fact, in this debris of everything familiar, there were no grounds for a proper decision" (Narayan 293-4). Gita realises that in order to make a relationship with Ajay work, she must "sever parts of herself," the parts that contradict, the parts that are irreconcilable. The "grounds" that Ajay searches for are not present because there is no syncretism, no containment of identity. Gita refuses to abandon parts of herself. Ajay refuses to tolerate the contradictions and ambiguities that are present in Gita's diasporic subjectivity. Their relationship comes to an end.

Narayan's novel also points to this impossibility. Self and other dichotomies along with binaries of east and west are, on the one hand, too simple because multiplicity is more descriptive than duality. But, on the other hand, they create an impossible tension –

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impossible to avoid and impossible to resolve. Narayan's character Firoze says that "we're all possessed by cultural others in one way or another . . . Except, at this moment in time it can be sort of hard to say what makes for a cultural self and what's an other . . . People like us are this impossible collage" (Narayan 304). Narayan's characters describe themselves as an "impossible collage" and this implies a plurality of contradictory and ambiguous selves. The distinction between self and other, citizen and foreigner, is blurred to reveal impossible possibilities, an inclusive collage.

One of Firoze's professors at Berkeley presents another example of incommensurable worldviews. Again, the distinction appears between his public academic and private self.

> He used to say that there are two kinds of social theorists: those who view life as spectacle, and those who see it as predicament . . . What was intriguing about this fellow was that from his writings it was clear that he saw us all as landed in a bloody horrible predicament: capitalism, racism, sexism, nuclear arms, environmental crisis, all the rest of it. But then if you went to see him in office hours or anything, he would hold forth with funny stories, spectacles of the first order . . . it seemed like this prof chap had a vision of the world in which, within the huge predicament, most human interactions were a bloody absurd spectacle. I still wonder whether his stories meant that he'd given up, or whether he'd just accepted that there are some things too enormous to always keep in your mind or to tackle directly. I can see that

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> teaching could be a form of political activity if you change the perspectives of your students. Choosing teaching and letting other fronts of action slide, maybe he had just accepted his own limitations. (Narayan 197-8)

This unnamed professor meets with his students in the classroom where life is a predicament and in his office where life is a spectacle. The two views on life are contradictory and yet his "vision of the world" includes both in a way that does not reconcile the two. He realises that it is "too enormous" to hold both in his mind simultaneously. A student such as Firoze is able to capture, little by little, the tensions of what he is trying to teach.

One of the ways in which the protagonist of this novel complicates orientalizing and essentializing narratives about her identity is by changing her outward appearance. When we first meet Gita, she is a newly arrived student in the U.S. She has long hair, which she enjoys caring for and washing on Saturday nights. "Books might be tumbled about her desk, assignments a muddle of index cards and incomplete outlines; but when the comb met no obstacles in that soft, scented mass, Gita felt there was a flow and order to her life" (3). Combing her hair, though time-consuming, made her feel centred. But aspects of her appearance including her hair in the context of the U.S. take on meanings that they didn't have in India. After a conversation with her white American housemate, Bet, Gita looks in the mirror and sees herself differently. "In America, her dark complexion had taken on a touch of mystery, even for herself" (102). Slowly she starts to change the way she dresses and chooses to wear a dress to a party instead of a sari. "Gita felt sophisticated and slim-waisted in this dress. There was something about wearing saris to every major occasion that had been making her feel old-fashioned, as though she were holding on to every vestige of fixed difference from this rapidly moving American world" (Narayan 111). And finally at

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the end of the novel, Gita cuts off her long hair. "I was just so fed up with being that Woman with the Hair, you know, all the exotic mystery" (301). One reviewer of the novel has located the moment that Gita cuts her hair as one of the most significant in the novel: "the real finale was the moment Gita cut her hair, a step as drastic and definitive in its way as Nora Helmer's slamming the door in "A Doll's House" ("One Girl's"). In the context of the U.S. that Gita lives in, shorter hair and fewer saris serve to complicate the way in which she is viewed as well as any essentialized sense of self.

Assuming a coherence in diasporic cultural identity, even for political purposes, can be dangerous because of its reductive capacity. Like Firoze's professor, we must assume that the world is larger and more incongruent than the bits and pieces of public and private life that we encounter. There is no reason why an incoherence between a public and a private sense of self, in other words, a contradictory notion of identity cannot also be useful. Radhakrishnan ends his book, *Diasporic Mediations*, with a divided response to Peter Brooks' production of the Hindu epic *Mahabharatha*. He

> appreciated . . . humanizing . . . Krishna, endorsed *in principle* globalizing a specific cultural product, and approved the production for not attempting to be an extravaganza. On the other hand, [he] was critical of some of its modernist irony . . . its shallow . . . internationalism, its casting of an African male in a manner that endorsed certain black male stereotypes, and finally a certain . . . Eurocentric arrogance that commodifies the work of a different culture and decontextualizes it in the name of a highly skewed and uneven globalism. (Radhakrishnan 212-213)

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Radhakrishnan's divided response is the result of his contradictory diasporic identity. Unlike the strategic public identity that Ang endorses, Radhakrishnan's identity is incoherent. This incoherence can be useful in questioning notions of "solidarity and criticism, belonging and distance, insider spaces and outsider spaces, identity as invention and identity as natural . . . rootedness and rootlessness" (Radhakrishnan 213).

Vijay Mishra also insists on incoherent and fluid identities within and outside of nations. In his article "Postcolonial Differend: Diasporic Narratives of Salman Rushdie," he writes that " 'Home' now signals a shift away from homogeneous nation-states based on the ideology of assimilation to a much more fluid and contradictory definition of nations as a multiplicity of diasporic identities" (Mishra, "Postcolonial Differend" 7). He stresses the contradictory aspect of his definition of diasporic identities by pointing to the incommensurability of the two public reactions to Rushdie's *Satanic Verses*. He writes, "in the political domain the reaction to the text has been articulated through conflicting discourses that cannot lead to equitable resolution because the discourses presuppose rules of judgment that are totally at variance with each other" (Mishra, "Postcolonial Differend" 32). It is impossible, therefore, to engage in consensual politics when so many conflicts and contradictions exist. As I have mentioned earlier however, Anzaldúa sees these same contradictions as a driving force behind personal and political change.

Moreover, Mishra is not completely disheartened by the impossibility of consensual politics in a situation of contradictions. He compares it with the Kantian sublime and Lyotard's differend and concludes that a totality can no longer be justified. "Yet in that moment of celebration, in that dispute between faculties, in that incommensurable differend, no object can be represented that equals the idea of the totality" (Mishra, "Postcolonial Differend" 41). We are so accustomed to totalizing and essentializing narratives that we

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consider contradictions impossible when they are not only possible but also very real. We think Narayan's "impossible collage" is impossible because it is not a totality. Instead of thinking in terms of a totality such as orientalism, we need to complicate this essentializing narrative. If Norvin's brand of contemporary orientalism is to be avoided, difference cannot be displayed as authentic, not even when it is posited as politically useful. Narayan's novel shows the artificiality of authenticity for the specific purpose of resisting orientalism.

Badami's *Tamarind Mem* and Narayan's *Love, Stars and All That* both have covers that appear to be authentic and orientalist. While Narayan's novel contains content that refutes authenticity by showing how artificial it is, Badami's novel is ultimately less successful in resisting orientalism. Nonetheless, "a positive sense of the inauthentic is the necessary condition of both critic and artist" (Donald 340). In *Love, Stars and All That*, the sari on the cover is selling an authentic story about India but the saris in the story are named and associated with all languages and all cultures, not just Indian or South Asian. Rather than fall into the trap of orientalism, this novel unsettles a simplistic notion of self and other. It embraces contradictory identities rather than essentialize them even when it may be politically prudent to do so. By subverting authenticity, which is the basis of orientalist ideas that emphasize exotic difference, Kirin Narayan creates a space for messy and unpredictable subjectivities. Her characters negotiate complicated circumstances in the diaspora and the homeland without reinscribing orientalist stereotypes of either place or its people.

In the next chapter, I will discuss Bharati Mukherjee's works, which strive to avoid diasporic identities by choosing nationalist subjectivities. Even though diasporic subjectivities can be quite successful at fighting orientalism, there are times when nationalist identities can be useful as well. However, because of the close relation between nationalism and orientalism, a relation I will discuss in chapter five, Mukherjee's works do not combat

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orientalism as strongly as they could. Nonetheless, the work that Mukherjee published in Canada is quite anti-orientalist because it is anti-racist.

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IV

Shifting Allegiances: Bharati Mukherjee

In the first chapter, I argued that some South Asian women writers' novels are marketed with covers that use exoticized images of South Asia and South Asian women to sell the novel. This, I argued using Bourdieu, is a way to gain economic capital in the field of cultural production. In the second chapter, I compared a book published by a mainstream press with one published by a small press to show the ways in which the book by the small press resisted orientalism to a much greater extent. I concluded, however, that since the book published by the mainstream press would be much more widely distributed and read, I would continue to discuss mainstream novels to show how they do and do not resist the orientalized images that are often on their covers. In the third chapter, I showed how *Love, Stars and All That* resisted the orientalist idea of authenticity. Each of the three books I have discussed so far has been the first for each of its authors. With regard to the two that were published with mainstream presses, and thus had exoticised covers, one might argue that, as first-time novelists, Badami and Narayan had less control over the packaging and marketing of their works. One might even argue that 20 or 30 years from now, when they are more established in their writing careers, they might choose to insist that their book covers reflect the contents of their novels.

In this fourth chapter, I will discuss the career of Bharati Mukherjee, a writer who, unlike Badami and Narayan, has published seven works of fiction, five novels and two short story collections since 1971. Mukherjee is very well established in her career from the perspective of both economic and cultural capital. Moreover, her essays on immigrant writing have been caught up in anti-orientalist discourses, specifically in the literary field. In

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fact, she has spent three decades discussing immigrant fiction and its tendency to be received as exotic. It simply isn't possible to explain away the exoticized nature of her book covers by pointing to her timidity as a first-time novelist. If anything, Mukherjee is the most outspoken of all South Asian women writers of fiction in Canada and the U.S.

After exploring Bharati Mukherjee's writing career within and in terms of her shifting allegiances to India, Canada and the United States, I would like to focus on her insistence since the 1980s that she is an American writer. This focus of my chapter will argue that Mukherjee's later writing attempts to gain legitimacy by appealing to ideas of American nationalism. Her later work, fictional and non-fictional, takes an open, public stance against the kind of exoticism that is displayed on her book covers. However, after all her attempts to distance herself from her ethnicity, Fawcett Columbine recently re-released all her fiction with new book covers containing stylized images of South Asian women that are even more exoticized than the old book covers. One can only assume that Mukherjee's success comes from different kinds of legitimation. One kind comes from the economic capital to be gained from selling a lot of books using eye-catching, exotic covers. Another comes from appealing to the audience's nationalism. In Mukherjee's case, her novels are well received partly because she publishes with commercial presses that market her books with such book covers and partly because she appeals to her audience's nationalism. The question remains, however, to what extent and under what circumstances does her writing resist orientalism?

Contrary to what one might expect from a migrant writer, Bharati Mukherjee embraces American nationalism. Inderpal Grewal begins to explain this apparent paradox when she notes that "immigrant writers, in particular, are in crucial locations where, under present political and economic conditions both in the US and worldwide, their cultural productions can be used both to challenge and to recuperate forms of nationalism,

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citizenship, and politics of the nation-state" (Inderpal Grewal, "Postcolonial" 46). Mukherjee appears to have recuperated, rather than challenged, a certain form of American nationalism. In fact, Mukherjee's other works embrace this notion of American nationalism by comparing it with her own idea of Canadian nationalism. According to Anne Brewster, Mukherjee aligns herself in this way because it keeps her from living in diaspora. I want to argue that living in diaspora without national affiliation or with multiple national affiliations is something that Mukherjee wants to avoid. Thus, she avoids the displacement and alienation of diaspora and simultaneously legitimizes her work by embracing the nation she inhabits.

The work of Benedict Anderson usefully explains the imbrication of nationalism and legitimation in the contemporary world. Regardless of the nation and the type of nationalism one chooses to espouse, Benedict Anderson writes, "nation-ness is the most universally legitimate value in the political life of our time" (Anderson 3). American ideology provides a clear definition of American identity: an American is an individualist who believes in the American Dream that if one works hard, one will reap its rewards. In *The Shock of Arrival*, Meena Alexander, a South Asian American author, writes, "Ralph Waldo Emerson, transcendentalist and [nineteenth-century] philosopher of America, spoke of the American self as having no need of memory. He invoked life in the New World, cut free of the past, raised into the shining present" (*Shock* 156-7). Thus, an immigrant to the U.S. can easily become American by imagining that s/he has shed her/his "old world" identity. Even though this is a nineteenth-century mainstream idea, twentieth-century South Asian American writers such as Meena Alexander in her novel *Manhattan Music*, Bharati Mukherjee in her novel *Jasmine*, and Ameena Meer in her novel *Bombay Talkie* all use the same trope once espoused by Emerson. Mukherjee's work about the U.S. takes on controversial

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overtones when her protagonists rebirth themselves anew as assimilated Americans with tremendous faith in the power of the individual.

Writer and critic Bharati Mukherjee came to the U.S. from India in 1961, lived and worked in Canada from 1966 to 1980 before moving to the U.S., where she currently resides. The critic Fakrul Alam groups Mukherjee's books according to the country of residence that most influenced its writing. I use his groupings because I find them useful in comparing Mukherjee's engagement with ideologies of nation and orientalism. These associations between books and countries are more imaginative than physical and, as a result, they are not necessarily the countries in which Mukherjee wrote them. Accordingly, *The Tiger's Daughter* and *Days and Nights in Calcutta* are associated with India; *Wife, Darkness, The Sorrow and the Terror* and her essay "An Invisible Woman" are all associated with Canada; and *The Middleman and Other Stories, Jasmine, The Holder of the World,* and *Leave it to Me* are associated with the U.S. Any discussion of South Asian women writers of fiction in Canada and the U.S. would be incomplete without some attention to Mukherjee's career and writing because she is the most commercially popular South Asian woman writer on the continent.

Bharati Mukherjee's popularity comes partly from the sheer length of time she has spent living here, partly from the types of presses she has published with and partly from the awards she has won.[75] Over the last 30 years, Mukherjee has earned many prizes in both Canada and the U.S. *Wife*, her second novel, was a finalist for the Governor General's Award of Canada in 1975. Her short stories, "Isolated Incidents" and "The World

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[75] Of the nine books mentioned earlier, seven are fiction and two are non-fiction co-authored with Clark Blaise. Mukherjee's seven works of fiction are all still in print with Random House/Ballantine Books' popular imprint Fawcett Columbine. On its website the press describes itself as "one of the oldest and most successful paperback publishers" whose "rich mass market list is accentuated by such noted authors as James Michener, John Updike . . . [and] Bharati Mukherjee."

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According to Hsu," won first prize in 1980 from the Periodical Distribution Association and a Canadian Journalism award, respectively (Leong 487-9). In 1981, she received the Canadian National Magazine Award's second prize for her essay "An Invisible Woman." "Angela" was selected for inclusion in *The Best American Short Stories of 1985*. These three short stories are from her first collection *Darkness*, which the *New York Times Book Review* named one of the best books of the year. "The Tenant," a short story from her second collection *The Middleman and Other Stories*, was chosen for inclusion in *Best American Short Stories of 1987*. And lastly, Mukherjee won the American 1989 National Book Critics Circle Award in fiction for *The Middleman and Other Stories*, becoming the first naturalized American citizen to do so. At least one reviewer writes of this award that it "is given by the organisation of 485 professional book editors and critics from across the country and carries more clout in literary circles . . . than the national Book Awards [sponsored by the publishing industry] or the Pulitzer Prize" (qtd. in Brewster 51). Although this is her most prestigious award to date, her novel *Jasmine* was chosen as one of the best books of 1989 by the *New York Times Book Review*.

Mukherjee's short stories have been anthologized with that of other South Asian Canadians in *The Geography of Voice*, with other Americans writing about a singular image in *The Wedding Cake in the Middle of the Road*, and with other Asian Americans in *Charlie Chan is Dead*. These three anthologies are excellent examples of the diverse ways in which she has positioned herself as a writer. However, all three of these anthologies were published in 1992 and 1993 when Mukherjee was living in the U.S. and insisting that she was a non-hyphenated American. This claim is inconsistent with the first and third anthologies. Regardless of her simultaneous positioning as an American, an Asian American and a South Asian Canadian, most critics position her primarily as an American and only sometimes as an

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Indian writer. I want to argue that throughout Mukherjee's writing career, she has associated her work and herself as a writer with the countries she has inhabited. As I have already mentioned, Fakrul Alam's book on Bharati Mukherjee also divides her fiction into categories that correspond with the countries of India, Canada and the U.S. While Alam's work dwells on themes of exile, expatriation and immigration, my work makes the connection between these themes and Mukherjee's consistent avoidance of the state of diaspora. My approach is different from Alam's because I see Mukherjee's association with these countries as motivated not only by a desire to avoid the lack of national affiliation in diaspora but also by a struggle for legitimation in the context of orientalism. This context is one in which national affiliation is granted haltingly to people of colour in North America. Under these circumstances, Mukherjee's stance towards each of these countries through her fiction becomes more complicated because her resistance to orientalism is sometimes strengthened and sometimes lessened depending on how she weaves her stories into the myths about each of these countries.

In fact, the ideologies of orientalism and nationalism intersect and overlap with one another in Bharati Mukherjee's essays and interviews. In one interview, she said that she has "been murdered and reborn at least three times; the very correct young woman I was trained to be, and was very happy being, is very different from the politicized, shrill, civil rights activist I was in Canada, and from the urgent writer that I have become in the last few years in the United States" (*Iowa Review* 18). I don't see Mukherjee's supposed rebirths as a complete remaking of herself. Each country has shaped her in ways that she cannot deny or escape. There are differences as well as similarities between each of these three incarnations. By denying the similarities and emphasizing differences between each rebirth, Mukherjee is taking a simplistic stance that is caught up in the discourse of orientalism. She is never

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completely cut off from her past. As I have already mentioned, the idea of being cut off is merely a nationalist American myth which, in this case, coincides with an orientalist focus on difference. I want to argue that Mukherjee takes this orientalist and nationalist stance in order to gain legitimacy, which for her is related to class and dominance.

Along with orientalism and nationalism, then, Mukherjee's work is peppered with class ideology. Her relationship with each country is dependent on issues of dominance. In India she is very correct; her correctness leads her to support the rich, dominant class of people rather than the poor, dominated workers. She associates the rich with a glorious Indian past and the workers with a corrupt Indian present. As a result, her stance in India reflects her interpellation into the ideology of orientalism. In Canada she becomes a civil rights activist who speaks out against the ideology of official Canadian multiculturalism. This stance is diametrically opposed to the first one in that Mukherjee goes from supporting the dominant to supporting the dominated. The reason for this has everything to do with Mukherjee's own position within these two countries: in India she was dominant; in Canada she was dominated. Moreover, her anti-racist work focuses on similarities between the dominant and dominated. As a result, in Canada she resists orientalism more successfully than in India. In the U.S. she does not question the American ideology of assimilation and thus is interpellated by it. As a result, she assimilates the myth that the U.S. is a relatively classless society where most people have access to the American dream and that individualism leads to the greater good. However, her insistence on being a non-hyphenated American can be read as her desire to be dominant again. Regardless, her American nationalism influences her resistance to orientalism in divergent ways. Thus, compared with India, her resistance to orientalism is stronger but not quite as strong as in Canada. Her relationship with government is another way in which Mukherjee's rebirths are complicated.

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While her association with Canada was anti-government, her associations with India and the U.S. have been decidedly pro-government. By government, I am referring to official policies as well as the mainstream, dominant myths and ideologies of nationalism. Thus, ideologies of nationalism and class intersect with orientalism in ways that have real material effects on Mukherjee's resistance and writing.

India: Class Collusion

According to Fakrul Alam, Bharati Mukherjee's writing career can be divided into a number of phases. He calls the first phase "An Exile's Perspective on 'Home'" and claims that her novel "*The Tiger's Daughter* and Mukherjee's part of *Days and Nights in Calcutta* can thus be considered together. Both works use the motif of the return home from voluntary exile in an alien country and both conclude that expatriation is more desirable than what 'home' has become" (Alam 16). It is true that these works do end in this way, with the protagonist and Mukherjee both leaving India. I would add to this that both books were written in the early 1970s and set in Calcutta where since the late 1960s the Naxalite communist movement was gaining popularity and strikes and riots occurred regularly. Mukherjee in her memoir *Days* and her protagonist in *Tiger's* sympathize with and associate themselves with the entrenched power structure of India more than with the Naxalites or even Canada despite the fact that Mukherjee returns to Canada at the end of *Days*.[76]

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[76] Another critic, Indrani Mitra, also takes these two books together in her article, "Luminous Brahmin Children Must Be Saved," where she argues that postcolonial literature should be resistant literature and that *The Tiger's Daughter* is not at all resistant. Set in the early 1970s, this novel takes place in Calcutta, which was the centre of the communist Naxalite movement that began as a peasant uprising in 1967. According to Mitra, even though "the movement attained its desired end in only a few pockets, and then only temporarily, its ideological impact was felt throughout the sociopolitical life of the country" (288). Unfortunately, Mukherjee writes her novel as if there were no causes for this movement and does not even name this political group. "The terms 'Naxalbari' and 'Naxalite' never surface in the narrative. We hear, instead, of *goondahs* (hooligans) and 'burglars' . . . The text does not permit a close look at the revolutionaries; we see them only as a 'disorderly crowd' with no

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Even though Tara, Mukherjee's protagonist, at times feels as if she doesn't belong to the modern India she has returned to after 7 years, there are still plenty of examples showing her basic loyalty to the upper class Hindu Bengalis she has grown up with and the Calcutta of her youth. "[L]ittle things had begun to upset her . . . she had been outraged by Calcutta . . . there were too many people sprawled in alleys and storefronts and staircases. She longed for the Bengal of Satyajit Ray, children running through cool green spaces, aristocrats despairing in music rooms of empty palaces. She hated Calcutta because it had given her kids eating yoghurt off dirty sidewalks" (*Tiger's* 128).[77] The narrator informs us that Tara hates Calcutta because of its increasingly widespread poverty but that she is nostalgic for another Bengal, defined by a filmmaker and involving fewer people, particularly fewer poor people. This desire for fewer poor people may seem benevolent at first, but Tara is not really interested in a redistribution of power and wealth to change the situation.

Tara's desire for fewer poor people is a result of the way they threaten her class and her person. It is, after all, these poor people who, as she rides a horse in Darjeeling, try to "pull the reins out of Tara's hand" (213). And when she visits Joyonto Roy's house and compound in Tollygunge where he does not live because it has been taken over by squatters, Tara is assaulted by a poverty-stricken young leprosy victim who screams out "I want a sari just like that! I want that! I want that!" (145). Tara, whose sari has led the child to scream, wants a Calcutta without poverty because the poor are a threat to the people of her class in

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clear agenda beyond overturning cars" (Mitra 291-2). The result is a novel with a distorted view of history. In fact Mitra calls it a "calculated distortion" which succeeds in "casting the dominant, economically powerful group in the role of victim" (293). Thus, I agree with Indrani Mitra that, in *The Tiger's Daughter*, Mukherjee's sympathies are with dominant India rather than the India that is resistant.

[77] All quotations from Mukherjee's fiction are taken from the Fawcett editions of her books.

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the Calcutta of the early 1970s. They want her wealth and the wealth of her class and they want power.

Tara's loyalty to upper-class Hindu Bengalis creates her hatred toward the poverty and the strikers and protesters against that poverty. But *The Tiger's Daughter* sets up a second enemy to the people of Tara's class. The second is the Marwaris, a class of business people more energetic than the men in Tara's social circle are. P.K. Tuntunwala, a Marwari who is running for public office, rapes Tara. When the rape occurs, the narrator informs us, "In another Calcutta such a scene would not have happened. Tara would not have walked into the suite of a gentleman for medicine, and a gentleman would not have dared to make such improper suggestions to her . . . Tara's Calcutta was disappearing" (235). The implication of the word "dared" in this passage suggests nostalgia for a lost moment. In Tara's Calcutta, the Calcutta of the past, the little girl from the squatter colony would not have dared demand a sari as beautiful as Tara's sari. Similarly, in the past of Tara's Calcutta, this evil Marwari would not have dared to attempt this seduction of a young woman from Tara's class. In each case, Tara has lost the security that she was able to count on in her youth, a security that was hers because of class privilege.

A close look at *Days and Nights in Calcutta*, which is an autobiographical work written between 1973 and 1974, reveals Mukherjee's alliances to an even greater degree than her novel does. Written as a journal kept separately by Bharati Mukherjee and Clark Blaise during a year-long stay in India, it reveals two separate narratives often about the same events from two different points of view: Blaise, a stranger and Mukherjee, returning after 14 years. The first half of the journal is Blaise's while the second half is Mukherjee's. She begins her section of the memoir by stating that 1973 "was a year of protest marches and labor strikes and of heartbreaking letters in local newspapers" (167). The reader is

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immediately enthralled and wonders why these marches and strikes are taking place. But as with her earlier novel, she refuses to provide the reader with causes. "In India, history is full of uninterpreted episodes . . . Events have no necessary causes; behavior no inevitable motive. Things simply *are*, because that is their nature" (*Days* 168). We are expected to assume that the marchers and strikers have no motivation for their behaviour. Without motivation, they become faceless crowds easily blamed for the violence in India.

Clark Blaise's portion of the memoir is very differently written because it lacks Mukherjee's loyalty to her class. His point of view is also interesting for what it tells us about Mukherjee. Through his eyes, we see her fame in India as an Indian writer.

> Though her novel was unavailable in Calcutta, she was still a celebrity . . . She'd been interviewed on the radio and featured in the Bengali and English press. *Desh*, a literary magazine that publishes a hundred thousand copies a week in culture-mad Bengal, did a photo-essay and proclaimed her proudly as a "Calcuttar meye" (daughter of Calcutta). One night at a performance of Tagore's most famous play, *Dak-Ghar* (The Post Office), we found ourselves sitting three seats away from the actor Soumitra Chatterjee. We couldn't take our eyes off him, but during the intermission, it was Bharati who was approached by a row of teen-age girls for her autograph, and it was a friend of Soumitra's who turned to him and said, as we all filed back inside, "Bharati Mukherjee's in town." (*Days* 136-7)

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Mukherjee is more of a celebrity to teenage girls in India than a male movie star. The implication of the scene Blaise describes is that the India of Mukherjee's social circle accepts and recognizes her writing because it reflects their views about their lives.

Her sympathies lie mostly with her school friends in Calcutta and most of her section of the memoir follows the lives of these upper-class women; "soon I was absorbed into the daily texture of other people's lives. Every day I met with one or more of these old and new friends, drove in their chauffeured cars . . . accompanied them to their clubs . . . shared hors d'oeuvres with their guests, with steel tycoons . . . film stars . . . former maharajas . . . and visiting knighted Britons" (199). Unlike her novel, this book names the Naxals. One of her friends recounts an incident in which she "had stepped out of the bathroom one morning and found a Naxal youth in her bedroom, waiting to solicit for a neighborhood religious festival. For *his* neighborhood, not hers, could I imagine the cheek?" (201). Here the emphasis on *his* is Mukherjee's and her friend's. These upper-class women find it astonishing that they should be expected to give ten rupees for a festival in an obviously poorer neighborhood. In the recounting of incidents such as these, Mukherjee's allegiance is clearly with the women of her class. In an essay on *The Tiger's Daughter*, Debjani Banerjee comments on Mukherjee's allegiance to her class. "Through her persistent effort to erase the rebellious insurgents of Calcutta from her text, while focusing on the privileged sectors, Mukherjee perpetuates silence and lack of communication between two groups of people" (Banerjee 164). This silence about the poor of Calcutta is worse in her memoir than it was in her novel because in the novel, one could imagine that fictional characters were silent and insensitive, not necessarily their author. In her memoir, Mukherjee shows her own insensitivity to matters of class by representing the women of her own class as victims and Calcutta's poor as aggressive ruffians.

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Mukherjee's friend, Veena, recounts the tale of three days in 1969 when strikers blockaded her house. Her strategy for dealing with them was to ignore them by leading the children and sixteen household servants to a room where the sound of the air-conditioner kept the sounds of the strikers out. "The only way to deal with the fury of the strikers had been to deny their very existence" (*Days* 207-8). As Mukherjee listens to Veena, she indirectly agrees with Veena's strategy. "I was relieved that the air conditioning cut off the noise from the street and the park" (*Days* 208), she writes as she describes what she sees there: overcrowding, boys teasing a monk, men fighting. She also realizes that this strategy was taught to her and her sisters by their school, the Loreto House missionaries, and by their parents. As a girl Mukherjee had also ignored strikers. "This same impulse had compelled my sisters and me in the early fifties, when our car had been blocked outside the factory by workers wearing red kerchiefs, to thrust open the car door and walk, unhurried, toward the safety of our gates" (*Days* 208). Mukherjee seems to be agreeing that the only way to deal with strikers is to ignore them. Banerjee writes that the way in which Mukherjee deals with the two classes in *The Tiger's Daughter* is "an act of connivance with . . . imperial interests" (168). This connivance is more blatant because the Loreto House nuns taught it to her. Their missionary status in India makes them complicit with imperial interests and their strategy of dealing with strikers is also to ignore them. Mukherjee goes on to relate one more anecdote in which the nuns that taught her deal similarly with striking boys. "Ignoring the adversary had worked for us, and it had worked for Veena. In Loreto House, I knew, it was still being passed on as a powerful tactic" (*Days* 208). No one asks why the boys were striking in the first place. And Mukherjee does not question the dehumanizing nature of the strategy that she and other women of her class use in these situations.

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Even though the subject of both the novel and the memoir is not the Naxalite movement in Calcutta, both works are situated in this political context and both Mukherjee in *Days* and Tara in *Tiger's* refer to the strikes and riots that are a consequence of this significant political event. Mukherjee's omission of its causes belittles the Naxalite reasons for striking in the first place. By ignoring them on the street and in her writing, she not only dehumanizes them but also sympathizes and colludes with the injustices of her own class. In both texts the dominant class is described in the role of victim even though eventually their power remains entrenched. "[B]y . . . 1971, the Naxalite movement had largely failed; although a Communist government was voted into power, the composition of the indigenous elite changed only slightly as establishments of power remained undisrupted. So Mukherjee's paranoia seems largely exaggerated and misplaced" (Banerjee 166).

Mukherjee's sympathies with and association with these upper-class women is summarized by her statement "I love these women; I was one of them" (216). Because she is one of them, she feels she can and should point out their faults and help them remember what it is to be a Hindu Indian. Mukherjee feels that there is something terribly wrong with her class, that they will become extinct like the Edwardian British who, she claims, created them. "Like the Edwardians, exquisite social refinement and stunning social obtuseness will be our downfall; we have evolved to such pinnacles of presentability that we are in danger of losing the most precious legacy in the Hindu tradition, our gifts for improvisation and adaptation" (217). At this point in Mukherjee's career, she is still an Indian, speaking as an Indian about what it is to be a Hindu Indian.

Mukherjee ends her memoir, as I mentioned earlier, by a decision to leave India permanently. "I believed that if I stayed on, the country would fail me more seriously than I had failed it by settling abroad" (296-7). The country that would fail her is the part of the

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country she lacks sympathy for, the Naxalites. She believes they would fail her by violently overthrowing the Bengali upper classes that she loves and cherishes. That leaving India permanently in this way has to do with leaving behind these upper classes can be seen in the nostalgia of this statement: "I would never again flit inside the cool dark mansions of cultivated Bengali housewives like Anjali and thrill to teatime intimacies and tamely revolutionary ideas" (297). While writing this memoir, this is exactly what Mukherjee does. She appears to be examining the woman she might have become if she had remained in India and married an Indian of her class. Thus, even as she aligns herself with Bengali housewives like Veena who are terrified by their husband's workers, she simultaneously notes down all the instances of gender oppression within the marriages she sees in order to celebrate her own economic freedom. The purpose is to establish that Mukherjee is less oppressed than the women of her class in India are. One woman actually tells her to write about this oppression.

> The fat housewife beside me in the back seat of the car jiggles her weight from hip to hip and tells me without rancor, 'I want you to write this down in your book, okay? Write down that Indian women are born to suffer. Why should girls be taught to cover their heads in the presence of older men and speak softly and never look boldly into their eyes? It's women who go through all the pain of labor and then the child carries the name of the father. Write down, Bharati, that in modern India there are many pockets of anger.' She giggles into a loose end of her cotton *tangail* sari to minimize the seriousness of her remarks. (*Days* 235)

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Mukherjee recounts incident after incident, relating not only what she sees but also what she is told. However, by focusing on the problems of gender oppression she erases the problems of class oppression.[78] The India that she leaves at the end of her memoir is a metaphor for the women of her class who are still oppressed. By leaving, Mukherjee feels that she has escaped the oppression they suffer.

However, in spite of leaving literally, Mukherjee continues to inhabit India imaginatively. She continues to speak of creating "metaphorical Indias" in her imagination and in her writing (*Days* 298). She describes her writing as decidedly Hindu and non-Western. "To admit to possessing a Hindu imagination is to admit that my concepts of what constitute a 'story' and of narrative structure are noncausal, non-Western" (298). Here we have Mukherjee's recourse to aesthetics in order to evade political responsibility. She claims that the Hindu Indian way of writing is noncausal. Thus we are not given any reasons why the workers were striking violently while she was there. She doesn't mention that Hindus are the dominant majority in India and that her noncausal stance as a writer aligns her with upper and middle-class Hindus against the working-class strikers.

Mukherjee's relationship to India is in some ways seamlessly caught up in the discourse of orientalism. She is nostalgic about a past which she describes in glowing terms and absolutely loathes present-day poverty and its results on her class. Said describes

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[78] Susan Koshy, who finds that Mukherjee emphasizes gender and erases class in most of her writing not just in *The Tiger's Daughter* and *Days*, has also made this point. "The difficulty can be located in Mukherjee's tendency to frame issues in terms that always claim maximum marginalization for her main characters. Insofar as they are victims, they are shown as being marked by racial, religious, or class conflicts; but Mukherjee obscures similar social relations in situations where they are part of the structures of dominance. Since her main characters are usually middle-class Indian women, *class* becomes the ground of greatest obfuscation and ambivalence in her fiction. Quite often, Mukherjee stages confrontations so that the gender conflicts overwrite and obscure class conflicts" (Koshy, "Geography" 70).

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orientalists in a similar way. "Faced with the obvious decrepitude and political impotence of the modern Oriental, the European Orientalist found it his duty to rescue some portion of a lost, past classical Oriental grandeur" (*Orientalism* 79). Mukherjee rescues her Hindu Indian writing aesthetic and the metaphorical Indias of her mind and takes them with her when she leaves India. Said writes that the orientalist feels that he alone can use best what he takes away from the orient. "What the European took from the classical Oriental past was a vision (and thousands of facts and artifacts) which only he could employ to the best advantage; to the modern Oriental he gave facilitation and amelioration – and, too, the benefit of his judgment as to what was best for the modern Orient" (*Orientalism* 79). Mukherjee also gives advice before she leaves. She writes that the people of her class must not forget the most important teachings of Hinduism; they must not lose their ability to improvise and transform themselves. In general she describes India and Indians as substantially different from the West. This attitude reinforces orientalism.

However, even though like an orientalist she is constantly pointing out the fixed differences between east and west, there are moments, especially in the novel, when one could argue that she is resisting orientalism. One such instance occurs when an American, Washington McDowell, comes to Calcutta and stays with one of Tara's friends. Tara is asked to act as a bridge between him and the family he stays with because Tara lives in the U.S. This seems fairly logical at first because there are things about him that only Tara understands. For instance, she is the only one who realizes that his sympathies lie with the strikers. "McDowell's sympathies were probably with the *goondahs*. It would be impossible to explain to Reena that Washington McDowell *was* the other side, that when he returned to Watts he would make fun of Camac Street girls like Reena, that one day at Berkeley perhaps he too would slash cars and riot" (*Tiger's* 175). Tara's assumption that Washington is from

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Watts has already offended him and Tara has made her racism against him fairly clear. Nonetheless, she is correct that he does sympathize with the other side and eventually they do lose him to the students when he leaves to room with someone he met in a coffee shop. What Tara realizes – and what I find resists orientalism – is that she can't act as a bridge between people because people from the U.S. and from India are not so separate and distant that they need bridges. It occurs to Tara that the similarities and differences between Washington and Reena are not as fixed as orientalism implies. "It was impossible to be a bridge for anyone; she wished someone had made her duties clearer for the evening. Reena seemed to be getting on extremely well on her own, urging the guest to teach her new phrases and songs. Bridges had a way of cluttering up the landscape" (*Tiger's* 173). People either connect or they don't. And usually relationships between people and between cultures are far more complicated than the idea of a bridge or the ideology of orientalism suggests. The need for a bridge implies fixed difference that needs to be known, conquered and bridged. It implies that, like an orientalist, Tara must use her knowledge of Washington's country to make it possible for Reena and Washington to communicate. But Reena does connect with Washington even though she doesn't understand his political convictions; and Tara doesn't connect with him even though she does. This part of the novel resists orientalism because it shows relationships between people and cultures that are complex and fluid rather than static and fixed.

Such moments, however, of resisting orientalism are very few and the general tone of both these books is quite orientalist because of the emphasis on India as a place with a worthy past which is now unworthy and corrupt. Even more importantly, resistance is connected to the state of being dominated. Despite all of Mukherjee's sympathies with the women of her class in Calcutta, and despite her erasure of the working-class strikers, both of

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Mukherjee's books do not succeed in giving the impression that these women are dominated without also reifying orientalist stereotypes about the other woman as victim. Thus, these books do not resist orientalism because the women Mukherjee portrays are dominant not dominated.

Canada: Racism and Resentment

The second phase of Mukherjee's writing career is associated with Canada. Alam calls this phase "The Aloofness of Expatriation," and includes in it her novel *Wife*, her collection of short stories *Darkness*, her argument about Canada in *The Sorrow and the Terror*, and her essay "An Invisible Woman." Mukherjee herself coins this phrase, "The Aloofness of Expatriation," to describe the Canadian phase of her career in her introduction to her first collection of short stories (*Darkness* xv). This phrase captures the idea that Mukherjee remained aloof from the country she resided in at that time, Canada. She considered V.S. Naipaul "a model" (*Darkness* xiv) for her writing because he, too, writes as an aloof expatriate rather than as a citizen or immigrant to any country.

The reason for Mukherjee's aloofness from Canada is her resentment against Canadian racism. In her introduction to *Darkness*, she writes that Canada "proudly boasts of its opposition to the whole concept of cultural assimilation" (xiv). Mukherjee wanted to assimilate and found it difficult to do so in Canada, so she left Canada in 1980. But despite the aloofness that she insists she had in Canada, I would like to argue that, as in the case of India, Mukherjee still associated herself with this country and had a place in it. She spoke out against Canadian racism as a Canadian, not as an aloof expatriate. Her civil rights activism in this Canadian phase of writing resists orientalism to a much greater degree than her Indian phase of writing because in Canada she resists the dominant by emphasizing similarities rather than differences.

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Mukherjee, herself, provides me with good reason to consider her novel *Wife* part of the Canadian phase of her career in her essay "The Invisible Woman." "In case anyone finds a copy of *Wife*, it should be read in the following way: the nominal setting is Calcutta and New York City. But in the mind of the heroine, it is always Toronto" ("Invisible" 329). The heroine, Dimple Dasgupta, marries and moves from Calcutta to New York, which is really standing in for Toronto. Mukherjee describes Dimple as a woman who "thought of premarital life as a dress rehearsal for actual living" (3-4). When she finally does marry, she is torn between becoming the proper Bengali wife who is devoted to her husband regardless of romance and passion, and becoming a heroine from an Indian movie who loved the kind of men she saw in magazine ads. Even before she and her husband immigrate to the U.S., Dimple is fantasizing about romance. "She borrowed a forehead from an aspirin ad, the lips, eyes and chin from a bodybuilder and shoulders ad, the stomach and legs from a trousers ad and put the ideal man and herself in a restaurant on Park Street or by the side of a pool at a five-star hotel" (24). Dimple takes body parts of different men from different ads and fantasizes about romantic liaisons with them. As she lives the life of the properly devoted wife, she fantasizes about being the passionate woman she sees in movies. This inability to negotiate an identity from the two that are thrust upon her in India is exacerbated in the U.S.

In the U.S., she is still torn. This time the proper Bengali wife is signified by Meena Sen, the woman she stays with when she and her husband first arrive. Ina Mullick represents the Indian movie heroine who is free to wear what she likes and flirt with whom she pleases. "[S]he didn't want to be like Ina Mullick (Ina said that she had gone to a C-R group on 116th Street and taken off her clothes and shown them her hernia scar so people wouldn't call her beautiful all the time), and she didn't want to be like Meena Sen or Mrs. Roy and live in a little Ballygunje ghetto" (180). Dimple is torn between these two identities and rejects them

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both in favour of living more and more in her fantasy life, which is fueled by television soap operas. Dimple's problem is her inability to choose between the two roles presented to her in India and the U.S. When the places change, the roles and Dimple's lack of decisiveness continue. On the one hand, the two roles of proper wife and flirtatious woman are orientalist and sexist because they are based on expectations of eastern women as subservient and western women as sex objects. On the other hand, Dimple's rejection of both roles resists patriarchy (because both roles oppress women) and resists orientalism (because both roles are to be found in India and the U.S.) *Wife* is thus not as orientalist as *Tiger's* because it doesn't dwell on the difference between India and the west. India is not a place that is so different from North America that the protagonist continually compares the two. In fact, the protagonist has exactly the same problem in the U.S. that she had in India.

Not only is the protagonist Dimple, unable to choose between two monolithic identities, she is also violent. Patriarchal oppression appears to be the reason for both her indecisiveness and her violence. *Wife*, as one can tell from the title, is a novel about patriarchy and the ways in which it can lead to madness for women. In fact, R.S. Krishnan has even charted its similarity to Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper." After all, eventually, Dimple does decapitate her husband as he eats a bowl of cereal in the kitchen. Like her indecisiveness, the violence is present in India before she arrives in the U.S. Even though she is more violent in the U.S. than in India, coming to America is not the reason. According to critic Carmen Wickramagamage, the seeds of violent behaviour were present in India. In a footnote to her article, she writes,

> certain actions of Dimple's while still in India – the vicious beating to death of a pregnant mouse, the brutal physical punishment that she subjects herself to in order to rid herself

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> of an unwanted fetus – indicate that her discontent is already manifesting itself in violence, even if she did not consider her husband a potential target of such violence then. There can be no doubt, however, that the indirect target of her self-induced 'miscarriage' is her husband, who had given every indication of being overjoyed at the impending arrival of his (male) progeny. (Wickramagamage 196)

In addition to these acts of violence in India, Dimple informs her husband Amit that as a child she pulled a snake with her bare hands. "When I was a little girl I pulled a snake by its tail. I pulled it straight out of its hole" (*Wife* 40). When a friend brings her a goldfish as a present she flushes it down the toilet. "The goldfish, swimming mightily, had withstood three flushes of the toilet" (*Wife* 40). Both of these acts are relatively benign but they do show a propensity towards violence that grows throughout the novel. For instance, after killing the mouse and goldfish, Dimple kills a cockroach for being slow to move. "Sometimes she scared roaches out of dark corners. If the roach was slow, she hit it with her broom until the hard shell broke and the whitish liquid splattered" (*Wife* 42). Thus, the novel is anti-orientalist because it doesn't focus on the differences between India and the U.S. Instead, it follows a character Dimple who is violent and indecisiveness in both India and the U.S.

In an interview, Mukherjee actually compares herself to Dimple, the protagonist of *Wife*. "She hasn't – just as I hadn't when I was writing that book – clearly found out what it is that she wants, or what it is she should be doing. So she ends in depression, madness, and murder" (*Iowa* 24). Mukherjee implies that, like her protagonist, she herself would have gone mad if she hadn't found out what to do. Eventually, she does find out what she wants and

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what she should be doing. I am not referring here to Mukherjee's decision to leave Canada, but rather to her essay "The Invisible Woman," her short story collection *Darkness*, and her book *The Sorrow and the Terror*, all of which inform Canadians of systemic problems of race in Canada.

Mukherjee begins her essay "An Invisible Woman" by stating, "In this story, no place or person fares well but Canada comes off poorest of all" (324). She then goes on to present her thesis: Canada is racist in every way possible. Throughout the essay, however, she locates herself as a Canadian. "Do not think that I enjoy writing this of Canada. I remain a Canadian citizen" (326). She even locates a community of friends in Canada to whom she feels she owes a deeper analysis of Canada's racism. "I owe it to my friends, and I have many friends in Canada, to dig deeper" (327). She refers to the Canadian government as her own government. "It is not pleasant to realize your own government has betrayed you so coldly" (328). Thus, as with her criticisms of India, she states her problems with Canada as a Canadian.

Out of the twelve short stories that make up her collection *Darkness* only three actually deal with Canada: "The World According to Hsu," "Isolated Incidents," and "Tamurlane." Each deals with Canadian racism directly or indirectly and at least one critic has dealt with these stories separately from the rest (Kumar). But the other stories also lack optimism. "The Lady from Lucknow" "feels at home everywhere, because she is never at home anywhere" (25). Coming from any other writer a statement such as this might be considered positive, but given Mukherjee's statements on the topic, we know that she sees this as a negative statement. "A Father" is "a lonelier man" who attacks his pregnant daughter (60). In "Nostalgia," Dr. Patel is called "Paki scum" by one of his patients (82) and then when he goes to the Little India in his city, he meets "an experienced team of hustlers

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who sexually entice him, then blackmail him" (St. Andrews 57). In "Saints," a young boy seems to go mad. In her 1990 *Iowa Review* interview Mukherjee said of *Darkness*, "It was still darkness, after all, and I was coming out of that whole Canadian mess. I want to think that writing that book was invigorating for me. But for many of the characters, things didn't work out when they transplanted themselves into a new culture" (28). The darkness of the stories reflects the darkness that Mukherjee felt when she lived in Canada.

Even though Mukherjee wrote both "An Invisible Woman" and *Darkness* in the U.S., she used dark Canadian themes in both works. However, although she was living and writing in the U.S., she was unable to interest an American publisher in *Darkness*. In an interview, she describes why she had to publish with a Canadian publisher. "The American publishers who were shown it didn't want to publish it. Their response was, who was going to read about immigrants?" (*Iowa Review* 28). Even though her introduction to *Darkness* speaks positively of the U.S. and negatively of Canada, American publishers rejected the manuscript. Canadians published it and received it favourably even though the introduction, according to George Woodcock, "is a bitter little piece of writing, and how much of it comes from the writer's temperament and how much from experience one must leave the reader to judge" (Woodcock 151). Woodcock questions Mukherjee's assertion that the government of Canada officially incites racial hatred. However, he does agree that there is racism in Canada, which "is no less disturbing" and "morally just as bad as 'official incitement'" (Woodcock 151). Woodcock's compliments to and agreement with Mukherjee are, however, double-edged. "It is not accidental that Mukherjee has won major journalism awards (Canadian ones, be it noted by those who take over-literally her accounts of being rejected here) for her stories; they are in fact very good magazine fiction, provocative in tone but not experimental enough to be difficult reading, and – with two or three exceptions – not wiry

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enough to stand up well to collection" (151). He ends his review of *Darkness* with "Personally, I think it is a pity she is lost to Canada; stories like 'Tamburlane' are full of threats and promises, and the conflict of Canada might have brought them out more formidably than the content of American acceptance" (152). This last comment indicates how Woodcock, like others, continues to consider Mukherjee a Canadian or former Canadian writer. However, his implication that Mukherjee's temperament might have something to do with her experiences in Canada and his assertion that her fiction does not stand up well to collection does in some ways confirm exactly what Mukherjee is pointing to. In the same review he looks at *A Meeting of Streams: South Asian Canadian Literature* and concludes that only the essays about Canadian literature in Punjabi and Urdu are good. He claims that English writing in Canada by South Asians does not "show us authentic continuations of South Asian tradition" (Woodcock 150). His desire for the authentic is exactly what Mukherjee critiques. Her critique of orientalism is one that fights racism in Canada by depicting it in essays and fiction in language that is not difficult and experimental. Woodcock may condescend to Mukherjee's writing style but she does reach more people with her message and this makes her critique of orientalist racism even stronger.

The main way Bharati Mukherjee resists orientalism in Canada is by resisting official Canadian multiculturalism which, according to Himani Bannerji, encourages us "to forget that people do not have a fixed political agency, and as subjects of complex and contradictory social relations can be summoned as subjects and agents in diverse ways" (Bannerji 6). Thus, elite multiculturalism in Canada is orientalist because it depends on fixed differences between people. *The Sorrow and the Terror* is the best demonstration of this because it shows exactly how multiculturalism in Canada can be both condescending (because the Canadian government did not think the South Asian Canadians responsible for

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the bombs were capable of violence) and violent (because hundreds of people died as a result of this condescension). In order to write this book, Mukherjee and Blaise researched the origins and the legacy of the Air India tragedy, which killed 329 people. According to an interview, Mukherjee and Blaise were teaching in the New York area when they wrote *The Sorrow and the Terror*. In order to research they would drive 12 hours to Toronto to spend their weekends interviewing family members and policemen there. They also traveled to Vancouver to interview alleged extremists there and flew to Ireland for the unveiling of the memorial. Mukherjee proudly states, "We discovered a great deal more than the Toronto *Globe and Mail*, and the local Canadian papers. Or maybe they didn't want to discover" (*Iowa Review* 13). What they discovered was that the Canadian government knew about the alleged extremists and neglected its duty to protect the passengers of that flight from a bombing. As in the essay, the novel and the short stories associated with Canada, Mukherjee shows an interest in speaking against the dominant, mainstream ideology of multiculturalism in Canada. Her bitterness is not that of an outsider but that of an inside critic: "we were driven to write this book as citizens bearing witness" (*Sorrow* ix). In fact, before she left Canada, she considered running for public office as an NDP candidate (*Jouvert* paragraph 64).

Bharati Mukherjee's relationship to Canada allows her to resist orientalism in a number of ways. In *Wife*, the characters of Ina Mullick and Meena Sen represent monolithic western and eastern identities. Even though depicting Ina and Meena in such a stereotypical way could be considered orientalist, Dimple's madness resists orientalism because it resists these monolithic identities in both India and the U.S. Dimple is not faced with one in India and one in the U.S. She faces both identities in both countries and rejects both in order to resist patriarchy and orientalism. The introduction to *Darkness*, "An Invisible Woman," and *The Sorrow and the Terror* lay out Mukherjee's anti-orientalist stance against Canadian

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multiculturalism. She believes that this policy requires immigrants to hold on to their fixed difference from mainstream Canadians. Thus, according to Mukherjee, mainstream Canadians are more likely to hate visible minorities. Not only that but in *The Sorrow and the Terror* she argues that this policy is too liberal towards different cultural groups and therefore allows them to engage in terrorist activities. Mukherjee's work in Canada and about Canada is anti-orientalist because she shows the causal relationship between Canadian multiculturalism and racism. The careful research and analysis in *The Sorrow and the Terror* force the reader to think through and defy orientalism because the reader is asked to face that the west, represented by Canada, is not civilized. "But in a political and historical sense, Canada was not just smug, indifferent and unlucky. Canada contributed more to the tragedy than it has ever acknowledged" (*Sorrow* 203-4). Lastly, it is important to point out that Mukherjee's successful resistance to orientalism in Canada is also a result of her dominated position. Her own experiences of racism led to her theory and her work.

America: Assimilation through Individualism

When Bharati Mukherjee moved from Canada to the United States, her position as a writer changed for the last time. Her immigration to the United States led to a new model, Bernard Malamud, after whom she has named one of her sons and to whom she has dedicated *Darkness*. The most important difference between her American writing and her Canadian writing is that unlike in Canada, Mukherjee does not critique American nationalist ideology. In fact, she tries to place her work in the tradition of pre-established American ideology. She calls this phase the "Exuberance of Immigration" and she sees herself as writing "in the tradition of other American writers whose parents or grandparents had passed through Ellis Island" (*Darkness* xv). This complete acceptance of the U.S. and its dominant ideology of assimilation is similar to her association with India. As a result, her

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American work does not resist orientalism as well as it did in Canada. As Himani Bannerji has pointed out, the American ideology of assimilation is just as orientalist as the Canadian ideology of multiculturalism. According to Bannerji, assimilation simply

> keeps the so-called immigrants in place through a constantly deferred promise. In the multicultural paradigm, where difference is admitted, structural and ideological reasons for difference give place to a talk of immutable differences of ethnic cultures. In both paradigms as the focus shifts from processes of exclusion and marginalization to ethnic identities and their lack of adaptiveness, it is forgotten that these officially multicultural ethnicities, so embraced or rejected, are themselves the constructs of colonial – orientalist and racist – discourses. (Bannerji 9)

Thus, the most orientalist aspect of Mukherjee's American work is her constant reprimanding of South Asians in the U.S. for not adapting quickly enough. However, as I will show later in this section, Mukherjee's American work is not as orientalist as her Indian work because she also reprimands the English in India for not adapting quickly enough. The result is that her work in the U.S. resists orientalism more than in India but less than in Canada.

In an essay published in the *New York Times Book Review*, Mukherjee announces her American citizenship. "I'm one of you now," she declares ("Immigrant Writing" 1). She explains that she sees no point in writing about the places she has lived in the past and she urges new writers to stop doing so as well. "Turn your attention to this scene . . . See your models in this tradition . . . We are in their tradition" (29). She feels that the differences

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between Canadian and American national ideologies hindered her ability to write and live in Canada while helping her in the U.S.: "The transformation as writer, and as resident of the new world, occurred with the act of immigration to the United States" (*Darkness* xiv). Thus, the works in her present, American phase of writing are as optimistic as the tone of her essay "Immigrant Writing."

The first work in this phase is the short story collection *The Middleman and Other Stories*. The front cover of Viking's 1988 edition depicts a brown hand holding Liberty's flame just below Liberty's green hand. The Statue of Liberty is, of course, a symbol of American freedom. Mukherjee has placed minority immigrants alongside pre-established American symbols. She depicts America and the immigrants she writes about with the optimism of established American nationalist rhetoric. Whereas her characters during her Canadian phase dealt with, sometimes, insurmountable obstacles, the characters in her American phase are survivors who make their "dreams come true." In these stories, obstacles do not stand in the protagonists' way because the protagonists assimilate and therefore have access to the American dream. Instead of critiquing American assimilation as orientalist, Mukherjee depicts characters that assimilate successfully.

The reason that these characters are so successful is that they are able to transform themselves into Americans. Out of the eleven stories in *The Middleman*, eight are set in the U.S. These stories end with the main characters fulfilling their dreams or at least holding onto their dreams, whether of personal or financial success. Of the three that are not set in the U.S., even the one set in Canada, "The Management of Grief," about the Air India Crash, ends with the protagonist hearing "the voices of my family one last time. *Your time has come*, they said. *Go, be brave*" (194). She walks off on a voyage and the tone is decidedly exciting even though one wonders whether she has gone mad. (She is, after all, hearing the

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voices of people who are not physically present.) But Deborah Bowen has traced the opposition between reason and faith in this story and has concluded that the protagonist is able to move on and put the deaths of her family behind her. She transforms herself from a woman in mourning to a woman able to walk into the future with the past behind her.

Similarly, at the end of "The Tenant," the protagonist moves out of one lover's life into another's. At first she reprimands herself with these words. "She has accomplished nothing. She has changed her citizenship but she hasn't broken through into the light, the vigor, the *bustle* of the New World. She is stuck in dead space" (*Middle* 110). Eventually she meets a man who is similar to her and, as one critic puts it: "At the end, she does bustle off to meet the man who will make her whole again (and whom she will make whole) in this new life" (Sant-Wade and Radell 14). It is an exciting new beginning for her because she has decided to change where she lives and who she lives with. She has broken into the light of the New World that is America, in stark contrast to the darkness of Canada.

At the end of "Jasmine," the protagonist is described as "a girl rushing wildly into the future" (135). In "Orbiting," the Italian American protagonist sees her Afghani lover as "Clint Eastwood, scarred hero and survivor" (76). She grins as she thinks this at the end of the story and the reader is left with hope that the couple will overcome the obstacles that her parents might become. At the end of "Danny's Girls," a fifteen-year-old South Asian Ugandan American finally has sex with the girl of his dreams. In "Buried Lives," a Sri Lankan illegal en route to Canada stops in Germany and there finally gets his wish: to marry a beautiful widow he has met there. Even in "Fathering," where a white American Vietnam veteran tracks and finds his Vietnamese daughter and brings her to live with his white American wife in the U.S., despite all the conflict between husband and wife, father and daughter embark on an adventure together at the end of the story. "I jerk her away from our

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enemies. My Saigon kid and me: we're a team. In five minutes we'll be safely away in the cold chariot of our van" (122).[79] Each story is meant to end optimistically because the characters survive and face a new future that is better than their past.

In Mukherjee's controversial third novel, *Jasmine*, the protagonist does more than move to the U.S. She takes on the American identity that insists that she give up who she was: "There are no harmless, compassionate ways to remake oneself. We murder who we were so we can rebirth ourselves in the images of dreams" (*Jasmine* 25). According to one critic, these "dreams" are related to the American Dream, which gives the immigrant a ready-made identity. In "A Critique of Bharati Mukherjee's Neo-Nationalism," Anne Brewster writes that "Mukherjee's neo-nationalism, figured in the fantasy of the land of opportunity and the romance of the immigrant, is . . . the counternarrative to her own diasporic condition and the dilemma of postcoloniality" (Brewster 56). Thus, the nostalgia for the origin, which Mukherjee and her protagonists reject, is replaced with nostalgia for the American Dream.

According to Kristin Carter-Sanborn, these dreams are related to fantasies that other male characters have about her. They are not her dreams at all. "Bud, Taylor, and even her first husband Prakash . . . speak the narrator's name and thus remake her in the shape of their own fantasies" (579). In fact, some critics have found this aspect of Jasmine's rebirths rather disturbing. McWilliam writes, "Jasmine's several incarnations are more than a device. They exemplify the main power a passive character has: to become someone other and stop the internal bleeding of memories; to clarify by starting again, becoming what others want

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[79] Of course, there are serious problems with the way in which the Vietnamese child is depicted. In fact, Knippling argues that Mukherjee translates this wholly other child into "the self-consolidating other, the West's Other" (Knippling 150) over the course of this short story.

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you to be" (McWilliam 23). While some see Mukherjee's rebirthing device as a useful survival technique (see Kehde), others worry that the protagonist lacks agency. Thus, Mukherjee fails to grasp the inherent orientalism of the ideology of assimilation. The fact that her characters do it to survive is part of the racism of the ideology but Mukherjee's tone continues to celebrate rather than critique.

Over the course of the novel, Jyoti becomes Jasmine becomes Jase becomes Jane. As one critic puts it, "The account of the protagonist's speedy and spectacular progression from Jyoti to Jane, from the farmland of Punjab to the other farmland of Iowa is the core of the novel" (Gurleen Grewal 184). In order for Jane to be born, according to Mukherjee, Jyoti, the woman who carries her past history in India, must be murdered. According to another critic, "the narrator's plurality of names – Jasmine, Jazzy, Jase, Jane (which successively became more Westernized) – helps to mask her ethnic difference and enable her to survive in a hostile, alien land" (Leard 115). As she cuts herself off from her past, she becomes more Western but her white lovers still see her as Indian. Thus, she allows one of her lovers, Bud, to exoticize her. "Bud courts me because I am alien. I am darkness, mystery, inscrutability. The East plugs me into instant vitality and wisdom. I rejuvenate him simply by being who I am" (*Jasmine* 178). Unlike Gita in Kirin Narayan's novel, Mukherjee's protagonist does not appear to have a problem with Bud's ideas about her. Mukherjee distinguishes between the protagonist's Indian past, which she has shed, and her outward appearance, which she can never shed. There is no bitterness and none of the resentment that fueled her anger in Canada. Therefore, the protagonist is able to indulge the orientalist fantasies of her lovers, which have more to do with them than her. Her lack of anger combined with the fact that she gets more western with each transformation makes the way in which Mukherjee writes *Jasmine* quite orientalist.

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As I mentioned earlier, the protagonist is aware that one of her lovers, Bud, only desires her because he sees her as exotic. One critic implies that the protagonist willingly obliges Bud. Gurleen Grewal writes, "he endows her with a predictable foreignness: Jasmine points out that it is her mysterious and inscrutable exoticism that entices Bud so much. Although a case could be made for the ambivalence and irony of this statement (as of many others), Jasmine readily complies as the exotic Other. In fact, this compliance is her ticket to the American Dream" (191). Another critic sees Half-Face, her rapist, as similarly desirous of the protagonist when he says "I thought you'd be different from the others" (*Jasmine* 99). His desire for her hinges on her difference. "Jasmine here represents to Half-Face the inaccessible 'exotic' – not in terms of her sexual availability, which he easily enforces, but in terms of her 'inscrutability,' her unknowability, her otherness" (Carter-Sanborn 588). This critic goes on to write, "I do believe that the specific instances of exoticism in *Jasmine* serve to reify subaltern identity rather than to liberate it" (Carter-Sanborn 583). Jasmine assimilates to the idea of America as fixedly different from India by taking on the western name Jane. At the same time, she is aware that her appearance cannot be changed as easily as her name. The fact that she doesn't resist the idea of assimilation on this basis serves to reify orientalism.

In her essay, "The Nation in Performance," Sangeeta Ray points out that the migrant writer does not always critique national narratives such as assimilation. In fact, she writes, "a migrant who desires to be anchored in the host nation state precisely because she wishes to counter the vagaries of being displaced, is often the most vociferous champion of regressive forms of the politics of identity and identification" (Ray 221). She is, of course, referring to *Jasmine*. Like Brewster, Ray relates the protagonist's position with that of the writer herself, claiming that both are striving for the same thing: complete acceptance by the American

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mainstream. This acceptance hinges on Mukherjee's and Jasmine's acceptance of America. If they accept and repeat the dominant national myths, they will assimilate and become dominant themselves. Mukherjee's own personal history of being dominant in India and disliking being dominated in Canada leads one to conclude that her attitude in the U.S. is simply the result of her past experiences.

Another way to gain acceptance or legitimation is by writing Jasmine into the myths of American identity formation. As mentioned earlier, Mukherjee places her protagonists in the American myth of assimilation. Another such myth sees early immigrants as moving westward to find a new home, as does Jasmine. Ray writes that this myth "is reterritorialized in Mukherjee's valorization of her heroine as adopting and reflecting the adventurous spirit characteristic of the Americans" (Ray 227). Ray is not the only critic to comment on this aspect of *Jasmine*. Carmen Faymonville has found that "Mukherjee employs frontier myths to project the psychological and cultural development of Jasmine" (Faymonville 53). Jasmine must, therefore, be accepted as an American because she is following in the footsteps of earlier, more legitimate (because they are white) Americans who continually moved towards the uncharted west. America must accept Jasmine because she embodies early American myths.

While one expects the cultural difference of the migrant to call into question the homogeneity of the nation, Ray argues that *Jasmine* does not critique the nation because it fails to transform its myths. "In *Jasmine* the presence of cultural difference is assimilated in a manner that fails to transform or question the myth of the American metropolis as a place of tremendous possibilities" (Ray 229). The American melting pot is also never critiqued. Cultural difference is not empowering; assimilation is. This assimilation leads to a separation from a politics of collectivity. Jasmine acts individually.

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Other critics such as Lavina Dhingra Shankar and Sangeeta Ray have similarly critiqued Mukherjee's works for valorizing individual action instead of collective action (Shankar 77). "Here an assertion of the triumph of the postcolonial individual is not only dependent on a negation of collective action, but the very survival of both the nation and the immigrant rests on a violent othering of herself as an East-Indian woman. The other as East-Indian woman is then offered to the American palate as a desirable exotic product for consumption" (Ray 233). Jasmine is desirable while other South Asians living in the U.S. are not. Uma Parameswaran goes so far as to say that the "life and routine of Indo-Americans emerge as unrelentingly trivial, and the novel seems to establish that Jasmine-Jane fulfills herself only because she washed her hands of her fellow Indians" (187). Again, the individual, domesticated, exotic other accomplishes more than the collective does. This, too, is an American myth that Mukherjee mines successfully.

Not all literary critics are as critical of *Jasmine* as this. Deepika Bahri has pointed out that the novel can be read as deferring all stable identities, even American ones. Because the protagonist keeps moving and keeps changing her name, Bahri calls her simply J and claims that this ever-shifting name prevents her from the kind of stability that other critics have insisted she has. "Moreover, her persistent in-between status in that she never acquires an institutionalized 'American' identity through citizenship or any other modicum of civic recognition has not been deemed particularly important in much of the criticism of the novel" (Bahri 139). Jasmine does not become a legal American citizen or a legal wife to any of her American lovers or even a legal mother to Du. Bahri points to these aspects of the novel to argue that Jasmine remains in-between these stable, legal, institutionalized identities.

Moreover, Bahri argues that if Jasmine is the novel's protagonist then "the nationalist construct, America" is the novel's "alter protagonist" (143). Jasmine does not completely

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become American. She is always in the state of "becoming American even as America is becoming J" (144). Unlike the critics before her, Bahri is not critical of Jasmine's individualistic mode of action. She comments instead on Jasmine's power by comparing her to Columbus or the *Mayflower* or imperialism. "No less a force, J.'s career demonstrates [*sic*], is currently at work reconstructing the West" (145). Thus, the novel may recount the story of an individual but Bahri sees this individual as part of a group of migrant subjects whose arrival and presence in the U.S. changes it. I will return to the question of Mukherjee's individualism at the end of this chapter.

As Bahri has convincingly argued, America is a character in Mukherjee's stories, a character that is transformed by immigrants. However, in keeping with Mukherjee's harshest critics, I would argue that America is a pre-existing idea that immigrants hold onto when they arrive, molding themselves to become that idea, assimilating. The former is a positive way to look at Mukherjee's works. Certainly, she herself would see herself as transforming America as it transforms her. This view is similar to the idea that ideology is a site of conscious struggle, which shapes the imaginary as well as social reality. The latter is a negative way of looking at Mukherjee's works and many of her critics (myself included) would insist that she is merely writing herself and her characters into this nation, this superpower, which makes its immigrants believe that it and now they are better than all other nations. The end result is homogenization. The reason why I do not agree with Bahri's defense of *Jasmine* is that Mukherjee's American works do not transform the idea of America. They simply assimilate to pre-established discourses: the melting pot, moving westward, cutting oneself off from the past and of course individualism. None of these ideas about America are new. Mukherjee simply writes new stories about old ideas, which she uncritically inserts into her narratives. In order to transform America, she needs to

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come up with a new American dream, a new myth that does not expect Mukherjee to fit her writing into established American literary traditions. Mukherjee's desire to align her characters and works of fiction with the idea of America is a desire to gain legitimation. America makes Jasmine who she is. Jasmine does not make America who it is. Thus, the idea of a pre-established orientalist America that expects immigrants to assimilate quickly plays a huge part in Mukherjee's works and provides the reason for her unparalleled success as a writer.

The most important way in which *Jasmine* fails to resist orientalism has to do with the American ideology of assimilation. Jasmine assimilates dominant American discourses of individualism, the American dream, moving westward and leaving the past behind. Assimilation assumes that immigrants are different and it promises immigrants complete acceptance if they adapt quickly. But according to Himani Bannerji non-white people in Canada are reluctant to give up their cultural baggage *because* of the hostility they encounter here. I agree with Bannerji and I think that immigrants in the U.S. who adapt slowly do so because they face similar discrimination. Thus, I think the point Bannerji makes about Canada can be generalized to the U.S. She writes, "if the Canadian society into which they come were non-threatening and non-exclusive, if racism were not a daily reality, this stage of cultural bonding would be short, and more fluid than it is at present" (Bannerji 159). Bharati Mukherjee sees extended cultural bonding as a problem and depicts a character Jasmine who assimilates quickly, transforming her from Jyoti to Jane. But because she doesn't see the reason for slow assimilation as racism, she is unable to draw attention to this in her novel. In orientalist fashion, the other South Asian characters in *Jasmine* are blamed for refusing to do what Jasmine did. The fact that Jasmine cannot change her appearance and still looks exotic is not even described as a problem. Thus, Mukherjee doesn't see the orientalism of

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assimilation in the U.S. and *Jasmine* is not an anti-racist or anti-orientalist work. As Inderpal Grewal has pointed out, "racist images of all minority groups abound in the US; who absorbs and deploys them is a complex matter of economics, racialized structures of the nation-state, US imperial history and militarism, and the globalization of capital and labor. These structures are consumed not only by the dominant white population but also by minorities, who are at the same time drawn into 'American' nationalism and rejected by its whiteness" (Inderpal Grewal, "The Postcolonial" 70). Thus, not only does Mukherjee fail to comprehend the reasons for slow assimilation, but she also fails to see that it is an ideology that defers full citizenship by promising a dream that white immigrants can aspire to with more ease than non-white immigrants.

Even though both *Middleman* and *Jasmine* contain narratives that celebrate the immigrant's assimilation into pre-established American nationalist ideology without seeing its inherent orientalism, Mukherjee's novel *The Holder of the World* manages to resist orientalism in its depiction of English people in India. In a way, Mukherjee is using exactly the same strategy of assimilation that she uses in narratives set in the U.S. But since context is everything, when she depicts the slowness to adapt of the English in India, it has completely different repercussions since the English avoid 'going native' because they are racist. Thus, in reprimanding the English for living separately from Indians in India, Mukherjee actually resists orientalism.

Like *Jasmine*, *The Holder of the World* is set partly in the U.S. and partly in India. But unlike Jasmine, Mukherjee's protagonist is not South Asian. Also the novel covers two different time frames: one in the late 17th century and one in the late 20th century. In the 20th century, Beigh Masters narrates the story of Hannah Easton who lives in 17th century Salem, Massachusetts. Eventually, Hannah moves to India, befriends her Indian servant, Bhagmati,

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and has an affair with a Hindu Raja, Jadav Singh. When she and Jadav are unable to continue their relationship, Hannah returns to Salem, pregnant with Jadav Singh's daughter. Both Beigh and Hannah are white and American. At least two critics are disturbed by this method of narration because the narrator silences the others she writes about. Gita Rajan argues that Hannah is only available to the reader through Beigh. "Even though the novel is Hannah's life story, the reader learns of Hannah's feelings, her emotions, her fears, and her anxieties from the narrator. We do not have a voice to match the carefully drawn character . . . the narrator . . . remains oblivious to the domination in her own voice, which in turn silences Hannah's" (Rajan 297). While a white woman in the present silences a white woman in the past, Nalini Iyer finds the brown woman to be the most silenced of all. She writes that Hannah's voice sometimes comes through the narrative but Bhagmati is the one that is truly silenced. "Beigh's dominating consciousness does not allow Bhagmati a voice; she is always re-presented by an interlocutor. Although Beigh also retells most of Hannah's story, Hannah's narrative breaks through Beigh's dominant one in the form of fragmented diary entries and pieces of embroidery" (Iyer 40). Rajan and Iyer are disturbed by Mukherjee's apathy towards such questions of voice. But Mukherjee's agenda has never been that of giving voice to the subaltern. The individualism of Jasmine in her previous novel also shows that Mukherjee is not interested in a community of women. Mukherjee's concern is primarily with the individual. Her characters, especially in the U.S., are individuals first and members of communities second or not at all. This aspect of her characters is in line with American individualism and succeeds in gaining legitimacy for Mukherjee herself.

Another way in which Mukherjee aligns herself with an American myth is by describing Hannah's attitude towards class. Thus, when Hannah compares American men

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with English men she finds, in a predictably clichéd way, that Americans are less interested in class and status.

> Nothing in colonial society had demonstrated its unalienable claim on her affection. Nothing in English society, or among recently arrived Englishmen, excited her contempt. The English, like her husband, seemed vastly more exciting and knowledgeable and appreciative than the men of Salem; on the other hand, their scrutiny extended to realms of social rank that seemed to her false measures of value. (*Holder* 73)

Through her description of Hannah's attitude, Mukherjee has reiterated an old myth that Americans are not interested in class positions. Moreover, America takes on a magical quality in her novel because Hannah feels that anything is possible there. She comes to this conclusion after meeting an Englishman who believed "that the world was explicable by formula and experiment" (156). Hannah believes that he would be more open to other possibilities if he had seen America and India. Unlike *Jasmine*, where India was the place without possibilities, in *Holder* England lacks possibilities while both America and India are depicted as positive places. This diminishment of England's potential is also part of an American myth. However, depicting both America and India as places of exciting possibilities resists orientalism.

Mukherjee's preoccupation with national myth comes from a belief in rootedness, especially the importance of being rooted to the place one physically inhabits. In *The Holder of the World*, Mukherjee describes rootless people. "Men like Higginbottham and the Marquis had no home, no loyalties except to themselves. Their homelands were imaginary. For them there was no going back, and no staying on . . . They were ghosts, trapped in space

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meant for full-fleshed and warm-blooded humans. She would need to root herself, she was not sure where nor how, before she too became ghostly" (*Holder* 182). Mukherjee's fiction is often quite didactic because she always returns to this basic idea: immigrants to the new world must let go of the old world to root themselves in the new. In *Jasmine*, she describes immigrants who don't assimilate as those who live artificial lives. "In this apartment of artificially maintained Indianness, I wanted to distance myself from everything Indian, everything Jyoti-like," the protagonist says (*Jasmine* 128). The difference between *Holder* and *Jasmine* is that in *Jasmine* non-white immigrants are Mukherjee's targets but in *Holder* white men who are pirates and only interested in their own profit are the targets. The strategy that was orientalist in *Jasmine* becomes anti-orientalist and even anti-capitalist in *Holder*.

In *The Holder of the World*, Mukherjee, thankfully, refrains from reprimanding South Asian immigrants to the U.S. for not assimilating fast enough. She turns her attention to the English in India in the 17th century and reprimands them instead. The idea is still to distance oneself from the past and assimilate quickly into the new environment. But in colonial India the result of Mukherjee's reprimands is an important anti-colonial project. In India, Hannah, the protagonist, meets two English women, Martha and Sarah, who both complain that they "feel bereft – of roots, of traditions" (*Holder* 163) because in India they are cut off from their beloved England. Martha and Sarah bemoan the loss of their homeland while Hannah "goes native." Unlike non-white immigrants to the U.S., Martha and Sarah are the wives of colonialists who condescend to Indians. When Hannah "goes native" she actually develops relationships with Indians that are not related to colonialism.

The theme of rebirth is a part of Mukherjee's notion of rootedness because it appears that the only way to root oneself is to be reborn. As we have already seen in *Wife*, if Mukherjee's characters are not able to root themselves in their new situation so that they can

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be reborn, their lives end tragically.[80] In *Holder*, Hannah assimilates to India by befriending her servant and taking an Indian lover. Hannah's lover in India, a Hindu Raja, helps her realize the folly of the English. "With Jadav Singh, she'd finally accepted how inappropriate it was in India – how fatal – to cling, as White Towns tenaciously did, to Europe's rules. She was no longer the woman she'd been in Salem or London" (234). She is reborn just as Jasmine was. "She wasn't Hannah anymore; she was Mukta" (*Holder* 271). Thus, in *Holder*, the lesson of assimilation needs to be learned by white women in India instead of South Asians in the U.S. This is different, politically speaking, because white women in India at that time were part of the colonialist project whereas South Asians in the U.S. do not have that kind of power. Mukherjee's work in *Holder* resists orientalism and colonialism because it actually espouses an anti-racist strategy

Interestingly, despite the fact that most of the novel recounts Hannah's time in India, Mukherjee insists in an interview "this is not a book about India, but about the making of America and American national mythology" (*Jouvert* paragraph 96). Hannah is, after all, American and the text implies that her ability to assimilate in India comes from the fact that she is American. Martha and Sarah are English and therefore unable to assimilate in India. Because Hannah's husband, Gabriel Legge, becomes a pirate in India, the narrator, Beigh, associates him with America because she believes immigrants to America have the same dream. "Perhaps piracy on the Coromandel Coast . . . was the seed of the frontier dream, the circus dream, the immigrant dream of two centuries later" (*Holder* 165). The last two

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[80] Also, the theme of rebirth is not at odds with the religion that Mukherjee was raised in, Hinduism. As one critic has noted regarding *Jasmine*, "Both Jasmine and Mukherjee, Indian-born and Hindu, have been socialized in a culture that considers the transmigration of the human soul a very real possibility; human life, therefore, does not appear to them as a one-time event, with birth and death signaling the beginning and end of this singular occurrence" (Wickramagamage 192).

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pages of the novel place Hannah in American literary and political history. She returns from India to Salem where she lives with her illegitimate child "until her death in 1750 at the age of eighty" (*Holder* 284). The narrator tells the reader that the story she has read is in fact the true story of the woman in *The Scarlet Letter*. As readers, we are asked, "Who can blame Nathaniel Hawthorne for shying away from the real story of the brave Salem mother and her illegitimate daughter?" (*Holder* 284). And, of course, we cannot help but admit that Hawthorne could not have told this story in his earlier context when adultery was one thing but miscegenation quite another. Once the novel has been inserted into American literary history we read that Hannah's daughter "saw in her old age the birth of this country, an event she had spent a lifetime advocating, and suffering for" (*Holder* 284). Thus, *The Holder of the World* is connected with the very birth of America because its characters, Hannah and Jadav, have a daughter who spends her life fighting for American independence. This novel is in keeping with Mukherjee's previous work because of its close relationship with the idea of Americans as those people who assimilate to their surroundings. But it is also different because Mukherjee uses this idea of assimilation in the context of 17th century India as an anti-colonialist and anti-racist project. Thus, in *Holder*, Mukherjee uses the traditional idea of America in a new way that resists orientalism.

My main point is that Mukherjee's works about the U.S. accept and reflect American myths because by rooting herself and her writing in these traditions, Mukherjee gains legitimacy. The short stories in *Middleman* celebrate surviving through assimilation without questioning the orientalism of assimilation for immigrants. In *Jasmine*, assimilation is the transformation that the protagonist goes through to become Jane. Mukherjee is aware of the non-white immigrant's inability to transform outward appearance, but she does not critique it and therefore does not resist orientalism. But there is one way in which *Jasmine* does do

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some anti-orientalist work. Mukherjee's protagonist equates the farms of Iowa with those of the Punjab and, thus, refuses to "other" India for the sake of America. However, this is only one example of resistance to orientalism. In general, Jasmine's easy assimilation across race and class does not question the reasons why non-white immigrants remain in cultural ghettoes for so long. This lack of critique keeps *Jasmine* from resisting orientalism in a consistent way. In *Holder*, an othering process occurs when Mukherjee depicts the English as unable to assimilate to India. She reserves this ability to assimilate for her white American protagonist, Hannah. On the one hand, Mukherjee doesn't transform any American myths in *Holder*. On the other hand, by placing the American ideology of assimilation in the context of colonial India, Mukherjee critiques the orientalism of the English colonialists. Thus, Mukherjee's American work celebrates assimilation without critiquing it. However, when a white American assimilates in India, Mukherjee does manage to critique the orientalism of English colonialists.

Despite Mukherjee's anti-orientalism in *Holder*, the persistent problem of celebrating the American ideology of assimilation remains. Assimilation is orientalist because it promises non-white immigrants to the U.S. that they can and should do whatever it takes to transform themselves into Americans. Although physical transformations are impossible, immigrants are interpellated ideologically. One discourse that immigrants are expected to assimilate in America is individualism. Mukherjee appears to celebrate it simply because it is associated with America. But historically, the immigrants who came through Ellis Island or even the earliest white pioneers could not have survived without collective cooperation. When Jasmine cuts ties with communities of colour in order to pursue her goals individually she is assimilating. Thus, in her complete acceptance of assimilation, Mukherjee fails to critique the orientalism behind it.

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Ideological Shifts

In the previous three sections, I have shown a number of Mukherjee's ideological shifts as they coincide with allegiances to three countries and her ability to resist orientalism in her writing. The reason why I choose to discuss Mukherjee's works from each country she has lived in is because her American work needs to be understood in the context of her Canadian work, which needs to be understood in the context of her Indian work. In India, Mukherjee's class ideology leads her to produce work that is quite orientalist. The critic Craig Tapping finds that Mukherjee's rejection of Canada and immersion in the U.S. are both a response to the hostility she faced in Canada. "Mukherjee's prolonged examination of Canada and her embrace of America are ethnographic in that both reveal how the misrepresented 'other' responds, individually and communally, to the shame and defilement of an exclusion that is always more clearly understood and more fully recognized on the margins than it is by the practitioners of casual disregard at the centers of our national hegemonies" (Tapping 44). Mukherjee's critique of Canada often centres on its official multiculturalism, which "is a state sanctioned, state organized ideological affair" (Bannerji 27) and also part of Canadian nationalist ideology. This critique makes it possible for her to articulate her most anti-orientalist work. In the U.S., on the one hand, Mukherjee does not critique American assimilation nor does she relate its orientalism with the orientalism of Canadian multiculturalism. On the other hand, she does use American assimilation in colonial India to critique the colonialist project there. The result of this is anti-orientalist even though assimilation in the context of the U.S. is quite orientalist. Thus, if Mukherjee's work is placed in its context, it emerges as more complex than the blatant American nationalism that she is most often associated with. Even Mukherjee resists orientalism sometimes.

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But Mukherjee's struggle for legitimacy is always skewed by nationalism. As a result, her attempts to gain national acceptance in the U.S. have to do with comparing her fiction and novels in the American canon. According to Jonathan Arac, the American literary canon is different from other national literatures because of its hypercanonization of only a few works. "By hypercanonization I mean that a very few individual works monopolize curricular and critical attention: in fiction preeminently *The Scarlet Letter*, *Moby-Dick* [sic], and *Huckleberry Finn*" (Arac 133). These works are canonized as literature and taught, studied and compared with new writing. "Books published in the 1990s are praised for resembling *Huckleberry Finn* but not, I believe, any other single work of the later nineteenth century" (Arac 134). While one reviewer has compared Mukherjee's most recent novel *Leave it to Me* with *Huckleberry Finn*, Mukherjee herself compares *The Holder of the World* with *The Scarlet Letter*.[81] At this rate, it may be safe to assume that Mukherjee's next work of fiction will bear a striking resemblance to *Moby Dick*.

There are two main sets of reactions to Mukherjee's stance towards America. Those who are critical of her tend to bracket her "pro-immigration, let-it-go stance with those of some unsavory company" (Mukherjee, "Homelands" 77). Those who support her celebrate her work "as a bold statement of faith in the American experiment, warts and all" (77). In a recent essay, Mukherjee has written that she is dissatisfied with both of these reactions to her political stance. When she asks immigrants to let go of their past, she does not want to be in the company of conservative groups such as those who support the English-only

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[81] "The orphan plot is quintessentially American . . . A female . . . Huckleberry Finn, Devi Dee is one of a small but growing list of female protagonists who navigate through their plots mostly alone and under their own steam and emerge at the end triumphant to some degree, without parents or men deciding their fates . . . a novel of . . . postfeminist and postcanonical American narratology" (Friedman).

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Proposition 63 in California. And even though she is optimistic about the possibilities that America provides for immigrants, her faith in America is not so strong that she doesn't see any room for improvement.[82] What she wants, or what she says she wants in the essay, is for all the people in America to *accept* all the other people in America no matter what their relationship to the country of residence.

She provides four narratives or four ways of living in the U.S. She calls immigration "the act of adopting new citizenship, of going the full nine yards of transformation" ("Homelands" 71). According to Mukherjee, those who immigrate are those who transform themselves completely and, therefore, are totally included in the new society. She compares immigrants with expatriates and describes expatriation as "an act of sustained self-removal from one's native culture, balanced by a conscious resistance to total inclusion in the new host society" ("Homelands" 71). She distinguishes exile from expatriation by writing, "the comparative luxury of self-removal is replaced by harsh compulsion" (73) in exile. And lastly she describes repatriation as "a repopulation of formerly Spanish lands, formerly French lands, formerly Native American lands, which involves the undocumented movement of millions over borders that we think of as unviolable but which others have long considered mere extensions of their homeland" (83). She wants everyone living in the U.S. to accept everyone else living in the U.S. even if they have chosen to live differently. Such a politics is based on the individualism of American nationalism. The logic of the argument is based on the American myth of the power of the individual. Because individuals are so powerful in America, if each individual accepts every other individual, racism would end. The problem with Mukherjee's stance is that she doesn't realize that

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[82] Mukherjee's nationalism is readily available on the internet in the form of a photograph in which she can be seen wearing an American flag like a sari ("American Dreamer").

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racism and prejudice are systemic problems that need collective action to be solved. On the other hand, individualism can resist orientalism because stereotypes are based on the belief that groups of people are the same in some way. Individuality can subvert this type of thinking. Thus, even though Mukherjee's brand of American individualism does ignore systemic problems, individuality can resist orientalism.

Mukherjee's previous writing, fiction and nonfiction, has reprimanded people who choose expatriation or those who consciously resist total inclusion in the new society instead of immigration. For instance, in 1988 she wrote "I've come to see expatriation as the great temptation, even the enemy" ("Immigrant Writing" 28). When in 1997 she wrote, "I have no respect for these expatriate fence-straddlers" ("Beyond" 137), it seemed as if her attitude towards those who choose expatriation hadn't really changed during the nine years between the first and second quotation. But in "Imagining Homelands," which is written in 1999, only two years after the second quotation, it seems that Mukherjee has made an attempt to accept the choices of expatriates and others who are different from her. She writes, "we must find a way of integrating all four modes of entry into our narrative of Americanism" (84). This stance, while still appealing to a certain amount of nationalism in its attempt to gain legitimation for all residents, alien and undocumented alike, is definitely more accepting of different points of view in the diaspora.

In fact, she uses the word *accept* many times nearing the end of her essay as a description of what she must do and of what every American individual needs to do. "I must be prepared to accept the validity of my sister Mira's narrative of expatriation and those of others like her" (85). She goes on to insist that the discourse of exiles along with the minority status of the U.S. must also be acceptable. "We must be prepared to accept the bitter, exiled discourse," "we must understand, and truly accept, that the United States for all

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its power is only a minority state" and "it must understand that part of its core is the acceptance of the cruel fact of its minority status" (86). Thus, it seems that Mukherjee is finally attempting to accept the diversity of choices open to the diaspora in the U.S. This stance is similar to the idea that we should 'live and let live' and depends on individualism in so far as it relies on the power of the individual to create peace. The problem, however, is not about individuals; it is about institutions and group relations. Ironically, even though Mukherjee advocates this stance, unfortunately, she is unable to "accept" all four narratives equally.

As in her previous writings she feels it necessary to make immigration the superior choice. Even though she wants to accept expatriation, she writes of those who choose it, "I grieve for them far more than I resent them" (85). Mukherjee's grief, here, is quite condescending. Despite the inclusive tones of the essay, it still insists that immigration or assimilation is the best way to live. Her lesson, therefore, is not to live in diaspora at all. To live in diaspora is to feel allegiances to more than one nation, to negotiate the contradictions that this situation sometimes leads to. As I have shown in each of the preceding sections on India, Canada and the U.S., Mukherjee consistently avoids multiple nationalisms and loyalties as well as the rootlessness of diaspora by grounding her work in myths and ideas about each of these countries. She resists orientalism less in India because of her dominant position there and most vociferously in Canada because of her dominated position there. In the U.S., her acceptance of American assimilation, which leads to her belief in the American dream (the myth of a classless society) and individualism, places her in the position of the dominant. This lessens the force of her critique of orientalism because she doesn't see that assimilation is orientalist.

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By arguing against exile and expatriation, Mukherjee is giving her argument and her books more legitimacy in mainstream American discourse because her American work reflects the ideology of an interpellated American subject. She assimilates and believes the dominant American myths regarding moving westward, the American dream, and individualism. Unfortunately, assimilation is orientalist because it is based on the self-other dichotomy. It is the other that needs to assimilate, not the self. Mukherjee's work is filled with comparisons that essentialize. She valorizes the U.S. by demonizing Canada, England and sometimes India. She doesn't question the basic problems with nationalism that lead her to think in this way in the first place.

In the next chapter, I will show how Sara Suleri lets go of allegiances of all kinds – to countries and categories – in order to resist orientalism more successfully. Whereas the fiction of Bharati Mukherjee insists on adding oneself to a nation, the United States, Suleri steers clear of such exacting claims and even provides a critique of such thinking. Suleri's stance appears to question Mukherjee's over reliance on the category of nation to define subjectivity. Another difference between Mukherjee and Suleri lies in their relationship to history. Whereas Mukherjee's subjectivities cut themselves off from or try to minimize the past, Suleri insists that one cannot be free of history. Lastly, whereas Mukherjee's protagonists divest themselves of community concerns as they move towards American individualism, Suleri shows how the individual is related to the community. Suleri's ability to question nationalism as well as all categories – including gender – leads her to resist orientalism in a much more consistent way.

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V

Critic of All Categories: Sara Suleri

One of the key differences between *Meatless Days* and the texts discussed in the four previous chapters is that while mainstream, commercial presses published them for the mass market, *Meatless Days* was published by a university press for a more academic audience. As a result, it has more legitimacy based on cultural capital than the fiction of Badami, Narayan and Mukherjee. I would like to argue that Sara Suleri's critique of all categories in her exploration of diasporic subjectivity is central to the cultural capital that this book accrues. Suleri questions categories as diverse as women, body, and nation while insisting on a relational subjectivity that is positioned at the intersections of the categories it questions.

Another difference between the books I've already discussed and Suleri's *Meatless Days* is that this literary work is not fiction but autobiography. It consists of nine stories in which Suleri recalls her life with her family in Pakistan and her subsequent move to the United States. Autobiographical subjectivities sometimes carry more weight than fictional subjectivities, especially outside literary circles. As a literary critic, however, I will read Suleri's text using the same tools I used for fiction to determine the extent to which Suleri resists orientalism as she expands and relocates conventional western notions of the autobiographical subject.

In this chapter, I argue that Suleri combats orientalism by constructing relational subjectivities that defy easy binaries. First, I find that Suleri emphasizes the notion that the individual woman is enmeshed in communities of others. In addition, she questions the category women itself. According to Suleri, gender must be accounted for in relation to the material contexts of age, class and nation. In the section entitled "Histories, Natives and

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Practices," I discuss the ways in which Suleri resists orientalism by explaining her relationship to marginalized history and by undoing the category native. Even though she insists that people cannot be separated from their contexts, such things as culture should not solely define them. Suleri suggests the importance of not creating hierarchies between one's gender, nation, history or practice. In accordance with her mother's lessons, she relates who people are to what they do. The section entitled "Fluid Bodies and Incoherent Voices," works against orientalism by showing that people, their bodies, voices and food are all unstable. "Mind and Body" is a section that discusses Suleri's sister's hyper-embodiment and her father's disembodiment in order to describe relationality within and between people and ideas. Suleri's autobiographical subjectivity relates the body with the mind, the individual with the community and gender with nation without creating hierarchies. In "Diaspora and Nation," Suleri shows the similarities between her father's nationalism and orientalism. She then goes on to defend her choice of diaspora as an anti-orientalist choice. Suleri ends her autobiography by suggesting that her home, the place where she lives, is in relation to her loved ones, in her writing about those loved ones. Thus, her autobiography, itself, is her home. In the final section, I end with a reading of the cover photograph of *Meatless Days* to show how it too represents a relational subjectivity. By relating women to communities, gender to nation, native to foreigner and theory to practice, Suleri defies and critiques the boundaries around all these categories and, in so doing, extends and disperses the limits of autobiography.

Relational Subjectivities

In this section, I begin by showing that the traditional western autobiographical subject can be unitary and colonizing. I go on to illustrate that Suleri avoids this by constructing a relational subjectivity, one that is not an individual but exists in relation to

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others. Suleri shows that even the concept of woman is not stable because it is contextual. I will end this section with a discussion of the way in which, even though Suleri's book rejects the category women, her subjectivities do not lack agency.

According to Julia Watson and Sidonie Smith, the traditional autobiographical "I" is a universal, rational, individual. Autobiography, Watson writes, "entwines the definition of the human being in a web of privileged characteristics. Despite their myriad differences . . . all 'I's are rational, agentive, unitary. Thus the 'I' becomes 'Man' (xvii). This Man is then associated with the colonizer. Watson writes, "Where Western eyes see Man as a unique individual rather than a member of a collectivity of race or nation, of sex or sexual preference, Western eyes see the colonized as an amorphous, generalized collectivity" (Watson xvii). Obviously, when a non-western woman of colour, like Sara Suleri, writes her autobiography, which is set in a former British colony, she runs the risk of succumbing to the unitary, colonizer status of her autobiographical subject. On the one hand, she will be empowered by it. On the other hand, if she writes a traditional autobiography, she may write like a colonizer. Watson and Smith, therefore, warn that "the power of cultural forms to recolonize peoples cannot be underestimated . . . [T]he relationship of the colonized subject to autobiographical inscription is indeed troubled" (Watson xxi). In what follows, I will show that Suleri avoids these potential problems by creating a relational subjectivity. Suleri's autobiography is relational because she chooses not to create a hierarchy where the individual is more important than the community.

In their introduction to *Life/Lines: Theorizing Women's Autobiography*, Bella Brodzki and Celeste Schenck write, "self-definition in relation to significant others is the most pervasive characteristic of the female autobiography" (Brodzki 8). While this point can be disputed, it

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certainly seems to be true for *Meatless Days*.[83] Suleri illustrates how individual women are enmeshed in communities by the very first sentence of the very first story of this book. She writes, "Leaving Pakistan was, of course, tantamount to giving up the company of women" (1). As readers, we are asked to associate Suleri's Pakistan with communities of women. She goes on to describe the company of women she grew up with in Pakistan. The house she was raised in contained her sisters, her mother and her grandmother. Each had a place in the community of her family regardless of age and when Suleri leaves Pakistan she gives up their company because they no longer share a roof with her. She remembers them as an absence because she implies that the category women does not exist in Pakistan. She had a community of people who were so different from each other, that they could not be grouped together under the category women. Suleri writes, "Now I live in New Haven and feel quite happy with my life. I miss, of course, the absence of women and grow increasingly nostalgic for a world where the modulations of age are as recognized and welcomed as the shift from season into season" (19). Whereas in the U.S. women are present but not the recognition of aging, in Pakistan women are absent but aging is expected and welcomed. Thus, Suleri associates herself with a community that includes a complex understanding of women best characterized as an absence, foregrounding the community rather than the individual.[84]

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[83] It is important to note that despite the fact that the narrator is known through others or in relation to others, the narrator is also quick to complicate the possibility of knowing others. As Linda Warley has aptly pointed out, "the autobiography emphasizes just how difficult it is to know others – even those closest to us – and to understand what the precise terms of those relationships are" (115).

[84] Inderpal Grewal has written convincingly that if Suleri rejects the category women, she also rejects women's collective struggles. "The danger of rejecting the term 'women,' besides that of eliding the effects of modernity, is that of foreclosing feminist struggles that are increasingly transnational in this interconnected world of diasporic populations and multinational corporations" ("Autobiographic" 243). But rejecting the category women does not mean that Suleri rejects companies of women. In

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Another way in which Suleri shows us that individuals are enmeshed in communities is by the very structure of her autobiography. Suleri's life story cannot be read except in relation to the stories of the others in her life. Thus, each story focuses on a different person in the narrator's life. We are led to believe that others define her. *Meatless Days* contains stories devoted to Suleri's friends, lovers, siblings, father and mother. Her "I" is found within their stories. One critic writes that even the author is not the protagonist of this autobiography. "*Meatless Days* constructs postcolonial subjectivity almost exclusively by speaking about other people; Suleri is not her tale's protagonist" (Lovesey 43). Moreover, the photograph on the front cover is not of Suleri but of her sister, Ifat, and Ifat's daughter. At one point in the story about Ifat, Sara compares a friend of hers, Richard, to her sister. She means it as a compliment but he is uncomfortable. She writes, "naming her put the unpronounceability of my life between us in a way that gave him unease: he did not wish to see me framed by family just then but to picture me alone instead and isolate me in his gaze" (137-8). Suleri's life is unpronounceable without her relation to others, especially her family.

Since its publication, literary critics have foregrounded the narrator's connections with others by relying on certain characters in the book to provide insight into the narrator. For instance, Linda Warley focuses on the grandmother and the mother.

> Although all of the tales represent the narrator's attempt to come to understanding through narration, two tales in particular are central to the issue of how the 'I' is known or not known in relation to an 'other.' The tales that focus on Dadi and the mother seem to frame the text, and they could

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my opinion, Suleri's rejection of women allows the companies of women to acknowledge their different material contexts while maintaining the idea of a collectivity.

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> be understood as the narrator's examination of her split identity as a woman of mixed race. Dadi is the devout, traditional Muslim woman; her mother is the abstracted, intellectual European woman. Both are potential female models. (Warley 116)

Samir Dayal, on the other hand, focuses solely on the mother. "Everything she tells us about Mair Jones is also an oblique reference to Suleri's own postcolonial and diasporic situation in the West, an inversion and displacement of her mother's own situation" (Dayal 252).[85] Oliver Lovesey points to the importance of the grandmother, mother, and sister but agrees with Dayal that the mother is the most important of all. Again, each of these critics is forced to turn to Suleri's family members to get a sense of the author herself. Lovesey writes, "The creative heritage of *Meatless Days* leads from the wily, eccentric Dadi and Suleri's Welsh-Pakistani mother to the resplendent Ifat. Suleri writes through these women and particularly her mother, lost on the divide of West and East and ignored in her husband's unrequited romance with national history" (Lovesey 45). All of the critics of *Meatless Days* focus on the mother, Mair, to make their points about the protagonist. The reason for this is that Sara sees her mother as a role model giving her insight on how she can live her life as a member of a minority. I have chosen Mair and Ifat as the characters in *Meatless Days* that are most crucial to understanding the protagonist. Whereas Sara attempts to emulate her mother, she sees her sister as someone who refuses to live as a minority. Ifat tries to immerse herself in the nation of Pakistan and Suleri implies that this is the real reason for her tragedy.

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[85] Grewal points to the asymmetry of this inversion when she writes that Suleri, "unlike her mother, does not occupy the position of a gendered colonizing subject in a postcolonial state" ("Autobiographic" 247).

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The photograph of Ifat on the cover of *Meatless Days* and its textual elaboration within the covers echo with Sara's description of her mother. Both Sara's mother and the woman in the photograph could be described as distracted. Sara describes her mother's response to her students' unthinking adulation and devotion to her as an absent smile and a gesture of distraction. "Mamma . . . would smile a little absently at them, concealing her annoyance in something else, some slight gesture of vagueness or distraction" (Suleri 156). In the photograph, Ifat is looking down and away but in the book Sara's mother is described in the same way responding to Ifat. "Then a glance crossed my mother's face, a look between a slight smile and a quick rejection of the eloquent response, like a woman looking down and then away" (Suleri 16). Furthermore, Ifat looks as if she is trying to recede from her child just as Sara insists that her mother receded: "she let something of her influence imperceptibly recede" (Suleri 10). Thus, this photograph of Ifat contains glimpses of the mother. Because this autobiographical work is inherently relational, these overlaps between Sara's mother and sister, women who are otherwise very different from each other, are not out of place. They point to contradictions that would otherwise be lost in a linear narrative of the development of a unitary self. Thus, *Meatless Days* is an elegy to both Ifat and the mother, both of whom have died at the time of the writing of the book. Suleri's text suggests that all elegies are autobiographical because the mournful lamentations describe the loss suffered by the living. The adult woman's body on the cover of this autobiography represents subjectivity that is divided because it is relational. Sara cannot be read without Ifat and Mair.

At the end of the first story, Suleri makes a startling statement. She writes, "there are no women in third world" (20). We are startled because Suleri presents her life in relation to many women who all live in the third world. In fact, the whole story that precedes this

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statement is filled with vivid images of the company of women Suleri feels she has left behind in Pakistan.[86] She even keeps them in mind as she makes this statement. A student has asked her why she doesn't have equal numbers of women writers on her syllabus for third world writing. Suleri writes, "I look up, the horse's mouth, a foolish thing to be. Unequal images battle in my mind for precedence – there's imperial Ifat, there's Mamma in the garden, and Halima the cleaning woman is there too, there's uncanny Dadi with her goat. Against all my own odds I know what I must say. Because, I'll answer slowly, there are no women in the third world" (20). Suleri names four women of different ages and different classes but refuses to place them in the category women. She implies that people are so different from each other – gender intersects with so many other factors such as age, class and nation – that gender alone reveals very little about them.[87]

In an interview she gave in Pakistan to the magazine *Newsline*, Suleri points to the difference that context can make to the concept of woman. Suleri tries to explain the differences she sees between Pakistani women and American women. She says:

> I've always had deep admiration for women in Pakistan. Not because I'm a simplistic biological feminist; I'm not, I don't

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[86] Dayal deals with this apparent paradox by finding that, in Pakistan, there are no women in the public sphere but companies of women in the private sphere. "In the public sphere female subjectivity is an empty category, but in the private sphere women are enabled to enter into community *among themselves*, as a vital collectivity" (255). I think Suleri is definitely focusing on the collective in *Meatless Days*. But I don't think this collective is necessarily private. Sara performs plays in public, her mother teaches in public and Ifat publicly defends Sara when she is harassed in public.

[87] Sangeeta Ray's comments on this statement are most informative. "Perhaps Suleri wishes us to examine our desire for easy ideological categories; perhaps the simple representation of so called third-world women by an inclusion of names and texts of certain women writers allows us to leave the binary division of the world into first and third intact; perhaps the important differences between third-world cultures and the women inhabiting those spaces are collapsed for a facile incorporation of other cultures in a premature celebration of the liberal pluralist agenda of multicultural education. The larger questions still remain unanswered. We need to pay close attention to our particular social locations and critique the tendency to indulge in a simple counting of the categories" (55).

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> prefer one gender to the other. But I do find the women here [in Pakistan] have a certain inherent dignity in coping with very difficult restraints without becoming hysterical and strident about it. One of the annoyances about living in the States today – particularly in the academic field – is how pietistic women are about themselves, about oppression. Over here [in Pakistan] there is less talk about oppression but you have more, very quiet, very strong ways of dealing with it. (Interview 155)

Even though I do not agree with Suleri's homogenization and dismissal of western feminists, her statement here is useful for its attempt to contextualize feminism in disparate locations. Again, Suleri appears to be pointing to the importance of context to the concept of woman. It is possible that the Pakistani context restricts talk about oppression and that this is reflected in Pakistani women who, perhaps, talk less. However, since one does not need to talk about something in order to act, obviously Suleri feels that Pakistani women still act with strength when faced with oppression. The implication of Suleri's discussion of gender is that women are so different depending on context that the category women needs to be critiqued.

Some years ago, regarding the Rani of Sirmur and by extension, the subaltern, Gayatri Spivak wrote something similar to what Suleri has written. She wrote, "Between patriarchy and imperialism, subject-constitution and object-formation, the figure of the woman disappears, not into a pristine nothingness, but into a violent shuttling that is the displaced figuration of the 'third-world woman" caught between tradition and

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modernization, culturalism and development" (*A Critique* 304)[88]. According to Spivak, there are no women in the third world because they disappear into the cracks between indigenous patriarchy and foreign imperialism. Spivak shows that women cannot be separated from the material conditions of their social and political context. If the social and political context of Pakistan precludes recognition of gender and age in exactly the same way as in the U.S., this does not mean that oppositional politics are also absent in Pakistan. Suleri critiques not only categories but also the orientalism that assumes that western modes of resistance – i.e. modes that assume collectivities based on gender – are the most effective.

Since the category women is enmeshed in the categories of ethnicity and nation, there is no such thing as a woman removed from her context. We cannot talk about women in the first world and women in the third world as if the category women remains the same in each of these contexts. As Chandra Mohanty reminds us, "gender and race are *relational* terms: they foreground a relationship (and often a hierarchy) between races and genders. To define feminism purely in gendered terms assumes that our consciousness of being 'women' has nothing to do with race, class, nation, or sexuality, just with gender" ("Introduction" 13). Like Mohanty, Suleri suggests that culture, among other things, reframes gender issues. For instance, when she writes about Pakistan, she writes that her "reference is to a place where

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[88] The first version of this statement was published in 1985 in an essay entitled "The Rani of Sirmur," where the line reads, "Between patriarchal subject-formation and imperialist object-constitution, it is the dubious place of the free will of the sexed subject as female that is successfully effaced" (144). The second version was published in 1988 in "Can the Subaltern Speak?" and is closer to her latest formulation of this sentence. "Between patriarchy and imperialism, subject-constitution and object-formation, the figure of the woman disappears, not into a pristine nothingness, but into a violent shuttling which is the displaced figuration of the 'third-world woman' caught between tradition and modernization" (306). Even though the newest version is published in 1999, it is safe to assume that Suleri would have read it before she published *Meatless Days*.

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the concept of woman was not really part of an available vocabulary:[89] we were too busy for that, just living, and conducting precise negotiations with what it meant to be a sister or a child or a wife or a mother or a servant" (Suleri 1).[90] Thus, in this autobiography the place reframes the concept of woman.

Since orientalism is based on fixed categories of difference where the orient is figured as eternally more effeminate than the west and oriental women as doubly feminized in their passivity and inability to save themselves, Suleri's discussion of gender is quite useful in working against it. As Dayal has pointed out, Suleri denaturalizes all categories of difference. He writes, "Suleri's book calculatedly opens with a problematization of 'speaking as' – speaking as a woman, as a Pakistani, as a woman of a certain class, and now as a diasporic. The denaturalization of the category woman is everywhere explicit" (Dayal 254). This process of denaturalization subverts both orientalist notions of the third world as

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[89] Although I have not discussed the invisibility of class in this narrative, I agree with Susan Koshy that it should not have been ignored. "To what extent the seeming non-availability of a vocabulary of woman is a product of the class position and privilege of her family circumstances remains unconsidered in *Meatless Days*. Such questions might have fruitfully opened her own fraught complicities in enunciating a deconstructive statement such as 'there are no women in the Third World'" ("Mother-Country" 53).

[90] Grewal has critiqued Suleri's use of specifically patriarchal roles for women to resist the category women. "Thus, even while it is important to critique an ahistorical category of 'woman,' it is just as problematic to seek authentic versions of women's locations within societies. The reaction against the modernist discourse of 'woman' is not to revert to its Other 'traditional roles,' but to delineate the problematics of both these forms of female gender construction and the complex ways in which they intersect. In staying within the poles of tradition and modernity, Suleri's text reaffirms the power of modernist discourses" ("Autobiographic" 244). While I take Grewal's criticism seriously, I would insist that Suleri does not stay within these two poles because she does not marry, she does not have children, she leaves her father rather than remain the dutiful daughter and does not adopt her sister's children to fulfill her obligations to Ifat.

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woman and notions of the third world woman as passive.[91] Without the category women such generalizations become impossible.[92]

Inderpal Grewal argues that without this category oppositional practices also become impossible. "*Meatless Days*, therefore, may seem an exemplary text of postmodernism in its rejection of the unitary subject and its delineation of a diasporic, multiple, incomplete subjectivity. Yet it disquiets feminist readers, especially those who seek to make postmodern subjectivities empowering for women. Such readers are disturbed by a text that seems to reject all feminist practices, including those by women of color in the United States, and that suggests, therefore, that only a single, modernizing, and hegemonizing feminism exists" ("Autobiographic" 242). I would argue that Suleri's stance is anti-orientalist, non-hegemonic and feminist. Not all feminist practices have to be based on the category women usefully deployed in a hegemonic way. Even Grewal implies that non-hegemonizing feminisms exist. In fact, Grewal suggests that Suleri doesn't acknowledge these feminisms when she rejects the category women. However, I can't think of a better way to construct a non-hegemonizing practice without first rejecting all the categories that are responsible for hegemonies. Suleri's work may not provide a "full assault" (Inderpal Grewal, "Autobiographic" 247) on orientalism and sexism, but it does reject the categories that these discourses are based on. This rejection is oppositional and feminist. Moreover, Susan Koshy refers to the agency depicted in *Meatless Days* as one of accommodation rather than mastery ("Mother-Country" 50). In a footnote she explains, "Suleri's emphasis on

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[91] Dayal elsewhere notes, "Suleri mocks the notion that the Eastern woman is unthinkingly sensual; the Suleri women are formidably intellectual, though hardly incapable of passion" (263).

[92] Lovesey finds the statement "there are no women in the third world" to be anti-orientalist. "This formulation undercuts Eurocentric feminism and third worldism and acknowledges the location of

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accommodation is grounded in the historical specificities of migration and war as well [*sic*] the psychic dislocations resulting from the sudden deaths of her mother and sister. It is crucial to recognize the specificities of the narrative of accommodation as a discourse of survival in order to resist its inscription as Oriental passivity or fatalism" ("Mother-Country" 59). Koshy's excellent analysis shows not only that Suleri's work is anti-orientalist but also that Suleri's notion of agency must be contextualized. This is why Suleri's oppositional agency is based on accommodation rather than a full assault. I am convinced that such an agency is also useful.

Histories, Natives and Practices

In this section, I will show that Suleri resists orientalism in two important ways. First, Suleri illustrates that the concept of native is a false concept. There is simply no such person as a native who knows everything about a culture or nation. This is both anti-orientalist and anti-essentialist. Second, Suleri shows that instead of being defined by issues of nativity, subjectivity is defined by one's history and one's practices. This combination of history and work grounds subjectivity in its material context and fights orientalism.

One of the many epiphanies in this book occurs when Sara realizes the relation between herself and history. No matter how far she runs away from history or at least her father's version of Pakistan's history, she is still connected to it. The critic Silvia Caporale Bizzini finds that history is important to the way in which Sara relates to others. "The presence of history in the text is constant without being overwhelming; it is there because it represents the limits within which Sara moves and relates to other people" (Bizzini 60). On her return to the U.S. from Pakistan after her sister's death, she faces the fact that she can

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the subaltern in a country founded on Islamic nationhood, and it also problematizes the positioning of gendered postcolonial subjectivity given the colonial feminization of the exotic Orient" (44).

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never completely sever herself from her past history. She writes, "It was only then that I became historical, a creature gravely ready to admit that significance did not sit upon someone else's table like a magazine to which one could or could not subscribe" (127). The reason she initially thinks she can opt out of history is because her father's relationship to history is so all consuming. "I sometimes wished that he were less competent, ready to become instead a sager, quieter soul: but how could that happen when history, dressed as the *Pakistan Times*, was waiting for him, beckoning him into the longest romance of his life?" (119-120) Z. A. Suleri's history is not only continually demanding of the time and energy needed to run a newspaper, but also insistent upon complete faithfulness to the nation of Pakistan.[93] Sara runs from history because she thinks it is comprised only of newspapers and nationalism.[94] What she realizes is that this is her father's version of history and it is only one version. Hers is different but as inescapable for her as his was for him.

She must make herself historical even though she knows it will be impossible to explain to her father "who needed badly to retain his version as the only form of history" (127). The writing of *Meatless Days* is one way in which she makes herself historical, differentiating her history from her father's in order to follow her mother's example. Sara distinguishes between each parent's relationship with history. "He made each front page fit into his control of the aesthetic of his history. My mother, however, let history seep, so that, miraculously, she had no language in which to locate its functioning but held it rather as a

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[93] According to Dayal, Pip's faithfulness to Pakistan could have been represented with more kindness. "The father's nationalism is rather too blithely deprecated; here, the reader might well feel, Suleri takes too much the metropolitan, Western perspective on the Third World. From that perspective, Third World nationalism has only too often, and sometimes too hastily, been ridiculed" (Dayal 260).

[94] Ray refers to Pip's history as one of many "superficial narratives of dominant history" (54).

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distracted manner sheathed about her face, a scarf" (168).[95] Sara's mother allows history to seep rather than dominate and Suleri's autobiography also avoids domination.[96]

Whereas her father's history is consumed with having majority status within a nation, Suleri writes her history in defense of her choice to give up that privilege.[97] The connection between her father's history and orientalism lies in the privileging of a dominant self against a minoritized other.[98] Because her father privileges the majority, he is an orientalist engaged in defining Pakistan against its others. Suleri's history is a response to and a rejection of her father's orientalist desire to privilege the dominant. Thus, Suleri's father cannot accept her life in the U.S. as a minority. As Koshy points out, " Since his life's work, the struggle for Pakistan, was founded on the repudiation of minority status for Muslims within a unified India, Sara's voluntary assumption of marginality within someone else's history is galling to him" ("Mother-Country" 54). As an orientalist, Sara's father believes not only in the privilege of the majority, but also in nationhood, which is based on exclusions. Her history is a rejection of this privilege because she remembers the costs of Muslim and Pakistani nationhood in 1947[99] and in 1971. Suleri is anti-orientalist in that she refuses the privilege of

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[95] Regarding this passage, Birgit Krückels writes, "Sara's mother appears to stand in more immediate relation to history than her husband precisely because she does not distance herself from it by talking about it. This immediacy is illustrated in the image of a scarf that is close to her body" (180). I agree that Sara's mother has a more immediate relation to history that is not dominating.

[96] Lovesey similarly connects Suleri's history with her mother's when he writes, "memory is linked inextricably with history and the idea of nation conceived as part of a matrilineal heritage" (46).

[97] Grewal also points to Suleri's decision not to be dominant but equates this decision with an inability to be oppositional. I am convinced that Suleri is oppositional without being dominant. "In *Meatless Days*, the writing of history via the memoir can be done from the margins, from an 'author' whose location in the United States as a Pakistani woman and an academic prevents her from seeking or attaining a dominant or oppositional subject position" ("Autobiographic" 242).

[98] For the dominant Muslim majority in Pakistan, this other was Hindu in 1947 and Bengali in 1971.

[99] Suleri writes that she wishes her father could have witnessed the cost of partition. "Today I often regret that he was not in Pakistan at the time of the partition, to witness those bewildered streams of people pouring over one brand-new border into another, hurting as they ran. It was extravagant, history's wrenching price: farmers, villagers, living in some other world, one day awoke to find they no longer inhabited familiar homes but that most modern thing, a Muslim or a Hindu nation" (116).

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dominant majority status. She refuses to make someone else an other to her dominant self. Her stance is effective because it valorizes feeling foreign as a minority rather than the familiarity of the majority. Her history, a history that is in keeping with her mother's history, plays just as important a role in context as nation does.

Suleri's autobiography relates individuals to communities and puts people in the context of their cultures and histories showing how relational all of these categories are. We realize that women are different depending on their contexts. But *Meatless Days* also keeps us from making the mistake of defining people by their cultural contexts alone. Suleri makes a point of critiquing the category native to avoid this. She destabilizes[100] the notion of authenticity by revealing that even the native is not always privy to all the information about a culture. For instance, in the second story, Suleri relates an anecdote in which the narrator realizes that *kapura*, a food that she has grown up eating and has always thought are sweetmeats, are actually testicles.[101] At first she can't believe that her nativity is even in question. She writes, "Natives should always be natives, exactly what they are, and I felt irked to be so probed around the issue of my own nativity" (22). Even though natives are supposed to have access to such knowledge and even though she considers herself a native of Pakistan, she had to be told this information many years later and she realizes that she was wrong. As Warley writes, "the fact that *kapura* are goat's testicles is not as significant as the narrator's attempts to uncover the origins of her assumptions about food and the long personal history that she has with it. The text records ways of coming to knowledge; it does

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[100] Grewal also finds that "Suleri's text reveals that instability is an intrinsic aspect of autobiographic representations" ("Autobiographic" 241). She, too, points to the metaphor of the *kapura* to make this point.

[101] Lovesey focuses on the transformation of the sweetbreads into testicles rather than on the artificiality of the concept of native. Thus, his analysis concludes that the parable ends up "anticipating the transformation of personal and national discourses in *Meatless Days*" (47).

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not assert being in knowledge" (114-5). Undoing the category native works against orientalism because, as I have shown in chapter three, the authentic native is crucial to orientalism.[102] All of the assumptions of orientalism are based on the native as different from the non-native because she has authentic knowledge of her native culture. Without this knowledge, without the binary that separates native from non-native, orientalism cannot function. Even though cultural context defines people to a certain extent, it alone is not responsible for identity. Suleri, thus, subverts the most basic claim of orientalism.

Lastly, Suleri's autobiography ends with a discussion of how one's work or profession can define one's self. Sara realizes that just as one must relate the self to others and to culture and to history, one must also relate people to what they do. She believes that her mother's relationship with history makes it possible for her to become her work. "We, her children, somehow must have sensed that she intended to become herself in every available manner, be one with her own history, her dust, in a way that made us just a moment in her successive transformation" (168). The reason Sara believes this is that her mother made it impossible to distinguish between who she was and what she did. Sara's mother is an English professor at the Punjab University in Lahore. Suleri writes, "Whenever was there such a perfect match . . . between teacher and the task? Task and teacher seemed wedded as a voice marries thought" (153). There seems to be no way to distinguish between Sara's mother and her lessons. And so Suleri writes, "Mamma, is it fair that you have reached a point where you no longer bother to differentiate between what the world imagines you must be and what you are?" (169). Sara may be irked but her mother does not

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[102] The critic Anja Oed similarly finds Suleri's anecdote about the *kapura* to be subversive. "In its naïveté, it echoes western discourses that homogenize the 'Native' into a monolithic figure; in its epistemological insistence it ironizes undifferentiated claims to native authenticity, thus effectively subverting either trend" (Oed 193).

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feel the need to make this distinction because she is what she teaches, she practices what she preaches.[103] Sara realizes that her mother knew how to be a responsible teacher and by extension a responsible person. Unlike Sara's father, who forces his will on everything and everyone around him, Sara's mother simply becomes her history and her work. Thus, she provides an alternative to Sara's father's orientalist and hegemonic ways.

Suleri's notion of self in this autobiography is in keeping with Spivak's description of deconstruction. According to Spivak, "deconstruction suggests that there is no absolute justification of *any* position" (*Post-colonial* 104). And Suleri's project seems to echo this line of thinking. We cannot justify a sense of self that creates a hierarchy among its categories. Gender cannot outweigh nation, which cannot outweigh history, which cannot outweigh what we practice from day to day. By writing a relational autobiography, Suleri is able to destabilize absolute positions of all kinds and complicate the ways in which we define selves. Suleri works against orientalism by complicating the absolute dichotomy of east and west. Her attention to the intersections of various categories allows her to specify contexts in multiply layered ways.

Fluid Bodies and Incoherent Voices

In this section, I will show how Suleri destabilizes orientalist essentialisms by emphasizing the fluidity and incoherence of people, their bodies, their food and their voices. First, Suleri explores the fluid properties of her grandmother and brother's bodies. Then she

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[103] Rather than interpret this as a way to practice what you preach, Grewal interprets it as a way to free yourself from the expectations of others who may want to possess you. As a result, her conclusions are less positive than mine are. "It is suggested that she refines and improves her sense of self so that she loses interest in possession or belonging, no longer living according to the gaze of others, thus freeing herself from expectations, and therefore wishing no longer to 'bother to differentiate between what the world imagines you must be, and what you are'" ("Autobiographic" 246).

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shows the folly of expecting food to remain stable. Lastly, she connects the incoherence of her own story-telling voice with a portion of her mother's body.

In the story "Excellent Things in Women," Suleri destabilizes the body by discussing the fluidity of the burnt bodies of both Dadi and her brother, Irfan. Whereas one would expect a stable body that does not change before one's eyes, Suleri describes the body's mutability when she describes the bodies of Dadi and Irfan. When boiling hot water is dropped on to Irfan's lap, he is described as jumping "figuratively and literally, right out of his skin" (11). The word figuratively is used because he is frightened and the word literally is used because the burnt skin comes right off his body. Dadi is described as burning herself while trying to make tea in the middle of the night: "we discovered that Dadi's torso had been almost consumed and little recognizable remained from collarbone to groin" (14). When Dadi insists that Sara change her dressings daily, she writes, "Thus developed my great intimacy with the fluid properties of human flesh" (14). And so it did; the body in this autobiography is fluid rather than stable.

Not only are the bodies fluid in *Meatless Days*, but so is the food those bodies ingest. In the eponymously entitled "Meatless Days," Suleri tells stories about foods that refuse to meet expectations and are just as fluid and difficult to categorize as subjectivities and bodies.[104]

> Items of security – such as flour or butter or cigarettes or tea – were always vanishing . . . a crow had drowned in the water tank on the roof, so for a week we had been drinking dead-

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[104] In fact, Suleri describes the chapter as a parable about the transformations of food. "Am I wrong, then, to say that my parable has to do with nothing less than the imaginative extravagance of food and all the transmogrifications of which it is capable?" (34)

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> crow water . . . the milkman had accidentally diluted our supply of milk with paraffin instead of water; and those were not pistachios, at all, in a tub of Hico's green ice cream . . . I can understand it, the fear that food will not stay discrete but will instead defy our catergories of expectation in what can only be described as a manner of extreme belligerence. (Suleri 29)

Suleri questions the authenticity of everything, including food. She questions the whole notion of expecting people, bodies and food to remain within the bounds of their "name and nature" (22). For instance, Ramzan, the Muslim month of fasting, always surprises the Suleri family. "Ramzan, a lunar thing, never arrives at the same point of time each year, coming instead with an aura of slight and pleasing dislocation" (29). One can guess when the moon will be sighted but one cannot know exactly when someone will actually see it. The month of Ramzan does not officially begin until someone physically sees the moon in the sky. Depending on cloudy weather, the moon defies expectation as does the month of fasting.

The destabilization of food is then linked to her autobiographical mode of storytelling. "Meatless Days" seems to flow from anecdote to anecdote and bits and pieces of stories often do not cohere. For instance, it is difficult to determine what the births of Sara's two younger siblings and her younger brother Irfan's love for birds and her friend Tom's large body have to do with *kapura* and kidney and Ramzan and meatless days. The latter are associated with food but the former are anecdotes that appear to digress far from her topic. "Perhaps I should have been able to bring those bits together, but such a

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narrative was not available to me, not after what I knew of storytelling (37).[105] What she knows of storytelling – that stories, just like people and bodies and food, refuse to remain within the bounds of their "name and nature" by becoming incoherent – she learns from her mother. In fact, her storytelling voice is linked with her mother.

At the end of "Meatless Days," she dreams that she takes a piece of her mother's dead body and places it in her mouth under her tongue. In her dream, Sara is told by her father to put her mother's refrigerated dead body into her coffin.

> What I found were hunks of meat wrapped in cellophane,
> and each of them felt like Mamma, in some odd way . . .
> Then, when my father's back was turned, I found myself
> engaged in rapid theft – for the sake of Ifat and Shahid and
> Tillat and all of us, I stole away a portion of that body. It was
> a piece of her foot I found, a small bone like a knuckle, which
> I quickly hid inside my mouth, under my tongue. Then I and
> the dream dissolved, [*sic*] into an extremity of tenderness.
> (44)

It is significant, I think, that she does not eat this portion of her mother's foot as soon as she puts it in her mouth. By hiding it under her tongue, she is linking her mother's foot or her service to her mother with her tongue or her autobiographical voice.[106] The implication of

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[105] Apparently, Tom's relationship with food is so loaded that Tom and Sara cannot make and enjoy meals alone together. Tom finds it too intimate. As a result, they are forced to have meals in restaurants so others can be present. "It was revelatory for me, who had never before watched someone for whom a dining table was so markedly more of a loaded domestic space than was a bed, but I was not totally averse to this new logic" (37). Thus, food is at the heart of all things in this book.

[106] Lovesey also connects the piece of her mother's body with Suleri's autobiographical voice. "In this evocative passage Suleri accepts the responsibility of her mother 'when my father's back was

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the title "Meatless Days" is that even though Suleri's days are meatless, at night during her dream, she is nourished by her mother. "I had eaten, that was all, and woken to a world of meatless days" (44). Suleri looks upon the dream as one in which she had eaten. Her mother's foot is meat, food and sustenance to her. When she woke up, the world did not contain her mother's body, her nourishment. It was a world of meatless days, similar to the meatless days that the government of Pakistan designated. Two days out of the week, butcher's shops were closed "to conserve the national supply of goats and cattle" (31). Suleri complicates this metaphor as well because even though Suleri awakes to a world without her mother's body, she still has her mother's disembodied voice. Similarly, even though the government has designated meatless days, "the people who could afford to buy meat, after all, were those who could afford refrigeration" (31). Thus, meatless days are not really meatless for meat-eaters and Suleri's mother is still with her even though her body is not.

Suleri's voice's disjunctive tone is linked with a piece of her mother's body, a piece that is disconnected because she steals it in a dream. The world is meatless and her mother is no longer present in it, but Suleri has a voice that is connected to her mother. That the piece of her mother's body comes from her foot is significant. Sara's paternal grandmother, Dadi, finds her grandson insulting not only her granddaughters but also women in general.

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turned,' and in a kind of creative eucharist hides 'a small bone like a knuckle' under her tongue, from which the voice of *Meatless Days* issues" (46). Koshy connects this dream with Suleri's service to her mother, as I do, but her analysis compares it with Suleri's relationship with her father. "Re-membering her mother is figured as a fulfillment of daughterly duty, but also as a covert transgression of paternal jurisdiction over the maternal body" ("Mother-Country" 47-8). Whereas Koshy considers the dream a re-membering, Dayal sees the dream as illustrating that one can never re-member those who are dead. "But the narratological purpose of rendering Ifat as so central to the novel is to enable remembrance fully reconciled to the impossibility of re-membering: an impossibility already prefigured in the dream of her mother" (261).

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> 'There is more goodness in a woman's little finger than in the benighted mind of man. . . . For men,' said Dadi, shaking the name off her fingertips like some unwanted water, 'live as though they were unsuckled things.' 'And heaven,' she grimly added, 'is the thing Muhammad says (peace be upon him) lies beneath the feet of women!' (Suleri 7)

As women find a home in mothering, men deny their mothering. Since suckling is the most physical aspect of being mothered, when Dadi argues that men live as though they were not suckled, she suggests that they aspire to transcend the body and its embarrassments. Dadi points to another woman's body part, her feet, in order to praise woman's heavenly rootedness in her body. That heaven is to be found under one's mother's feet is one of the most commonly quoted sayings of the Prophet in Pakistani households.[107] It means that one will surely go to heaven if one supports, serves, and cares for one's mother. Thus, it is significant that, at the end of "Meatless Days," Sara finds her disjunctive, sometimes incoherent autobiographical voice in a piece of her mother's foot, which is where heaven lies.

Mind and Body

I have already discussed a number of ways in which Suleri's autobiographical subjectivity is relational. In this section I will show that Suleri perpetually associates the abstractions of the mind with the corporeality of the body to reinforce a metaphor of dis/embodiment. By this I mean neither/both disembodiment nor/and embodiment. The slash between dis and embodiment allows me to express neither and both. Suleri navigates a

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[107] The saying is probably a figurative rendition of the literal massaging of one's mother's feet after she has worked all day.

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position between her sister Ifat's over-reliance on the body and her father's complete disdain for it. She understands but rejects both her father's and her sister's position by ultimately relating the mind to the body. This is yet another way in which Suleri's autobiography is relational. In the end, minds and bodies are shown not as hierarchical opposites but rather as fluid and relational terms that shouldn't be separated.

Ifat's hyper-embodiment seems to be the result of the fact that when she ran away to elope against her father's wishes, she found herself in unfamiliar territory. Even though she returned to her father's house as a visitor, his inability to truly forgive her led her to become unfamiliar in the home she was raised in. She theorizes her plight as the plight of all women, outsiders in their father's and their husband's homes. Her ideas about home lead her to associate women with bodies and with mothering. Ifat tells Sara that "Men live in homes, and women live in bodies" (143). Ifat is also at home in her body when she is part of the mothering process. When she announces that a woman can't come home, Sara asks why. "Oh, home is where your mother is, one; it is when you are mother, two; and in between it's almost as though your spirit must retract . . . your spirit must become a tiny, concentrated little thing, so that your body feels like a spacious place in which to live," Ifat explains (Suleri 147). Ifat believes that home has to do with mothering, which is linked to the body. Sara doesn't endorse this view and states rather that home, for her, exists in the connection with her sister rather than in such literal mothering.

This idea of home lying in the connection with people does have a bodily aspect for Sara, however. Even though she disagrees with Ifat's hyper-embodiment and does not find that women live in their bodies, Sara does find home in a connection with people who are associated with the places they occupy. Suleri implies that place can become

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indistinguishable from people. Near the end of her autobiography she talks about the way she associates her loved one's faces with the places they inhabit.

> I must admit that my faces do not remain distinguishable from their contexts, that their habitation must lend feature to the structure of significance. It is hard for me to picture Nuz without seeing simultaneously Karachi's maniacal sprawl, its sandy palms and crazy traffic . . . Tillat in desert-land is busy, surrounding herself with oases, pools of infancy, converting in my mind a grain of sand into signs of impressive fertility. And it is still difficult to think of Ifat without remembering her peculiar congruence with Lahore, a place that gave her pleasure. (181)

In this passage, Suleri describes how each of her sisters has become indistinguishable from her home, the place she lived. Thus, habitation does have a bodily aspect to it for Sara. But this bodily aspect is not the same as Ifat's sense of habitation. Sara associates bodies with the places she finds them and vice versa.[108] Her focus is on context.

Whereas Ifat's hyper-embodiment associates the body with women, Sara associates the body with a geographical landscape on which political and cultural histories write themselves. Thus, the national landscape of Pakistan becomes a metaphorical body. Suleri conceptualizes the political situation in Karachi through the body.

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[108] Suleri's sense of habitation linking people to where they live is different from Bharati Mukherjee's insistence upon people rooted in the nation. The difference is that the aspects of the place that Suleri associates with these people are not related to national myths and ideologies. Mukherjee inserts people into an uncritical nationalism while Suleri focuses on descriptions of physical context that are not related to nationalism.

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> It was that Pakistani balance that came to my thoughts, a sharper word than ever now, with Karachi in a state of civil war, the frontier under siege. 'The country cannot last,' I heard repeatedly, 'we have seen this before.' So I looked out in the direction of the borderlines and tried to picture their perpetual rewriting, teaching myself to think through and repeat: 'Your mind is a metropolis, a legislated thing. The keener your laws the better their breakage, for civilizations will always rise and fall upon your body's steady landscape.' (Suleri 87)

Karachi has been the site of lawlessness since Suleri published her book. The laws are strict and are broken with zeal; violence and social unrest are the result. Sara teaches herself that her mind is a metropolis with laws that are more likely to be broken the stricter they are; but the body is steady. Here the mind is culture while the body is nature. The body will not be legislated and changed under the strictness or leniency of the mind's laws because, somehow, nature is not conquered by culture. The rising and falling of civilizations on the "body's steady landscape" is the result of the mind's changeable laws. According to Suleri, this occurs because cultures come and go but nature remains constant. The dualism that places mind above body is reversed because Suleri appears to assert that the body's steadiness is more admirable than the fickleness of the mind. Suleri's theorization of the body is, thus, more complicated than Ifat's assertion that women live in bodies.

Even though Ifat's relationship with her body appears rather simplistic, her focus on literal mothering is in keeping with the fact that she is always two. She appears to have a double consciousness which, when pregnant, focuses on a past when she lived with her

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mother and a future when she will mother. Iris Marion Young also suggests that the experience of pregnancy leads to a doubled consciousness:

> The pregnant subject, I suggest, is de-centred, split, or doubled in several ways. She experiences her body as herself and not herself. Its inner movements belong to another being, yet they are not other, because her body boundaries shift and because her bodily self-location is focused on her trunk in addition to her head. This split subject appears in the eroticism of pregnancy, in which the woman can experience an innocent narcissism fed by recollection of her repressed experience of her own mother's body. Pregnant existence entails, finally, a unique temporality of process and growth in which the woman can experience her self as split between past and future. (Young 46)

This doubled subjectivity can be viewed as potential, which becomes a metaphor (misplaced or not) for the woman's own potential. As Ifat says, home is in this potential to reproduce: "where your mother is" and "when you are mother" (147). What she describes to Sara is similar to Young's description of a pregnant woman experiencing herself as split between past and future. This junction between past and future locates Ifat in more than one time because of her body and this frees her from the restrictions of the in-between state she describes, where her spirit must become a tiny, little thing.

Suleri contrasts Ifat's hyper-embodiment with her father's disembodiment. The story about the father, entitled "Papa and Pakistan" recounts his association with the idea of Pakistan. Just as Sara does not agree with Ifat's reliance on the body to make a home, she

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also disagrees with Pip's association with the mind. When East and West Pakistan separate from India in 1947, Sara's father is in England and does not see the bloodshed that ensues. In 1971, when East Pakistan separates from West Pakistan to form Bangladesh, Sara's father is present in South Asia but fails to note the bloodshed again. He chooses to concentrate on ideas rather than bodies. Sara explains,

> It was not so much the country's severing that hurt as the terrible afterimages we had to face: censorship lifted for a flash, flooding us with photographs and stories from the foreign press of what the army actually did in Bangladesh during the months of emergency that precede the war. "I am not talking about the two-nation theory," I wept to my father, "I am talking about blood!" He would not reply, and so we went our separate ways, he mourning for the mutilation of a theory, and I - more literal - for a limb, or a child, or a voice. (Suleri 122)

Rather than purging the mind of the body, Suleri thinks through the body to identify with the victims of Pakistan's civil war. The mutilated bodies retain their corporeality for her and thus signify more than just statistics about casualties, which, perhaps, can easily be ignored due to their more abstract nature.

When Sara uses the metaphor of pregnancy to give birth to an Ifat who is not surrounded by rumours of her murder, she complicates Ifat's notions of women, the body, pregnancy, and home. To Suleri, the connection between people is home, even though that connection includes their bodies and their geographical contexts. Suleri does not reject the body as her father does, but she also does not take it as literally as Ifat does. The body is

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both material and metaphorical in this autobiography. As a result, birthing/writing also have a metaphorical and simultaneously material use. Suleri ends up with both rather than one or the other. The birthing/writing of Ifat without the taint of murder to her name cannot be seen as either material or metaphorical. It is both.

> Then commenced keen labor. I was imitating all of them, I knew, my mother's laborious production of her five, my sisters' of their seven (at that stage), so it was their sweat that wet my head, their pushing motion that allowed me to extract, in stifled screams, Ifat from her tales. We picked up our idea of her as though it was an infant, slippery in our hands with birthing fluids, a notion most deserving of warm water. Let us wash the word of murder from her limbs, we said, let us transcribe her into some more seemly idiom. (Suleri 148)

Sara is able to give birth by writing. And instead of giving birth to either a body or merely an abstract idea, she gives birth to the idea of a body. Sara undoes the dichotomy set up by Ifat and Pip: between male and female, mind and body.

Sara is able to negotiate a position between hyper-embodiment and disembodiment because of her mother. Mair's lessons combining the intellectual and the material are the reason why Sara is able to see the problems with her father and sister's positions. Sara's mother's lessons are abstract and insist that familiarity, ownership and belonging are unimportant. "She learned to live apart, then – apart even from herself – growing into that curiously powerful disinterest in owning, in belonging, which years later would make her so clearly tell her children, 'Child, I will not grip'" (Suleri 164). Her distracted and vague

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manner and ideas make it difficult for anyone, including her own children, to really know her. Sara describes her as "invisible", "difficult to discern" (Suleri 154), "reticent" (Suleri 157), "restrained", "abstracted, faraway" (Suleri 158). These qualities appear to associate her more with her intellect than with anything material. But Mair's stance makes such binaries irrelevant. While she is extremely abstracted, she is also extremely aware of the tangibilities of race and colour in her children.

When the Suleris live in London, England, we see an example of Mair's awareness of her children's bodies. She wonders why Sara is often alone while her sister Ifat has so many friends. The father's response to Sara's answer shows an inability to relate the mind to the body while Mair's response sees mind and body as interrelated.

> 'It's because Ifat's white, and I am brown,' I suggested . . .
> Papa the politician was outraged . . . [He] could not stomach
> such a bald fact, launching instead into a long and passionate
> speech about the ancient civilization that inhered in my genes,
> about how steadily I should walk in such proud pigmentation
> . . . My mother did not say a word, but later that evening . . .
> 'How truthful you are, Sara,' she said with bright approval.
> (Suleri 160)

Mair encourages Sara to continue to theorize based on the materiality of the body. Sara's father can only theorize history without regard to the actual material conditions of the schoolyard, but Mair and Sara both see what he does not.

As a Welsh woman living in Pakistan, Sara's mother maintains her difference from Pakistanis without judging their ways. When her students think she is a saint and her children express the desire to sell her effects, "saintly portraits and other sundry charms," in

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a bazaar, she proclaims her knowledge of the body. " 'You can't treat people's feelings as though they were items on a marketplace,' she chided me, adding, in her habit of secret logic, 'I know how the human body is made' " (Suleri 166). Sara's mother knows that the human body is made of feelings as well as body parts. Again, she doesn't try to separate the mind from the body.

Just as she refuses to cling, grip or belong to either England or Pakistan, and just as she refuses to separate the mind from the body, she also navigates expected female behaviour in Pakistan. Ifat describes the situation:

> 'The only trouble with being female in Pakistan,' Ifat complained, years later, 'is that it allows for two possible modes of behavior – either you can be sweet and simple, or you can be cold and proud.' 'No wonder they found Mamma difficult to decipher, then,' I agreed, 'whose coldness was so sweet . . .' 'As tactful as ice in water,' Ifat added passionately, 'and as sweet!' (Suleri 166)

Sara's mother unifies these two modes of behaviour. She refuses to be tied to either sweetness or coldness and negotiates her own complicated position.

Mair's subject position is neither unified nor stable. It is in many places at once. She is "one who hid[es] the precision of her judgement in a dispersed aura that spread[s] throughout each room she inhabit[s]" (Suleri 156). This dispersion is only possible because her body does not limit her. "It was always hard to keep her in one place, make her stay with you . . . She seemed to live increasingly outside the limits of her body, until I felt I had no means of holding her" (Suleri 156). She cannot be held because she is unstable. Sara cannot hold her, know her, reach her. And yet Mair embodies the subjectivities of the book.

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The character of her mother is central in turning the mind and body into polarities that are fluid. And since orientalism is based on static, eternal and unchanging polarities, between eastern bodies and western minds, Suleri's *Meatless Days* creates relational fluidities that work against orientalism.

Diaspora and Nation

Whereas Mukherjee's work extols the virtues of rootedness in the nation, Suleri focuses on the ways in which Sara and her brother, Shahid, feel foreign and choose to live as minorities. Because Pip single-mindedly worked to bring about the birth of the nation of Pakistan, he is too convinced of the importance of being a part of a nation. Shahid, like Sara, prefers to be a minority and therefore moves to England. Sara writes that the periphery, even though it forces her to be an "otherness machine" (105), has an inexplicable "lambent quality" (106). While their father never feels foreign in Pakistan, his children feel foreign everywhere. "After having lived in England for some years, we were accustomed to feeling foreign, which we felt just as strongly, in turn, when we went back to Pakistan" (94-5). Thus, both Sara and Shahid find diasporic subjectivities more comfortable than nationalist ones.[109]

Similarly, Sara's mother chooses to repudiate majority status by spending her life in Pakistan instead of the U.K. where she is from and insists that familiarity is unimportant: "the possibility of adding herself to anything was irrelevant to her" (165). Sara's mother

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[109] Their sister Ifat is similar to their father in her desire to immerse herself in the nation of Pakistan. She runs away from home to marry a man who signifies to her "a complete immersion into Pakistan" (140) so that she can make a home of Pakistan. "She was living here for good now, she must have thought, so why not do it well? And what greater gift could she give my father than literally to become the land he had helped to make?" (140). The fact that her beloved father disapproves of her husband seems not to matter to Ifat because, like him, her devotion and loyalty to people and nations is complete.

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refutes notions of origin and belonging because she left England for Pakistan without any nostalgia for her place of origin and without any sense of belonging in her adopted country. Colonial history made it impossible for her fellow Pakistanis to fully accept her and her own sense of courtesy forbade that she even try. "What could that world do with a woman who called herself a Pakistani but who looked suspiciously like the past it sought to forget? Then my mother learned the ironies of nationhood – of what can and cannot be willed – when she had to walk through her new context in the shape of a memory erased" (Suleri 164). This lack of a sense of belonging was the opposite of Sara's father who was single-mindedly obsessed with the making of Pakistan's political history. Without a sense of belonging, orientalism cannot dictate who belongs where and how one's domicile will reflect who they are. Unlike Mukherjee's desire to add herself to the American nation, Suleri's book, through the characters of the mother, Shahid, and Sara, appears to extol the virtues of diaspora. These virtues are in keeping with a more strenuous fight against orientalism.

In each of the preceding sections of this chapter, I have shown Suleri's stance towards the body, the nation and subjectivity itself. We cannot justify the position that the body is associated with women or that it is exoticized or that it is unitary. We cannot justify the position that the nation must lead us to absolute loyalty involving never straying from our nation physically and never questioning what has been done in the name of nation. We cannot justify a subjectivity that creates a hierarchy between its categories. Suleri subverts absolute positions and categories in this autobiography in order to emphasize relationality and subvert orientalism.

Another way in which Suleri subverts orientalism is by relating the western notion of saving daylight to the eastern practice of taking a couple of hours during the summer heat to read a book or nap: "daylight always tires, needing hours of afternoon where it can retreat . .

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. and pretend not to be day" (176-7). This in-between state is then likened to "living between two languages: it is a lie to say that some people only live in one" (177). This implies that she isn't speaking literally about speaking two languages, just about living in-between and "the problems of maintaining a second establishment even though your body can be in only one place at a time" (177). Suleri puts forth an autobiographical subjectivity that is in-between: neither completely abstract disembodiment, nor simply defined by the body. Her subjectivity is relational.

Its relationality, Sara's relationality, is also found in the homes she creates out of "these quirky little tales" (173), as she calls her autobiography. These tales are "brittle homes to put upon the mollusk of a name" (173). She is putting the tales she writes onto the names of her loved ones. By writing the names, she is relating herself to them. Their faces are not relevant. As she walks down the street with her friend Jamie, she thinks about how people sometimes look exactly like others. "For faces slip, become third persons in their bearing of themselves, a disheartening trick to observe" (176). The writing of the names is the home that relates the self to others, not seeing their faces or bodies. Suleri realizes that she lives inside discourse not space. "Living in language is tantamount to living with other people" (177). Thus, it is not only the sentences she writes that are homes, but also the sentences written by her loved ones. Sara quotes a sentence from her sister Ifat's last letter to her before her murder, before the letter became evidence for the police. " I love you, Sara, the times I've felt, 'if Sara were here, how much easier it would be . . .'" (181). These words become a home where Sara can live. And even though she admits that she doesn't live in Ifat but rather in New Haven, her relation to Ifat is a home for her. "I made a city of that sentence, laying it out like an architect as a picture of the parameters where I could rest, or

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shop, or work" (182). And it is not a photograph of New Haven that graces the cover of Suleri's home, her autobiography, but a photograph of Ifat.

Just as Sara is at home in relation to her sister, categories such as gender, body, and nation are at home in relation to each other. Suleri implies in her autobiography that to conceive of a disembodied category, a category that is not grounded in other categories, is to conceive of a self that bears no relation to anyone else. Selves are only selves if they are at home in relation to others and in relation to many categories simultaneously. The intersections of these categories are the homes of relationality where we all live. And that is why Suleri is the critic of all categories.

A Cover/ed Body

The cover of *Meatless Days* presents a subjectivity whose relationality is immediately visible. In terms of marketing, like the other books I have already discussed, Suleri's book displays a South Asian woman in South Asian dress. And while it can be argued that these facts alone put her in the tradition of the exoticized woman, her stance makes the cover of this book different from that of the other books. Sara's sister, Ifat, not only has a story dedicated to her, "The Immoderation of Ifat," but she can also be found on the front cover of *Meatless Days*. This photograph is translated into verbal language and becomes a significant passage in the chapter. Appearing near the end of the autobiography, it dwells on the ways in which Sara's sister, Ifat, was immoderate. For instance, Ifat did elope with a man her father disapproved of at the age of nineteen. This passage describes the context of the photograph on the front cover when Ifat, wearing her bridal dress, awaits the return of her husband from a prisoner of war camp:

> Ifat put on her bridal clothes the day Javed returned. What
> festivity went quickening through our house in Lahore,

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> making us wince to contemplate the gravity of her joy. Fawzi took a photograph of Ifat on that day: it is an uncanny image, which almost seems to know what it must represent, the twinning impulses of Ifat's soul. She stands white and erect, glancing down at a diagonal to the tugging of her daughter Alia's hand. She seems tall and finely boned, head bowed in the face of its own beauty, quite grave to be what it must be. Her slenderness is such as to suggest a keen fragility, most poignant to me, so that when the photograph first met my eyes I cried aloud, "I must protect this girl!" (Suleri 144)

While the photograph of Badami on the cover of *Tamarind Mem* seems to fix and contain her, the photographic representation of Ifat's "twinning impulses" on this cover does not. Ifat's posture is divided because her whole body seems to be facing one direction while her head is facing her daughter who is tugging her in another direction. Ifat is, after all, uncontainable because she is never singular. "Ifat was always two. In moments when her affection felt most fierce to her, she would send out two fingers to bracelet tightly the wrist of whoever was beside her and gave her joy" (133). Not only is she two but she operates in twos. She tells Sara, "There are two chords of voice inside my throat" (132). And after her death, Sara feels that nothing can be two again. "I found myself inhabiting a flattened day in which nothing could be two: where is the woman of addition? my mind inquired of me" (147-8). That is why her stance on the cover shows her about to move in two directions at once and accounts for the fact that she is two in many different ways.

Most importantly, however, this photograph cannot simply be considered a description of Ifat. As the cover photograph, it represents and gives meaning to the entire

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text. A divided South Asian woman in South Asian dress represents this text. We can then say of the book that it is about women who are torn. Her body points in one direction while her face (no doubt due to the tugging of her child) points in the opposite direction. The cover photograph is also significant because it contains two figures rather than one. The individual is enmeshed in others. The woman cannot act without considering the child. Thus, the cover emphasizes Mair, Sara's mother and anyone who has felt that her actions have repercussions for others around her.

The subjectivity that Suleri creates in her autobiography depicts the interconnectedness of people where relations with each other are paramount. That is why Sara's home is in her relation to her sister, even though her sister has died. This is the uncontroversial aspect of Suleri's relational subjectivity. After all, finding one's "I" in relation to others is not new in autobiography. But critiquing all categories, even the category women, is controversial. No matter how much feminists theorize difference, and insist on the intersections of gender with race and class, the category women remains, sometimes in the most tattered and torn form. Nonetheless, it does remain in most feminist analysis. Despite its controversial nature, Suleri's relational subjectivity works against orientalism more effectively than the subjectivities put forth by each of the authors I've discussed in the preceding chapters. The reason for this is that orientalism is based on essentialist categories which provide static binaries. Without categories, we are left simply with layers of significance, overlapping and intersecting, but never becoming the solid substance of category.

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Conclusion

In this project, I argue that even though latent orientalism continues to exert its influence in our culture to interpellate subjects through racist and sexist images in the news media, advertising, and even book covers, resistance, as they say, is not futile. The incursions against orientalist ideology made by the five South Asian women writers I study do succeed in complicating the field of cultural production. My goal is to contextualize their resistance to orientalism, which is linked to patriarchy and nationalism, so that their negotiations with and implication in all of these ideologies can also become clear. My approach to the texts I study is materialist feminist ideology critique because I read these women's rebuttals to orientalism as historical and constructed rather than essentialist. My project asks, what are the subversions of orientalism in these women's fiction given the context in which they write and the politics of their reception in North America? While my method of showing complicities as well as contestations may appear less forceful than a full assault on hegemonic forces, I am convinced that a contextual and provisional practice is important if we are not to engage in the maneuvers we want to combat. Thus, this project constructs meaning and creates culture that is resistant and oppositional without resorting to overly simplistic resolutions.

Throughout this project, I show that orientalism, like nationalism and patriarchy (to some extent), needlessly emphasizes difference for the purpose of exclusion. In the introduction I discuss how the orientalizing gaze is simultaneously a feminizing gaze and how the diasporic perspective, which is the opposite of a nationalist perspective, can serve to resist orientalism. In Chapter One, I linked orientalism and patriarchy to show that marketers appeal to our culture's latent orientalism by using images not only of the exotic other but of the exotic other woman. Chapters Three through Five all deal with issues of

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difference from within the competing and overlapping discourses of patriarchy and nationalism as well as orientalism. In Chapter Three, I read a novel that subverts the notion that authentic identities actually exist in order to argue that contradictory identities, rather than strategic essentialism, should be used for political change in the diaspora. I argue that Kirin Narayan's novel shows that strategic essentialism can be dangerous because it can reinforce orientalist sexism and racism. In order to discover the effects of nationalism on orientalist ideologies, in Chapter Four I examine the books of an author who has lived in India, Canada, and the U.S. with the result that her response to each country's myths either adds to or diminishes her attempts to resist orientalism. I argue that Bharati Mukherjee's resistance to orientalism changes in intensity with each of her shifting nationalisms, which also have repercussions for her feminism. In Chapter Five, I discuss a memoir that fights orientalism by critiquing all categories including "woman" and "third world" while simultaneously creating a relational subjectivity at the intersections of the categories it rejects. This final chapter illustrates that the emphasis on difference for the purpose of exclusion, whether orientalist, nationalist or patriarchal, needs and relies on categories. Thus, this project ends with an anti-orientalist stance that suggests useful ways of resisting nationalism and patriarchy.

In this project, I also argue that writers struggle for legitimacy in the field of cultural production. In the first chapter, I argue, in keeping with Pierre Bourdieu's work, that the literary field consists of three competing principles of legitimacy. Writers struggle to gain acceptance from: a) other writers, b) academics, and c) the mass audience. While the first two result in cultural capital, the third principle of legitimacy, also called popular legitimacy, results in economic capital for the author. Thus, I use the theories of Pierre Bourdieu to explain the packaging of South Asian women's novels as a result of the orientalism of our

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culture, which insures that exotic book covers sell more books and lead to popular legitimacy for the author. In the second chapter, I compare the works of two writers to determine the relationship between popular legitimacy and textual resistance to orientalism. My goal is to find out what kinds of narratives are more likely to gain a mass audience. In comparing Anita Rau Badami's *Tamarind Mem,* which has popular legitimacy, with Rachna Mara's *Of Customs and Excise,* which does not, I find the extent of their resistance to orientalism to be the difference that accounts for popular legitimacy. Thus, the book that gains popular legitimacy is one that contains both orientalist and anti-orientalist ideas, images and themes. Presumably, it appeals to a larger audience because it has something for everyone. The reason I investigate the field of cultural production in my study of anti-orientalist writing is because I believe that wider dissemination of resistant ideas and cultures is crucial for fighting oppression. Thus, this project is a study of mostly mainstream fiction.

Furthermore, my focus on context leads me to complicate even blatantly orientalist images of South Asia and South Asian women under certain circumstances. For instance, if orientalist packaging of books leads to a mass audience, economic capital for the author, and also helps South Asian women readers find books about and books by South Asian women, then commodification in and of itself is not necessarily something to be vilified. In fact, at the end of chapter five, I discuss a book cover that manages to work against orientalism even though it displays a photograph of a South Asian woman in South Asian dress. Anti-orientalist work can be done in the way one reads the books, in discussions about the books and in projects like this one, where analysis is always contextualized. The multiple identities represented in the literary texts, essays, and interviews I study combat orientalist stereotypes by illustrating the complexities of history, geography, patriarchy and diaspora. Their

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resistance to dominant orientalist ideology is important because even though culture shapes the subject, the subject also shapes culture.

A record of what I have accomplished here is also of necessity a record of what I have not pursued. In light of the events of September 11th and the orientalism at work in the ensuing rhetoric of good and evil, civilized and barbaric, the need for searching analyses of these binaries and the violence that results from them has become more urgent than ever. Perhaps the next frontier of research into resisting orientalism may be found in representations and discourses about religion. This project could be extended into a study of South Asian Muslim women writers such as Sara Suleri, Yasmin Ladha, Tehmina Durrani, and Tahira Naqvi, for instance, with an explicit focus on representations of gender and Islam. Such a study might find that even while religious ideology converges with orientalism to oppress these women, the way in which each of them understands her relation to her religion may influence her resistance. It may even provide her with the strength to resist. Alternatively, a transnational feminist cultural study that looks at the links among fundamentalist religions in different parts of the world might prove to work against orientalism more effectively than a study that was limited to one geographical context. Future research might discuss the similarities between ideologies of Islamic fundamentalism in South Asia and Christian fundamentalism in North America. One could argue that both developed as a response to the uncertainties of modernity and both have patriarchal inclinations. Such a study would further our understanding of fundamentalist groups and resist ongoing orientalism regarding Muslims by troubling the stereotypes currently used to bomb Afghanistan.

Other research might select more fiction like Rachna Mara's. As I discussed in Chapter Two, her work resisted orientalism more strenuously than Anita Rau Badami's

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popularly legitimate novel. Nonetheless, I chose to discuss mainstream fiction in this study because I wanted to engage with books that were widely disseminated. Perhaps other researchers could engage with anti-orientalist fiction published by small presses and in so doing, help to increase their circulation. For instance, South Asian women who have published with small presses include Meena Alexander, Ameena Meer, Shani Mootoo and Shauna Singh Baldwin. Even though the latter two writers eventually published their later fiction with large publishers, a study of small press fiction should include their earlier work. Since writers struggle to gain acceptance from academics and since this leads to more sales because students will buy books that are taught in university classes, perhaps research that discusses these books will lead to more engagement with anti-orientalist issues in the culture at large.

Another project that could continue the work of this one might look at images of other women in film and television. Such a study could compare feature films and television shows made by and about South Asian women in diaspora and in South Asia. I am thinking specifically of the films of Mira Nair and Deepa Mehta in diaspora and the television plays of Haseena Moin and Fatima Suraiya Bajia in Pakistan. Resistance through fiction writing is not necessarily more effective than resistance through filmmaking, screenwriting and writing for television. In fact, it is arguable that visual images are more effective in conveying meaning than literature. Since most South Asian countries have high illiteracy, it would not be surprising if films were more widely disseminated, despite censorship, than books. A more rigorous understanding of anti-orientalist and feminist practices in film and television may continue the work of this project even more effectively.

Whether future research develops in the directions of religious ideology critique, transnational feminism, the reception of small press fiction, or cultural studies approaches to

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film and television, I hope that it remains propelled by curiousity and the desire to learn more about the discourses that resist as well as those that complicate resistance. Such studies may enable not only new questions about representation and legitimacy with regard to third world women but also new methodologies and new paradigms for thinking about these issues.

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