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(Re)constructing the hybrid:

negotiating transcultural South Asian women's subjectivity

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Introduction

My project compares two canonical works of literature by transnational South Asian feminist authors: *Jasmine* by Bharati Mukherjee and *Anita and Me* by Meera Syal. I seek to explore the protagonist, the transnational and/or transcultural South Asian woman, as postcolonial hybrid subject. Specifically, I hope to address how this figure is accessible to whiteness or has access to whiteness while simultaneously navigating her status as Other. I am grounding my research within postcolonial feminist theory and women of color feminisms, and contextualizing it through whiteness studies. This framework enables me to analyze my novels and my research in a globalized, intersectional context. I also explore notions of hybridity as understood within the context of South Asian-identified women at Macalester. Ultimately, I explore how the transnational/transcultural South Asian subject—the protagonists of *Jasmine* and *Anita and Me*, as well as the women I interview at Macalester—navigate their status as hybrid, using it simultaneously to both claim power and challenge hegemonic power relations. In doing so, I hope to contribute to the existing literature on transcultural South Asian women's subjectivity and to place their experiences alongside that of other women of color.

My method is divided into two parts. For the larger part of my project, my method is my literary review and analysis of texts in which I trace the construction of each text's hybrid protagonist. For the last part of my project, my method is my linking of textual and literary research in carrying out ethnographic research that looks at South Asian women at Macalester's construction of themselves as hybrid subjects in their day-to-day lives. As part of my postcolonial feminist methodology, I maintain that the various

methods I use in this project are inextricably interrelated; each section deeply informs the others. Finally, syncretism as feminist methodology (both in the texts, authors, and participants I examine as well as part of my own methodology) is important to my project, in that the culturally hybrid subjects I analyze use their contradictory and complicated positions as Self/Other to disrupt the binary between those two poles.

Literature review: locating postcolonial hybridity

I began my research by reading five additional transnational South Asian English language canonical novels: *Meatless Days* by Sara Suleri, *Shame* by Salman Rushdie, *The Binding Vine* by Shashi Deshpande, *Fault Lines* by Meena Alexander, and *The God of Small Things* by Arundhati Roy. Although I ultimately decided to do a comparative literary analysis on the two novels I listed in my introduction, the novels I initially read are pertinent to the intellectual process of my honors. Prior to this project, I had not read very much South Asian literature, and so these novels functioned as my introduction to the field and fleshed out the literary background for my project. They informed my analytical framework and helped me decide what questions I was most interested in asking.

In this section, my literature review, I map out the postcolonial and feminist theory grounding my project. In particular, I explore the construction of the hybrid subject, which I use as an analytic paradigm. Specifically, I am looking at hybridity as subject-position through which transnational and transcultural South Asian women construct selfhood despite or in conjunction with their status as both insider and outsider. However, while the culturally hybrid subject is my frame, I also acknowledge that it is important to not blindly privilege cultural hybridity. I am interested in seeing how postcolonial hybridity contains the possibility of simultaneously subverting and/or reaffirming cultural hegemony, and consequently what is the use or function in (re)claiming the status of hybrid Other**.**

For this section and for my literary analysis, I focus on three themes: representation, tolerance, and violence. These three themes recurrently appear in the

novels and are interrelated. Questions of representation depends on those of authenticity, and within multicultural discourse, tolerance function through and relies on the notion of a so-called authentic racial Other. At the same time, tolerance within multiculturalism enables violence: both the epistemic violence that is done to the selfhood of the Other, and the threat of material violence in terms of policing bodies.

Because I rely on an analysis of hybrid subjectivity to analyze postcolonial diasporic literary texts, and postcolonial theory and literature is central to my project. However, postcolonialism—and all that it entails—is difficult to define. In the most literal sense of the word, it implies a temporal period after colonialism: "The dismantling of structures of colonial control, beginning in earnest in the late 1950s and reaching its high point in the 1960s, constituted a remarkable historical moment, as country after country gained independence from the colonizing powers" (Childs and Williams 1). However, postcolonialism rejects the neat chronology of such a definition: it is also an engagement with and resistance to imperialist discourse and ideologies. By imperialism, I am referring to the globalization of capitalism, through which—alongside political and cultural hegemonies—numerous Western powers still exercise control over former colonies and much of the globe. Of course, in context of neocolonialism and imperialism, "There is a form of perverseness in taking the label 'post-' for a state which is not yet fully present, and linking it to something which has not fully disappeared, but in many ways that paradoxical in-betweenness precisely characterizes the post-colonial world" (Childs and Williams 7).

In addition, in the interest of contesting reductionist boundaries and binaries, "post-colonial work is—must be—interdisciplinary" (Childs and Williams 22).

Postcolonialism certainly resists categorization, particularly the rigid separation of various academic disciplines,

> For a number of years, feminism has argued for an end to... the habitually competitive and adversarial nature of academic practice, and some post-colonial critics have built on these insights. Feminism is interested in power relations in the academy, and obviously their gendered nature; post-colonialism introduces racial and cultural dimensions onto the analysis (Childs and Williams 22).

Feminism and postcolonialism both seek to reveal and rearrange gendered and racialized relations of power.

Postcolonialism is thus obviously a scattered and wide ranging field, one which invites its participants to ask: when, who, where, and what, precisely, is the postcolonial? For example, in regards to the novels I analyze: are they postcolonial only insofar as they are written by nonwhite authors? What defines a postcolonial text? Childs and Williams argue that, in referring to postcolonialism as an engagement with the continuing forces of colonialism, "texts which are anti-colonial... might be regarded as post-colonial insofar as they have 'got beyond' colonialism and its ideologies, broken free of its lures to a point from which to mount a critique or counter-attack" (Childs and Williams 4). In my project, I delineate the novels I analyze as postcolonial in that they challenge the ongoing legacies and processes of colonialism, specifically by contesting the bounded cultural borders of the nation-state. I seek to explore how each of my protagonists troubles cultural borders within the nation, which create, embody, and reproduce the nation-state. Childs and Williams point out,

> As Homi Bhabha says: 'The Western metropole must confront its postcolonial history, told by its influx of postwar migrants and refugees, as an indigenous or native narrative *internal to its national identity*...' The idea that post-colonial groups and their histories, far from being alien or Other to carefully constructed and guarded Western identities, are in fact an integral part of them... is even truer

> in the postcolonial period when the Other comes 'home' (Childs and Williams 13).

The protagonists of *Jasmine* and *Anita and Me* force each of the imperial nations they are in (the United States and Britain, respectively) to reconsider and renavigate the distance between core subjects and periphery subjects. They do so not only through their physical presence (their dark, explicitly racialized and gendered bodies) but also by recovering their own erased selfhood over the course of each novel.

Overall, in my project I utilize the theoretical paradigm of postcolonial subjectivity. This paradigm strives to destabilize the power relations that characterize the relationship between the colonist (the hegemonic center) and the colonial subject (who is delegated to the margins). Postcolonialism seeks to enable the subaltern subject to represent herself, and to produce cultural discourses which challenge and unsettle the hegemonic center. In doing so, postcolonial theory attempts to decenter by making visible that which exists at the margin, ultimately breaking down the binary relationship of colonizer/colonized. In the remainder of my literary review and throughout my project, I draw on postcolonial and women of color feminist theorists such as Chandra Mohanty, Gayatri Spivak, Trinh T. Minh-Ha, and bell hooks.

Situating otherness

In his classic postcolonial text *Black Skin, White Masks*, Frantz Fanon famously conducts a sociological study on the inferiority complex of the colonized subject. Using psychoanalysis, Fanon describes the damage—the violence—done to the selfhood of his subject, the Antillean black man. Having grown up in a white-dominated cultural context that is premised off of the exclusion and revulsion of blackness, the black child is taught from infancy—through the consumption of cultural commodities such as comic books

and cartoons—that his blackness is evil. Fanon delineates the anti-blackness at the heart of the European unconscious, and the process by which the European must reject this "uncivilized" blackness inside himself so as to achieve morality, which is associated with whiteness and light. Consequently, "Moral consciousness implies a kind of scission, a fracture of consciousness into a bright part and an opposing black part. In order to achieve morality, it is essential that the black, the dark, the Negro vanish from consciousness. Hence a Negro is forever in combat with his own image" (Fanon 194). Put simply, the colonized subject internalizes the externalized hegemonic conception of himself as Other: the colonized subject's selfhood undergoes violence.

Of course, the material realities of a black man living in Martinique in the 1950s, when Fanon was writing, is very different from that of the Indian woman immigrating to the United States in the 1980s, or from that of a young Punjabi girl growing up in England in the 1960s, and certainly from the circumstances of my peers at Macalester. I do not want to draw parallels so much as draw from Fanon's psychoanalytic framework situating the subject. Due to the enduring influence and presence of colonialism in today's postcolonial era, it is difficult to transcend or operate beyond aforementioned dialectical power relations between colonizer/colonized, or Self/Other, or center/margins.

The postcolonial feminist theorist Gayatri Spivak writes about the difficulties of representing subaltern subjectivity. In her essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" Spivak explores the enactment and the consequences of epistemic violence to the subjectivity of the Other. Spivak's subaltern refers to the portion of the population that is excluded from representation within hegemonic discourse. Acknowledging that the term was originally coined by Michel Foucault, Spivak defines epistemic violence as "a complete overhaul of

the episteme" done to the subaltern (Spivak 76). Epistemic violence is a violence done to the knowledge of a people. Spivak describes epistemic violence as operating in two parts: there is the "project to constitute the colonial subject as Other," coexisting with the "asymmetrical obliteration of the trace of that Other in its precarious Subject-tivity" (Spivak 76). Spivak is continuing Fanon's analysis: the subaltern is Othered so as to create the Self, which is defined as being not-Other.

In this last quote, Spivak is also invoking Edward Said's landmark postcolonial text *Orientalism.* Said writes that the concept of the Orient in Western academy is useful more as a reflection of a Western Self than as an actual conceptualization of what we consider geographically and historically to be the Orient. "The Orient has helped to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience... The Orient is an integral part of European *material* civilization and culture" (Said 87). In short, the Orient must assume a fixed relationality as Other so as to procure the universal and transcendent notion of the Eurocentric Self. By operating as the Other in the necessarily dichotomous relationship between colonizer and colonized, the colonized functions as object so as to define the material conception of the imperial Western subject. The Other both formulates and reaffirms the Self. In light of this dichotomy—as Spivak points out—the Self must annihilate any trace of Otherness in own subjectivity, since the Self only exists in that which it is not: the inferior Other.

Epistemic violence is then part of the project to assume mastery over the Other. If epistemic knowledge functions so as to create how we know what we know, the erasure of epistemic violence forces the Other to operate within hegemonic modes of being. Indeed, the ultimate result of epistemic violence in colonialism, Spivak argues, is that "an

explanation and narrative of reality was established as the normative one" (Spivak 76). The term "normative" is important because it echoes the aforementioned imperialist project of creating an Other so as to establish and reinforce the universal, normative self. Non-normative, "subjugated knowledges," a term that Spivak again borrows from Foucault, are subsumed under and reinforce the hierarchy of dominant knowledge (Spivak 76). Essentially, Spivak is concerned with how the subaltern is silenced and misrepresented within the hegemonic discourse of the academy. Privileged, Western educated academics work to benevolently represent the subaltern while simultaneously erasing her voice and making the category of subaltern a monolith. These practices reaffirm the centrality of the Western subject in postcolonial academic discourse. Spivak seeks to deconstruct and decenter the ideologies of the Western subject.

However, due to the epistemic violence committed by dominant imperialist discourse to the colonized subject, postcolonial literature must necessarily engage with the colonial project. Third World thinkers exist and function at both margin and center, and embody the contradictions of their complicated position. Postcolonial theorist Abdul JanMohamed writes,

> The Third World's literary dialogue with Western cultures is marked by two broad characteristics: its attempt to negate prior European negation of colonized cultures and its adoption and creative modification of Western languages and artistic forms in conjunction with indigenous languages and forms (JanMohamed 21).

Transnational and transcultural Third World theorists exist within hegemonic Western discourse which labels them as Other, and as such they constantly occupy a syncretic space: a non-space, a place of contradiction. These thinkers must simultaneously deal with the internalized epistemic violence committed to their knowledge, while at the same

time navigating their fundamentally multiple subject-position so as to create knowledge and/or representation.

The female South Asian postcolonial subject of my analysis occupies this syncretic space. That is, while marked by otherness or difference, the transnational/transcultural South Asian woman subject constructs herself at both margin and center simultaneously. Existing at this syncretic location between epistemologies, she embodies postcolonial hybridity. However, postcolonial hybridity is a very broad term: on a basic level, it refers to the mixing of two or more different cultures. As such, in my project I focus primarily on cultural hybridity. Regarding cultural hybridity, literary theorist Homi Bhabha writes,

> Terms of cultural engagement, whether antagonistic or affiliative, are produced performatively. The representation of difference must not be hastily read as the reflection of pre-given ethnic or cultural traits set in the fixed tablet of tradition. The social articulation of difference, from the minority perspective, is a complex, on-going negotiation that seeks to authorize cultural hybridities that emerge in moments of historical transformation (Bhabha 2).

Cultural hybridity is constantly reproduced as the negotiation between differences. The culturally hybrid subject exists in the interstices between the cultures of Self and Other, and furthermore, at the gaps between differences themselves. Bhabha asks, "How are subjects formed 'in-between', or in excess of, the sum of the 'parts' of difference (usually intoned as race/class/gender, etc.)?" (Bhabha 2). The culturally hybrid postcolonial subject constantly mediates her conflicting identities, as well as her status as Other, thereby existing in and creating countless liminal cultural possibilities.

As such, the postcolonial hybrid subject must necessarily occupy a space of liminality. As Spivak claimed earlier, this space is often violently imposed through the systematic erasure of non-normative (non-Western, non-masculinist) knowledges. Thus,

as JanMohamed points out, “The domain of literary and cultural syncretism belongs not to colonialist and neocolonialist writers but increasingly to Third World artists” (JanMohamed 23). Hybridity and syncretism are then both imposed and innate processes of hybrid subjectivity which are constantly being recovered and reproduced. Hybridity breeds syncretism through necessity and as a means of reclaiming, reformulating, deconstructing, and decentering hegemonic conceptualizations of Self and Other.

I need now to make a clear distinction between the terms hybridity, syncretism, and liminality. Thus far I have used these terms in relation to one another and sometimes interchangeably; all three terms have overlap. By hybridity I am referring to the performative intermingling and negotiation between culturally distinct systems, institutions, or analytical paradigms. Similarly, syncretism refers to the melding and overlap of various and seemingly contradictory schools of thought. Finally, liminality invokes the ambiguity inherent to the in-between spaces and possibilities created by the dialectical relationship between Self/Other, colonizer/colonized, sameness/difference. All three terms are useful for my project in that they capture different but interrelated processes. The subject of my analysis is the cultural hybrid, who as I have argued must inhabit a syncretic space of contradiction by virtue of her location as Other while physically and epistemologically existing within the hegemonic center. Consequently, the epistemological contradictions that characterize the syncretic space give rise to a liminal field of possibilities for reimagining the seemingly dialectical (but in fact overlapping) relationship between Self/Other.

Importantly, cultural hybridity also invokes Bhabha’s concept of mimicry. Bhabha defines colonial mimicry as,

> the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as *a subject of difference that is almost the same, but not quite*. Which is to say that the discourse of mimicry is constructed around an *ambivalence*; in order to be effective, mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference (Bhabha 126).

Bhabha describes how during colonial reign in India, English missionaries and administrators sought what they defined as interpreters: a middle class of Indian men who were nevertheless thoroughly Anglicized in their aesthetics, ethics, and academics. Hence, mimicry occurs when the colonized subject essentially copies the master, adopting the language, dress, politics, or cultural attitude of the colonizers. In copying the colonizer, the colonized subject seemingly seeks to access the colonizer's power while simultaneously denying or suppressing their own status as culturally Other. However, Bhabha argues that mimicry may in fact be subversive in that it reveals the de-essentialized, performative nature of cultural engagement:

> The figure of mimicry... problematizes the signs of racial and cultural priority, so that the 'national' is no longer naturalizable. What emerges between mimesis and mimicry is a *writing*, a mode of representation, that marginalizes the monumentality of history, quite simply mocks its power to be a model, that power which supposedly makes it imitable (Bhabha 128).

Bhabha maintains that mimicry is not the same as the process of othering by which the white subject recreates its selfhood. Rather, mimicry is subversive in that it conceals no essential reality or truth: its potential lies in its ambivalence. "The desire to emerge as 'authentic' through mimicry—through a process of writing and repetition—is the final irony of partial representation" (Bhabha 129). Mimicry mocks the denaturalized ambivalence of colonial discourse and in doing so, ruptures its authority by revealing what Bhabha terms to be the "partial representation/recognition of the colonial object" (Bhabha 129). In essence, mimicry reveals the constructedness of the Self. The cultural

hybrid may engage in mimicry in hopes of achieving the power of the hegemonic Self, while at the same time decentering the Self through this process.

Space, race, and the Other

In the last section of my literature review, I situate this paradigmatic analysis of the Other's subjectivity in the context of both women of color feminisms and in its relationship to whiteness.

One foremost postcolonial and woman of color feminist theorist who embodies cultural hybridity is Chandra Mohanty. Mohanty consciously identifies as "both Western and Third World... I straddle both categories... I speak as a person situated in the One-Third World, but from the space and vision of, and in solidarity with, communities in struggle in the Two-Thirds World" (Mohanty 503). She points out that the construction of so-called Third World women as a monolith deemed "ignorant, poor, uneducated, tradition-bound, domestic, family-oriented, victimized" (Mohanty 22) overlooks the diversity and multiplicity of non-Western women. Mohanty argues that Western feminist writings often "discursively colonize the material and historical heterogeneities of the lives of women in the Third World, thereby producing/representing a composite, singular 'Third World woman'" (Mohanty 19). By colonizing Third World women in depicting them as ahistorical, irrevocably different, and a monolith, Western women are able to think of themselves as "educated, as modern, as having control over their own bodies and sexualities and the freedom to make their own decisions" (Mohanty 22). Overall, Mohanty argues that in doing so Western feminisms "construct themselves as the normative referent in such a binary analytic" (Mohanty 22). Western feminists are recreating the same binary of Self/Other (that renders the feminine Other so as to create

the masculine Self as that which is not-Other). This time, she argues, the difference is that Western feminists function as Self.

As a Third World feminist in the United States, Mohanty is marked by difference. Still, she is self-conscious in interrogating her positionality: she recognizes that she works within Western academia and as such receives the privileges of an elite minority. In realizing her positionality, Mohanty acknowledges the contradictions inherent to her position as a racialized and gendered Other operating within a traditionally hegemonic site of knowledge production. Mohanty uses syncretism as feminist methodology: she struggles to displace and dislocate feminist academia from within dominant structures. Rather than speaking on behalf of Third World women, Mohanty claims solidarity with them. She therefore acknowledges that women are various located by virtue of their location to disparate proximities to structures and/or relations of power.

Difference is consequently central to postcolonial and women of color feminist thought. Mohanty advocates for difference as forming a basis for feminist solidarity, as does feminist activist and writer Audre Lorde. Lorde writes, “Advocating the mere tolerance of difference between women is the grossest reformism. It is a total denial of the creative function of difference in our lives. Difference must be not merely tolerated, but seen as a fund of necessary polarities between which our creativity can spark like a dialectic” (Lorde 1).

However while difference may, as Mohanty and Lorde argue, function as a basis of strength and solidarity, oftentimes conceptualizations of difference engender discourses of multiculturalism and tolerance. Another postcolonial feminist theorist, Trinh T. Minh-Ha, deals with this notion of assimilationist difference. In her book

Woman, Native, Other, she writes: "i am *tolerated* in my difference as long as i conform with the established rules. Don't overstep the line" (Minh-Ha 87). She continues,

> i am also encouraged to express my difference. My audience expects and demands it... Eager not to disappoint, i try my best to offer my benefactors and benefactresses what they most anxiously yearn for: the possibility of a difference, yet a difference of an otherness that will not go so far as to question the foundation of their beings and makings (Minh-Ha 88).

Minh-Ha points out that she often functions simply as a convenient marker of multiculturalism within the white academy. Her difference is permitted so long as it does not disturb the hegemonic white center. In fact, her cultural difference reinforces essentialist narratives and pre-existing hierarchies. Rather than challenging notions of the hegemonic Self, she still reinscribes the Self by functioning as Other. Under this enactment of multiculturalism, the Self is not subjected to either the gaze of the Other or to a self-reflexive gaze. Instead, the hegemonic Self may codify and arrange representations of Otherness from its privileged position at the center. Minh-Ha writes, "They, like their anthropologists whose specialty it is to detect all the layers of my falseness and truthfulness, are in a position to decide what/who is 'authentic' and what/who is not" (Minh-Ha 88), and later on in the same page she writes, "Authenticity in such contexts turns out to be a product one can buy, arrange to one's liking, and/or preserve" (Minh-Ha 88).

Multiculturalist tolerance thus entails the white majority spatially arranging authentic representations of otherness into specific positions. As such, tolerance contains the possibility of physical violence: both tolerance and racism are "similar practices of spatial power" (Hage 92). In *White Nation: Fantasies of White supremacy in a multicultural society*, Ghassan Hage argues, "[Intolerant people] are only practicing

exclusion to the extent that they believe that those they want to exclude have transgressed what they believe are *their* limits of tolerance" (Hage 92). Hage cites the example of a white Australian who is able to mingle with a few Muslim immigrants but who described a mass Muslim migration to his neighborhood as "intolerable." "Here we see that tolerance, like the practices of exclusion, is primarily about the realisation of the national will as exacted by the nationalist" (Hage 92). This leads Hage to claim that, "the difference between those who practice nationalist exclusion and those who practice nationalist inclusion is not one of people committed to exclusion versus people committed to inclusion, but rather one of people with different thresholds of tolerance" (Hage 92). Hage goes on to point out that while racism is typically associated with intolerance, tolerance and racism actually go hand in hand: "Indeed, often the history of tolerance as an actual practice is to be found in the history of *exploitation* even more so than in the history of grand sentiments about the toleration of other 'religions'" (Hage 94). For example, exploited laborers are permitted in the dominant group's space even while the limits of their inclusion are strictly mapped, because of their value, economically and culturally. Valuing, positioning, and tolerance are all interlinked practices. "The practices of tolerance, like the practices of intolerance and exclusion, are nationalist practices aimed at the management of national space" (94). This white fantasy space, Hage argues, is in line with Minh-Ha's account of her performative difference: it is oriented with the white nationalist at the center and so-called ethnics arranged neatly around as objects of national will.

To conclude my literary analysis section, I want to focus on the notion of the radical potential of the Other's gaze, which was invoked by Minh-ha. Minh-Ha describes

how her difference did not provoke any sense of self-reflection in the hegemonic white imaginary. In her essay “Representing Whiteness in the Black Imagination,” bell hooks uses the phrase “looking relations” to describe the literal and figurative white refusal of the black gaze as a method of maintaining white supremacism. During slavery, dehumanization relied on the “white control of the black gaze” (hooks 168). Blacks could not directly look at their white masters; observation warranted punishment. By denying them the power of sight, whites denied blacks their subjectivity: they forced blacks to lower their eyes and assume invisibility. “To be fully an object, then, was to lack the capacity to see or recognize reality” (hooks 168). An object may be seen, but cannot see. Even in America today, hooks points out, whites can live as though “black people are invisible and can imagine that they are also invisible to blacks” (hooks 169). In systems of domination, the objectified Other cannot assume the capacity for sight, but is simultaneously constantly accessible within the paradigm of an invasive, fetishizing, and oppressive gaze. hooks’ theoretical concept of looking relations consequently refers to hierarchical economies of visibility, both literal and figurative. Literal, in that the Other is rendered invisible: for example, the limited visibility of brown bodies in the media. Figurative, in terms of the failure of difference within multiculturalist discourse that Minh-Ha referred to earlier: the Other does not have the ability to look at the Self, or to cause the Self to critically appraise it selfhood. However, looking relations also offer the space for subversion. The concept of the Other as looking back—of assuming subjectivity, exercising one’s gaze, and constructing one’s own representation—is subversive. As the objectified Other, reclaiming the powers of sight, conception, and

observation disrupts the dominant hegemonic imagination. Throughout my project, I seek to ask: can the Other look back?

Literary analysis: (re)producing the cultural hybrid

Bharati Mukherjee's *Jasmine* and Meera Syal's *Anita and Me* are very different novels. *Jasmine* depicts a transnational journey, whereas *Anita and Me* tells the story of the transcultural subject. The protagonist of *Jasmine* is a first-generation immigrant from the rural village of Hasnapur, while Syal's Meena is born and bred in Tollington, does not speak Punjabi, and has never visited India. However, both novels create and explore the construction of postcolonial hybrid subjectivity, and in doing so invoke the themes I introduced in my last section: representation, tolerance, and violence. For my literature review, I will divide my analysis into three sections, tracing in each of the texts first the issues of representation, then of tolerance, and finally of violence, and exploring how these concepts are related.

Bharati Mukherjee is both an established and controversial figure in South Asian diasporic literature. Born in India in 1940 to a Bengali-speaking Hindu Brahmin family in Calcutta, Mukherjee traveled with her parents to Europe after Partition and then returned to Calcutta in the 1950s. She completed her B.A. and M.A. in India, and then received her M.F.A. and Ph.D. from the University of Iowa in the United States. After marrying husband Clark Blaise in 1966, she moved to Canada for a number of years before moving back to the United States and becoming an American citizen in 1988. She does not identify as a hyphenated American in any sense of the word. In her article "Beyond Multiculturalism," Mukherjee writes,

> To reject hyphenation is to demand that the nation deliver the promises of the American Dream to *all* its citizens. I want nothing less than to invent a new vocabulary that demands, and obtains, equitable power sharing for all members of the American community (Mukherjee 460).

Mukherjee's denial of hyphenated immigrant or racial identity in multiculturalist discourse encompasses her attempts to "obliterate categorizing the cultural landscape into a 'center' and its 'peripheries'" (Mukherjee 460). Having come to America in the 1980s, Mukherjee challenged the "melting pot" discourse of American multiculturalism even while embracing her identity as an American. Sharmani Patricia Gabriel argues,

> In renouncing the hyphen, Mukherjee is consciously setting out to contest the essentializing strategy in this binary construction of national identity and ethnicity that upholds a Eurocentric framework of values and meanings associated with the hegemonic culture in American multiculturalism. In accordance with her refusal to treat ethnicity as a clearly divisible and dichotomous category that exists outside Americanness, Mukherjee reconceptualizes melting-pot assimilation" (Gabriel 2005).

Despite the controversies and critiques leveled at her for doing so, Mukherjee firmly embraces her Americanness. At the same time, she grapples with deconstructing Americanness and resignifying the relations of power and privilege among Americans.

Meera Syal was born in 1961 to a Punjabi family in Essington (which, like Tollington, is a small, remote village in the British Midlands) to Hindu and Sikh parents. Due to her success with novels such as *Anita and Me* (1996) as well as films such as *Bhaji on the Beach* (1994), Syal rapidly emerged in the 1980s and 1990s as part of a prominent handful of Black British women writers. The category of "black" Britishers, however, is complex and categorically diverse. Generally, it is used to refer to an oppositional and unifying political consciousness among non-white peoples in Britain (Cieko 67). In fact, "'Black' in Britain functions like 'people of color' in the United States" (Cieko 68).

Published in 1989, *Jasmine* tells the story of its titular character's journey from a rural village in India to the United States, traveling westward all the while. Jasmine first

moves after her initial marriage to Prakash, a progressive young Indian man, from her village of Hasnapur into the city of Jullandar, and then to Florida and up to New York before settling down in Iowa, pregnant with her partner—a white Iowan farmer's—child. At the novel's end, Jasmine, her unborn child, Taylor (her former employer in New York), and his daughter all decide to travel out to California to look for Jasmine's adopted stepson Du (a Vietnamese immigrant), forming a hybridized, makeshift family.

Anita and Me tells the story of Meena Kumar, a British-Punjabi girl coming of age in Tollington, a fictional rural mining village in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Meena's parents, Daljit and Shyam Kumar, immigrated to Tollington after meeting in New Delhi, where they each fled after the violence of Partition in 1947. The novel focuses on Meena from ages nine through eleven, telling the story of her friendship with another girl in the village, Anita Rutter. Anita is blonde, rebellious, older, charismatic and obscene; everything Meena—awkward, chubby, and brown—wants to be. The novel is semi-autobiographical, weaving Syal's childhood memories indiscriminately throughout.

It is important to note that *Jasmine* takes place in a distinctly American setting, whereas Syal writes during a very specific time in England, in the wake of official decolonization and during the subsequent decline of the British Empire. Both protagonists find themselves in settings characterized by distinct forms of whiteness. As such, at this point I need to provide and contextualize my definition of whiteness. In my project—with the exception of my analysis of *Anita and Me*—I largely refer to an American whiteness. However, in general whiteness is conflated or synonymous with the West. In his article "Constructions of Whiteness in European and American Anti-Racism," Alastair Bonnett writes, "Although... Whiteness is still subject to rearticulation

and resignification, the twentieth century has seen the category become increasingly synonymous with 'European'" (Bonnett 176). As such, although I seek to contextualize the different forms of whiteness present in each of my novels, I also assume that whiteness refers back to a Eurocentric subject.

In his essay "Whiteness is: the Struggle for Postcolonial Hybridity," Peter McLaren defines whiteness as,

> Whiteness is a type of articulatory practice that can be located in the convergence of colonialism, capitalism, and subject formation. It both fixes and sustains discursive regimes that represent self and "Other": that is, whiteness represents a regime of differences that produces and racializes an abject Other. In other words, whiteness is a discursive regime that enables real effects to take place. Whiteness displaces blackness and brownness—specific forms of nonwhiteness—into signifiers of deviance and criminality within social, cultural, cognitive, and political contexts. White subjects discursively construct identity through producing, naming, 'bounding,' and marginalizing a range of others (McLaren 67).

As I have mentioned, whiteness is thus produced in specific sociocultural, historical, and economic contexts. Referring back to the formation of the Self/Other dialectic I detailed earlier, whiteness creates and sustains its Other (blackness and browness, or nonwhiteness in general) so as to maintain its Selfhood. Whiteness' status as Self both relies on and fixes certain privileges to those deemed white. In the context of the convergence of colonialism and capitalism, whiteness is rendered normative and maintains a cultural hegemony all over the world, providing white bodies with greater mobility and access even beyond and across the borders of the nation-state.

In her essay, "Wa(i)ving It All Away: Producing Subject and Knowledge in Feminisms of Colours," Mridula Nath Chakraborty claims,

> White settler states arrange themselves politically, institutionally and socially within the binaries of insider and outsider, resident and alien, citizen and subject, home and exile, settler and immigrant, while the 'native' and the 'aborigine' is

> violently and systematically erased from the map... The Others in such states are necessarily categorized and pathologised in opposition to the normative Eurocentric subject. Racialized subjects have the double burden of proving that they are equally valid candidates for citizenship at the same time as having their difference marked and fetishized (Chakraborty 105).

By multiculturalist white settler states, Chakraborty is referring to countries such as the United States, Britain, Canada, and Australia. In these states, as Leslie Roman argues in her article "Denying (White) Racial Privilege: Redemption Discourses and the Uses of Fantasy," that multiculturalism is a "spectacle... which commodifies and appropriates 'racial' and 'national' otherness rather than redressing racial and imperialist inequalities" (Roman 272). As I explained in my literary review, tolerance of difference in multiculturalist societies such as that of the United States relies on an implicit (white, masculinist) center which has the power to permit (or erase) difference.

McLaren writes of whiteness in America,

> Whiteness constitutes unmarked patriarchal, heterosexist, Euro-American practices that have negative effects on and consequences for those who do not participate in them. Inflected by nationhood, whiteness can be considered an ensemble of discursive practices constantly in the process of being constructed, negotiated, and changed. Yet it functions to instantiate a structured exclusion of certain groups from social arenas of normativity (McLaren 67).

Whiteness in America is contextualized in terms of heteropatriarchal capitalism and is premised off of normative exclusionary discourse. Through gendered, racialized, and sexualized constructions of whiteness, Americans outline the concept of nation, embedding and conflating Americanness with whiteness.

If whiteness in America is concerned with recreating and maintaining the imperialist borders of the nation-state in the context of America's global cultural hegemony, whiteness in Britain struggles to redefine nationhood in the wake of the decline of empire. In her article "Island Racism: Gender, Place, and White Power," Vron

Ware writes, “Almost continuously since the 1940s, however, there have been many other voices... insisting on the harm being caused to ‘British culture’ by the presence of former colonial subjects” (Ware 283). Ware goes on to describe the nationalist, xenophobic, and racist outbursts by young men she refers to as “English hooligans, thugs, and yobs” (Ware 285) who “revealed the unacceptable and uncontrollable face of English national pride” (Ware 284). These young men represent a racialized, gendered, and classed anxiety in the aftermath of decolonization. Simply put, they are a manifestation of Britain’s (white, male, heterosexual) identity crisis.

There are consequently some differences in terms of the multiculturalism inherent to the cultural and anti-racist policies of both the United States and Britain. Regarding the United States,

> Multiculturalism in the United States is marked by “an increasing use of a culturalist/ethnicist discourse (often racialized) by the U.S. corporate and government sectors, while also indicating the lack of state-sponsored and centralized legal forms of multiculturalism... the U.S. continues to use an assimilationist universalism deployed through a language of liberal pluralism and citizenship, while also proliferating and relying on a language of racialized ethnicity of social and cultural alienness (Bannerji 17).

The United States actively practices a multiculturalism that is inextricable from neoliberalism. While this multiculturalism provides a framework through which it is possible to imagine multiculturalism as the “heir to the deceased civil rights movement” and to analyze intergroup interactions and build coalitions across the United States, it also fossilizes difference and renders it static: an inessential afterthought to the cultural center. As I have alluded to earlier in this project, under this definition multiculturalism “establishes the centrality of an American culture by simultaneously designating other cultures as both autonomous and subcultures” while at the same time acting as a “tool for

corporate America, both in terms of its internal diversity management and international capitalism or globalization" (Bannerji 18).

A few pages later, Bannerji describes Britain's multiculturalist framework. Similarly to the U.S., multiculturalism in Britain is,

> A complicated and voluntary affair... There may be some symptoms of multiculturalism emerging in the state and economy for management or containment of racialized class relations and exploitation, but they are far from being prominent... The centrality of the dominant English culture, with its colonial self-importance dating back from the days of empire, has not yielded to any talk of adjustment under the pressure of 'other' cultures" (Bannerji 20).

Britain's multiculturalism is thus more overtly exclusionary than that of the United States. At the same time, Bannerji refers to the phenomenon of Black Britishers,

> Antiracist politics in Britain has largely developed under the umbrella of black and class politics. The notion 'black,' disarticulated from a biologistic connotation, has codified an oppositional political stance... Avoiding the British government's divisive naming of local non-white population as 'black' and 'Asian,' women of the third world in Britain—i.e. non-white women—have called themselves 'black'" (Bannerji 21).

These politically black Britishers—Meera Syal among them—invoke the positive implications of multiculturalism: its possibilities for interracial and interethnic coalition building. Bannerji continues, "It is through the door of the notions of hybridity, openness, and fluidity of identities, rather than strong state or ethnic nationalism, that a multiculturalist approach has marked 'black' politics in Britain" (Bannerji 22).

Representation

In his essay "Imaginary Homelands," Salman Rushdie describes his fragmentary hybrid subjecthood. He writes of himself and his contemporaries, "Sometimes we feel that we straddle two cultures; at other times, that we fall between two stools" (Rushdie 15). Given their permanent status as insider/outsider (in the Western countries in which

they make their homes as well as in the countries from which they emigrated), he claims, "Those of us who have been forced by cultural displacement [have had] to accept the provisional nature of all truths" (Rushdie 12). Consequently, Rushdie's writing is not linear; it does not claim any sort of certainty of reality. In describing his novel *Midnight's Children*, he writes,

> This is why I made my narrator, Saleem, suspect in his narration; his mistakes are the mistakes of a fallible memory compounded by quirks of character and of circumstance, and his vision is fragmentary. It may be that when the Indian writer who writes from outside India tries to reflect that world, he is obliged to deal in broken mirrors, some of whose fragments have been irretrievably lost (Rushdie 11).

Both *Jasmine* and *Anita and Me* are examples of postcolonial novels in that they are each rooted in the overlap and mistakes of memory rather than absolute truth. Despite the fact that they both follow the personal trajectory of a singular protagonist, neither protagonist's journey is linear. Each novel's protagonist is caught between her status as insider and outsider. As permanently othered by hegemonic discourse, Jasmine and Meena both strive to construct an "authentic" selfhood.

In doing so, each novel functions as a sort of mythological bildungsroman. The bildungsroman emerged in Germany near the end of the eighteenth century. Typically, the trope of the bildungsroman implies linearity, a process of development, and ultimately progress through a journey embarked upon by the protagonist. In addition, the traditional bildungsroman depicts a realist consistency of its protagonist's character; a coherence of the self from the novel's beginning (in the past) to the novel's end (its present or potential). However, neither *Jasmine* nor *Anita and Me* are linear or factual; rather, they both invoke Rushdie's paradigm of the jumbled inconsistency of the postcolonial novel.

For this section, I find it interesting to read popular allusions to each novel. *Jasmine*'s book jacket displays several reviews: the *San Francisco Chronicle* hails it as "poetic" and "exotic," and the *New York Times* named it a Notable Book of the Year, an eloquent "fable, a kind of impressionistic prose-poem." On the book's back cover, the *Los Angeles Times* praises the author, claiming "Only a foreign eye could fix the world of the Upper West side with such hilarious and revealing estrangement... [Mukherjee] marks with unsparing brilliance the symptoms of a new Third World." This reference to a foreign eye draws an interesting parallel between Mukherjee and her titular character. In the novel's opening, Jasmine is visiting an astrologer who, after predicting her widowhood and exile, hits her on the head and knocks her onto the ground. As she falls onto a bundle of firewood, an errant twig punctures her forehead. When her sisters worry about the scar the wound will leave on Jasmine's face, she shouts, "'It's not a scar... it's my third eye'" (Mukherjee 2). She elaborates that a third eye was a magical property belonging to the holiest of sages, who used it to peer into invisible worlds. Returning to the book jacket, another review on the novel's back cover by *USA Today* overtly references this third eye, "With the uncanny third eye of the artist, Mukherjee forces us to see our country anew." This orientalist discourse creates Mukherjee's third eye and gives it mystical properties, depicting it as surveying the United States with penetrating wisdom.

In her article "'We Murder Who We Were': *Jasmine* and the Violence of Identity," Kristin Carter-Sanborn argues that this third eye "reveals itself to be the uncanny eye of the third *world* artist for these reviewers"; that it "embodies the mystical insight of the Other" (Carter-Sanborn 575). This gaze, which interchangeably belongs to

either Jasmine or to Mukherjee herself, gaze probes the American consciousness, but ultimately does not challenge it, as is evidenced by a review by *the Baltimore Sun* on the novel's back cover. The review describes *Jasmine* as, "The story of the transformation of an Indian village girl, whose grandmother wants to marry her off at 11, into an American woman who finally thinks for herself." Within this narrative Jasmine conveniently functions as the oppressed Third World girl—an inherently paternalistic term—who upon reaching the West (or coming into contact with Western feminism) becomes a liberated American woman. Jasmine, and by extension, Mukherjee, is cast as the orientalized Other. She is foreign, vaguely mysterious and mystical, but ultimately assimilationist and unthreatening.

However, this interpretation of *Jasmine*—that of an Indian village girl who transforms into a liberated American woman, reinforcing sexist and colonialist Western fantasy—is due in part to the fact that it is being read and discussed in English, and therefore in the Western world. *Publishers Weekly* and the like take Bharati Mukherjee's voice to be representational as an authentic voice for South Asian women. Within this discourse then, as Chandra Mohanty noted, Third World women become a monolith. Mukherjee's novel (whether intended as representational or not) speaks for the silent mass. In an interview, Spivak describes this practice of assumed representation in her comments regarding her own writings, in which she struggles to reinscribe the voice of a young Indian woman, "So if I'm read as giving her a voice, there again this is a sort of transaction of the positionality between the Western feminist listener who listens to me, and myself, signified as a Third World informant" (Spivak 57). The fact of even working within this discourse implicates Spivak—or the Third World woman who is accessible to

Western consumption—as a tokenized representative. Mukherjee's position as Third World artist—or as the Orientalized third eye—is enforced by a multiculturalist Western framework, which authenticates her as representative/informant.

Anita and Me struggles with somewhat different questions of representation and authenticity. Meena struggles with a lack of authenticity: Meena is never authentically anything. She is perceived as unable to represent "authentic" Englishness or Indianness. Meena worries, "I knew I was a freak of some kind, too mouthy, clumsy and scabby to be a real Indian girl, too Indian to be a real Tollington wench, but living in the grey area between all categories felt increasingly like home" (Syal 150). Meena's grey area invokes Bhabha's Third Space; the location in which she inhabits and constructs hybrid subjectivity. Meena does not simply occupy this third space by virtue of existing; she actively creates, modifies, and shuttles in and out of this space through practices such as code-switching. She constructs various identities in response to her situations. Neither "truly" Indian nor "truly" British, Meena is caught in the in-between. She oscillates between her desire to represent either Englishness or Indianness.

Like *Jasmine*, *Anita and Me* is a fable, this time dealing with the interstices in both Meena Kumar and Meera Syal's histories. Looking at the summary of the novel online on Amazon.com, the book is depicted as "a unique vision of a British childhood in the Seventies, a childhood caught between two cultures, each on the brink of change." Already, this summary is touching on liminality, regarding both Meena's transcultural status and also British and diasporic identity. Over the course of the novel, Meena constructs her subjectivity as exceeding both positions, thus challenging notions of authenticity (Alexander 40). In referencing the novel as a mythology during the preface,

the narrator (an adult Meena) writes, “those of us deprived of history sometimes need to turn to mythology to feel complete, to belong” (Syal 10). Caught between gender, race, and nation, and transgressing the boundaries of all three, Meena seeks to modify and reimagine past, present, and future. As a marginal subject, she writes herself into being, and by referring to her novel as a mythology she does so without claiming any absolute depiction of reality. In foreshadowing the development of the protagonist from a future adult standpoint, the preface disrupts the linearity of the bildungsroman.

However, in his article “Beyond (T)race: Bildung and Proprioception in Meera Syal’s *Anita and Me*,” Berthold Schoene-Harwood argues that in many ways *Anita and Me*—particularly in the novel’s beginning—is ambivalent about the discursive potential of hybridity. Rather, Meena’s trans- or intercultural identity throughout the novel often threatens to maroon her outside of either English or Indian culture, leaving her isolated from both cultures rather than participating in or drawing from either. Schoene-Harwood writes, “It seems as if ultimately, to survive and prosper in the Third Space, the postcolonial self must not enter but come out of *Bildung*… Meera Syal experiments with alternative, expressly anti-*Bildung* modes of hybrid self-authentication” (Schoene-Harwood 160). *Anita and Me* is consequently fluid and cyclical: “a novel of transformation instead of formation, featuring an interaction between self and society as the heroine influences and is influenced by her surrounding environment” (Alexander 12). Furthermore, rather than focusing solely on the individual, Syal’s novel simultaneously acts as societal criticism, invoking reflection of the hegemonic white cultural center through its focus on an unlikely (brown, female) protagonist.

Of course, many of the issues of representation and authenticity inherent to *Anita and Me* are applicable to *Jasmine*. After all—is Jasmine perceived as "truly" American? By either the people she encounters in the United States or by the novel's reviewers? And what is the price of this so-called authentic Americanness? Shortly after entering the United States, Jasmine goes to New York and lives in an ethnic neighborhood in Queens, where she finds herself surrounded by other Punjabis. She struggles with the weight of this Indian community and eventually breaks free, going to Manhattan to live with a white couple and working as their nanny, and then moving to Iowa, the white heartland of America, before finally heading West to California. Throughout these travels, she is often the only South Asian present. To become authentically American, then, Jasmine must break free from her community and surround herself primarily by whiteness. At the same time, the novel proves its "authentic" Americanness by reaffirming individualist white narratives of America. Like her protagonist, in writing the novel Mukherjee breaks from an Indian situatedness and immerses herself in an American literary context. Acceptance as "authentically" American comes at a cost: the overt refusal of her Indianness, or at least her Indian community.

Tolerance

Anita and Me deals far more explicitly with questions of tolerance than *Jasmine*. Jasmine is a solitary immigrant, and she does not ask for tolerance. Tolerance implies passivity; Jasmine actively immerses herself in America and Americanness. She does not remain in any one place long enough to be tolerated. Instead, Jasmine constantly negotiates between past, present, and future, actively engaging herself and her surroundings so as to transform what it means to be American.

However, many academics—among them Kristin Carter Sanborn—argue that *Jasmine* functions as "a sort of pop multiculturalist prop." In fact, Carter-Sanborn claims that its popularity is due to the novel's "simultaneous exoticism and domesticability" (Carter-Sanborn 575). Jasmine's positive reception is due to its existence as benignly multiculturalist—or domesticated—difference. While providing an interesting, so-called "authentic" glimpse into the otherwise inscrutable world of the Other, this difference does not really challenge Western Orientalist and imperialist discourse; in fact, it may reinforce it (as evidenced by the novel's reviews).

Jasmine is indeed palatable to whiteness; the novel—with its cover featuring a wistful, attractive young Indian woman staring out a window—reaffirms white selfhood. The authentically Other functions as representative so as to neatly delimit difference in multiculturalist discourse. Small numbers of "authentic" representatives of difference may be tolerated, even encouraged, because this difference ultimately acts—to use Carter-Sanborn's term—as a prop that goes toward creating and maintaining hegemonic white Selfhood.

Anita and Me depicts a very different immigrant experience than that of *Jasmine*. Foremost, Meena and her family live among a different sort of whiteness. In post-imperial and post-industrial Britain, the village of Tollington acts as a contact zone between "native" (white) Britishers and diasporic immigrants from former colonies such as the Kumars. Marked by economic and racialized fears of being overrun by foreigners, the white villagers treat the Kumars with a mixture of deference, hostility, and indulgence. For example, the Kumars's neighbor Sandy thanks Daljit by saying, "'You're so lovely. You know, I never think of you as, you know, foreign. You're just like one of

us'" (Syal 29). Sandy's compliment is simultaneously a racialized microaggression, reminding Daljit of her permanent exclusion by bestowing on her a superficial inclusive status within the village. Meena describes the villagers' perception of her mother: "[Daljit] was the epitome of grace, dignity and unthreatening charm" (Syal 28). Daljit is perceived as remote and dignified while simultaneously unthreatening.

Sophie Alexander writes that the villagers' conflicting attitude toward the Kumar family discloses,

> An ambivalence of desire and aversion, the ultimate paradox of colonial relations... The co-existence of respect and contempt illustrates the many nuanced reactions to Black Britons and the contradictory impulses to expel difference and to assimilate this difference into a national community and make it useful to the nation-state (Alexander 47).

These contradictory impulses are premised off of the white master's dependence on the Other's recognition of him. Because the master needs the Other, he "becomes a prisoner of the projected image," leading to fetishization and fixation on the Other (JanMohamed 20). As such, due to these contradictory impulses—desire and revulsion; economic resentment and at the same recognition of the Kumars's economic utility—the villagers of Tollington tolerate the Kumars. However, this tolerance belies their dependence on the Kumars to prop up their national fantasy. Because of this, JanMohamed claims, "The colonialist's desire only entraps him in the dualism of the 'imaginary' and foments violent hatred of the native": a hatred which JanMohamed goes on to characterize as a "desire to exterminate the brutes" (JanMohamed 20).

Consequently, the Kumars's spatial and power relationship to the white villagers of Tollington is complicated. Near the novel's opening, Meena describes her house, "There was my home, halfway down the hill, standing on the corner of the crossroads"

(Syal 12). Meena's house is in a liminal space, situated between the houses of the white villagers. Its location reflects the ambiguity of the Kumars's relationship to whiteness. On one hand, the Kumars are the racialized Other, acting as representative and reminders of gendered and raced national insecurities in the wake of the decline of Empire. On the other hand, the Kumars are more educated and upwardly mobile than many of their fellow inhabitants in Tollington. They are securely middle class, with their language skills, respectable values, and education.

The villagers appreciate the Kumars's economic and cultural value while simultaneously resenting their superior class status. For example, Deidre Rutter confronts Daljit about her disapproval of Anita, asking if Daljit has banned Meena from playing with Anita, incredulous that she and her family may not be "good enough" for Meena. Waiting for Daljit's answer, Meena notes that Deidre's tone is "one not of hostility but of disbelief"; she is puzzled, upset, and frightened by this possibility (Syal 215). Rather than embodying the "faceless hordes" (Syal 215) Deidre saw on the television, "Mama and papa charmed people, they had bought a new car, they held parties, they did not ask for approval or acceptance but it came to them nevertheless. Deidre had been seeking approval all her life in this village, her village" (Syal 216). The Kumars's social acceptance and approval disrupts Deidre's fantasies of white ownership. This scene, in facts, depicts a reversal of tolerance: rather than Deirdre charitably agreeing to help Daljit—and act as the benevolent extender of inclusion, and thus the center of power—the scene ends with a concession from Daljit: "But mama's face told a different story, she was smiling, gracious, mama the bounty giver. She felt victorious enough to be charitable, she had won, and Deirdre knew that too" (Syal 216).

Initially, Anita and Meena's relationship is premised off of Anita's charitable acceptance of Meena, even as they both grow aware of Meena's social (economic, educational) capital. Even after having won the villagers' approval, the Kumars are able to leave and do so, whereas the Rutter women are trapped in an increasingly disjointed and claustrophobic Tollington. By the novel's end, it does indeed seem as though the Kumars have "won": after passing the eleven-plus, Meena, having outgrown her friendship with Anita, leaves the village with her family to a "nice area" (Syal 327) just as Tollington falls into even greater disrepair.

Anita's charitable tolerance and simultaneous unconscious fear and resentment of Meena come to a head in the incident near the novel's end at the Big House. Roused on the eve of her fated eleven-plus exam, Meena joins Tracey to go look for Anita at the Big House. Stumbling upon Sam Lowbridge and Anita having sex, Tracey attacks Sam, and she and Anita run off fighting, leaving Sam and Meena alone. Sam approaches Meena, finally confessing his (imperialist) desire for her. When Meena confronts him about his racist attacks on other British South Asians, an unexpected role reversal occurs. Sam yells,"'I never meant you, Meena! It was all the others, not yow!'" (Syal 313). He goes on to say,

> 'Yow've always been the best wench in Tollington. Anywhere! Dead funny.' His face darkened, maybe it was another shift of the moon. 'But yow was never gonna look at me, yow won't be stayin will ya? You can move on. How come? How come I can't?' And then he kissed me like I thought he would, and I let him, feeling mighty and huge, knowing I had won and that every time he saw another Meena on a street corner he would remember this and feel totally powerless (Syal 314).

Again, Sam's simultaneous revulsion and desire for Meena mimics the historic relationship between colonizer and colonized. Meena, however, reverses the power

dynamic: she is charitable, letting Sam kiss her. Previously deemed an “unimaginable” (Syal 105) match for the white village boys, who ignored her even while they flirted with Anita, Meena now has the power to tolerate and finally reject Sam’s affections. Of course, their relationship is marked by class; Meena is able to move past Sam, to leave him behind, which Sam himself recognizes and bemoans. Like Deirdre and Anita, Sam is simultaneously drawn to the Other and then stricken, mystified, and frightened by the Other’s rejection or dismissal of him.

Simultaneously, Anita returns and is incredulous at this confirmation that Sam prefers Meena to herself. The previously unthreatening Meena is now cultural competition in her own right for the affections of white males. Meena is no longer one of Hage’s dead objects that Anita can artfully arrange around herself. Since Meena is not the chubby, brown sidekick who functions to increase Anita’s own desirability, her use value in Anita’s eyes has disappeared. As such Anita terminates their relationship: the novel ends with Meena wryly noting that of course, Anita never called.

As such, both Jasmine and Meena refuse to be simply tolerated. Despite their disparate circumstances, each protagonist rejects and renegotiates multiculturalist tolerance. While she neatly fits into American assimilationist paradigms, Jasmine insists on destroying and reshaping her surroundings: “I’m a tornado, blowing through Baden” (183). Meena, while initially only too happy to shed any traces of Indianness marked on her body and episteme, eventually rejects the supposedly charitable inclusion this affords her at the hands of Tollington inhabitants such as Anita Rutter and Sam Lowbridge. Tellingly, both of these processes of rejecting tolerance and assimilation involve a violent refusal and de-selfing

Violence

Jasmine and *Anita and Me* both take place in the shadow of Partition. Each novel deals with physical as well as epistemic violence: *Anita and Me* references the violent acts committed against brown bodies as the backdrop against which Meena comes of age, while Jasmine herself often undergoes physical, sexualized violence. Because *Jasmine* deals far more explicitly with themes of violence than *Anita and Me*, in this section I will focus on *Jasmine* at greater length.

Throughout *Anita and Me*, Meena herself grows aware of threats of literal violence in post-empire Britain. At the same time, as she comes to accept her identity as hybrid, there is a violence inherent to Meena's process of decolonizing her mind and becoming hybrid: of de-selfing. As she comes of age, Meena longs for whiteness. For the first time, she struggles to forcibly escape her status as Other: "I wanted to shed my body like a snake slithering out of its skin and emerge reborn, pink and unrecognisable" (Syal 146). Meena's internalization of racist norms of Self/Other are destructive to her selfhood. She embodies Frantz Fanon's psychoanalytic analysis of the racialized Other: she is uneasy in her own skin, and internalizes an externalized perception of her bodily self as essentialized and inferior Other. Surrounded by normative whiteness and white bodies, Meena's dark body is an object she cannot transcend. Instead, Meena searches for belonging outside the home, primarily through her friendships. She embodies Bhabha's mimicry, striving to embody everything to do with Anita Rutter. Her mimicry does not fully succeed: she is still overtly Other, marked by the color of her skin. In this respect, "There is no closet for the ethnic deviant, no way to go undercover and 'pass'" (Schoene-Harwood 162).

As such, as Meena grows up, she also has a growing awareness of the violence that discourses of tolerance inflict on othered bodies. The villagers' indulgent and uneasy tolerance can and occasionally does give way to violence. Often the villagers overtly engage in acts of violence, such as the racist physical attacks perpetrated by Sam Lowbridge and his gang (the young "yobs" and "thugs" of Vron Ware's article) against brown skinned Britishers, such as Meena's Indian Bank Manager. As Hage pointed out in *White Nation*, nationalists who engage in intolerant behaviors do not conceive of themselves as intolerant so much as having reached the limits of their tolerance, and consequently as having to reestablish their national boundaries and limits. Hage claims that referring to these practices as those of nationalist exclusion means reinstating the symbolic violence of "those whose threshold of tolerance is represented by the state" (Hage 93). According to Hage, intolerant and tolerant nationalists differ only in their capacities for tolerance. In fact, "Both are about realising a vision of national space through tolerance and intolerance, through the exclusion of some and the inclusion of others" (Hage 93). As such, (in)tolerance in the discourse of middle-class multiculturalism is "premised on fantasies of national ownership," (Alexander 20) referring back to a previously established hegemonic center which benevolently permits existence at the margins. Meena's awareness of the structural violence underlying Tollington is finally encapsulated by the brutal meaning Meena reads into Sam's scar at the incident at the Big House: she imagines him attacking an Indian woman in alley, Sam flinching as the woman fights back.

Indeed, at the novel's end there is an act of bodily violence and near-death: Tracey Rutter falls into the dark pond of the Big House and nearly drowns. In his article,

“Meena’s Mockingbird,” Graeme Dunphy claims, “Meena projects fantasies and frustrations onto Anita, using her to overcome her own insecurities; and when she finally rejects Anita, this is a growing-up process in which she is turning her back on a part of herself... we might suggest that Anita is for Meena a kind of alter ego” (Dunphy 642). As the novel progresses and culminates, Meena is violently de-selfing. She recognizes and rejects the promise of violence inherent to Anita’s tolerance. This recognition and partial reversal of epistemic violence is accompanied by the literal violence of Tracey’s drowning. While Meena grows stronger, both physically after her horse-riding accident and mentally in terms of re-selfing, Tracey fades away. Daljit and Shyam even worry it was their daughter who fell into the pond and nearly died: Tracey was wearing Meena’s sweater. Tracey is Anita’s shadow, doubling Meena’s mimicry and representing the damage to Meena’s selfhood in her friendship with Anita Rutter. Tracey’s increasing physical negation and near-death is the violent due paid for Meena’s de- and re-selfing. Schoene-Harwood writes,

> As the title of Syal’s novel suggests, Meena’s... narrative casts her as the mere reflection—the shadow—of Anita’s hegemonic self. Evidently, Meena has suffered identification as a process of doubling and projective mimicry exacerbated by an internal split into colonizing self and far too readily colonized other... It appears that, to become fully and freely herself, Meena must trace and exorcise her memory of Anita (Schoene-Harwood 165).

As Tracey fades away, Meena’s mimicry fades alongside her, paving the way for reclaimed selfhood.

In fact, near the novel’s end, while recalling the details of Tracey’s drowning for the police, Meena leaves her body onto reenter it: “I was outside my body, watching a fat brown girl chew her lip and talk in faltering sentences” (Syal 325). Floating up and away from herself, Meena sees Tollington’s boundaries dissipate and meld together; she floats

back down to her body "which, for the first time ever, fitted me to perfection and was all mine" (Syal 326). By realizing the symbolic and actual bodily violence done to her self, Meena essentially grows up. She violently de-selfs so as to reclaim her experience as her own. She stops fluctuating between a desire for authentic or full Britishness or Indianness. Meena briefly transcends Tollington and her status as Other: like whites, she is momentarily able to transcend her bodily signifiers. In the end, however, she is estranged from her bodily self so as to reconcile with her visceral experience and deliberately construct her status as Other. On page 303, Meena writes,

> I now knew I was not a bad girl, a mixed-up girl, a girl with no name or no place. The place in which I belonged was wherever I stood and there was nothing stopping me simply moving forward and claiming each resting place as home. This sense of displacement I had always carried round like a curse shriveled into insignificance against the shadow of mortality cast briefly by a hospital anglepoise lamp, by the last wave of a gnarled brown hand (303).

Even in this quote, there is a reference to violence: Meena alludes to mortality, to bodily death, as finally allowing her to both transcend and deliberately assume her status as Other.

Schoene-Harwood also refers to Homi Bhabha's Third Space as presenting for postcolonial migrants the possibility of "post-nationalist, *inter*national identification, sited in the interstices between different, traditionally enclosed reservations of culture" (Schoene-Harwood 160). However, because in-between place is fluid and constantly dismembering and re-inventing itself, it is not a viable inhabitable space: the Third Space does not tangibly exist so much as it represents the achievement or fulfillment of an ideal. Thus, Schoene-Harwood importantly points out that,

> Hybridity does not miraculously release the self from its position of (post-)colonial inferiority. First and foremost, it signifies a multitude of unco-ordinated, chaotic differences precariously constituting a motley being which only in rare

> instances manages to emerge as a trickster-like herald of social change (Schoene-Harwood 160).

By the end of the novel, Meena constructs herself as hybrid subject, shuttling back and forth between cultures while existing in both and neither. Due to the violence she underwent as othered subject, forcibly displaced from her bodily selfhood, Meena's journey to reconstruct her self invoked the productive possibilities of violence.

Similarly, Mukherjee's Jasmine must also undergo a violent de-selfing so as to re-self. However, as a poor, illegal, uneducated widow immigrating to the United States, Jasmine's journey is marked by literal violence. The novel's turning point occurs, as I mentioned earlier, nearly exactly in the center of the novel, when the Vietnam War veteran Half-Face rapes Jasmine and then she murders him.

Kristin Carter-Sanborn argues that in this scene, "even as Mukherjee figures the act as agency rather than reactive self-defense—after all, Jasmine leaves Half-Face and *upon reflection* returns to murder him—she makes the murderer not Jasmine, but Kali" (Carter-Sanborn 589). Carter-Sanborn maintains that Mukherjee's reimagining of Third World woman as an original mythic presence so as to commit an act of violence ironically denies her agency: "Kali's presence overcomes and effaces Jasmine and the personal history which has brought her to this point" (Carter-Sanborn 589). As such, Carter-Sanborn claims that although Jasmine's rebirth is a violent event—and by this she references Frantz Fanon in his writings on the remaking of the colonized consciousness—it is also an act of "de-selfing." Instead of writing Jasmine as undergoing individual transformation, Carter-Sanborn claims that Mukherjee uses intermediaries—Kali, Lillian Gordon, etc.—to shuttle Jasmine from one position to another.

However, I argue that conceptualizing Jasmine's continuous process of change as abdicating agency by de-selfing assumes an essentialized, fixed, and contained selfhood. Critic Jennifer Drake writes, "To read *Jasmine* only through the lens of assimilation ignores that when a goddess transforms, she doesn't lose herself: she is no singular self; she contains the cosmos. When a goddess transforms, she takes action, exerts great power" (Drake 63-64). Shifting from Jasmine to Kali (or shifting from Jyoti to Jasmine to Jane) does not relinquish agency so as to render Jasmine into the passive. Rather, Mukherjee insists on the almost brutal, violent simultaneity of these multiple selves:

> Jyoti of Hasnapur was not Jasmine, Duff's day mummy and Taylor and Wylie's *au pair* in Manhattan; *that* Jasmine isn't *this* Jane Ripplemeyer having lunch with Mary Webb at the University Club today. And which of us is the undetected murderer of a half-faced monster, which of us held a dying husband, which of us was raped and raped and raped in boats and cars and motel rooms? (Mukherjee 114).

Jasmine's multiple selves are not distinct—they are constantly enacting cycles of death and rebirth; they are constantly performing violence to her past, present, and future. In doing so, Mukherjee both mourns the deaths of all these selves, and the violence they undergo, but also celebrates their lingering presence and their role in creating new selves. There is a violence to their forcible ending, their erasure and forgetting, but this violence is transformative. This theme of violent destruction and simultaneous rebirth is present throughout the novel, as Jasmine transforms with the beginnings and deaths of each new relationship: she goes from Jyoti to Jasmine with Prakash, and upon his death begins her new life in America. With Taylor and Duff, she becomes Jase, and then at the end of that relationship she becomes Jane. Finally, leaving Bud for Taylor, Jasmine against destroys a relationship, but she is pregnant with Bud's child—so the relationship is not truly destroyed.

Geoffrey Kain writes, “In murdering Half-Face Jasmine consciously becomes the image or incarnation of Kali, goddess of destruction” (Kain 154). Kain continues shortly thereafter, providing a quote from Mukherjee regarding Jasmine assuming the identity of Kali: “‘All Bengalis, including me, are Kali worshippers. She is the goddess of destruction, but not in a haphazard, random way. She is a destroyer of evil so that the world can be renewed’” (Kain 154). The contradictions inherent in Kali (and inherent in Jasmine) are visible through Half-Face’s reaction to his naked victim/killer: “His eyes fluttered open even before he felt the metal touch his throat, and his smile and panic were nearly instantaneous” (Mukherjee 105). Jasmine is simultaneously a vulnerable, naked, assaulted woman and also a murderous vengeful goddess. In the aftermath, the silence of the motel room contains, “Just me and the man who had raped me, the man I had murdered” (Mukherjee 106). Jasmine/Kali are figures of pleasure and pain, power and vulnerability. They incite lust and fear simultaneously, the same way that they both sow destruction and rebirth simultaneously.

In refusing to acknowledge a coherent identity, Mukherjee is neither denying Jasmine agency nor vilifying her “former” identity as Jyoti. Rather, she refuses to permit Jasmine any sort of unfragmented selfhood. In his article “The Technological Hybrid as Post-American: Cross-Cultural Genetics in Jasmine,” John K. Hoppe argues that Jasmine moves between new, empowering subjective possibilities. Hoppe points to the quote in which Jasmine claims she will “reposition the stars” (Mukherjee 144). He claims that Jasmine is not truly escaping but in fact restructuring and renegotiating her pasts. Jasmine, as a cultural hybrid, premises her transformative gaze as Other from the syncretic space she necessarily occupies. Within this space, she claims both American

mythology as well as Indian cultural and religious traditions as her means of exercising agency. In assuming the identity of Kali, Jasmine calls upon tradition, but she understands the power of tradition to transform and erase and produce. She embodies what Hoppe claims is "the inescapable excess of cultural interaction, the borderland postcolonial subjectivities that are multiple, and never thoroughly integrated into stable boundaries" (Hoppe 145). Jasmine, occupying conflicting marginalities in both Indian and American cultures, must fuse and transform each so as to survive.

Hoppe goes on to argue that both violence and technology come to play in these negotiations, these constant rebirths. He writes, "For Mukherjee, the mutually reinforcing tropes of technology and America serve as metaphors and vehicles for a version of the 'revision and reconstruction' Bhabha speaks of as defining the postcolonial identity" (Hoppe 146). Technology is a recurring theme in the text, playing a large role in Jasmine's first marriage to Prakash (they wanted to open an electronics shop), but, as Hoppe points out, featuring most prominently in America. Even during Jasmine's first view of America, "The first things I saw were the two cones of a nuclear plant, and smoke spreading from them" (Mukherjee 95). America is therefore already brutal, and this brutality is inherent in its technology. This first sight of America transforms a so-called virgin land into a "thickly populated zone of confrontation" (Hoppe 147). Hoppe writes, "It is this subversive re-appropriation of the already exhausted American cultural narratives of newness, open possibilities, and unknown but promising futures by new, postcolonial immigrants that is, we shall see, at the core of *Jasmine*'s multiple narratives" (Hoppe 147). Technology on one hand supports global capitalism and economic and

ideological neo-colonialism, but it also, Hoppe argues, provides a space for reimagining Jasmine and other immigrants: a place of hybridity, agency, brutality, and contradiction.

This depiction of technology as representing hybridity after Half-Face rapes Jasmine and permits her to go shower. It is Jasmine's first time in a Western shower: "It seemed like a miracle, that even here in a place that looked deserted, a place like a madhouse or a prison, where the most hideous crimes took place, the water should be hot, the tiles and porcelain should be clean, without smells, without bugs. It was a place that permitted a kind of purity" (Mukherjee 104). Jasmine cleanses her body, invoking transformation, manually coaxing out her other selves. The automatic shower is an emblem of Western technology, as it represents tenets of cleanliness that under colonialist paradigms marked the difference between whiteness (clean, pure and healthy) and the reviled Other (dirty, dark, and disease-ridden). Mukherjee takes the automatic shower, a technological site that historically functions as representative of Western imperialism, and transforms it into a place of ritual purity and transformation for the postcolonial hybrid subject. Jasmine subversively re-appropriates the shower and renders it a space of hybridity and contradiction. It signifies a brutal rebirth from violence, literal and immediate as well as historical and allegorical. Jasmine kills her former self (although this self is not truly gone, but lingers, overlapping and transforming her present and future selves) so as to be born anew as Kali.

Throughout the novel, Mukherjee overtly connects technology and its opportunities alongside the productive violence of the postcolonial hybrid subject. Hoppe points to the scene in which Jasmine tells Du, "'I understand circuitry'... 'I've also killed a man, you know'" (Mukherjee 139). Hoppe writes, "For Mukherjee, the postmodern,

postcolonial subject should be like an electronic component: functional, modern, and entirely flexible" (Hoppe 149). Death and rebirth are constant; furthermore, they are overlapping and contradictory.

In fact, Mukherjee depicts traditionalists as stagnant and ultimately doomed to extinction in a new, increasingly hybrid world. Jasmine ultimately leaves all of Mukherjee's traditionalist characters—Jasmine's father, who thirsts for pre-Partition Lahore; the Khalsa Lions, who strive to achieve to a romantic "pure" Sikh state; and Bud Ripplemeyer, who cannot understand or tolerate the changes occurring in the Heartland. In the end, Jasmine abandons the "old-world dutifulness" (Mukherjee 214) of India and of Bud. Jasmine, in her desire for survival, rejects stagnation, and instead goes West, towards, "Adventure, risk, transformation" (Mukherjee 214). Mukherjee is privileging futurity over romanticized depictions of the past, but her futurity is not linear. Rather, Mukherjee envisions a hybrid futurity. It is Jasmine's "non-integration" or her "ability and willingness to take up and cast off cultural, religious, and other roles as she needs to, in pursuit of a potentially utopian future... that makes her... as most identifiably American" (Hoppe 153). Her "doubled espousal of transformative violence and utilitarian technology" (Hoppe 154) marks Mukherjee's novel and forms the premise of her hybrid postcolonial subject. Jasmine's flexibility (and contribution to an emerging hybridized branch of American literature) is her ability to appropriate the pioneer/explorer rhetoric that had belonged to white Americans but which has since stagnated into tradition. Jasmine—and Mukherjee—reimagine American tradition, dismissing the notion of a static, romanticized, and discrete past, as well as Americanness and American futurity. In

Mukherjee's hybridized America, the past, present, and future intermingle and constantly produce new realities.

The lived experience of the hybrid subject

For the last section of my honors, I ground my analysis of hybrid subjectivity in the lived experience of South Asian. I decided quite late into my project that I wanted to conduct interviews, and consequently this section required quite a bit of unprecedented reading, planning, writing, and work. Even more jarring, this section forced me to operate out of my usual intellectual framework. As an English Literature and Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies double major, I have spent the past four years firmly ensconced in written words. Conducting ethnographic work mandated I speak to other women—other women of color and South Asian women—rather than simply theorizing women's experiences within a literary medium. As such, I chose to do interviews so as to navigate the supposed gap between theory and practice. Constituting women's lived experience as authoritative knowledge is central to feminist theory, which seeks to underscore the notion that theory is visceral. In doing so, my honors project is not simply relegated to an academic or intellectual sphere separate from the day-to-day experience of women at Macalester. Through my interviews, I hope to trace constructions of transcultural/transnational South Asian feminist hybridity in the lived experience of South Asian women of color at Macalester.

Due to the highly personal and possibly uncomfortable nature of the interviews, I strove throughout the research process to make my goals and procedures as transparent as possible so as to minimize participants' discomfort and ensure trust. I position myself within this project not only to contextualize myself in this work but also to acknowledge and minimize my power within the research process. As such, I am aware of my own positionality, and explained my positionality to participants so as to address the implicit

power I claim as an interviewer and interpreter/producer of knowledge. I had interviewees sign a consent form before the interviews, and informed them that they could refuse to answer questions or terminate their involvement at any point during the interview process if they felt uncomfortable. On this consent form, I delineated my research methods and goals, as well as my own personal stake in the project and in relation to the participants. In addition, before and during each interview, I explicitly stated my own experiences and intentions in constructing my identity as a transcultural South Asian woman.

I conducted interviews (lasting from thirty minutes to an hour) with three South Asian-identified women who attend Macalester. I divided my interviews into four parts: the introductory section and then three subsections which comprised the interview itself. Firstly, I provided each participant with a consent form detailing the goals, significance, and risks of my project, and explained the nature of the project itself as well as my motivations for the project. Next, I explained how my interview questions related to the novels, in that I was tracing three themes in my novels: representation, tolerance, and violence. Finally, I explained that I was covering three distinct (yet in this case, overlapping) identities: South Asian/desi (desi being a colloquial manner of referring to South Asians, or people of Indian, Pakistani, or Bangladeshi descent), women of color, and ethnic minority. I claim all of these identities, as do each of my participants. Next, in my first subsection, I asked participants to describe their processes (if any) of having come to identify as South Asian/desi and also as women of color. In the second subsection, I focused more on the performative aspects of constructing transcultural

South Asian and/or women of color identity. In my third and final subsection, I explored my participants' relations to other ethnic minorities.

Of course, as opposed to the multiculturalist policy of the United States and Britain in the 1980s and 1990s, the last section of this project takes place in Saint Paul, Minnesota in 2015. The racial climate of the country is very different today than it was when *Jasmine* was published. The inauguration of Barack Obama as President in 2008 was heralded by many Americans officially ushering in the "post"-racial era. A racial hybrid in the White House seemingly symbolizes America as having "ascended" rigid racial categories which prescribed "pure" racial identities (Squire 211). Racial obstructions in America have seemingly disappeared. As Kent A. Ono sardonically claims, "Postracism is the perfect elixir to help society forget about the icky historical abomination known as racism" (Ono 227). Post-racism is also explicitly linked to American capitalist narratives arguing for a pull-yourself-up-by-the-bootstraps mythology as underlying the American dream—and ignoring any sort of historical and structural inequality.

On the other hand, Macalester College is an institution committed to diversity, difference, and multiculturalism. Macalester strives to accommodate and foster multicultural spaces in which students and staff ostensibly discuss and analyze, according to Macalester's webpage on multiculturalism, "forces that create, contest, or maintain power, identity, or difference." This commitment to analyzing difference in terms of multiculturalism must, according to the same webpage, stand alongside an analysis of internationalism and hierarchical relations both among peoples in the United States and in terms of situating the United States in a transnational context. The webpage blurb ends

with the following quote, “In learning about other peoples, cultures, and global systems one dislodges presuppositions about others, and, crucially, about one’s individual and collective self.” However, while Macalester seeks to foster critical dialogues regarding difference, it is also an academic institution that exists in the larger post-racial climate of the United States, which enables a sort of historical amnesia and erasure of intersectional and interstitial differences. In addition, Macalester’s student body is very homogenous, with over two-thirds of its student population identifying as white. This leads to a somewhat contradictory environment: one which encourages difference, but often reproduces multiculturalist discourse that accesses and spatially arranges the Other while leaving its (white, middle class, heterosexist) center unexamined.

Despite my position as researcher, I count myself among the participants of this project. Throughout the writing process for my honors, I strove to position myself within the theoretical frameworks I am using. Therefore, I believe that my story is relevant to the project. In fact, much of the reason as to why I embarked on this honors was to understand and claim my own positionality. I am a Muslim second-generation Pakistani-American feminist. I’ve grown up in largely white, and sometimes East Asian-American, neighborhoods. I have not had much exposure to the South Asian-American community or to other racial minorities in the United States. Growing up, my parents were and are critical of whiteness in many ways, and actively strive not to assimilate or imbibe the cultural hegemony of whiteness in America. At the same time, my parents want my brother and myself to thrive in America and identify as an American: to make America our home in a way that they, as transnational immigrants, struggle to do. They feel that part of this process involves encouraging us to adopt what they consider to be the most

beneficial elements of (white, capitalist concepualizations of) Americanness, traits such as independence, agency, and a hard work ethic. Consequently, I identify much more with white culture than with any specific minority culture. Upon coming to Macalester, my identifications with white culture paid off: I made primarily white friends. By my fourth year, I found myself consciously and unconsciously passing only too well.

In her essay "Whiteness as Property," Cheryl I. Harris depicts the story of her grandmother literally passing as white so as to work in an upscale retail store in Chicago. This is not the definition of passing I use in my project. Rather, I refer to the accumulation of socioeconomic behaviors and privileges usually associated with South Asian communities in the United States. To pass, South Asian communities must be physically palatable to whiteness, and also must possess some of its tenets and material realities. Harris writes,

> The persistence of passing is related to the historical and continual pattern on white racial domination and economic exploitation that has given passing a certain economic logic. It was a given to my grandmother that being white automatically ensured higher economic returns in the short term, as well as greater economic, political, and social security in the long run. Becoming white meant gaining access to a whole set of public and private privileges that materially and permanently guaranteed basic subsistence needs and, therefore, survival (Harris 1713).

South Asians can pass in hegemonic white culture much of the time, in a variety of ways. One important way that South Asians pass is through economic mobility. Many South Asian immigrants and their families are well-educated and middle and upper-middle class, allowing them to assume many of the material privileges of whiteness. Another way that South Asians can pass is physically. South Asians are ambiguous and ethnically diverse racially, and the brown body is often read as mixed. This means that, while discernibly racial other, South Asians may also function as a space of access to the Other

without actually being too Other, be it physically, economically, or socioculturally. Much of the time, South Asians act as intermediaries between whites and other "bad" minorities (Latinos and especially blacks), with whites positing the economic success of some South Asian communities to punish minorities that demand legal reparation for the systemic and systematic oppressions they face.

The model-minority depiction of South Asian-Americans is fueled by the immigration of large numbers of highly skilled, highly educated, middle and upper class South Asians to America in the 1970s and 1980s (Gupta, 2009). Researcher Shireen M. Roshanravan writes,

> The model-minority racial project affects how people see one another as deserving or undeserving of the unequal distribution of state resources. The goal of this racial project is the fragmentation of cross-racial coalitional movement against white capitalist institutions. This is accomplished by portraying some people of color, namely Asians, as 'models' who then justify the poverty of so-called 'bad' or 'real' racial minorities. African Americans serve as the hegemonic representative of this 'bad'/'real' minority in large part because they figure prominently as a racial group that has demanded redress from the U.S. government... Specifically, the model-minority racial project attributes the economic success of certain Asian immigrant communities to 'superior' cultural values of hard work, discipline, and obedience to authorities (Roshanravan 3).

She points out that many South Asian communities have internalized the model-minority identity, which is depoliticizing and consequently makes coalitional politics difficult. As such, unfortunately, "The model-minority discourse cultivates popular perceptions of Asian American women as the least political among Women of Color and provokes questions about the authority of Asian American women to speak as Women of Color" (Roshanravan 3). These concerns are reflected in the interviews I conducted with my participants, and, as I delineate in this section, they connect explicitly with my writings on representation, tolerance, and violence.

I myself lead what people would consider a “white” lifestyle. I act and look white in terms of my behavior, cultural references, and clothing. I enjoy many of the benefits typically associated with whiteness, such as educational privilege and economic mobility. I have relatively light skin and long hair, so even though I am marked as racially Other, I still am largely accessible within beauty standards that fetishize certain mixed race bodies. In fact, upon coming to Macalester, I strove to immerse myself in whiteness, burying the so-called brown “parts” of my identity so as to become more fully “American.” However, at Macalester, through my growing awareness of racialized, gendered, sexualized, and classed systems of oppression in the United States and across the world, I came to deliberately claim my status as woman of color. At the same time, I grew more and more aware of my status as hybrid subject. I am constantly negotiating difference, whether consciously or not. I occupy a space of contradictions, and to survive, I often must navigate these contradictions simultaneously.

In my interviews, I strive to explore how my peers—three transcultural South Asian-American women in my grade here at Macalester—navigate the contradictions inherent to their construction of cultural hybridity. How does our lived experience of constructing cultural hybridity contribute to my analytical findings and goals in this project? Is it possible to trace issues of representation, tolerance, and violence throughout the lived experience of my peers and myself here at Macalester?

I have assigned each of my participants pseudonyms so as to protect their privacy. One of my interviewees (I will refer to her as Priyanka) is twenty-two, while the other two (I will refer to them as Myra and Avni, respectively) are both twenty-one. Priyanka is of North Indian descent, but she identifies as Indian-American or simply as South Asian.

She is not personally very religious, and neither is her family, but she comes from a Hindu background. She is a second-generation American, and her family is based in Seymour, Connecticut, where she grew up surrounded primarily by whites and isolated from other South Asians or South Asian communities. My second interviewee, Avni, is a Hindu of South Indian descent, and she is also a second-generation American who grew up in the Silicon Valley in California. In California, Avni was surrounded by primarily Indian communities—a situation which drastically shifted upon arriving at Macalester, where her friends are now primarily white. My last interviewee, Myra, is my only transnational participant: she is an international student who moved to the United States nearly four years ago to attend Macalester. Currently, she is planning on remaining in the Twin Cities after graduation, and is considering living in the United States permanently. Myra is Hindu and her family is originally from South India, but growing up she moved intermittently between Singapore and Mumbai. She did not make close Indian friends at school until attending high school in Singapore. Now, at Macalester, the majority of Myra's social circle is white, including her partner.

Roshanravan writes, "Recognizing the depth of assimilation to white/Anglo ways can thus leave one with a sense of self that has been reduced to an image without substance or independence" (Roshanravan 7). Similar to my own experience, all three of my participants describe struggling with passing only too well. Of course, it is not that they are read as literally white women, but rather they did not want to assimilate to what they consider to be hegemonic cultural norms which reinforce whiteness. For example, Priyanka acknowledges her proximity to whiteness and how, because of her immersion in whiteness growing up, she feels comfortable in white culture—enough that a white, racial

justice activist friend once said to her that “Indians are perceived as white,” making Priyanka “basically white.” In response, Priyanka claims, “So I guess identifying as a woman of color for me is a rejection of the model-minority stereotype that tells me I’m basically white or essentially white, ’cause like, I’m not white, and I do have a proximity to whiteness that a lot of people of color don’t have.” For Priyanka, claiming her status as a woman of color entails a rejection of the phenomenon of passing, and a movement towards inter-ethnic solidarity. Similarly, Avni described how her friends at home call her white-washed because of her desire to do “white” things in high school, such as applying to out-of-state liberal arts schools.

While Priyanka and Avni struggle with issues of authenticity—of being too white or too brown—Myra often finds herself forced into the position of representative. In her interview, Myra discussed how as an Indian international student, she is often singled out in class to act as representative for examples that invoke “developing” nations such as India. In fact, she maintains that she is considered a knowledgeable authority on India at Macalester and in the Twin Cities, even outside of the classroom. Myra often finds herself wondering which is better: surrounding herself by women of color who have had similar experiences as she has and as such can reinforce the experiences she undergoes as racialized Other, or whether that mindset is isolating and she has a responsibility so expose her white peers to difference so as to hopefully challenge their cultural preconceptions.

All three participants—particularly Myra and Priyanka—worry that they are tolerated because they are different *enough*. Myra maintains that her time in the United

States has not been marked by much overt racism; she feels that she has thrived here, personally, academically, and professionally. At the same time she wonders,

> I think I pass through a lot of those borders because I don't exhibit a lot of those traits of an international student of color. I think that if I had a stronger accent, or was not as comfortable in English, my experiences would be completely different—but I've been able to pass through what seems unfairly in like workplaces or interviews or things like that.

Because of this, Myra claims that she is read as,

> Competent because I don't seem too different to be, like, alienated from the culture, but like outside of the norm enough to be an exotic addition to wherever the group I'm in—like enough of a conversation starter, but not necessarily something that people think of as coming between us... and that's something that I've struggled with.

Myra's experiences in the multiculturalist environment of the United States suggest that she is tolerated within predominantly white institutions—and even white relationships—because her difference is assimilationist and ultimately unthreatening to whiteness.

My participants each delineate, then, the experience of being tolerated in their otherness, and imply that this tolerance is due to their status as a token representational Other. This tolerance of the token ethnic or the token women of color is premised on a perception of said women of color as being authentically Other so as to function as representative. For example, Avni describes struggling with her status as the token ethnic minority in her friend group even while she also strives to performatively "prove" her status as South Asian/desi. She struggles to establish her brownness, claiming that she likes Hindi music and participates in a bhangra dance team. Simultaneously, she tries to avoid the consequent stereotypes her friends project on her (such as the assumption that she can deal with any sort of economic or mathematical situation they encounter, or their excited references to her "colorful" and "better" Indian wedding someday). Like Myra,

Avni sometimes accepts her role as representative, simply because she is the only South Asian woman and often the only woman of color in many of her social circles. She constantly works to establish a distinction between genuine desires to learn more about South Asian culture, and microaggressions and discriminatory behaviors.

When asked about their status as women of color, all three participants were torn. On one hand, they each felt much political solidarity and personal connection with the term. For Priyanka, her status as a woman of color was the first identity she deliberately claimed for herself. Having been delegated a person of color growing up, after coming to Macalester she initially rejected the label of woman of color because she identified so much with whiteness. In addition, she believes that the multiculturalist environment of Macalester is dehumanizing and tokenizing: it values her for her the sum of her difference. Identifying as a woman of color, then, means that Priyanka does not accept assimilation: she will not be tolerated in and because of her difference. She strives for specificity and distinctions between herself and other women of color, as do Avni and Myra. In particular, each participant mentioned drawing solidarity—politically, aesthetically, emotionally, spiritually—from other women of color, even while resenting the umbrella distinction of "non-white" which identifies them as women of color.

Of course, as I have mentioned in both my literature review section and in my literary analysis section, tolerance of performative/representative difference under multiculturalism does epistemic violence to the racialized Other. Feeling obligated to simultaneously perform difference and also circumvent one's status as Other is impossible and exhausting. Particularly within a liberal, (post-) multicultural framework, where performing difference in encouraged, there is a sense of anxiety regarding the

hybrid subject's positionality in regards to her location. For example, Myra's worries that she is accepted merely because she is different enough to be a conversation starter, but not so different as to bewilder or offend, as well as Priyanka's worries about her status as a tokenized person of color in the Macalester course catalog, meaning that she is present and valued largely because of her quantifiable difference. Avni describes how freshmen year at Macalester, "I projected many of the insecurities and flux of that year in general onto the color of my skin. For the first time, I saw myself as the only dark body in a white space." There is a sense of paranoia—is this happening because I am brown?—which is especially aggravated by the larger post-racial context of the United States which silences and erases meaningful discourses on race, subsuming them under the hegemony of white multiculturalism. In each case, there is an element of internalized harm done to the participant's sense of self.

All three respondents invoked the epistemic violence of constantly being Othered, both in South Asian spaces and also in culturally white spaces. Priyanka worries about her cultural identifications with whiteness: she believes that these render her illegible as a woman of color. Myra and Avni, both of whom are South Indians and relatively darker skinned, worry that they are both racially Other but also not Indian enough. Myra, as an international student, describes how growing up, she imitated the social precedent set by her white peers. Even though she attended high school in Singapore, her international school was predominantly white, and whites—as the most socioeconomically and culturally privileged students—held the most cultural currency at her school. Myra used to wish for straighter, lighter hair, and bemoan her dark, thick body hair. She could not understand why the aesthetic ideals and trends set by whiteness did not physically flatter

her. At the same time, she remembers, “I’d move back to India and still not feel at home, because I was culturally different from everyone else—it just wasn’t the culture I grew up in. I’ve always grown up just being different from everyone else.”

Avni describes this experience as well, despite having lived in one country (the United States) all her life. After living in a primarily Indian community, she realized,

> That was actually one of my main motivations for leaving California, like fuck, if I don’t go to a school outside of California, I’ll never leave desi people, I could see—I knew what my future would be. I didn’t want that—I wanted to expand my social circles and get out of that cluster. I made a conscious decision to leave that community, and honestly I left it kind of shitting on my own culture.

Avni realized she would never be a “typical Indian girl.” Even in the United States, there is a modified version of the ideal desi woman: light-skinned, petite, and accommodating. Avni felt that this ideal of the typical Indian girl was imposed on her and that she was found lacking: too tall, too gangly, too dark. “I would be getting feedback from my male desi friends about what they value in a woman, and I’d hear them say something like ‘oh she’s hot, but she got too dark in water polo,’ and I’d think to myself ‘wow, then I’m never going to end up with them.”

However, after leaving her Indian community in California, Avni feels like she now goes back and re-identifies with it in many ways, appreciating it far more than she did before. She constructs her hybrid subjectivity, both within her Indian-American community and in the white-dominated multiculturalist framework of Macalester. As a dark-skinned woman, she says,

> I know this may potentially be problematic, but sometimes I feel like the desi community isn’t any help in navigating my being darker and having that not be normatively attractive anywhere, and so I try and relate to black women’s struggles through issues of color. Like I read their stories about being darker skinned and how they’re dating in America, so I learn through these examples from other ethnic communities while still trying not to co-opt their identities.

In this quote, Avni is utilizing women of color solidarity so as to restore damage done to her Selfhood under racist hegemonic beauty norms. At the same time, importantly, she is careful not to draw overt parallels or co-opt black women's experiences; rather, she seeks to draw strength from their activism in constructing her own subjectivity. Complicating the relationship between South Asian identity and women of color identity is the fact on which all of my participants agreed: South Asian identity—particularly transnational and/or transcultural South Asian feminist identity—is hugely wide and nuanced. The identity encompasses a variety of experiences: economically, culturally, socially, physically. Priyanka maintains, "For me, I think it's really important to acknowledge how I benefit from the model-minority stereotype, but also to acknowledge how me, and other South Asians, are really hurt and manipulated and oppressed by the model-minority stereotype."

As I have emphasized throughout this project, it is important to refuse to blindly privilege hybrid subjectivity. The South Asian women who participated in this project knowingly and unknowingly construct their hybrid subjectivities each day. In doing so, they use their multiple axes of affiliation and oppression—as transcultural subjects, as South Asians, as Western and Westernized women, as women of color—to navigate the conflicting demands of their subject positions. Much of the time, their status as hybrid may inflict violence. For example, in the context of Macalester each of my participants has had to assume the burden of representation as token Other while simultaneously erasing her lived experience and relationality to other women of color. As is the case with my novels, hybrid subjectivity may work simply to reinforce the hegemonic Self—particularly South Asian female hybridity as it is palatable to many tenets of whiteness.

Tolerance of the hybrid Other is dangerous, particularly because hybridity, by necessity, contains elements of the hegemonic Self in its location and construction.

At the same time, each of my participants struggles to reconstruct selfhood—one which consequently challenges, or (to once again invoke bell hooks) looks back at the hegemonic Self. Avni, Myra, and Priyanka work towards reclaiming their otherness as subject-position. This is part of the project of women of color in countries such as the United States and Britain: to reclaim their wholeness as subject even while they argue to fragment subjectivity. At the same time as they reclaim their selfhood, the cultural hybrids in my project are also struggling to navigate solidarity without transgressing or equating their experiences with those of other women of color. As Chandra Mohanty and Jacqui Alexander claim, “We were not born women of color. We became women of color” (Alexander and Mohanty 37).

Conclusion

In the vein of many feminist (and) postcolonial theories, this project has been a long, meandering, difficult, disorienting, and sometimes disheartening process. I embarked on it a year ago with only the vague notion that I wanted to produce *something* before graduating. At the time, I knew only that this project—in order for me to even complete it—had to have some sort of personal relevance. I began with only a fuzzy outline in mind: I wanted to delve further into women of color feminisms so as to identify my place among them as a Pakistani woman among women of color. However, in beginning my research I found that Pakistani—and other South Asian—women's stories seemed to be located more in the separate and yet overlapping field of postcolonial theory, which at the time I hardly knew anything about. And so, over the past few months, I have done my best to delve into the field of feminist postcolonial theory and to navigate its contradictions and its perspectives so as to understand my place within them as a woman of color. I did so by situating my location, through this project, within three arenas: feminist postcolonial theory and women of color feminist theory, as I have mentioned, and also whiteness studies. In researching and writing this project, I asked myself: how are these fields interrelated? Where is my place in all of this?

And finally: why am I doing this? What is the point of all this? What will I take away from this project? Firstly, as I have just mentioned, I took on this project so as to feel as though I produced my own, tangible project before leaving Macalester and its resources and opportunities. In addition, although I added the interview section somewhat unexpectedly, I am very grateful to the three women who agreed to meet with me and contribute to my project. If this project fostered any sort of community, solidarity, or

dialogue in their lives, then this project has been meaningful. Finally, I will take away from this project a sense of Self: an ability to recognize and name processes which, previously, had simply affected me. Similar to the processes of deliberate de-selfing and re-selfing Jasmine and Meena undertake in my novels, this project has equipped me to consciously reclaim and negotiate my subjectivity as Other, in all its contradictions.

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