

Gayatri Gopinath

Since 9/11, South Asian racialization in the United States has taken place through curious and contradictory processes. Even as the “indefinite detentions” and deportations of Arabs, Muslims, and South Asians continued unabated, the last three years saw an explosion of interest in Bollywood cinema among non-South Asian audiences.<sup>1</sup> In March and April 2004 alone, major stories about Bollywood’s moment of “arrival” in the West appeared in quick succession in *Time Out*, the *New York Times*, and the *Los Angeles Times*, to name just a few of the most visible instances of media coverage.<sup>2</sup> How can we account for this heightened visibility and “discovery” of Bollywood cinema at precisely the moment when South Asian communities in the United States are being more intensely surveilled, policed, and terrorized by the state than ever before? The stark contradiction between representational excess and material violence became particularly apparent to me during the 2004 Republican National Convention, as I found myself flipping through television channels hoping for some coverage of the massive protests in New York City. I came across the incongruous sight of protesters confronting a rather befuddled group of North Carolina delegates as they emerged from the latest Broadway show, none other than Andrew Lloyd Webber’s Bollywood extravaganza, *Bombay Dreams*. The show was apparently a hot ticket among the RNC delegates, and its tag line—“Somewhere You’ve Never Been Before”—provided a colorful backdrop as the camera captured delegates admonishing protesters for preventing the police from doing their job of “keeping America safe.” It seemed particularly ironic to me that the delegates occupied themselves inside Madison Square Garden with xenophobic calls for a never-ending “war on terror” while they diverted themselves outside the Garden with a brief foray into Bollywood glamour. The juxtaposition of nationalist spectacle and Bollywood spectacle may initially appear unremarkable, in the sense that *Bombay Dreams* can be seen as simply another safely multicultural, “ethnic” musical aimed at middle American consumers. One of the show’s producers, in fact, stated that she “views the show as a descendant of *Fiddler on the Roof* or *The King and I*, musicals with an ethnic milieu that have universal appeal.”<sup>3</sup> Yet I would argue that

the ubiquity and popularity of Bollywood at this particular moment of U.S. imperialist aggression and global hegemony bears closer scrutiny, as it reveals a great deal about the complex interrelation of multiple nationalisms and diasporic formations in the context of globalization.

To fully unpack these connections, I want to suggest the necessity of what we can term a queer diasporic frame of analysis. The concept of diaspora, as we know well from Stuart Hall and other theorists of diaspora, is double-edged in that it can undercut and reify various forms of ethnic, religious, and state nationalisms simultaneously.<sup>4</sup> Its potential has always been that it can work to foreground notions of impurity and inauthenticity that resoundingly reject the ethnic and religious absolutism at the center of nationalist ideologies. But the danger of diaspora as a concept, ironically, is its adherence to precisely those same myths of purity and origin that seamlessly lend themselves to nationalist projects. Indeed, while the diaspora within nationalist discourse is often positioned as the abjected other to the nation, the nation also simultaneously recruits the diaspora into its absolutist logic. The millions of dollars funneled from Indian American business, religious, and political groups in the United States to support Hindu Right governments and organizations in India is but one example of how diaspora and nation can function together in the interests of corporate capital and globalization, as well as ideologies of religious, cultural, and national purity.<sup>5</sup>

While Hindu nationalist forces in India acknowledge the diaspora solely in the form of the prosperous, Hindu, heterosexual nonresident Indian (NRI) businessman, there exists an alternative embodiment of diaspora that remains unthinkable within this Hindu nationalist imaginary. The category of “queer” works to name this alternative rendering of diaspora and to dislodge diaspora from its adherence and loyalty to nationalist ideologies. Suturing “queer” to “diaspora” points to those desires, practices, and subjectivities that are rendered impossible and unimaginable within conventional diasporic and nationalist imaginaries. A consideration of queerness, in other words, becomes a way to challenge nationalist ideologies by insisting on the impure, inauthentic, nonreproductive potential of the notion of diaspora. Queer diasporic cultural forms suggest alternative forms of collectivity and communal belonging that redefine “home” as national, communal, or domestic space outside a logic of blood, purity, authenticity, and patrilineal descent.

The notion of a queer diaspora resonates with Roderick Ferguson’s framing of a “queer of color critique.” While both queer of color and queer diasporic analysis are part of a collective endeavor to reshape queer studies through a thorough engagement with questions of race, nationalism, and transnationalism, it may also be useful to explore some of the points at

which the interventions and emphases of each project both intersect and diverge. In *Aberrations in Black: Toward a Queer of Color Critique*, Ferguson writes: “As the site of identification, culture becomes the terrain in which formations seemingly antagonistic to liberalism, like Marxism and revolutionary nationalism, converge with liberal ideology, precisely through their identification with gender and sexual norms and ideals. Queer of color analysis must examine how culture as a site of identification produces such odd bedfellows and how it . . . fosters unimagined alliances.”<sup>6</sup> Ferguson suggests here how queer of color analysis can be seen as a particular reading practice that enables us to trace the convergence of what seem to be radically distinct and disparate ideologies as they shore up heteronormativity. A queer diasporic framework similarly challenges what Ferguson terms “ideologies of discreteness”<sup>7</sup> by identifying and unraveling those peculiar alliances, the “odd bedfellows,” that emerge in the global restructuring of capital and its attendant gender and sexual hierarchies. It also names a mode of reading, of rendering intelligible that which is unintelligible and indeed impossible within dominant diasporic and nationalist logic.

While queer of color analysis identifies the U.S. nation-state and its particular mapping of racialized, gendered, and sexualized citizenship and belonging as a primary site of reference and critique, a queer diasporic analysis pays greater attention to the intimate connections between disparate diasporic and national locations as they converge in the production of “home” space. This is a particularly urgent and necessary project in the context of the Indian diaspora, given the centrality of the diaspora to the material and ideological maintenance of Hindu nationalism in India, and in light of the unholy alliance between the Hindu Right in India and the current Bush regime in the United States.<sup>8</sup> I do not mean to suggest here that queer of color critique and queer diasporic critique exist in a binary relation to each other, where the former is narrow, local, and national, as opposed to the latter’s apparent cosmopolitanism and expansiveness. On the contrary, queer of color critique, as Ferguson articulates it, explicitly rejects the parochialism of American studies as well as the underlying heteronormativity of even its postnationalist versions. In attending to the particularities of African American racial formation, Ferguson’s framing of queer of color critique allows for a wide-ranging inquiry into the racial, sexual, and gendered underpinnings of modernity and posits non-heteronormative racialized subjects as sites of knowledge that challenge the disarticulation of racial formation from national, class, gender, and sexual formations. Ferguson’s analysis foregrounds the sexual and racial normativity at the heart of the liberal nation-state while pointing to the inadequacy of nation-based, conventional area-studies approaches to theorizing the production of modern racial and sexual formations.<sup>9</sup>

The necessity of  
a queer diasporic  
critique that  
unravels the  
relation between  
diaspora and  
dual nationalisms  
(both U.S. and  
Indian) becomes  
apparent when  
considering the  
current global  
circulation of  
Bollywood  
cinema.

Queer diasporic critique can be seen as extending this project and as its necessary complement. In the context of South Asia, the framework of a queer diaspora is crucial if we are to challenge area studies models that fail to account for the ongoing interplay between diaspora and nation, and for how heteronormativity has historically functioned as a structuring mechanism of both colonialism and nationalism in the region. Queer diasporic critique shares with queer of color critique an interest in tracing how particular racial, sexual, and gender formations engender practices and subjectivities that exceed the nation's boundaries and contest its absolutist logic. If queer of color and queer diasporic critique take to task the implicit heteronormativity within some strands of area studies, they also powerfully challenge the parochialism of some strands of queer studies by making the study of sexuality central to an anti-imperialist, antiracist project. Together queer of color and queer diasporic critique reveal the gendered and sexualized dimensions of imperial projects both domestically (in relation to U.S. communities of color) and internationally. Indeed, at this current moment of U.S. imperial aggression, the indispensability of this new formulation of queer studies has never been clearer.

The necessity of a queer diasporic critique that unravels the relation between diaspora and dual nationalisms (both U.S. and Indian) becomes apparent when considering the current global circulation of Bollywood cinema. Bollywood has, of course, always been a global cinema,<sup>10</sup> but what is new, as I have suggested, is its popularity and visibility in the West, outside the South Asian diasporic audiences that have historically formed its largest viewership. This newfound popularity can be traced to how the genre and idiom of Bollywood cinema are being rapidly translated into terms more in keeping with the narrative and representational conventions of Hollywood cinema. We can identify three distinct but interconnected ideological projects where this appropriation and translation of Bollywood cinema is taking place: first, in a U.S. nationalist project; second, in an Indian diasporic liberal feminist project; and third, in an Indian nationalist project. Scrutinizing the deployment of Bollywood in each project reveals how popular culture becomes the contested terrain for consolidating ideologies of nation, race, gender, and sexuality. Crucially, the effacement of queer female desire and subjectivity marks each discursive site. This effacement, I would argue, is hardly incidental; rather, it must be understood as a constitutive absence in that it indexes the successful translation of Bollywood to Hollywood and is precisely what enables each of these ideological projects to function seamlessly.

The anecdote with which I began this essay is a telling instance of how the translation of a Bollywood genre and idiom operates within the context of a U.S. nationalist project. The move to make Bollywood intelligible to

non-South Asian audiences is nowhere more apparent than in the transfer of *Bombay Dreams*, originally a British product, to Broadway. The *New York Times* reported how the show had to be completely overhauled in terms of narrative, score, and design as it moved from targeting a primarily British Asian audience in London to a predominantly white one on Broadway. A cover story in the *Los Angeles Times* on both the show and Bollywood in general sums up much of the media coverage on Bollywood's "emergence" in the West. The author writes, "The golden age of Hollywood has moved to India. . . . These Bollywood films will bring you back to an era, long gone in our culture, when audiences demanded a lot of entertainment and had the wherewithal to enjoy it when it arrived. In our super-stressed age, it's positive tonic to act as if we have that kind of time, even if we really don't."<sup>11</sup> A subsequent *New York Times* article echoes these sentiments, stating, "Bollywood has kept alive the vibrant, sumptuous spectacle that Hollywood has all but abandoned."<sup>12</sup> Such statements reassert a familiar colonial, teleological narrative of modernity, where Bollywood embodies the past of Western cinematic history, and of the West as a whole, in that it is temporally anterior to Western representational regimes. The "we" in these comments interpellates an implicitly white Western viewer, where Bollywood enables "us" to come face to face with an exotic other that is uncannily familiar: "we" confront an earlier version of ourselves, one that is faintly recognizable while retaining a pleasurable frisson of otherness. The oscillation between sameness and difference, as Homi Bhabha has shown,<sup>13</sup> is the very structure of colonial subjectification that we find today reanimated in a post-9/11 racial landscape.

This strategy of containment of the racial/religious/cultural other through the consumption of Bollywood spectacle is one that is, not surprisingly, clearly gendered and heterosexualized. What is particularly striking in much of the media coverage of Bollywood is the hypervisibility and fetishization of South Asian women's bodies, framed as infinitely available to a heterosexual white Western gaze.<sup>14</sup> This discursive hypervisibility of South Asian women's bodies starkly contrasts with the literal effacement and invisibilization of South Asian men's bodies as they are increasingly being "disappeared" by the state. Martin Manalansan's recent study of the changing racial, sexual, and class landscape of Queens, New York, details how the months following 9/11 saw the ominous disappearance of South Asian men who used to populate the storefronts and street corners of Jackson Heights, a predominantly immigrant neighborhood in Queens. As one of Manalansan's Filipino informants commented about the men, "Suddenly they were just gone, they vanished like smoke."<sup>15</sup> In the context of this erasure of large numbers of Muslim men from the city's public space, as they are banished to a no-man's-land of infinite detentions and

deportation proceedings, it would be a mistake to dismiss the media blitz on Bollywood as simply another benign popular cultural fad. Rather, the recent fascination with Bollywood cinema is inseparable from the material and representational violences currently being enacted on South Asian communities in the United States.

Chandan Reddy has noted that “as an imperial state . . . the U.S. government has expanded its governance of racialized non-nationals in the name of guaranteeing the citizen’s liberty: the racialized immigrant, the black incarcerated, the enemy combatant, the Afghani, and the Iraqi are just some of the legally created categories against which the national citizen is both defined and materially supported.”<sup>16</sup> Similarly, Jasbir Puar and Amit Rai detail how racial discourses after 9/11 have produced “hyper-visible icons” such as the “monster-terrorist-fag” that serve to both quarantine racial and sexual others and transform them into docile patriots.<sup>17</sup> In light of these observations by Reddy and Puar and Rai, the fetishization of Bollywood as sexualized and gendered spectacle must be understood as yet another discursive mechanism that regulates and disciplines South Asian populations in the United States. The Bollywood boom, in this context, incorporates South Asians into the U.S. national imaginary as pure spectacle to be safely consumed while keeping intact their essential alienness and difference; such an incorporation holds safely at bay those marginalized noncitizens who function under the sign of terrorist and “enemy within.” We can mobilize queer diasporic critique as it intersects with queer of color critique here to name an oppositional subject position to the neoliberal citizen subject that provides a space from which to challenge the construction of South Asian bodies as either inherently criminal and antinational or multicultural and assimilationist.

The translation of Bollywood into terms that are intelligible and familiar to audiences steeped in Hollywood conventions invariably entails the erasure of queer female bodies, desires, and pleasures. This erasure is apparent not only in the mainstream manifestations of the Bollywood boom that I have referenced thus far but perhaps more surprisingly in the work of a new crop of Indian diasporic feminist filmmakers such as Mira Nair, Deepa Mehta, and Gurinder Chadha. As I argue in greater detail elsewhere,<sup>18</sup> these filmmakers are in no small part responsible for this translation of Bollywood into Hollywood,<sup>19</sup> in that they act as modern-day tour guides that in effect “modernize” Bollywood form and content for non-South Asian audiences.<sup>20</sup> We can read Mira Nair’s *Monsoon Wedding*, for instance, as a diasporic feminist rescripting of the Bollywood genre of the wedding movie; Nair’s film specifically references the 1994 Bollywood megahit *Hum Aapke Hain Koun . . . ! (Who Am I to You?)*, directed by Sooraj R. Barjatya. For all its religious and political conservatism, I argue that this

earlier film opened up the possibility of queer female desire in a way that *Monsoon Wedding* quite categorically shuts down. Indeed, the possibilities of female homoeroticism that we see in *Hum Aapke Hain Koun . . . !* are sacrificed in *Monsoon Wedding* in order for a modern, heterosexual, liberal feminist subject to emerge. We can trace a similar dynamic in other films by South Asian diasporic feminist filmmakers that purport to “update” the Bollywood genre; in each case, it is precisely the evacuation of queer female desire that enables a heterosexual feminist subject to come into being.<sup>21</sup>

The translation and transformation of a Bollywood idiom is also evident in films emerging out of the Bollywood film industry itself. Just as *Monsoon Wedding* “updates” the Bollywood genre of the wedding movie, a recent Bollywood hit such as Nikhil Advani’s *Kal Ho Naa Ho* (*Tomorrow May Never Come*, 2003), modernizes the classic Bollywood genre of the buddy movie. *Kal Ho Naa Ho*, which is set in New York City, shares with *Monsoon Wedding* an anxiety around representing a particularly “modern” Indian transnational subject. As such, both films attempt to reverse the colonial telos so evident in mainstream appropriations of Bollywood that situates it (and South Asia in general) in terms of a prehistory of Hollywood cinema and the West. In Nair’s film, it is a liberal feminist narrative of female self-empowerment that confers modernity onto its characters; in *Kal Ho Naa Ho*, curiously, it is male homosexuality that marks and consolidates this newly emergent transnational Indian subject as fully modern. The film in effect “outs” the representational conventions of the Bollywood buddy movie by making explicit the genre’s latent homoeroticism. *Kal Ho Naa Ho*’s pointed references to male homosexuality serve to mark the increasing modernity and cosmopolitanism of Bollywood cinema itself, as it comes to more closely approximate some of mainstream Hollywood’s strategies of gender and sexual representation.

In one telling scene, for instance, the film’s male hero, Amman, is found in bed with his male best friend by the friend’s housekeeper, a sari-clad, bindi-wearing elderly Indian woman named Kanthabehn. Kanthabehn is horrified by what looks like illicit sexual activity between the two men. The scene is predictably played for laughs, at Kanthabehn’s expense, as Amman proceeds to deliberately heighten the misrecognition by caressing his friend and making salacious double entendres. This misrecognition of the two men as “gay,” and Amman’s willingness to perform this identity, serves to underscore the modernity and mobility of the two men over and against Kanthabehn’s fixity, recalcitrance, and untranslatability. She remains an anachronistic figure quite literally out of time and out of place in the newly globalized landscape that the film maps out. Hopelessly mired in “tradition” and as the apparent marker of normative gender and sexual ideologies, she functions purely instrumentally, as it is her gaze

Within the  
frame of U.S.  
nationalism,  
the spectacular  
hetero-  
sexualization  
of South Asian  
women's bodies  
conceals the  
simultaneous  
disappearance of  
South Asian men  
and transforms  
South Asians into  
an eminently  
consumable  
multicultural  
commodity.

that allows the men to be read as modern, transnational, cosmopolitan, and mobile subjects.

Thus in all three sites where we see a Bollywood idiom being evoked and transformed, the concomitant absence of queer female desire and subjectivity is crucial to each project's ideological coherence. Within the frame of U.S. nationalism, the spectacular heterosexualization of South Asian women's bodies conceals the simultaneous disappearance of South Asian men and transforms South Asians into an eminently consumable multicultural commodity. In a diasporic feminist project such as *Monsoon Wedding*, or in a film that betrays the anxieties of Indian nationalism such as *Kal Ho Naa Ho*, the evacuation of queer female desire purchases the modernity of the emergent transnational Indian subject, one that is newly coded as "feminist" or "gay." It is only by deploying a queer diasporic framework that we can read the ways in which these seemingly disparate and disconnected projects converge around the rendering of queer female desire and subjectivity as impossible and unimaginable.

If the absence of queer female desires, bodies, and subjectivities is indeed constitutive of these various ideological projects, I want to end by pointing to queer diasporic culture's powerful alternative narratives to such literal and discursive effacements. The work of the British Asian photographer Parminder Sekhon, for instance, removes queer female desire from a logic of impossibility by installing it at the very heart of the "home" as both national and diasporic space. In so doing, queer feminist work such as Sekhon's fulfills the radical potential of the notion of a queer diaspora, a potential foreclosed by the availability of gay male desire to recuperation within patriarchal narratives of "home," diaspora, and nation in a globalized landscape. By shifting from a focus on the routes traveled by Bollywood cinema to the work of an individual artist such as Sekhon, I do not mean to reinstate a familiar opposition between the industrial dominant versus the subversive alternative.<sup>22</sup> Indeed, this essay has turned a critical eye not so much on the genre and idiom of Bollywood cinema itself but on its evocation, translation, and transformation in different ideological projects—even those (such as that of liberal feminism) that proclaim their ostensibly liberatory, progressive politics. Similarly, Sekhon's work is not purely redemptive but rather bears the marks of the same teleological narratives of modernity and progress that structure hegemonic nationalist and diasporic ideologies. At the same time, however, her images critique and lay bare the very production of South Asian bodies—particularly female bodies—as pure spectacle that we see in the various uses of a Bollywood idiom. By moving from the United States to the UK, I am pointing to the need to produce an analytic framework supple enough to engage multiple



national sites simultaneously and to track the transnational traffic of cultural and political influences between these diasporic locations.

Sekhon is well known in the black British arts scene because of her work in the 1990s on a series of public service posters on HIV/AIDS targeted to South Asian communities in the UK. Similar to the interventionist graphics of Women's Health Action and Mobilization (WHAM!) and other activist arts collectives in the United States in the early 1990s, many of Sekhon's images used the idiom of glossy Benetton or Gap ads to insert into public space those lives and bodies—queer, brown, HIV+—studiously effaced within a dominant nationalist and diasporic imaginary. The collapse of public and private that characterizes her work is particularly apparent in her documentation of queer South Asian life in London: her photographs are populated by glamorous South Asian butch-femme couples, the drag queens of Club Kali (London's queer South Asian night club), and drag kings who nostalgically evoke the masculinity of Bollywood film stars of the 1940s and 1950s. These images do the crucial work of providing a rich, material archive of queer South Asian public culture and attest to the unceasingly imaginative ways in which queer diasporic communities carve out literal and symbolic spaces of collectivity in inhospitable and hostile landscapes.

In one of her most compelling series of photographs, titled "Urban Lives," Sekhon uses the streets of predominantly South Asian neighborhoods in London as a backdrop for portraits of paired figures, one nude and one clothed. The images are named for the streets and neighborhoods in which the figures are situated—Tooting, Bethnal Green, Whitechapel, Southall—and provide a litany of geographic locales that evoke a history of working-class, South Asian settlement in London. The queer art critic Cherry Smyth writes of her initial reaction to the images as follows: "For me, they have something of the arousal and alarm of seeing my first nude photograph: here are Asian queers naked in the streets. Here are queer Muslims, naked in the streets. Nothing is happening to them. Nothing is said or done to them."<sup>23</sup> Smyth succinctly captures how Sekhon's images cull their power from simultaneously evoking both the extreme vulnerability and the defiance of queer racialized bodies as they lay claim to public space. As such, they force the viewer to read them not simply as static visual artifacts but rather as archival evidence of a live performance, with the threat of physical violence that such a performance evokes.

The interplay between bodily vulnerability and defiance is most notable in a particularly startling and moving photograph titled "Southall Market," where Sekhon pairs her own nude, pierced body with that of her elderly mother, in a *salwar kameez* and woolen sweater, as they stand

in front of a market in Southall, the South Asian neighborhood where Sekhon grew up and her mother still lives. The mother grips the handle of a battered shopping cart as she, like Sekhon, gazes directly into the camera. Behind them is the detritus of the market—empty stalls, discarded cardboard boxes, and packing crates. The light is indeterminate: it could be early morning or twilight, the low clouds and uniform grayness of the sky reflected in the rain-slicked pavement on which the two women stand. As a visual artifact, “Southall Market” is immediately intelligible within a number of “ready-made interpretive frames”:<sup>24</sup> if read through the lens of a conventional liberal feminist or “GLBT” framework, the photograph seems to suggest an easy equation of queerness (embodied by Sekhon) with modernity, visibility, sexual liberation, and revelation, which is set over and against the tropes of “tradition,” concealment, secrecy, and modesty (embodied by her mother). Indeed, the positioning of Sekhon, slightly in front of her mother, supports such a reading. In staging this series of binary oppositions—tradition/modernity, secrecy/disclosure, invisibility/visibility, queer/straight, first generation/second generation—the photograph evokes what Lisa Lowe terms “the master narratives of generational conflict and filial relation” that characterize dominant representations of South Asian immigrant existence in the UK. As such, the image can be seen to “displac[e] social differences into privatized familial opposition”<sup>25</sup> in a way that fits squarely into British nationalist discourse around unassimilable Asian immigrants, a discourse that occludes the British state’s central role in naturalizing and indeed legislating patriarchal familial relations in its production of the “Asian family.”<sup>26</sup>

“Southall Market,” then, cannot be understood as purely resistant to hegemonic structures of race, sexuality, nation, or gender any more so than Bollywood cinema can be understood as purely complicit with these structures. Rather, it is the uses to which these cultural texts are put and the circuits of their reception that determine their meanings. This is where the necessity of a queer diasporic analysis becomes most apparent. As Stephen Wright, in his discussion of colonial-era, anthropological photographs of young girls in Papua New Guinea, reminds us, “Photographs trace multiple trajectories: for all their superficial fixity and their inclusion in structures like the archive that seek to contain them, they are processual and constantly in motion. What brings meanings to photographs are performances of them, specific readings and enactments. What is important is not so much what the image contains, a meaning that resides within it, but what is brought to it, how it is used, and how it is connected to various trajectories.”<sup>27</sup> Following Wright, we can understand a queer diasporic reading practice as a kind of critical performance, one that restores a multivocality to Sekhon’s photograph that a conventional liberal feminist or

queer reading would deny. Reading the image through a queer diasporic frame renders it intelligible outside a teleological narrative of modernity and instead allows different historical and social contexts to come into view. “Southall Market,” as well as Sekhon’s other images of naked Asian bodies on London streets, places the viewer in the uncomfortable position of voyeur, in that it conjures forth a history of colonial (and specifically orientalist) practices of photography that fix “native” women as pure spectacle. But if colonial photography decontextualizes its objects and cuts them off from all meaningful social relations, Sekhon’s photographs radically recontextualize them, transforming objects into subjects by situating them within the banal details of the everyday—shopping for groceries on a Sunday morning, for instance—and in a paired relation to each other. Thus while “Southall Market” certainly evokes the ambivalent relation of undutiful queer daughters to immigrant mothers who seek to inculcate them into heteronormative domesticity, the image also suggests a more complex relay of desire and identification between the bodies of mother and daughter. Sekhon’s queerness is formed in and through her relation to “home” space, even as it radically disrupts and reterritorializes this space. Her nude body places queer female subjectivity at the very heart of diasporic public cultural space. We glimpse here an alternative construction of diaspora organized around queer, female lives, desires, bodies, cultures, and collectivities that remains utterly unintelligible and unimaginable within dominant state and diasporic nationalist frameworks, as well as within more conventional feminist or queer readings of the image.

I close with this evocation of Sekhon’s work because it suggests how queer diasporic cultural forms contest the modes of hypervisibility, spectacularization, and effacement through which South Asian bodies appear or disappear in the dominant representational regimes of this particular historical juncture. But her work does not simply provide a corrective to the deployments of gender and sexuality in the various ideological projects I have examined here. Rather, it underscores how a queer diasporic framework offers us a reading practice that enables us to “see” differently, to identify the places where seemingly discrete ideological projects intersect, and to suggest, to borrow a phrase from Dipesh Chakravarty, “other ways of being in the world.”<sup>28</sup>

I am grateful to David Eng and the anonymous readers from the *Social Text* collective for their invaluable suggestions on an earlier version of this essay.

1. The phrase *Bollywood cinema* refers to Hindi-language films from the Bombay film industry, the largest and most influential sector of Indian commercial cinema. For recent book-length analyses of Bollywood cinema, see Lalitha Gopalan, *Cinema of Interruptions: Action Genres in Contemporary Cinema* (London: BFI, 2003); Vijay Mishra, *Bollywood Cinema: Temples of Desire* (New York: Routledge, 2002); and Madhava Prasad, *Ideology of the Hindi Film: A Historical Construction* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998).

2. With titles like “Salaam New York!” (in *Time Out*) and “Salaam L.A.!” (in the *Los Angeles Times*), these articles betray a numbing sameness in their recycling of a limited number of orientalist tropes and imagery. See Tanuja Desai Hidier, “Salaam New York!” *Time Out New York*, 25 March–1 April 2004, 12–29; Kenneth Turan and Susan Carpenter, “Salaam L.A.!” *Los Angeles Times Weekend Calendar*, 15 April 2004.

3. Zachary Pincus-Roth, “The Extreme Makeover of ‘Bombay Dreams,’” *New York Times*, 18 April 2004.

4. Stuart Hall, “Cultural Identity and Diaspora,” in *Theorizing Diaspora*, ed. Jana Evans Braziel and Anita Mannur (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2003), 245.

5. Another stark illustration of diaspora’s double-sided character was apparent during the savage state-sponsored violence against Muslims in Gujarat, India, in February 2002. The Hindu nationalist state government in Gujarat received the support of NRIs even while other anticomunalist NRI organizations in New York and San Francisco mobilized against the violence and the government’s complicity in the killing and displacement of thousands of Indian Muslims. For an analysis of diasporic support for the Hindu Right in India, see Vijay Prashad, “Suburban Whites and Pogroms in India,” [www.zmag.org/sustainers/content/2002-07/14prashad.cfm](http://www.zmag.org/sustainers/content/2002-07/14prashad.cfm) (accessed 15 September 2004; this site is no longer active).

6. Roderick Ferguson, *Aberrations in Black: Toward a Queer of Color Critique* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 3.

7. *Ibid.*, 4.

8. For a persuasive analysis of how the alliance between the Bush regime, the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party in India, and the Sharon government in Israel constitutes a new “global Right,” see Vijay Prashad, *Namaste Sharon: Hindutva and Sharonism under U.S. Hegemony* (New Delhi: LeftWord, 2003).

9. Rod Ferguson, e-mail message to author, 23 September 2004. My gratitude to Rod Ferguson for helping me begin articulating the differences and similarities between queer of color and queer diasporic critique.

10. For various accounts of its circulation outside India, see Brian Larkin, “Indian Films and Nigerian Lovers: Media and the Creation of Parallel Modernities,” *Africa* 67 (1997): 406–39; Mark Liechty, “Media, Markets, and Modernization: Youth Identities and the Experience of Modernity in Kathmandu, Nepal,” in *Youth Cultures: A Cross-Cultural Perspective*, ed. Vered Amit-Talai and Helena Wulff (London: Routledge, 1994), 166–201; Minou Fuglesang, *Veils and Videos: Female Youth Culture on the Kenyan Coast* (Stockholm: Studies in Anthropology, 1994).

11. Turan and Carpenter, "Salaam L.A.!"
12. A. O. Scott, "From Breezy Bollywood, Film Anything but Vérité," *New York Times*, 16 April 2004.
13. Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 85–92.
14. The cover image of *Time Out*, for instance, features the curvaceous stars of *Bombay Dreams*, supplemented by the tagline "Spice Girls," while the *Los Angeles Times* cover depicts women in blue body paint and gold headdresses.
15. Martin Manalansan, "Race, Violence, and Queer Citizenship in the Global City" (paper presented at the American Studies Association Conference, Hartford, CT, 17 October 2003).
16. Chandan Reddy, "They Cannot Represent Themselves, They Must Be Represented: A Queer of Color Critique of Neo-liberal Citizenship" (paper presented at the Association of Asian American Studies Conference, San Francisco, 10 May 2003).
17. Jasbir Puar and Amit Rai, "Monster, Terrorist, Fag: The War on Terrorism and the Production of Docile Patriots," *Social Text*, no. 72 (2002): 118–48.
18. Gayatri Gopinath, *Impossible Desires: Queer Diasporas and South Asian Public Cultures* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005).
19. Indeed, Gurinder Chadha's latest feature is titled *Bride and Prejudice*, a Bollywood-influenced adaptation of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*.
20. For a much more detailed analysis of these films than is possible here, see Gopinath, *Impossible Desires*.
21. In Deepa Mehta's *Bollywood/Hollywood*, queerness conveniently resides on the body of the loyal male servant, who has a double life as a drag queen in a local gay bar. Similarly in Gurinder Chadha's *Bend It Like Beckham*, queerness resides not on the body of the football-loving female protagonist but rather on her best male friend. Both films once again use the gay male figure as the "real" queer character in the film.
22. I thank an anonymous reader from the *Social Text* collective for bringing this point to my attention.
23. Cherry Smyth, "Out of the Gaps: The Work of Parminder Sekhon," in *Red Threads: The South Asian Queer Connection in Photographs*, ed. Poulomi Desai and Parminder Sekhon (London: Diva, 2003), 108.
24. Christopher Wright, "Supple Bodies: The Papua New Guinea Photographs of Captain Francis R. Barton, 1899–1907," in *Photography's Other Histories*, ed. Christopher Pinney and Nicolas Peterson (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 150.
25. Lisa Lowe, *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996), 63.
26. For an analysis of how British immigration laws in the 1960s and 1970s legislated heteronormative familial arrangements within immigrant communities, see Anna Marie Smith, *New Right Discourse on Race and Sexuality: Britain 1968–1990* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 181.
27. Wright, "Supple Bodies," 166.
28. Dipesh Chakravarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 66.

