

The Cultural Politics
of South Asian
Diasporic Film

BEYOND

BOLLYWOOD



Jigna Desai

Also available as a printed book
see title verso for ISBN details

Beyond Bollywood

Beyond Bollywood

The Cultural Politics of South Asian Diasporic Film

Jigna Desai

ROUTLEDGE
NEW YORK AND LONDON

Published in 2004 by
Routledge
29 West 35th Street
New York, NY 10001

Published in Great Britain by
Routledge
11 New Fetter Lane
London EC4P 4EE

Copyright © 2004 by Routledge

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group.

This edition published in the Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2005.

“To purchase your own copy of this or any of Taylor & Francis or Routledge’s collection of thousands of eBooks please go to www.eBookstore.tandf.co.uk.”

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reprinted or reproduced or utilized in any form or by any electronic, mechanical or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including photocopying and recording or in any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Desai, Jigna.

Beyond Bollywood : the cultural politics of South Asian diasporic film /
Jigna Desai.
p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-415-96684-1 (Print Edition) (hard. : alk. paper)-ISBN 0-415-96685-X (pbk. :
alk. paper)

1. Motion pictures—India. 2. South Asians—Foreign countries.
I. Title

PN1993.5.18D48 2003
791.43' 0954—dc21
2003012737

ISBN 0-203-64395-X Master e-book ISBN

ISBN 0-203-68168-1 (Adobe eReader Format)

Contents

	Preface Brown Skins and Silver Screens	v
Chapter 1	South Asian Diasporas and Transnational Cultural Studies	1
Chapter 2	Between Hollywood and Bollywood	33
Chapter 3	When Indians Play Cowboys: Diaspora and Postcoloniality in Mira Nair's <i>Mississippi Masala</i>	67
Chapter 4	Reel a State: Reimagining Diaspora, Homeland, and Nation-state in Srinivas Krishna's <i>Masala</i>	96
Chapter 5	Homesickness and Motion Sickness: Embodied Migratory Subjectivities in Gurinder Chadha's <i>Bhaji on the Beach</i>	126
Chapter 6	Homo on the Range: Queering Postcoloniality and Globalization in Deepa Mehta's <i>Fire</i>	150
Chapter 7	Sex in the Global City: The Sexual and Gender Politics of the New Urban, Transnational, and Cosmopolitan Indian Cinema in English	182
Chapter 8	Conclusion: Migrant Brides, Feminist Films, and Transnational Desires	199
	Notes	218
	Bibliography	244
	Filmography	261
	Index	271

Preface

Brown Skins and Silver Screens

The “beyond” is neither a new horizon, nor a leaving behind of the past... Beginnings and endings may be the sustaining myths of the middle years, but in *the fin de siècle*, we find ourselves in the moment of transit where space and time cross to produce complex figures of difference and identity, past and present, inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion. For there is a sense of disorientation, a disturbance of direction, in the “beyond”: an exploratory, restless movement caught so well in the French rendition of the words *au-delà*—*here* and there, on all sides, *fort/da*, hither and thither, back and forth.

—Homi Bhabha (1994, 1)

This project began in a search for the beyond. Studying observational cosmology, I then focused my desire on gleaning what I could from the light traveling over vast distance and time to arrive through telescopes onto the computer screen. Contemporaneously, I fled from the theaterless years of my childhood to the art houses of Boston to see illuminations light up other screens as they too projected the complex relations between time and space in the lives of migrant and displaced subjects. In the New England town of Newburyport, Massachusetts, at the Screening Room, I first stumbled on the play of light as brown skins crossed the silver screen in *My Beautiful Laundrette*. The large screen filled with images that I had rarely seen before outside of the snowy confines of UHF, where briefly on early Sunday mornings overexposed bodies with whitewashed faces cavorted on Technicolor backgrounds. I walked quietly out of the theater relishing the disorientation caused by this return of desire in relation to this newfound pleasure. As brown bodies trespassed the spaces of colonial anthropology and history to spaces marked as the present, I experienced a return and rupture simultaneously. Neither the savage heart eaters of *Indiana Jones* nor noble-hearted survivors of colonialism in *Gandhi*, these Laundromat owners and white boy-kissing brown boys captured some other understandings of race and culture, gender and sexuality, and identity and modernity than I had previously encountered. These moments in which brown skins flashed across the silver screen were neither Bollywood nor Hollywood and yet were both as they disoriented my presence and present.

Though it is the literature of South Asian diasporic writers such as Salman Rushdie, Michael Ondaatje, Bharati Mukherjee, and Jhumpa Lahiri that garners popular and academic attention in postcolonial and Asian-American studies, it is cinema that reaches tens, if not hundreds, of millions of viewers. Film has played a feature role in the formation of South Asian diasporic cultures, partially because of its key role in South Asia itself. Although Hollywood cinema dominates global film culture, it is Indian cinema that produces the most films per year. Vastly understudied, unlike its Western counterpart, Indian cinema, especially Bollywood, the Bombay-based, Hindi language cinema, is also a global cinema popular in the Middle East, Asia, Africa, and South Asian diasporas. Suspended between and conversant with these two giant cinemas are the films of the South Asian diaspora. This project analyzes the emergence, development, and significance of contemporary South Asian diasporic cinema.

The late 1960s and 1970s marked a time of increasing migration of South Asians from India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Africa, and the Caribbean to the United States, Britain, Canada, Australia, and the Gulf states due to shifting geopolitical economies. Although South Asian diasporas existed in many nations prior to this time, the influx of new migrants and new technology reshaped older communities, formed new diasporas, and created new cultural processes and flows of cultural products. For example, with the growth of cable, then the VCR, and now satellite television, South Asian diasporans initiated the showing of Hindi, Tamil, and other vernacular language films on television and in movie theaters to wide audiences. South Asian language films, along with literature, music, and intellectuals, now circulate through large distribution networks that span South Asian nations and their diasporas. Able to take advantage of the extended distribution networks, films were able to reach wide audiences and they soon became central to processes of “imagining community.” In recent years, the language of South Asian diasporic identity and cultural production has been the language of cinema.

Discourses of diaspora have recently emerged in the interdisciplinary fields of Asian-American, postcolonial, and feminist studies. Theories of diaspora are forwarded by those critical of the nation-state (though still claiming affiliation) as well as those who cite its demise. Reemerging in the 1980s in postcolonial Britain, diaspora is defined in discourse, on one hand as an identity in response to exclusionary and racist national narratives and on the other hand as the “third space” of postcolonial migration and hybridity. In the United States and Canada, these discourses negotiated and reinforced the expansion of multiculturalism. In the early 1990s, with the rise of discourse on the death of the nation due to globalization, diaspora was hailed as a deterritorialized geopolitical community succeeding the nation in an age of increasing globalization. This comparative project challenges the facility with which diaspora has reemerged uninterrogated in postcolonial and feminist discourse as antinational and postnational by interrogating the relationship between diaspora and the nation-state in the context of globalization. This project intervenes in and transforms significant discussions in

feminist and queer studies, such as intersectionality, camp, and body theory, through the theories and methodology of diaspora and transnationalism, and, vice versa, the project genders and queers studies contemporary discussions of diaspora; postcolonial transnationalism, and globalization.

Focusing on films in English from and about the “Brown Atlantic” (South Asian diasporas in the United States, Canada, and Britain) as well as India within a transnational comparative framework, this project necessarily interrogates and reformulates the dominant emphasis on the nation and national cinema in cinema studies. *Beyond Bollywood* positions South Asian diasporic cinema as an interstitial cinema located between Hollywood and Bollywood. In this regard, this project understands this hybrid cinema as resulting from the migratory processes engendered by capitalism and postcoloniality. Consequently, *Beyond Bollywood* does not argue that diasporic cinema has transcended Bollywood through some space-clearing gesture. Instead, it understands “beyond” as posing hybrid possibilities forged out of the shifting sands of Hollywood and Bollywood. Moreover, although the project is about cinema, it is not only a project of cinema studies. The “beyond” in this context signals an investment in mobilizing an analysis of cinema to ask questions regarding significant cultural, political, social, and economic processes in globalization. In addition, this project goes beyond disciplinary rubrics and schemata by probing the analytic framework of transnational cultural studies.

Beyond signifies spatial distance, marks progress, promises the future; but our intimations of exceeding the barrier or boundary—the very act of going *beyond* — are unknowable, unrepresentable, without a return to the ‘present’ which, in the process of repetition, becomes disjunct and displaced.... These terms that insistently gesture to the beyond, only embody its restless and revisionary energy if they transform the present into an expanded and ex-centric site of experience and empowerment. (Bhabha 1994, 4).

This project seeks to embrace and embody that energy and spirit.

This book has been made possible by the support of numerous friends, family, and colleagues who have provided patience, encouragement, inspiration, and generosity. I am grateful to my friends who have endured endless conversations and viewings of these films: David Bael, Marie Coppola, Lara Descartes, and Nathan Yang during and since my MIT years. For providing warmth, gentle humor, and sustenance, I thank the Sullivans, Kathleen and Tom. Corinth Matera, Kathleen Sheerin-Devore, and Mary Heather Smith have read the earliest drafts of these chapters and provided much of the inspiration necessary to complete what I began so long ago. Mentorship was graciously provided by Amy Kaminsky, Helen Longino, John Mowitt, Jennifer Pierce, Naomi Scheman, and Jackie Zita.

My colleagues in the College of Liberal Arts have been generous with their comments and encouragement: Susie Bullington, Cathy Choy, Rod Ferguson, Qadri Ismail, Erika Lee, Josephine Lee, and Amanda Swarr. In particular, Ananya Chatterjee has been instrumental in making my work not only possible but

also enjoyable. To the “homegirls” of my department Richa Nagar, Gwen Pough, and Eden Torres, I owe gratitude for their unfaltering support and companionship. In addition, I want to thank the participants of the MacArthur gender workshop for their feedback. I greatly appreciate the remarkable encouragement from my distant colleagues, Sarah Casteel, Shilpa Dave, Khyati Joshi, Gita Rajan, and Pam Thoma, who have provided me with a sense of an engaged and excited community. I am highly indebted to the spirit of hospitality, collegiality and collaboration that was given by the group Sangini in Delhi, especially by Leslie, Sujata, Cath, and Betu.

I greatly appreciate the marvelous research assistance provided by Amy Brandzel and Erica Ganzell. In addition, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to Danielle Bouchard who has spent many hours poring over this manuscript, detail by detail, and provided much thought-provoking feedback. Their wonderful and sustaining conversations in addition to their careful readings indelibly mark these pages. Chapters 3 and 7 have been published in slightly different forms. Chapter 3 appears in *Diaspora* (Fall 2003) and chapter 7 in *South Asian Popular Culture* (Spring 2003, 45–61). A portion of chapter 6 also appeared in *Social Text* 70 (Winter 2002, 65–89). I thank the journals for permission to publish the chapters here as well as the reviewers Rajinder Dudrah, David Eng, and Gita Rajan for comments. I also extend my gratitude to the anonymous reviewers who supported this project. My editor Matt Byrnie at Routledge deserves much of my gratitude for his patience, clarity, and generosity. Additional thanks to Alan Kaplan for his painstaking precision and attention to details in the editing process. I also wish to thank the University of Minnesota for the grants it has provided that made this book possible.

Finally, my family members have shown unqualified and limitless faith in my ability to complete this project, for which I am very grateful. I am indebted to my brother Rakesh for his humor and warmth, as well as our numerous conversations about Hollywood. From my grandparents, I have tried to learn what I can from the splinters of their stories. Even though she was unable to see the fruition of my labor in particular, I thank Ba Nirmala Gandhi for her fortitude and late-night tales that were there to remind me of what is most important. My sister Seema has proved to be a kindred spirit that sustains my everyday life. Ruskin Hunt has been a partner in every sense of the word; his patience, advice, laughter and steadfast support have sustained me through my many ebbs. This book is dedicated to my loving parents Harish and Naina Desai to whom I can finally say “yes I am done.” I thank you for your unwavering encouragement of my curiosity.

South Asian Diasporas and Transnational Cultural Studies

Where the political terrain can neither resolve nor suppress inequality, it erupts in culture. Because culture is the contemporary repository of memory, of history, it is through culture, rather than government, that alternative forms of subjectivity, collectivity, and public life are imagined.

—Lisa Lowe (1998a, 22)

Only by weaving the analysis of cultural politics and political economy into a single framework can we hope to provide a nuanced delineation of the complex relations between transnational phenomena, national regimes, and cultural practices in late modernity.

—Aihwa Ong (1999, 16)

You may be an avid fan of diasporic films, eagerly awaiting the release of every new trailer and feature, or you may have casually walked by the video store and found the cover of *Monsoon Wedding* or *Fire* intriguing and brought it home. This book should be of interest and appropriate for both audiences. This book, like the films discussed below, should have a similar crossover appeal to multiple viewers—from those interested in understanding gender and sexual politics within racialized diasporic communities to those engaged with questions of agency and subjectivity in globalization and late capitalism. Therefore, this book is about film, but not only film. This project is written to be read in three simultaneous and different modalities. At one level, it is the first study of South Asian diasporic cinema and hence it asks questions generally considered of interest to those wanting to understand the emergence of this cinema, including its history, politics, and aesthetics, as well as readings of individual films. At another level, it intervenes in several theoretical debates occurring in queer, postcolonial, diasporic, cultural, feminist, and Asian-American studies, through the lens of transnationality. By focusing on significant topics such as the nation, subjectivity, agency, and embodiment in these areas, the project enriches and reshapes these conversations by suggesting new directions for analysis. Finally, this book expands transnational cultural critique, proposing a particular site of analysis, namely South Asian diasporic cultural studies. It

interweaves the disparate conversations in these arenas in analyzing its object of study: South Asian diasporic cinema.

This is the first book-length analysis of South Asian diasporic cinema. The films I discuss here are located in the metropolitan centers of the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, and India. The book outlines the emergence of South Asian diasporic cinema, paying careful attention to its narrative films and their relationships to various cinemas (e.g., Hollywood, Bollywood, national, art house, and parallel). It further poses questions regarding the production, circulation, and reception of these films. What are the various modes and contexts of production? How do we analyze the aesthetic strategies of these films in relation to their cultural politics? What happens when these films travel? Are they at home only in their place of production or elsewhere as well? What does their migration tell us about transnational communities and interculturalism? How might spectatorship and the gaze be thought within transnational frameworks? How do we understand the feminist and queer politics of these films? How do they negotiate issues of commodification? What role does South Asian and diasporic cinema play in the construction, activation, and deferment of nostalgia? The book further examines the formation and characteristics of diasporic cinema and the development of a diasporic spectatorship and subjectivity that creates a new mode of understanding transnational cultural productions, identities, and experiences. Because cinema and cultural texts are always implicated and located within changing systems and fields of power, we must reformulate and recalibrate our theoretical frameworks and methodologies, and create new conceptual models, to best account for these shifts.

Though this project focuses on a specific cinema within specific contexts, one need not be invested in South Asian diasporic cultural studies to access the analyses occurring in the book. It is the unmarked privilege of Eurocentric logic that treats discussions and analyses of white normative subjects as theoretical and universal while rendering work on ethnic or postcolonial topics as esoteric and particular. Instead, this project must be considered as of interest and import to those working on broad theoretical conversations, such as embodiment, identification, cultural production and reception, and nationalism as it seeks to expose the mutual constitution of the unmarked normative and its marked “other” in Eurocentric logic.

The book also seeks to interrogate more generally questions related to transnational cultural studies around political economy, reception, and production as well as issues of subjectivity and identity. Broad theoretical questions around issues of agency, subjectivity, and embodiment are addressed through the framework of spatiality, transnationality, and migration. In addition, discussions here of how diasporic cinema employs and transforms aesthetic and cultural strategies such as camp and disidentification are clearly linked to a variety of theoretical debates. Finally, the project expands current conversations about our understanding of diaspora, nation, and globalization in the study of transnational migration. My hope is that this study will interrupt certain types of narratives (e.g., national, heteronormative, masculine, bourgeois) as it maps the space of the “Brown

Atlantic,” paying particular attention to the contours of global capital, migration, colonialism, and empire in the global cities of New York, London, Toronto, and Bombay.

Studies of South Asian transnational cultures and subjectivities provide an opportunity to think through and interweave a variety of disciplinary approaches. Most important, this study attempts to disrupt and fracture the stability of disciplinary business as we know it—in other words, it does not fit neatly into the categorical disciplinary formations that drive knowledge production, rendering projects such as this at times illegible. Although in the last decade scholars in several key fields have greatly contributed to our understandings of transnational imaginings and practices, the boundaries that define the objects of study for fields such as gender, feminist, or women’s studies; area studies; Asian-American studies; and cultural studies do not generally include the production of the Brown Atlantic that is outlined and performed here in this book. At the same time, paradoxically, it is these very areas of inquiry that enable and inspire this project. This project seeks to reframe disciplinary paradigms as the project places centrally disparate “subjects or objects of study”: gender, sexuality, cinema, diaspora, globalization, Asian-Americans, Bollywood, and postcoloniality to name a few. In doing so, it begins to outline the necessary parameters for the formation and development of transnational cultural studies. This new creature, transnational cultural studies, integrates the fields of cultural studies, postcolonial and globalization studies, and black diasporic and Asian-American studies specifically in a way that challenges notions of culture as not being related to power relations, critiques of modernity and the nation, and political economy. In addition, this particular permutation also formulates the areas of feminist and queer studies as integral to this formation.

One contribution of this project is to locate cultural studies more strongly in relation to globalization processes. Rather than acquiescing an engagement of globalization to social scientists, I seek to understand how contemporary social, political, and economic processes can be understood through cultural production. For scholars of the Frankfurt school, such as Adorno, mass culture was a site of capitulation in contrast to the “cultural negativity” associated with modernist (high) art. In contrast, this project argues it is possible to seek complex and contradictory understandings of culture in relation to dominant institutions, ideologies, and aesthetics as well as global economics. South Asian diasporic cultural production is ideally poised to engage strategically and intellectually the macrological (i.e., capitalism and imperialism) and the micrological (i.e., discourses of everyday life) to enact analyses that examine the mutual constitution of the global and the local.¹ Migrant cultural production “does not metaphorize the experiences of ‘real’ immigrants but finds in the located contradictions of immigration both the critical intervention in the national paradigm at the point of its conjunction with the international and the theoretical nexus that challenges the global economic from the standpoint of the locality” (Lowe 1998a, 35). It is not necessary to seek folk or “traditional” texts as pure forms uncontaminated by capitalism and therefore to dismiss other media such as television, film, and the Internet as elitist. This project

suggests that cinema provides a significant site of investigation in these negotiations not only because it is widely accessible but also because of its engagements with globalization during circulation. My suggestion here is that understanding the political economy of cultural production, circulation, and reception will illuminate the multiple and contradictory contestations and negotiations that occur with the South Asian diasporas in this moment of globalization.

Another significant contribution of this project is that it places diaspora and transnationality in the center of feminist and queer studies, pushing these areas to further consider their relationships to globalization and postcoloniality. In doing so, I produce three methods that must be deployed for South Asian diasporic and transnational cultural studies. Although lip service has been paid to asserting the significance of gender and sexuality in relation to race within diaspora studies, seldom has scholarship been able to maintain an analysis that considers all of these simultaneously.² Discourses of diaspora often eschew significant differences such as gender and class in favor of an emphasis on race and nation. The approach here is to explicate the ways complex and contradictory material processes and discourses construct and negotiate subjects of race, class, gender, ethnicity, religion, sexuality, and so forth simultaneously. Areas of inquiry such as Asian-American and black British cultural studies have typically paid attention to the relevance of class and gender in racial formations. This study builds on this scholarship but also emphasizes the significance of a critical understanding of sexuality, particularly heteronormativity, to these racial configurations in the context of economic globalization. The integration here of feminist and queer studies with these other areas of inquiry forces an insistence on simultaneous understandings of gender, race, and sexuality in the production of South Asian diasporic subjectivities.

This chapter is divided into four main sections. The first section on South Asian diasporic culture begins with a brief summary of the formation and politics of contemporary South Asian transnationalities and migration. It then turns to the slippery concept of culture, clarifying how it is deployed in and its relevance to this project. The second and third sections are the heart of the chapter. In the second section, I present the critical frameworks, postcolonial critique, theories of globalization, and diasporic studies that provide the modes of understanding and engaging transnationality in this project. In the third section, I elaborate on the other theoretical engagements with transnationality in this project, namely those emerging from feminist and queer theories. Finally, I end with an overview of the remaining chapters of the book, highlighting individual films and significant arguments.

South Asian Diasporas

This book seeks to explore and explicate the cultural, political, and theoretical “cartographies” of South Asian diasporas, transnationalities that are disjointed, heterogeneous, and hybrid rather than stable, unified, or coherent. South Asia refers to the nation-states of Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan,

Sri Lanka, and Tibet. “South Asia” as a constructed category is often used as a strategic geopolitical or geographical term indicating political alliances, both in Asia and the diasporas, and the term is one that can configure social identities and categories without necessarily alluding to national identities. It is not to be taken as a term designating an object of study, as does area studies, but rather as designating a constructed geopolitical region with interlinked political economies and histories, a subject of study. Nevertheless, it is important to recognize the ambivalent function of the term; although South Asia provides opportunity to analyze the region because of its interconnected history, politics, and economics, it is also imagined as a homogenous community from an “external” (often Western) point of view.

Unfortunately, discussions of India dominate the study and meaning of South Asia in most (inter)disciplinary scholarship and (identity) politics.³ The framework of “South Asian” can reflect a liberal Euro-American discourse that views the region as a homogenous monocultural area in which an Orientalized version of India represents South Asia. Thus, strategically identifying oneself or one’s politics as “South Asian” can create, though does not ensure, meaningful alliances within certain contexts. Nation-states such as Sri Lanka, Bhutan, and Bangladesh, and Indian minorities including Muslims and Sikhs, as well as subaltern groups, offer multiple points to deconstruct not only the dominant national but also the Indian normative and multiple points from which to configure South Asia. Historical contexts have produced multiple oppressions and conflicts through the concept of religious difference within and between nations. In other words, the term needs to be unpacked to understand the complex relations of power that operate to consolidate a singular Hindu Indian construction of South Asia.

South Asian diasporas encompass people (and their ancestry) who have emigrated from South Asia. There are approximately 20 million people in the Indian diaspora alone (Sengupta 2003, A1). South Asian migrations are recent to the Middle East, like the guest workers, distant like the indentured servants who settled in the Caribbean during colonialism, or even multiple like the migrants who, evicted from Uganda, settled in Britain.⁴ South Asian diasporas refer to migrations to Southeast Asia, the Caribbean, North America, Fiji, South America, the Middle East, England, and East and South Africa in the nineteenth century and twentieth century. Although there are disjunctural similarities between older and newer diasporas, I focus on the latter in this project. I refer specifically to migration that occurred primarily after World War II and independence (post-1965 in the United States). I am particularly interested in recent South Asian migration to the West, specifically the United States, Britain, and Canada (Australia and New Zealand have increasing populations). The tension between similar and overlapping historical and material conditions of postcoloniality and globalization leading to migration provides the basis for this formulation of the Brown Atlantic. However, this is not to suggest a coherency or uniformity in discussing a singular diaspora but rather heterogeneous and multiple diasporas that can be discussed in relation to the specificities of their local modalities and histories.

South Asian is a useful nomenclature when referring to those who emigrated prior to the independence and partition of the Indian subcontinent. I primarily use the more specific term *Indian* when I am speaking exclusively or distinctly of India in this project to avoid masking the hegemony of India within the configuration of South Asia. In each case, I have tried to be specific as possible, referring to post-1965 U.S. immigrants as Indians but early century emigrants to Canada as Sikhs, Punjabis, or South Asians depending on the context. *South Asian* is also a strategic term for racial and ethnic identities, especially in the United States. *Desi* also has gained popularity to designate a pan-South Asian racial and ethnic migrant identity. In the Canadian and British context, *Asian*, rather than South Asian, often has been used to designate the similar identities. In these locations, South Asians tend to be the largest groups and therefore are known as Asians. (This is not the case in the United States). South Asians also identify as blacks, most frequently in Britain and Canada. South Asians in these two locations share some similar racialization processes because of a common legacy of racialized colonialism. South Asians in the United States and Canada also may share similar racialization processes because of similar immigration histories and political economies. In this transnational project, I employ *South Asian* to discuss diasporic locations. I attempt to employ the “local” moniker when possible. I have retained the nomenclatures and identities that are most significant and frequently used in specific locations, thus in the context of Britain and Africa, I employ *Asians*. Nevertheless, this study requires some fluidity and mobility in understanding shifting identification processes as it moves from South Asian to Indian or Pakistani to desi to British Asian to Asian Canadian and back again.

Public Culture

Many theories posit the homogenization of culture by the global spread of Western, namely American, cultural production, asserting that local cultures are overwritten by the hegemony of Western media. In contrast, Armand Mattelart cautions that transnational centrism is a dangerous colonizing perspective in which local subjects are reframed as “passive receptacles” of the “norms, values, and signs of transnational power” (cited in Grewal and Kaplan 1994, 13). In other words, Mattelart posits that “global” media are locally consumed and received in multiple ways that mitigate the dominance of such cultural production. Responding to such remarks, others comment that we must not be too eager to celebrate the local consumption and subversive reception of transnational products in the South without noting the profitable economic conditions of production and distribution in the North. Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson (1992, 19) argue that

the danger here is the temptation to use scattered examples of the cultural flows dribbling from the “periphery” to the chic centers of the culture industry as a way of dismissing the “grand narrative” of capitalism (especially

the totalizing narrative of late capitalism) and thus evading the powerful political issues associated with Western global hegemony.

Thus, studies examining the localized receptions of Hollywood or Bollywood films, solely at the level of reception, often ignore the economics of the production and distribution of such commodities at the level of political economy. Conversely, analyses focusing solely on production often ignore the local consumption of such works. Here, I argue that the study of the role of cultural politics of film in the production of diasporic affiliations, identities, and politics is crucial to an understanding of transnationalism and globalization.

Lisa Lowe and David Lloyd (1997) suggest that culture and cultural production, though located within the expansion of global capitalism, act as sites that may contradict and oppose capital and are not subsumed fully under the logic of transnational capitalism. They, among others, offer us an opportunity to see cultural production not as markers of the hegemony of Western imperialism and the total penetration of capital into arenas marked as separate from the economic and political but as sites in which such contestations occur. Cultural production can offer the opportunity to explore not only the relationship between culture and modes of production but also the possible ways to negotiate global processes. In this case, diasporic cinema located in the interstices of these processes promises to be a productive and unique site of inquiry that may assist in “unthinking Eurocentrism” (Shohat and Stam 1994) within the context of global capitalism.

This project analyzes transnational cultural production as described by Lowe and Lloyd (1997, 15):

What we focus on is the intersection of commodification and labor exploitation under postmodern transnational modes of production with the historical emergence of social formations in time with but also in antagonism to modernity; these social formations are not residues of the “premodern” but are *differential* formations that mediate the processes through which capital profits through the mixing and combination of exploitative modes. What we are concerned with is the multiplicity of significant contradictions rooted in the longer histories of antagonism and adaptation.

Taking these critiques into account, the authors are considering here “the contradictions that emerge between capitalist economic formations and the social and cultural practices they presume but cannot dictate” and that these contradictions “give rise to cross-race and cross-national projects, feminist movements, anticolonial struggles, and politicized cultural practices” (p. 25). The project focuses on how transnational cultural production negotiates the nation-state and capitalism, specifically within the racialized and gendered social and political transnational spaces marked as diasporas. The cultural sphere analyzed here is one that has recently emerged. As Spivak (1999, 357) suggests, “Culture alive is always on the

run, always changeful.... I am therefore a student of cultural politics. In what interests are differences defined?"

It may be useful at this point to outline some of the common characteristics that are shared by the representations and practices that are discussed here. South Asian diasporic cultural politics may differ from those in South Asia. This is in part due to the conditions of globalization and postcoloniality discussed previously, and specifically the technology that has been made accessible to these new communities. Diasporic cultural politics are mapped into this sphere of the public and popular that also negotiate nation-state policies and commercial film industries. Here the public spheres that are relevant to understanding the cultural politics of South Asian diasporas are necessarily transnational ones. This study focuses on the cultural space engendered by feature-length popular films, because of the particular ways in which they are produced, circulated, and received in the Brown Atlantic. Feature-length films popular in the West actively define and relate the central cultural debates in these transnational communities. Lesser well-known films are less likely to affect or engage South Asian transnational public cultures. Hence, although the analysis of these films is important, it is outside the theoretical framework of this project.

Unlike many conventional models, this study does not assume a split between popular and high culture. Instead, it employs the concept of public culture in its discussion of films. In their work on India, Arjun Appadurai and Carol Breckenridge (1989a and 1989b) offer the concept of public culture to create a space outside of such hierarchical approaches. They attempt to avoid these dichotomies between elite and popular, which they associate with categorical schema of Western cultures. More specifically, these dichotomies, they argue, are inappropriate for understanding culture within postcoloniality. They replace these schematic dichotomies with a framework that constructs a new cultural and theoretical space of analysis that is attentive to a variety of scales. Furthermore, Appadurai and Breckenridge propose that public culture can be employed to identify the "space between domestic life and the projects of the nation-state—where different social groups...constitute their identities by their experience of mass-mediated forms in relation to the practices of everyday life" (cited in Pinney 2001, 7). Christopher Pinney adds, "One crucial difference between public culture and popular culture is that the former presupposes processes of globalization within which the local operates" (p. 8).

For Appadurai and Breckenridge, "the term *public culture* is more than a rubric for collectively thinking about aspects of modern life now thought about separately. It also allows us to hypothesize not a type of cultural phenomena but a *zone* of cultural debate" (1989b, p. 6). Thus, rather than classify by genre or target audience, *public culture* is concerned with complex relations between multiple groups and interests in the dominant and popular space of diaspora. Appadurai and Breckenridge, though they avoid drawing distinctions between elite and popular forms, do not suggest that all interests enter into or are equally represented in the "zone of cultural debate." Public culture, therefore, is a site of contestation of class and other interests, often articulated through the production of differences in terms of power relations.

In addition, public culture identifies the space in which political, social, and economic contestations are negotiated in cultural discourses at a variety of scales and thus is not limited to the nation. This project focuses on the formation and emergence of these transnational public spheres from the local and regional to the national and global. Within the South Asian diasporic context, public spheres are the sites of contestation over social differences such as gender, race, nationality, and sexuality that are relevant to transnational subject formation. In addition, Appadurai and Breckenridge (1989b, 6–7) suggest that national culture and public cultures are sites “of an uneasy collaboration between the cultural agencies of the nation-state and the private, commercial agencies which dominate certain kinds of cultural production.” It is important to note that different groups may not participate in the public cultures associated with these films. In other words, although I emphasize the space of shared cultural discourses, I recognize that not all groups and classes may access or seek participation in the dominant discourses that enter the public culture described here. For example, these transnational public cultures focused on migratory subjectivities often foreclose the politics of subalternity in their imbricated relationship with global capitalism. These films often made in the name of the agency of the transnational elite postcolonial subject may therefore claim the space of native informant in relation to the racial underclass in the North and subaltern figures in the South.⁵

South Asian diasporic migration into the West engendered by global capitalism has created complex and contradictory cultural productions and subjectivities. Therefore, differentiating this cultural production and circulation may present oppositional politics but at the same time may traffic in normativities and self-commodification to access production and circulation. Thus, the project seeks to recognize the radical and oppressive cultural politics of South Asian diasporas and explores the contradictory and complex cultural debates present in these transnational films.

Postcoloniality, Globalization, and Diaspora: Theories of the National and Transnational

This book pays attention to the uneven, contradictory, and sometimes complicit relationships between the postcolonial nation-state and global capitalism in relation to modernity through what Aihwa Ong (1999) calls the transnational practices and imaginings of migratory subjects. Transnationalism emphasizes the movement across nation-states and simultaneously implies a state of change as well; it interrogates understandings of the national and transnational through critiques offered by postcolonial, globalization, and diasporic studies. This project identifies postcoloniality and globalization as the processes and conditions that construct and constitute the Brown Atlantic and its transnationalities.

Postcolonial Critique

The arguments around the term *postcolonial* are well rehearsed.⁶ Many of the contestations over “postcolonial” have sought to delineate its meaning as a social condition or a temporal period; while others define “postcolonial” as the political critique of modernity and colonialism that can be understood through analyses of the links between power and knowledge. Within this study, the former (social condition) is referred to as postcoloniality, and the latter as postcolonial critique. First, postcoloniality as a social condition (the condition resulting from a particular form of geopolitical cultural and economic domination and the subsequent struggles engaged against this domination that have been consolidated by the bourgeoisie as anticolonial nationalisms) provides a significant understanding of the histories of migration and dislocation since colonialism and independence. Furthermore, postcoloniality can be employed within varying contexts to engage shifting political struggles so that, for example, the imperialist relations of United States with decolonizing nation-states in the past six decades also can be considered within an understanding of postcoloniality.⁷

Second, postcolonial critique theoretically and politically attempts to identify and to deconstruct the universalizing Eurocentric discourses of colonialism, nationalism, and modernity through challenging universalist narratives of history, critiquing the form of the nation, and interrogating the relationship between power and knowledge. In doing so, the project of postcolonial studies seeks to disengage from the binary logic of colonial and anticolonial that characterizes elite nationalisms that do not deconstruct the Eurocentric logic of knowledge that continues to undergird anticolonial politics. Therefore, postcolonial studies, especially the project of subaltern studies, is distinguished by its focus on the nation and the project of modernity. Subaltern studies scholars, such as Ranajit Guha (1997) and Gyan Prakash (1992), have successfully employed Marxist and poststructural methodologies of “reading against the grain” of anticolonial nationalism for traces of subaltern struggles. “Reading colonial and nationalist narratives against their grain and focusing on their blind-spots, silences, and anxieties, these historians seek to uncover the subaltern’s myths, cults, ideologies, and revolts that colonial and nationalist elites sought to appropriate and conventional historiography has laid to waste by their deadly weapon of cause and effect” (Prakash 1992, 9). In doing so, they have sought to dismantle the supposed hegemony of the bourgeois class in constructing the postcolonial nation. Postcolonial feminist studies scholars, such as Partha Chatterjee and Gayatri Spivak, have interrogated the nation epistemologically and politically, respectively arguing that nationalism is derivative and complicit with colonialism and consequently that anticolonial bourgeois nationalism has failed to represent subaltern subjects within the nation and that the gendered subaltern signifies the space of the conceptual failure of the nation.⁸

In contrast to the nonelite subjects of subaltern studies, postcolonial diasporic migrants often have been members of the bourgeoisie who have remained invested in employing, rather than dismantling, this Eurocentric construction of cultural

difference. During British colonialism, South Asians migrated to Britain and other parts of the Commonwealth, including East Africa, Canada, and the Caribbean. More of the recent migration has been by more professional-class South Asians, people whose Indian postsecondary education and training makes them attractive to Western economies. This bourgeois class that has become transnational in the last half of the century was formed by the specific history of colonialism and could be called Macaulay's grandchildren. Lord Thomas Macaulay, a colonial administrator in India, wrote the following in his infamous 1835 "Minute on Education":

We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern; a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect. To that class we may leave it to refine the vernacular dialects of the country, to enrich those dialects with terms of science borrowed from the Western nomenclature, and to render them by degrees fit for conveying knowledge to the great mass of the population. (cited in Visweswaran 1997, 10)

Chatterjee suggests that it is this class that soon became the Indian national bourgeoisie that several generations later has transnational aspirations.⁹

With independence, this class gained access to education but not necessarily to compensatory employment and income or access to the promises of modernity. The postcolonial economy did not necessarily support the aspirations of this underemployed class that sought to migrate to fulfill its desires and capabilities. Kamala Visweswaran argues that this bourgeoisie saw themselves as forced to migrate to realize their potential. "In a sense, then, the subcontinental bourgeoisie ... must globalize in order to realize its interests, placing the postcolonial teacher of English literature in the US academy on a continuum with the family jeweler or venture capitalist" (Visweswaran 1997, 11). The legacy of Macaulay's "Minute on Education" ensured that these English-speaking bourgeoisie, consisting of merchants, academics, doctors, and engineers, among others, had access to migration to countries such as the United States, Britain, and Canada once those nation-state's immigration policies changed. As more skilled and professional labor was needed by the economic North, immigration policies shifted to allow for the migration of certain kinds of labor, much less than certain kinds of national populations. I will return to the topic of interrelations between subjects' desires to migrate and the economic forces that propel such desires. The English-speaking class first imagined by colonialism and reformulated by anticolonial nationalism are most frequently the constituents who seek the metropolitan center that they have been taught to desire. Hence colonialism and nationalism have engendered transnationality in postcolonial migration.

In the United States, for example, an influx of South Asian migration occurred after the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act (effective in July 1968) abolished quotas favoring northern European immigrants and assigned uniform quotas for all

nation-states, granting special preference to those with capital and technical skills regardless of origin. In contrast to the “pull” for immigrant labor that recruited Asian immigrants for the exploitation of their physical labor after the end of slavery, this more recent wave arrived in the United States as part of the restructuring of global capitalism in the twentieth century. Thus, Asians, often of the middle and professional class, were able to enter the United States if they had the sufficient funds or education to do so. Many South Asians were poised for migration and did so. The postcolonial nation-states suffered economic loss with the departure of each migrant. The economic and emotional costs are an undercalculated loss for the postcolonial South Asian homelands, despite the contributions and remittances made by the diaspora.¹⁰ The condition of postcoloniality led to a certain type of transnational migration, one that engendered South Asian diasporas marked by the legacy of colonialism. “Despite the usual assumption that Asians immigrate from stable, continuous, ‘traditional’ cultures, most of the post-1965 Asian immigrants come from societies already disrupted by colonialism and distorted by the upheavals of neocolonial capitalism and war” (Lowe 1998a, 16). Moreover, the colonial and Orientalist racial formations accompanied South Asian migration to Western nation-states so that although capitalism’s economic imperative was satisfied by the arrival of the migrating labor, the nation-state politically disenfranchised South Asians from full citizenship.¹¹

Several postcolonial scholars, such as Homi Bhabha, have sought to understand the relationship between postcoloniality and transnational migration. Postcolonial diasporas mark the return of the repressed in Bhabha’s work. Having already been part of the history of the colonial nation, “it is to the city that the migrants, the minorities, the diasporic come to change the history of the nation” (Bhabha 1994, 320). The migration of Asians to Britain, for example, results directly from the aftermath of colonialism in Britain where they are excluded from and denied full citizenship because of this history. Bhabha’s scholarship in its sweeping gesture does not distinguish between the subaltern nonelite, displaced diasporic, or migrant female in his postcolonial critique of modernity. Instead, his critique seeks heterogeneous sites, including postcolonial diasporas, that produce multiple cultural strategies (such as hybridity and mimicry) that critique nationalism, nativism, and modernity.¹² Postcolonial diasporic critiques of modernity pose a range of analytic possibilities that challenge many categories of modernity such as the nation and national identity but differ from postmodernist critiques in foregrounding complex histories of slavery, exile, colonialism, transnationality, and postcoloniality. Although some of Bhabha’s work is aligned with the subaltern studies scholarship, it diverges in its emphasis on postcolonial diasporic migration and transnationality. The significance of the subaltern studies project then emphasizes the necessity of attending to how diasporas are characterized by elite formations and therefore often aligned with the project of nationalism.

Migration and diasporas cannot be separated from colonialism, because it is the historical condition of colonialism and postcoloniality that has led to the global displacement of South Asian peoples under various forms of migration nor can they

be separated from the uneven expansion of global capitalism that also functions to provide mobility and agency to these postcolonial subjects. Bearing in mind the project of postcolonial studies, this study attempts to not only analyze the ways in which the logic of anticolonial nationalism appears in the deterritorialized nations of diasporas but also to analyze the ways in which postcolonial diasporas can provide sites for continuing to critique modernity and its universalizing narratives from a specific history and politics of transnationality.

Globalization

Most significant, globalization is understood by scholars as not only the expansion of capitalism into the “stage” of post-Fordist global capitalism and its attendant processes but also as the related intensification of compression of time and space.¹³ Globalization in the works of scholars such as Lowe and Lloyd (1997, 1) describes the moment and processes of late or global capitalism, “the universal extension of a differentiated mode of production that relies on flexible accumulation and mixed production to incorporate all sectors of the global economy into its logic of commodification.” The term also describes the accompanying social, political, and cultural processes. One of the political dynamics of this transformation that is of interest here is the deterritorialization of people, capital, and culture that is part of globalization.¹⁴

Saskia Sassen (2003, 5) comments, “Crucial to the critique of methodological nationalism is the need for trans-nationalism because the nation as container category is inadequate given the proliferation of transboundary dynamics and formation.” Although scholars have debated how best to comprehend the recent processes of globalization and their subsequent impact on nation-states and transnational migrations, the models for understanding global relations often have been either totalizing or celebratory. To better understand transnational phenomena as contradictory, fragmented, and heterogeneous, scholars have made the framework of the global and the local a powerful and frequent descriptor in this scholarship on transnationality. Though they hold differing understandings of the status of the nation-state, both totalizing and celebratory positions posit the current moment of postmodernity as one in which capital, cultural products, and people cross state borders in mass migration. In terms of the former position, structuralist scholars have offered varying paradigms to describe uneven economic and political global relations under the rubric of dependency and world system theories. Positing that the integration of non-European nation-states into the world economy is accomplished through exploitation and uneven capitalist development, these Marxist theories of imperialism (in the works of Samir Amin, 1976, and Immanuel Wallerstein, 1980, for example) employ structural analyses taking the globe as a political and economic unit, with nation-states as its geographical component parts. In general, world system models conceptualize the division of the world into the core and periphery, or now more frequently, into the North and South.¹⁵

Other social scientists who are often more interested in framing the local as creative, resistant, and transgressive offer contrasting emphases on the impact of the local. This approach takes the global to be a uniform set of macroeconomic forces resulting from the expansion of capitalism and the local to be complex and multiple situated processes (Ong 1999, 4). In other words, although the economic and political are still associated with top-down unified global forces in these theories, transnational processes occurring on the local level are associated with cultural specificity and resistance. Here, the tendency is often to privilege the local as the site of cultural resistance and creative engagement that is best approached through the social sciences, especially ethnography.

In analyses of the impact of globalization on nation-states, scholars such as Arjun Appadurai (1990 and 1996), Ulf Hannerz, and Linda Basch, Nina Glick Schiller, and Cristina Szanton Blanc (1994) have commented on the porosity of borders, the decoupling of the nation-state, and the adaptive transnational subjects cum citizens with varying degrees of economic and political power. Arjun Appadurai writes of the postmodern condition in which culture, capital, commodities, and people are in motion in complex transnational ebbs and flows in a postnational moment. Basch et al.'s work ambitiously connects the transnational migrations of postcolonial labor groups to metropolitan nation-states, noting the complicated economic, political, and social circuits established by these groups. Their study, like others, lacks an analysis of the situated racial formation processes that occur in these places, especially in light of discourses of multiculturalism, neoliberalism, and shifting citizenship policies.¹⁶ In response to the theories that emphasize globalization and the global as totalizing, these more celebratory discourses of cultural globalization focus on the disjunctures experienced by migratory subjects in their situated local forms of culture. As Cindi Katz (2001, 1229) comments,

The material social practices associated with globalization work in interconnection, such as when capital, labor, or cultural products move *from* one place *to* another, but they work iteratively as well, the effects of capitalism's globalizing imperative are experienced commonly across very different locales, and understanding these connections is crucial if they are to be challenged effectively.

In contrast, Saskia Sassen (2003, 2) examines globalization as encompassing processes that though located at national or subnational levels allows involves transnational formations that connect multiple locations in networks in complex and contradictory ways.

Appadurai has been one of the strongest advocates of the celebratory approach, suggesting the collapse of the nation-state due to globalization and the possibilities of postnational and diasporic identities. "We are in the process of moving to a global order in which the nation-state has become obsolete and other formations for allegiance and identity have taken its place...and there will be a spread of national forms unconnected to territorial states" (Appadurai 1993b, "Patriotism" 421).

Announcing the undoing of the hyphen between the nation and the state (also territory), the cosmopolitan possibilities of new global spatial relations and communities are seen to occur in the “local” spaces of culture that resist the “global.” Furthermore, he describes these new affinities as “strong alternative forms for the organization of global traffic in resources, images, and ideas, forms that either *contest the nation-state* actively or constitute peaceful alternatives for large-scale political loyalties” (Appadurai 1993b, “Patriotism” 421, emphasis mine).

Although one could make an argument about the increase in nationalisms, Appadurai is susceptible to diagnosing the demise of the nation-state. (The case of South Asia may actually indicate the opposite as the transnational participation of migrant nationalisms plays out in religious nationalisms within the diaspora.) Creolization, diasporas, and postnationality are evoked as indications of the demise of the nation-state rather than as markers of its transformation in relation to global processes. The “post” in Appadurai’s postnationality connotes “after” rather than “since.” Rather than teasing out the intricate web tying together nation, state, citizenship, and globalization, this line of inquiry assumes that transnational communities have replaced nation-states. Instead of viewing the United States as “a land of immigrants,” Appadurai (1993b, 423) suggests that it can be envisioned as “one mode in a postnational network of diasporas.” Here, his celebratory evocations of diaspora woefully undertheorize the relevance of political economy and race to national membership and citizenship.

A wide range of scholars including Jenny Sharpe and Aihwa Ong have forwarded critiques of this cultural globalization based on the substitution of ethnicity for race and the erasure of state citizenship in privileging the transcendence of the national. Appadurai’s nation of nations paradigm, writes Jenny Sharpe (1995, 189), “blurs the distinction between a racial identity formed in opposition to the idea of the United States as a nation of immigrants and an ethnic identity formed around the idea of the United States as a nation of un-meltable immigrants.” His lack of attention to racial formation and racism becomes masked in the emphasis on ethnicity and the United States as perhaps the über-multicultural nation of nations. Ong pinpoints Appadurai’s formulation of cosmopolitan globalism as predicated on the detachment of the nation from the state, and therefore the supposed irrelevance of the state, citizenship, and its recent reformulations due to the pressure of global capitalism. Ong’s critique further presses Appadurai as she asserts the significant function and power of the nation-state in globalization, especially in regard to the regulatory and constitutive role of citizenship that occurs at multiple scales. Sassen (2003, 6) writes, “Today’s re-scaling dynamics cut across institutional size and across the institutional encasements of territory produced by the formation of national states. This does not mean that the old hierarchies disappear, but rather that rescalings emerge alongside the old ones, and that the former can trump the latter.”

Citizenship, as Lowe, Ong, and other Asian-American studies scholars have argued, functions as a mechanism of inclusion and exclusion. As Lowe has discussed, the immigrant has been opposed to the citizen in normative constructions of the

nation. "These definitions have cast Asian immigrants both as persons and populations to be integrated into the national political sphere and as the contradictory, confusing, unintelligible elements to be marginalized and returned to their alien origins" (Lowe 1998a, 4). Lowe elucidates the ways in which the migration of Asians is situated in relation to the force of capital on one side and the desire of the nation on the other, thus creating contradictory and complex interpellations of the citizen-subject. In her account of Asian migration, Lowe (1998a, 10) suggests, "The economic contradictions of capital and labor on the national level, and the contradictions of the political national and the global economy, have given rise over and over again, for the nation to resolve *legally* capitalist contradiction around the definition of the Asian immigrant subject." In other words, capital's demand for the internationalization of labor coincides and conflicts with the nation-state's need for coherency and hegemony (Lowe 1998b, 15).¹⁷ The resultant migration attests to the ways U.S. imperialism and capitalism converge within global economy so that Asian migration to the West is facilitated and hampered by the nation-state. "We are here because you were there" aptly summarizes the relationship between Western interests and the counternarrative offered by migrants.

This study approaches the transnational and its relationship to the post-national as advocated by the recent scholarship in American studies. Postnational American studies rather than foregoing the nation-state foregrounds the transnational and international dimensions of the United States and the Americas. In particular, it reckons with the myopic and domesticating paradigms that not only previously contained American studies to the territory of the United States but also ignored U.S. imperialism and forwarded U.S. exceptionalism. Hence, the project tries to understand transnationality in terms of multiscalar processes. In this way, it takes transnationality as "the condition of cultural interconnectedness and mobility across space—which has been intensified under late capitalism" and transnationalism as "the cultural specificities of global processes, tracing the multiplicity of the uses and conceptions of 'culture' " (Ong 1999,4).

Furthermore, Appadurai links the expansion of capitalism and its consequential migrations as liberatory actions. In this case, he fails to note that the postnational moment of movement enabling liberatory shifts and reevaluations of identity is also the postmodern moment of late capitalism. He does not acknowledge that liberatory mobilizations occur within specific conditions (prefer parameters elsewhere has non-mathematical usage that is acceptable) accessible to limited populations. Therefore, Appadurai misreads the role of the state in the unbuckling of the nation-state; he neglects to acknowledge the shifted role of the state in engendering global capitalism. He eulogizes the nation and its correspondence to the state in his valorization of diaspora and other postnational forms of identity and community. His example warns us that it is necessary to locate diaspora as complicitly embedded in late capitalist formations and in relation to the racism of nation-states. Furthermore, racialization, as I argue later, is also linked to these economic global processes as well. In other words, ethnicity, religion, and race continue to be mobilized and

revitalized by global geopolitics and economics. Missing in many of these accounts of globalization is an understanding of gender and sexuality. Feminist theorists of globalization such as Lowe, Sassen, and Cynthia Enloe (1990) have been much more attuned to the ways in which globalization processes are specifically gendered, especially in their analyses of labor and migration.

Scholars such as Saskia Sassen (2003, 3) argue the necessity of transforming our theories and methods regarding studies of globalization:

Studying the global, then, entails not only a focus on that which is explicitly global in scale, but also a focus on locally scaled practices and conditions articulated with global dynamics and a focus on the multiplication of cross-border connections among various localities and the fact of recurrence across localities.

This project takes a multiscale approach to studying globalization as one of the conditions engendering South Asian diasporic transnationalities. It sees these processes as specific flows that follow certain circuits of migration. It recognizes that globalization processes are differentiated, reconstructing transnational circuits and regions, rather than a homogenous global structure; moreover, it recognizes their complex relations with the local, urban, regional, national, and international. This migration produces a certain heterogeneous and hybrid multiscale space—that of the Brown Atlantic.

Diaspora

Critiques of the nation have emerged not only from postcolonial and globalization studies but also from diasporic studies that have provided a complex conceptual framework for theorizing nation, race, and transnationality in relation to cultural identities. As David Eng (1997) writes in his article “Out Here and Over There,” diaspora can be a mode of critique for studies seeking knowledge production outside of a national framework. In his work, Eng proposes a queering not only of sexuality but also of the concept of home through the concept of diaspora. He suggests that home has been a problematic space and site that has been differently approached by Asian- American and queer studies. Bringing these methods of inquiry together through the diasporic critique allows us to query “the inevitability of these normative structures while deconstructing their mechanisms of exclusion” (Eng 2001, 206).

In the usage here, diaspora provides a critique not only of the concept of home but also of origins and the role they play in conceptualizations of nation, race, and identity. Hence, in this project, diaspora functions as a postnational critique of the nation and nationalism that is strongly associated with a critique of the concept-metaphor of home and origin. Rather than seeking to define the significance of diaspora through tracing its etymology in cultural studies, that is, seeking a linguistic origin, the project here is to understand when and why, and how it is

employed in cultural politics and knowledge production. Furthermore, in posing diaspora partially as a critique of constructions of home, this project necessarily interrogates spatialized and territorialized identities not only in relation to constructions of “migrant” subjects but also in relation to the mutual constitution of “native” subjects.

Unlike Appadurai’s theories on cultural globalization and diaspora, cultural studies scholarship on diaspora often has focused its constructions around a critique of the racialized formation of national identity, and has questioned the rooted, static, and sedentary logic of modernity. Challenging narratives of purity, rootedness, and timelessness, diasporic critique is positioned to dismantle nationalist constructions of belonging that link racialized and gendered bodies and space in seamless tales of bloodlines and family to the land. Reemerging in the 1980s in postcolonial Britain, diaspora is defined in discourse on one hand as an identity in response to exclusionary and racist national narratives and on the other hand as Bhabha’s third space of postcolonial migration and hybridity. In the United States and Canada, these discourses negotiated and reinforced the expansion of multiculturalism. In the early 1990s, with the rise of scholarship positing the death of the nation due to globalization, diaspora was hailed as a deterritorialized geopolitical community succeeding the nation-state in an age of increasing globalization. Furthermore, although classic definitions associate the space and condition of diaspora with nostalgia for the homeland, recent articulations of diaspora decouple and disassociate this nostalgia and desire to return.¹⁸ In current discourses on migration and transnationality, *diaspora* often is used interchangeably with terms such as *immigrant*, *exile*, and *refugee*. In these formulations, diaspora is forwarded as potentially undermining nationalist narratives. However, as scholars have noted, diaspora as a political category may work with and not against the nation-state.

From its Greek roots, *diaspora* means literally to scatter or sow across. The *Oxford English Dictionary* traces its usage to a reference in the Old Testament (Deuteronomy 28:25) to the dispersal of the people of Israel across the world. Traditionally, diaspora as a translocational identity relies on the idea of a home that has been left behind or lies elsewhere. The “classic” definition of diaspora, based on the Jewish model and biblical writings, often has assumed that dispersal was due to forced exile from a “homeland” to which a “people” hopes to return eventually. Contemporary dispersed communities, known today as diasporas (including the Jewish Diaspora), differ from this classical model of exile and diaspora.

Following a schematic understanding of diaspora, William Safran (1991,84) posits that diasporas “regard the homeland as the true, ideal home to which they or their descendants should and will eventually return when conditions are acceptable.” However, he acknowledges that few dispersed communities qualify as diasporas because they fail to meet all of his defining criteria, which includes the desire to return to the homeland.¹⁹ In defining a connection between people and the homeland, Khachig Tölölyan (1996,14) posits, “It makes more sense to think of diasporan or diasporic existence as not necessarily involving a physical return but rather a *re-turn*, a repeated turning to the concept and/or relation of the homeland and other

diasporan kin" (emphasis added). Thus, Tölölyan, rather than eliminating or evading diaspora's relationship with homeland, unfetters it from a permanent physical resettlement in favor of heterogeneous connections to both the homeland and to other diasporic locations through such forms as political commitment, imagination, memory, travel, and most important here, cultural production. For some contemporary diasporas, this reformulation of re-turn is significant as increasing transnationality makes re-turns of many kinds possible.²⁰ This is to suggest that not all transnational structures of feelings are nostalgia or longings for homelands.

This project attends therefore to the ways in which power manifests itself between South Asian diasporas located in the West or economic North and their nation-states of the economic South. More specifically, South Asian diasporas, unlike African diasporas, may often have more political and economic power than the nation-states of the South that are nonetheless invested often with more cultural authenticity and power. Many evocations of South Asian homelands emphasize a shared history, not of postcoloniality and globalization but of more simply some shared South Asianness. The shared South Asianness is based on an Orientalist and anticolonial nationalist formulation of Indian or South Asian difference. This project asks not only what impact does this have on diasporic politics and possibilities but, more important, how do we understand this in regard to the relationship between diaspora and postcolonial nation-states, especially ones located in the economic South. Moreover, it suggests that we understand the relationship between the construction of diasporic politics in relation to indigenous ones; I suggest that this is possible through interrogating their imbricated and problematic relationships to the concept of "native."

The relationship between diasporas and homeland requires clarification. In contrast to many constructions of diaspora that take the homeland as an *a priori* given or as a place of origin that exists prior to displacement, this study suggests that homelands like diasporas are produced through the material practices and cultural discourses of diasporic displacement and imaginings. For example, in my discussion of homeland and diaspora, I focus on the ways in which diasporas and homelands are produced and constructed through narratives, because diasporas, like nations, evoke a time of belonging and wholeness, the moment when the diasporic subject was neither fragmented nor disenfranchised. Narratives of exile, like classical discourses of diaspora, often privilege an originary and authentic nation as home. They are fecund in producing compensatory and fantastic imaginings that result from loss and distance. This loss is rewritten in the reinvention of a past home and nation, thus sometimes consolidating and supporting nationalism's logic of origin and authenticity. As I argue later, diasporas, rather than being derivatives of, often are mutually constituted with the homeland nation. In other words, diasporas and nations produce each other. This project examines the narratives of this mutual production, focusing on the social identities and politics articulated through these transnational cultural logics. For these reasons, it attends to the ways in which South Asian homelands imagine themselves and their diasporas as well as focuses on diasporic imaginings, consistently forwarding critiques of home and origin.

Therefore, coupling an understanding of diaspora as a mode of interpreting the transnational cultural and economic politics with diaspora as the critique of the notion of an origin and homeland provides a complex framework for theorizing contemporary migrations—migrations that also require considerations of race and other social categories of difference.

In black British cultural studies, that is, as in the work of Stuart Hall (1993) and Paul Gilroy (1993a and 2000), diasporic critique primarily engages with racial formation and the exclusions of the nation-state.

The concept of diaspora sets forth a range of analytic possibilities that offer a much-needed alternative to the Eurocentric debates based on ‘postmodernism’... by opening up a deep historical perspective on black experiences of Western modernity which disrupts the centrality of the categories of ‘nation’ and nationhood that are so often taken for granted. (Mercer 1994, 246)

Hall and Gilroy overlap and differ in their theories of diaspora. Hall promotes diaspora as a cultural identity that is enacted through difference rather than through an emphasis on return to origins. Although Hall positions diaspora as antinationalist discourse, this is not the primary function of the term. He understands diaspora, not in schematic terms, as a frame for understanding antiessentialist identities articulating difference. In expanding Hall’s strategic use of diaspora primarily in relation to race and cultural identity, my deployment here situates difference through multiple axes of social differentiation, including religion, gender, class, and sexuality. Diaspora is an attempt to reconstruct, reposition, and rearticulate these differences in global capitalist modes of production.

Citing the cosmopolitan transnational politics of the African (and Jewish) diaspora as exemplary, Gilroy emphasizes forced dispersal as leading not to common essential experiences but to shared racial politics. In this formulation, diasporic identity is focused “less on the equalizing, pre-democratic force of sovereign territory and more on the social dynamics of remembrance and commemoration defined by a strong sense of the dangers involved in forgetting the location of origin and the tearful process of dispersal” (Gilroy 2000, 123–24). Thus for Gilroy, diaspora primarily functions as a mode of identification and disidentification in relation to the nation and against nonsituated postmodern celebrations of mobility.

Gilroy (1993a, 7) calls for challenging frameworks that privilege the national for two reasons: (1) the necessity of interrogating the nation-state as a cultural, political, and socioeconomic unit, and (2) the necessity of challenging the essentialist politics of purity that haunt modernity’s construction of culture. *There Ain’t No Black in the Union Jack* (1987), *The Black Atlantic* (1993a), and *Against Race* (2000) assert the significance of transnational circulation to understanding racial formations and the cultural processes.²¹ Moving from diaspora as an abstraction, Gilroy posits the Black Atlantic as a specific transnational and intercultural site that encourages us to see mobility and movement in a hemispheric circuit. His proposition is that