THE UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

Brown Gazing:
the Pedagogy and Practice of South Asian Writing in Canada

by

Ashok Mathur

A DISSERTATION
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES
IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE
DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH
CALGARY, ALBERTA
MAY, 1999

Abstract

This dissertation focusses on the problem of race and racialization by examining a number of texts of "South Asian Writing in Canada" and exploring strategies employed by racialized writers to combat and subvert racist ideologies. By examining what bell hooks, Sherene Razack, and numerous critical scholars term an ideology of "white supremacy," and by following critical race theorists in telling stories that articulate a racialized sensibility, I work toward destabilizing whiteness as a central and unproblematized subject.

In order to reverse this dominant white gaze, I posit the possibility and necessity of a counterhegemonic strategy that I term "brown gazing." Drawing on feminist film theory which first suggested the dominance of a "male gaze," I adopt the principles and practices of Critical Race Theory — which suggests that racism exists, is normalized in dominantly white cultures, and that its occurrence in the everyday lives of people of colour is in no way extraordinary, remote, or infrequent — to develop several "counterstorytelling" techniques that address ways of empowering students and other people of colour.

Integral to this project is a critique of how whiteness (and white supremacy) operates at institutional levels, particularly at the site of the university, and how critical race studies can intervene to create a positive social change in this location. Therefore, several of the storytelling episodes critique these sites and open up the possibility of creating anti-racist, pedagogical interventions with the

aim of gesturing toward an anti-racist practice inside and outside the university.

Acknowledgements

As with any social or political project, this dissertation is the result of much community involvement, and for this I am extremely grateful. I would like to begin by thanking those who sat on my examination committee: Barbara Crow and Vijay Mishra who participated as examiners external to the department and the university respectively; Rod McGillis, who was gracious enough to come onto my committee at a rather late stage and prove very helpful at bringing this project to a close; Fred Wah, from whom I have learned a great deal about making words work in political ways; and Cecille Depass whose anti-racist sensibilities were a constant source of inspiration at all stages in the research and writing of this project. I would also like to thank my colleagues at the University of Calgary who provided much needed intellectual discussion and critical feedback on this dissertation: Jennifer Kelly, Louise Saldanha, Lucy Clarke, and Jeff Derksen. I also want to thank a number of professors who have taught and helped me over the years: Susan Bennett, Lorne Macdonald, Jeanne Perreault, and Aritha van Herk. I am also indebted to various friends and colleagues from across the country: Roy Miki, Scott McFarlane, Charmaine Perkins, Glen Lowry, Karlyn Koh, Monika Gagnon, Gladys Srivastava, K. D. Srivastava, Geneffa Popatia, Sharron Proulx, Hiromi Goto, Larissa Lai, Tamai Kobayashi, Rita Wong. Finally, and most importantly, I thank Aruna Srivastava for everything she stands for and all she gives, not just to me, but to her various and varied communities.

Dedicated to:

scholars, artists, and writers of colour from all over —

let's do the work we have to do

and

to my parents —

for getting me started and supporting this same work

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE

Gazes, reflections, and how to theorize through anti-racism

I.

Three ways of gazing, critically

I have shaved my legs.
This is not a statement that alludes to
some sort of transgendered subjectivity. Neither is it
an occupation of re-constructed gender roles.
It's just an act of making smooth.
Partly, an act of making the familiar strange is at work here, the legs my legs, normally hairy (that is to say, not hairy, as in chockfull of hair, but hairy, the quality of having hair, as normal, as familiar). And so I shave, denude, defamiliarize my legs for myself. Take away the excess, remove that surface layer — no, not surface, but surface-sprouting. Down to the surface, along the surface, a surfeit of surfaces. And, like Margaret Atwood (well, maybe not quite), I now bring my head above, break the surface, make my self new again, and say to you to me, my legs are smooth. A naked apparition.

This story is part of a series of stories, many of which are highly detailed, a continuing prologue to a dissertation that might further appear to circle around the issues, to speak *nearby* instead of *about*.[1] But this story, this *Story*, in concert with stories — of my own, of others, of *reading* others' stories, of reading my own — is a story of resuscitation and rejuvenation. As part of this prelude, I should point to the apparent informality of much of the writing that follows: the use of vernacular and oral speech patterns, the very definite first-person presence throughout, the constant intrusion of story into the criticism and of criticism into the story. All of these techniques I intend to explain at greater length, but it is important to point to them now, to insist on their presence from the start, so that they read as a strategy of "brown gazing" from here on in.

The title of this project brings to mind a number of questions, if not outright contradictions. To begin with: "Brown Gazing." I use this in the context of feminist theorizing which critiques the male gaze, positing the possibility of a female, or even feminist, gaze,[2] that ability to wrest from a dominant social order the power of construction and to redefine such power. A corollary to this male

---

[1] Trinh T. Minh-ha uses the phrase "speak nearby" (*Framer Framed* 96) in reference to her film/anthropology work which refuses traditional and/or modernist approaches that try to explicate fully a given anthropological situation. As Trinh is concerned with positioning herself within her research, so am I in this dissertation.

[2] Laura Mulvey, in her "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," introduces the concept of the male gaze, followed by critics such as Ann Kaplan and Kaja Silverman who argue for the possibility of female spectatorship.

gaze, discussed at length in the now-flourishing school of critical white studies, is the "white gaze." Much like the position of men who, in a patriarchal culture have the privilege of seeing themselves as the social norm, those who are constructed as white "while socialized in a racially constructed world, are taught not to be aware of themselves in racial terms.... White racial identity is a psychological template which operates as a 'world view' and serves as a filter for race-based information" (Carter 199). In other words, the privilege of whiteness creates for itself such a normalized space that whiteness is constructed as the neutral value from which all others differ.[3] But if the gaze is attributed to a dominant form of viewing, my use of "brown gazing" points to and disturbs that notion of normalcy. Although "brown" is a word which normally inhabits the role of adjective, modifying, colouring if you will, the real subject, "brown gazing" carries within it two possibilities: 1) the modifier stands not as adjective, but as subject, gazing, just "being" brown and gazing; or 2) acting as a colouring adjective, "brown" suggests an otherwise normative value to the concept of the gaze; that is, without modification to "brown," the gaze exists with a putatively value-free quality which, I suggest, is the quality of whiteness. Obviously, the "brown" is also a reference to the South

---

[3] See Richard Dyer's *White* where, largely through an analysis of film theory, he comes to the conclusion that whiteness is both highly visible, as the norm, and invisible in that it becomes constructed as colour-less; Cornell West, in his internet article, "Towards a Socialist Theory of Racism," introduces this concept as the "white normative gaze"; and Sonia Smee's "Colouring the Pronoun" in *Colour. An Issue* (West Coast Line) demonstrates that the racialized nature of language depends on the normalization of whiteness.

Asian context of this study, but here I have to stand back and question that metonymic usage. If "brown" stands in for "brown skin" which in turn attempts to represent "south asian-ness," perhaps I am suggesting that this project is subjectively positioned from a brown-skinned perspective, most specifically South Asian (even if this does suggest a huge question concerning others who would identify as "brown" but not South Asian). And what of my South Asian sisters and brothers whose mixed-race heritage — or whose various identities are largely shaped by class, gender, sexuality, caste, and migration — might cause them to view themselves as South Asian but "not-brown," that is, as white, black, or without colour. Indeed, some may choose to identify primarily with communities around class,[4] sexuality, or gender rather than race. I pose all these problems and questions not to create an endless circle of postmodern debate, but to articulate what will remain a central sensibility in this dissertation — a continuous, self-reflexive, critical analysis of the stories told here, not necessarily as a negating/oppositional force, but as a way of understanding the political importance behind all these gestures and motions around race, writing, and representation.

So, back to the issue, the title at hand. I note, too, that I have chosen to use the continuous present rather than any other verbal

---

[4] Critics of capitalism, such as Oliver Cromwell Cox, suggest that race as a category and a divisive factor among people is really only a playing out of a class dynamic, "that people are encouraged to think in terms of race and, therefore, inherent inequality because it benefits capitalism" (Cashmore and Troyna 43).

form: "Brown" does not gaze, has not gazed, will not be gazing, but *is* "gazing." This continuous present articulates, for me, at least a couple of directions. First, it allows for me as the *subject*, the writer of this dissertation, to look at the nuances of this gaze, how it shifts and reformulates itself dependent on a number of conditions, all of which occur simultaneously; second, it allows me to watch myself watching this process, allows me to gaze in at me gazing outward. This is not, of course, to suggest that such a gazing in is uncomplicated or in any way a more transparent analysis; rather, drawing on Mulvey's critique of the "male gaze" and, from there, Cornel West's concept of the "white normative gaze," I reflect on W. E. B. Du Bois's notion of "double-consciousness," that is, of seeing oneself from inside and outside. I should emphasize here that such a back and forth gazing is engaged in as a process to resist the normativity of whiteness; that is, a system that enforces whiteness as normal encourages me (and other subjects defined outside whiteness) to see myself as a type of apparition existing against or opposed to the embodied white self. I am encouraged to see myself *with white eyes* as a brown body, even as I am aware that it is the brown body who looks at itself. In a sense, then, this brown body looks at itself both as an object (outside of whiteness) and as the subject-constructed-by-whiteness looking at the very body which *defines* whiteness by its given position at the perimeter of whiteness.[5]

---

[5] In "Can the Subaltern Speak?" Gayatri Spivak talks about how the dominant

What I intend to do here, then, is to re-address the use of the term "gaze" to represent a form of empowerment rather than a form of imposition. In their books that suggest a similar repositioning, critics such as Sherene Razack (*Looking White People in the Eye*)[6] and Himani Bannerji (*Returning the Gaze*) both argue for a re-framing of the dominant gaze. They argue, as I do, that when a member of a subjugated class, in this case, someone outside the realm of normative whiteness, re-situates the gaze so that it comes from (me) rather than from outside, I contend that this re-frames the issue of self-representing the racialized body. I am not, however, suggesting an unfettered freedom that comes from discovering individualism (which is itself a particularly insidious manifestation of liberal ideology, borne of the belief that the individual can enact free will to work independently of the system). What I do suggest is that it is critical for racialized subjects, living under a white normative system, to explore forms of expression such as I offer under the term "brown gazing" to adopt a subject position that is not entirely determined by an overarching whiteness.[7] Much like Butler, who suggests the "female

---

social order will use the marginalized subject, the subaltern, to define its own limits, to define itself by what it is not, to perceive "the Other as the Self's shadow" (280).

[6] Including her article "Storytelling for Social Change" as the second chapter of her book, *Looking White People in the Eye*, Razack prefixes the title with the phrase: "The Gaze from the Other Side" (36-55).

[7] Referring to Paulo Freire's concept of conscientization, Cornel West writes: "[t]his unique fusion of social theory, moral outrage and political praxis constitutes a kind of pedagogical politics of conversion in which objects of history constitute themselves as active subjects of history ready to make a

'object' ... inexplicably returns the glance, reverses the gaze, and contests the place and authority of the masculist position" (*Gender* ix), I suggest the racialized "object" may perform a similar reversal on the authority of a dominant white position.

This said, I reflect on what lies beyond the colon, a post-colon phrase: ":the Pedagogy and Practice of South Asian Writing in Canada." A couple of points are worth pondering here: I set this up as a discussion of South Asian Writing in Canada, yet there are clearly some writers who, despite a citizenship and/or history of living in Canada, live and write from other nations. Yet their writing appears most frequently in this "home" space, is often published here, and these writers often frame their imaginative spaces within these national borders. In these theoretical times when nation-states (and concomitant "national" literatures) themselves are challenged by global economies and a radical movement away from nationalist/protectionist policies,[8] I realize that a work that chooses to limit its parameters to such nationalistic boundaries might well be questioned on such delimitations. However, within diasporic communities whose destinies have been determined historically by the whims of national governments, I believe that focussing this study on South Asian Writing in Canada

---

fundamental difference in the quality of the lives they individually and collectively live" ("Freire" 179).

[8] The North American Free Trade Agreement and the temporarily stalled Multilateral Agreement on Investment are just two examples of a trend toward limiting nationalist powers and, by so doing, limiting the imaginative space of the nation. See *MAI : the multilateral agreement on investment and the threat to Canadian sovereignty* by Tony Clarke and Maude Barlow.

(and not, I should foreground, *Canadian* South Asian writing) is a valid decision. As I will explain in the following chapter in my discussion on naming, what is important here is the way terms serve to racialize a people across and despite national boundaries. Given the power of such terminology, to be "Canadian" is to be *not*-South Asian (nor a person/people of colour) for, as I shall demonstrate later, to be "Canadian" — or to be a citizen of any nation-state that perceives its historical status to be based on European "founding" or settlement — is to be white.

The "Pedagogy and Practice" that foregrounds this phrase, however, is somewhat more difficult to articulate. By pedagogy, I do not want to limit my discussion to the act or study of teaching; indeed, although one section of this dissertation does critique the actual classroom dynamics of teaching these literatures, much of this project reflects upon pedagogy as a way in which this writing exists, insinuates itself, and thereby "teaches" in the worlds it inhabits. That said, however, this dissertation does concern itself with questions concerning anti-racist teaching,[9] and I use this terminology as a theoretical model that has utility in the classroom but also in other pedagogical circumstances. By stating this, I intend this dissertation to be a useful resource for those of us who are

---

[9] Roxana Ng points out that anti-racism and anti-sexism teaching approaches need to go "beyond formulating sexism and racism in individualist terms and treating them as ("flawed") personal attitudes. She goes on to distinguish between non-racism — i.e. trying not to appear racist — and anti-racist — i.e. working to eliminate racism.

engaged in anti-racist teaching, particularly in post-secondary institutions.

The "Practice" enters this discussion in several ways: how *do* those of us who write call ourselves South Asians[10] and what does it mean to us and others to use this as an enunciation of our writings? That is, what does it *mean* to say "I am a South Asian writer?" Avoiding, I would hope, the pitfalls of essentialism,[11] I will examine the small sample of South Asian writers and writing in this study through the lens of race — that is, rather than situating these writers as homogeneous, distinct from other racialized groups, I will contextualize their work in the larger frame of racialization in Canada. To do so, I will work through three separate but linked modes of race theory/activism: 1) critical race theory, 2) integrative anti-racism , and 3) anti-racist activism, all of which share certain histories but differ on a number of levels. And while I situate this study in the context of "South Asian" writing in particular, I also present it as a study of anti-racism and literature — focussed through the lenses of such methodologies as critical race

---

[10] The term "South Asian," which I discuss at some length later in this work, I use here to designate a racialized group of people whose histories trace back to the subcontinent of south Asia.

[11] In *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler writes: "The foundationalist reasoning of identity politics tends to assume that an identity must first be in place in order for political interests to be elaborated and, subsequently, for political action to be taken. My argument is that there need not be a 'doer behind the deed,' but that the 'doer' is variably constructed in and through the deed" (142). While I agree with Butler, I also want to recognize that deeds, whether performed by or to a subject, do go a long way toward the construction of that subject; that is, a racialized subject is already constituted as such prior to her/his deeds which may contribute or detract from the further project of racialization.

theory, integrative anti-racism, and anti-racist activism — that *practices* these anti-racist strategies through the choice of South Asian diasporic literatures. Perhaps, then, as a preliminary step and as a way of foregrounding the methodology I intend to pursue, it is worth expanding on the areas just mentioned. These three theoretical models form a frame for this dissertation. I should emphasize here that while each of the following models has distinct characteristics, they have more of an ideological and praxis crossover than they do of any clearly articulated differences. However, we need to recognize how these models are positioned before proceeding further.

1. Critical Race Theory (CRT)

Coming out of critical legal studies and owing much to feminist legal theory, critical race theory presupposes a number of conditions, the primary of these being that racism exists and is "normal." That is to say, the occurrence of racism in the everyday lives of people of colour (and in a rather different way, to white people) is in no way extraordinary, remote, or infrequent. CRT proponents acknowledge that "[b]ecause racism is an ingrained feature of our landscape, it looks ordinary and natural to persons in the culture" (Delgado xiv). Focussed as it is on the law and legal studies, CRT suggests that such an existence of racism affects the supposedly unbiased courts and legal systems which are

necessarily subject to the normative racism of the world. I should introduce here a working definition of systemic racism since this concept is so central to this dissertation. Systemic racism refers

> to the laws, rules, and norms woven into the social system that result in an unequal distribution of economic, political, and social resources and rewards among various racial groups. It is the denial of access, participation, and equity to racial minorities for services such as education, employment, and housing. (Henry et al. 48)

I should also emphasize that denials of access and participation may appear in extremely subtle forms and are not necessarily overt gestures that deny human rights to racial minorities. For instance, words of encouragement from a white teacher directed toward a white student, words that are not similarly directed toward a student of colour, *may* indicate the workings of systemic racism. Such repeated denials, to carry this example further, may result in a student of colour determining what *not* to pursue in his or her future.

CRT also points to "interest-convergence" as an underlying premise: "[d]eveloped by Derrick Bell, this idea holds that white elites will tolerate or encourage racial advances for blacks only when they also promote white self-interest" (xiv).[12] CRT proponents choose a number of strategies to counter this existence of racism,

---

[12]Much of race discourse written in the United States predicates itself on issues of "blackness" and "whiteness," often eliding the so-called "in-between colours" or, more appropriately, issues that pertain to people of Asian and Aboriginal histories (as opposed to African and European). While this is important to recognize, most specifically so that peoples outside the familiar black/white framework are not ignored, the theorizing around black-white relations is still very useful and fruitful to this study.

relying on the tenets of critical legal studies which suggest that the "law" is no more than a series of stories, narratives, and so-called "rational" accounts (i.e. testimony, evidence) of history. Many of these strategies entail what Richard Delgado calls "counterstorytelling," a way in which people of colour resist the master narratives that put them at a disadvantage through a white-lensed legal system.

> Critical Race Theory's challenge to racial oppression and the status quo sometimes takes the form of storytelling in which writers analyze the myths, presuppositions, and received wisdoms that make up the common culture about race and that invariably render blacks and other minorities one-down. Starting from the premise that a culture constructs its social reality in ways that promote its own self-interest (or that of elite groups), these scholars set out to construct a different reality. Our social world, with its rules, practices, and assignments of prestige and power, is not fixed; rather, we construct it with words, stories, and silence. But we need not acquiesce in arrangements that are unfair and one-sided. By writing and speaking against them, we may hope to contribute to a better, fairer world. (xiv)

In practical (and legal) terms, this would mean the inclusion of, for instance, forms of testimony/evidence/witnessing not normally prescribed (or accepted) by a European-based legal system. Take, for example, the Gitksan Wet'suwet'en land claims case in British Columbia, where the legal counsel for the Gitksan people tried to introduce forms of narrative and storytelling that used traditional methods used by the Gitksan people, including long narratives and song, forms which were vigorously criticized by the presiding

judge.[13] To *counter* this official story (the judicial decision) — to *counterstorytell* — resists oppressive systems and provides a way for a people and coalitions of people to renegotiate their histories and, by extension, their and our present and future lives. Responding to the empirical nature of the law, Razack suggests that "[s]torytelling in law, then, is an intellectual movement that is a 'rebellion against abstractions.' Its purpose is to interrogate the space between knower and the thing known" (*Looking* 37). Translating this methodology from law to critical pedagogy, Razack notes that critical educators refuse to marginalize — in fact, they re-centre — the histories and experiences of students, an act that is particularly important when those students' stories themselves reflect a different social order than that of the dominant narratives available (43). It is this form of storytelling, as I explain in detail later, that will be central to this dissertation.

Most important in the whole CRT movement is what is called a "call to context" which reverses the priorities created by "mainstream scholars [who] embrace universalism over particularity, abstract principles and the 'rule of law' over perspectivism (an approach characterized by an emphasis on concrete personal experience)" (xv). Instead, CRT critics, who came to their practice after recognizing that even civil rights movements of the 1960s adhered to a liberal, not radical, principle, "urge

---

[13] See *Colonialism on trial: indigenous land rights and the Gitksan Wet'suwet'en sovereignty* by Don Monet and Skanu'u for an excellent treatment of this case.

attention to the details of minorities' lives" (xv), which reflects back on the concept of storytelling and counterstorytelling. It is this crucial element of CRT that informs much of the methodology of this dissertation. As it is important for Delgado and other CRT advocates such as Mari Matsuda, Charles Lawrence III, Kimberlie Crenshaw, Patricia J. Williams, and the aforementioned Derrick Bell to try to affect the (American) judicial system, I feel it is equally important for me, as a social critic/academic/writer, to try to affect the communities I inhabit. The stories that I tell in later sections are my version of this counterstorytelling, although clearly my stories are meant to affect different quarters of the socio-political system than are those of the critical race theorists.

2. Integrative anti-racism (IAR)

George J. Sefa Dei defines integrative anti-racism as a practice which focusses largely on the inter-relatedness of various forms of oppression. IAR is "the study of how the dynamics of social difference (race, class, gender, sexual orientation, physical ability, language and religion) are mediated in people's daily experiences. Integrative anti-racism is also an activist theory and analysis that must always be consciously linked to struggles against oppression" (55). Dei argues that

> The study of race, class, gender and sexuality in critical anti-racism work should be pursued as an integrated approach to understanding the lived (social and material) realities of

> people. A foregrounding of race in the integrative anti-racism approach should not mean the exclusion of class, gender and sexual orientation. Integrative anti-racism has to address the intersectionality of class, gender and sexual orientation (sexuality). (56)

Of critical importance here is that Dei is not suggesting a generic "anti-oppression" position, although in theory that is what his integrative approach would facilitate. Race is still foregrounded; indeed, many of us in anti-racist work talk about race acting as a filter[14] through which we see the world and use as a way of identifying and resisting complex forms of oppression. Dei suggests that

> Legitimate concerns are being raised, particularly by marginalized and minority groups in society, about how conventional discourses do not adequately inform knowledge producers and consumers about the totality of human experiences. We need to ... articulate comprehensive forms of knowledge that reveal an understanding of how our multiple identities and subject positions affect our very existence. (55)

He suggests that his model of "integrative anti-racism" is one way of coping with these comprehensive forms of knowledge. In

---

[14] I am indebted here to a former student and colleague, Geneffa Popatia who, in a creative writing course I was teaching addressing various positions outside the mainstream, brought to the class's attention this notion of filters. She explained that as someone deeply concerned about social issues as a feminist and an anti-homophobia activist, she still found herself viewing her world first through the filter of race, which she attributed to the powerful socio-political forces that help to create racial constructs. Grillo and Wildman also write that "[t]o people of color, who are the victims of racism/white supremacy, race is the filter through which they see the world" (45).

keeping with this articulation of comprehensive knowledge forms, Dei acknowledges, as do proponents of critical race theory,

> the relevance of *personal experiential knowledge* and the specific ways our multiple subject positions and identities affect our ways of creating knowledge. Knowledge is produced out of a series of socio-political arrangements, such as the particular intersections of social oppressions. Lived, personal experience is central to the formulation of any social knowledge.... However ... we must guard against an over-valorization of personal experiential knowledge.... We must also resist the temptation of presenting ourselves as not-to-be-questioned voices of authority merely because we are speaking from experience. (63)

It is this last point, "the over-valorization of personal experiential knowledge," or, more specifically, the potential of such, that I want to comment on further. There is, I contend, a fine balance between this over-valorization and an overall dismissal of personal experiential knowledge. I agree with Roxana Ng when she writes that by invoking the personal, her "intention is not to attribute blame or to identify victims, but to explicate the systemic character of sexism and racism as they are manifested in institutionalized interactional settings" ("Woman" 41). Certainly, where I enunciate personal experience (and I will use various forms of personal storytelling and anecdote in this dissertation) I exercise a degree of caution; however, in doing so I intend not to undervalue the usefulness of personal experience, especially as it is couched through the medium of storytelling, nor to see it only as tertiary to, for instance, the theoretical, research-based, and otherwise more

"academic" work. Again, it is through the process of narrative that the interstices of the forms of oppression identified by Dei may be examined and a critique of the systemic be applied.

3. Anti-racist activism (ARA)

More so than either integrative anti-racism (with its sociological and institutional roots) and critical race theory (with its legal history), anti-racist activism is entrenched in the dynamics of social change. It is also a larger model, more practice-based than either CRT or IAR; this is not to decry the usefulness of either CRT or IAR, both of which proclaim an anti-racist stand in their particular ideologies, but to recognize that anti-racist activism is about shifting social realities in the realm of the social and material world and not just within certain institutions and/or disciplines.

Anti-racism activism predicates its success on the degree of social change and/or influence it fosters. As Paul Kivel puts it, "*We must judge our efforts at justice by the justice they produce*" (162). Cornel West echoes this when he writes: "concrete antiracist struggle is both an ethical imperative and political necessity for democratic socialists" ("Towards" np). In other words, for the on-the-street anti-racist activist, it is not enough to study the problem, analyze it, and work within narrow disciplines to change material conditions. ARA assesses its usefulness by its practical results.

Interestingly enough, the term "anti-racist" takes on different weight depending on the communities using it. "Anti-racism" in a university environment is sometimes coded as a representative teaching method — that is, the inclusion of more First Nations and/or people of colour on reading lists — whereas "anti-racism" in a street sense can mean anything from a popular rally around current anti-immigration policies to deep, emotional workshopping on internalized oppression and dominance. Yet these examples of anti-racism are often described as "activist" by their supporters.[15]

Further, the history of the term "anti-racist" is rather more complicated. In North America, the term in its popular connotations refers to a resistance movement, one that counters racism on individual and systemic levels. Indeed the very term suggests a reactionary rather than pro-active direction (i.e. fighting *against* something rather than fighting *for* something). However, in the U.K., the term anti-racism sometimes encompasses what critical educators, in Canada and the U.S., would call "multiculturalism," although that term, too, is read somewhat differently in the Canadian and American contexts. As Jon Young points out, since the early 1980s, U.K. education theorists such as Godfrey Brandt, Paul Gilroy, Paul Connolly, Mike Cole, Madan Sarup, and Barry Troyna have paid attention "to separating anti-racist education from

---

[15] Aijaz Ahmad is strongly critical of activism that is so severely limited to textual practice. I elaborate on Ahmad's critique later in this chapter, but it is worth noting here that Ahmad's position is predicated on his insistence that intellectuals working in institutions have not always steered clear of confrontational, "street" activism.

multicultural education" (53). However, Young goes on to critique the Canadian system which, dedicated to multicultural education through government policy and practice, has failed to address anti-racist education and that such "training of teachers has been conspicious only through its absence" (56). At any rate, I suggest that the term "anti-racism" is far more useful than "multiculturalism" in making a direct connection between recognizing systemic racism and combatting it through critical resources.

A further point on terminology is worth noting here: the term "white supremacy" has gained currency in anti-racist discourse over the past several years, largely due to the influential work of bell hooks. She writes: "I try to remember when racism ceased to be the term which best expressed for me exploitation of black people and other people of color in this society and when I began to understand that the most useful term was white supremacy" (*Talking* 112). She recalls that she came to the term to combat white liberalism which, in distancing itself from "overt racial discrimination," continued to support and affirm *structures* of "racial domination and oppression" (113). Frances Lee Ansley writes that she uses the term to refer to

> a political, economic, and cultural system in which whites overwhelmingly control power and material resources, conscious and unconscious ideas of white superiority and entitlement are widespread, and relations of white dominance and non-white subordination are daily reenacted across a broad array of institutions and social settings. (592)

And Grillo and Wildman write that they "use the term 'racism/white supremacy' to emphasize the link between discriminatory racism and the privilege held by whites to ignore their own race" (45). The strategic use of the term "white supremacy," which I strongly support, names power structures for what they are, disallowing more ambiguous terms from manipulating racial contexts. For example, in a right wing backlash environment, the term "racism" is all too often countered with claims of so-called "reverse racism." One would be hard-pressed to imagine how the term "white supremacy" could be similarly co-opted. However, this term does create discomfort for some, perhaps because it is too closely affiliated with extremist groups, thus potentially distancing the problem from a systemic analysis.[16] But the term itself places the emphasis on naming a dominant ideology on the basis of its power — in this case, whiteness. One example that proves useful in this argument is the Toronto Urban Alliance on Race Relations study referred to by Henry at al. The author of this report studied over 200 editorials and columns in the *Toronto Sun*, identifying moments where people of colour were constructed as inferior to white people. This form of racism is not identical with

---

[16] Both students and colleagues have brought this to my attention, suggesting that white systems of power can remain intact if individuals are allowed to distance themselves from extremist terms like "white supremacy." Indeed, hooks writes that in her public lectures, her "use of the term 'white supremacy' always sparks a reaction, usually of a critical or hostile nature," often accompanied by the insistence that "racism is not nearly the problem it used to be" (114).

alliances with white supremacist organizations, but it does support a position of white supremacy (241).

The common thread running through critical race theory, integrative anti-racism, and anti-racist activism is the critical importance of recognizing that racism — or, more accurately, white supremacy[17] — exists and can be fought. One strategy of resistance, proposed to some degree by all these methodologies, is a form of storytelling that resists master discourses as well as dominant notions of common sense. Another shared concept here is that of critical self-awareness, whether it be formed through an ability to criticize the aforementioned "commonsense" arguments coming from dominant sources, or the ability to reflect critically on our own subjective positions and/or stories (e.g., challenging ourselves and our communities not to privilege the personal without critical insight).

Taking cues from these various approaches, I have constructed this dissertation as an interrupted narrative, rather than pretending, or trying, to create a seamless piece of academic criticism. Francisco Ibanez writes:

---

[17] The debate over the use of this term is not limited to academic discussion. Writers for the popular press, such as Margaret Cannon, argue that we live in a white supremacist culture, while Warren Kinsella, whose work focusses on extremist groups such as the Ku Klux Klan, the Aryan Nations, and neo-Nazi movements, decries using this term to describe racial discrimination in a white-dominated culture. I would argue that Kinsella's intention is to keep the focus on extremist groups, his particular area of expertise, but that this serves to locate white supremacy *only* within these extreme regions and not in dominant culture.

> Academic written texts are regarded as authoritative and legitimate. Embodied texts — the bodies of our subjects — are perceived as "irrational" and "unreliable" and, so seen, they become the sites of "subjugated knowledges."[18] Appealing to both texts equally reminds us that "the personal is political" — "personal" not in an individualistic sense of the word, but in a dialectical sense, the body that is immersed in a web of social relations and within specific material conditions. (113-14).

The stories, or counterstories, that permeate this text intrude and, I hope, disrupt normative expectations of how a research project performed at a post-secondary institution is *supposed* to read. I draw here on the words of Himani Bannerji, who suggests that some of the most pressing questions for her are those "involving the actual producers of cultures and discourses whose experiences are deeply implicated in and constructive of the social relations, everyday practices and histories within which they live" (*Writing* ix), and from Roxana Ng who presents a personal narrative "to explicate the social organization that produced and reinforced [her] position as a gendered and racialized subject in the university" ("Woman" 41). I keep in mind, too, Aruna Srivastava's "minimal surprise" when a racist incident she narrates "to conclude her ironic discourse about academic feminism, identity formation" is "editorially excised" from conference proceedings (105). Perhaps, then, it should come as no surprise to me that readers of earlier drafts of this dissertation expressed concern at the inclusion of such personal narratives and/or storytelling moments and suggested

---

[18]Ibanez draws this term from Foucault's *Power/Knowledge: Selected interviews and other writings, 1972-1977.*

they did little to contribute to the academic merit of this project. Indeed, not only are these storytelling moments perceived as irrelevant, but they are also distrusted as academic writing. It is this distrust that I hope to challenge in the stories included here and the commentaries that surround them. As John Clifford writes, "the typical academic essay [is] ideologically committed: the confident thesis statement and the logical arrangement of concrete evidence is, in fact, a specific way of asserting that the world is best understood in this way, that knowledge can be demonstrated in this unproblematic form" (223). However, while such a form may please a dominant mindset, it "is not geared to please those who stand on the margins, those who ... often feel alienated and displaced by the academy's 'normal' discourse" (223).

Another element which troubles traditional research methodology is my use of the *incidental*, the telling of particular incidents either in footnote or body-text form, whether they are comments from friends, observations made at conferences, or, particular insights made by various individuals which, for the most part, I intentionally leave undocumented. My rationale is that the sources of such incidents are less crucial than their content. To literally "source" these incidents, to document them in such a way as to pull them into this study *as* academic research, would be to disregard my intentions. That is, I want these incidents to perform more as "memes," to utilize the term that Suniti Namjoshi borrows from Richard Dawkins in her *Building Babel* internet site, bits of

cultural knowledge that circulate and contribute to the constitution of our cultural milieu. I recognize that the danger of including such material may suggest a lack of rigour in that, undocumented as it is, this material cannot be contested on grounds of facticity; however, I contend that these bits of anecdote and remembered conversations are present as a backdrop to this writing, not as a form of statistical proof. If anything, however, I hope these incidental fragments effectively interfere with what David Simpson calls the "doctrine of politeness" that is the mainstay of academic writing that utilizes anecdote.[19] In other words, anecdote can have the unpleasant effect of "shutting down" this polite conversation, or turning this conversation into a polemic monologue that will only serve to alienate readers. Again, I think it is important to introduce these anecdotal elements to this dissertation to demonstrate the multiplicity of "stories" out there which never seem to make it into academic discourse.

Nonetheless, much of what follows *does* take the form of a formal academic critique, focussed on close readings, critical analyses, and theoretical responses. The series of storytelling events that interrupt this process, however, attempt to "talk nearby" this work. The rationale behind using interruptions rather

---

[19] Simpson argues that Michael Oakeshott is one of Richard Rorty's "precursor[s] in the circles of good conversation" (45), suggesting that such parties are willing to engage in the intellectual activity brought about by dialogue so long as the conversation is not "ruined" by inappropriate behaviour, or what Oakeshott calls "bad manners." Being a good conversationalist, then, according to Simpson, "assumes that one does not have any awkward convictions that might put an end to talk: that one is not a sectarian in religion or politics" (47-48).

than trying to integrate these threads into the larger piece is that, in academia in particular, there is a tendency to try to present a clear, unfragmented, irrefutable argument (something which holds true even for postmodernist attempts), which does a disservice to a study of this kind. The tension of stopping and starting, of bringing new information into the middle of an otherwise fluid piece, is a necessary — crucial — element of this "brown gazing." A further note on the writing style of these creative interruptions: language play, the use of new words or "improper" use of existing ones, syntactic disarray, are all intentional disruptions of academic writing. These notions — that an argument should be shored up by similar historical thinking, that the academic work should be fluid and uninterrupted, that it can challenge but should not offend readerly sensibilities — are important to recognize here in order that they may be worked against in the writing that follows. Nevertheless, these stories are intended not to shock, dismay, or overwhelm an audience — indeed, at times the subject material may appear banal and routine — but to bring *into* this academic dissertation a different way at looking at the problems discussed here.

One of these problems, of course, is the *presence* of the writer, me, within the writing of the dissertation. A traditional way to create a platform of self-awareness in a literary critique is to position oneself — with experiential histories and a listing of privileges, oppressions, and other particularities — at the beginning

of the piece, assuming that such a confession will inform the "informed" reader of such a continuous positioning throughout the article/chapter/book. But the weight of academic protocol is so great that, beyond that initial positioning, a person (and here I mean both writer and reader) can easily get lost in the process of the ensuing "real" critique so much so that any prior "positioning" is lost or relegated to a faint remembering of a distant prologue. Therefore, in an attempt to combat this ever-present danger, I will be constantly re-positioning (or, at times, re-*emphasizing* my position) as this brown gaze proceeds. Important to note here is that it is really quite impossible for someone who considers himself to be an anti-racist activist *not* to reflect upon his perspectives of this work *about* brown people and their words without constantly assessing and recognizing his own *brown-ness*. I suggest that this strategy is *not* mere self-indulgence, an apolitical framework of personal narratives; further, I think it is crucial that I *not* simply emphasize my reading of the work instead of my *reading* of my reading of the work. I hope that the readers of this work (other than myself) will find my process is one that, in its evolution, adds to rather than detracts from their own readings.

Further to this, and in keeping with the strategies of storytelling and counterstorytelling articulated by Delgado, some of these interruptions will in themselves take the form of story. Sometimes these stories are more reflections than fictions; sometimes, the other way around. Much of the interrupting

narrative will gloss the critical text, rather than preceding or proceeding in linear fashion. This process is intended to create a sense of simultaneity (the aforementioned continuous present) so that the text (and here I mean the entire body of words and language encompassed in this study) challenges a readership and writership by creating a stronger sociopolitical reading. Postcolonial critics Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin have argued about the use of linguistic glosses, whereby an author writing in english but using words or phrases from another language, chooses or chooses not to translate these into english (56-57). There is, indeed, something compelling about opacity, leaving the text unglossed, perhaps unreadable for certain readers and doubly-coded for others. To "translate" this to the strategy I am proposing here, there are times when the academic language (i.e. the close readings, the literary critiques) will remain unglossed, readable and acceptable to certain informed academic audiences; at other times, the attendant glossing, whether it be around storytelling or self-reflection, will in a sense "re-read" the academic text and vice versa.

As a point of entry to this strategy, I refer back to the opening rhetoric of legs, shaving, and making the familiar strange. The text occupies a privileged position in a long work like this, not just at the beginning, but centred and highlighted in such a way that it demands to be read (or, perhaps, glossed over by the reader intent on getting to the "real work"). Such is the position reserved for lead-off quotations from well-known critics or writers, for

instance. But this is not an epigraph or pithy quotation; it is a fragment of a story, my story. I want to reflect upon the uncertain realities that this text intends to discover, uncover, and what better method than the metaphor of shaved legs? This plays on the edges of socialized gender roles in Western culture — as a male in a particular socio-political reality, what reason could I possibly have to shave my legs?[20]; eroticism versus aberration — the hairless (female) leg culturally constructed in a heterosexist patriarchy as presentable, normal, while the *naturally* hairy leg is a sign of abnormality and *un*femininity — that is, the masculine, which, to mirror psychoanalytic theory that constructs woman as "lack," presents its hairiness as a *lack* of femininity[21]; and questions of authority — literary and theoretical in terms of who is *supposed* to leg-shave and who has the privilege *not* to leg-shave. This story emphasizes the importance of looking anew at the familiar, a defamiliarization that allows for a new perspective. It also brings my body into play, me gazing at my body (implied), acting upon it, and the question of who is object and who is subject. This is Brown gazing and also brown, gazing: the subject Brown who gazes and the object, here brown legs, the gaze not coming from them but coming

---

[20] Such a reality exists, in some ways, outside the realm of the imagination: a colleague remarked on how smooth my legs were and was quite surprised when I told her I had shaved them. It seems easier, perhaps, for the imagination to construct my legs as naturally hairless than consider the possibility that I might bend gender norms, however slightly.

[21] Referring to Mulvey's use of Lacan, Sefozo and Farrell write that if the phallus symbolizes a whole, then "the female's lack of a phallus ... signifies an incomplete being in want of completion" (http://www.yorku.ca/org/spot/jspot/volino1/hfarrell2.htm). It is this notion of "lack" that I am inverting in my discussion on hair-removal.

upon them. Overall, however, the text speaks of "making smooth," however unnatural an act this might be, of creating a reality/story that is somehow acceptable to the reader, to the writer, to the shaver, and to the shaved. Although this might not seem to be an act of anti-racist resistance (or even a moment of story-creation), I would suggest that this act of limb-denuding, of *writing out* this act of limb-denuding, is an action that suggests social change and a refusal to submit.

I shaved my legs several days ago. Now, black specks erupt through skin, a re-growth that irritates, sometimes infects, and certain follicles are surrounded by a brilliant red. Renuded. Returning.
The story runs its course and new stories come from old.

II.
What's race got ta do with it?
— hiring, teaching, writing from this skin

One of the primary arenas of literary study that initiated a critical look at race was postcolonial theory. Such a critique, however, was a long time coming, and it is arguable that postcolonial studies still does not deal adequately with the subject

of race. In order to illustrate this claim, I will briefly address some of the arguments made by postcolonial theorists. This is not intended as an exhaustive study of this enormous field, nor as a suggestion that race theory (and the "brown gazing" of this dissertation) naturally follows on postcolonial discourse. But I want to show how the historical trajectory of postcolonial thinking comes into play in this dissertation and, perhaps more importantly, how it is essentially inadequate in dealing with race issues. As I will demonstrate in the conclusion to this dissertation, it is work within the arena of critical race theory that, I suggest, might address the tricky terrain of race and anti-racism in today's (and tomorrow's) academy and other institutions.

One of the problems I want to address is the gap between the lived experiences of postcolonial citizens and the arena of postcolonial studies, which is largely undertaken in First World institutions. Mishra and Hodge write that the complexities of the histories and politics of so-called postcolonial peoples, most specifically what they term "the centrality of action ... is transformed by the authors of [*The Empire Writes Back*] into a broader, somewhat depoliticized category, the 'counter-discourse.' Political insurgency is replaced by discursive radicalism" (278), a strategy I would suggest is eminently appealing to textual critics operating within the privileged First World academy. However, I want to be careful here not to discount the *potential* subversive power of such a counterdiscourse which, when applied in particular

contexts, such as the Gitksan Wet'suwet'en land claims case (Monet and Skanu'u) when it performs *from* but is not contained *by* textual spaces. Aijaz Ahmad's critique of this situation is even broader, taking to task the very concept of "theory" in the post-60s academy. The dominant strands of such theory, writes Ahmad, "have been mobilized to domesticate, in institutional ways, the very forms of political dissent which those movements [of the 1960s] had sought to foreground, to displace an activist culture with a textual culture, to combat the more uncompromising critiques of existing cultures of the literary profession with a new mystique of leftish professionalism" (1). This domestication is so complete, the displacement so absolute, that it becomes possible not just to argue for continuing textual research and analysis in the academy (which in and of itself is not a bad thing), but to argue that such work is *itself* and *in isolation* an act of radical enterprise.

I want to be clear here that my position is not an either-or dichotomy — I do not support a wave of anti-intellectualism, a refusal to investigate postcolonial politics and theory — but what I do propose is a renewed activism, inside and outside the academy, around the very issues we, as First World academics, insist we are exploring. To this end, I believe that counterstorytelling can have this effect, to agitate and eventually create a space for critical social change. However, to return to Mishra and Hodge:

> The danger here is that the post-colonial is reduced to a purely textual phenomenon, as if power is simply a matter of discourse and it is only through discourse that counter-claims

> might be made. This move is clearly aimed at making the diverse forms of the post-colonial available as *a single object* on the curriculum of *the centre*.... [I]t is hardly surprising that the dominant tone in [*The Empire Writes Back*] is the tolerant pluralism of liberal humanism. Difference is recognized but contained within a single pattern....(278, my italics)

I should point here to the subject-object relationship posited by the italicized phrases above. The "post-colonial" in the above passage refers to the individual and collective subjects living in and beyond the colonial legacy. However, as Mishra and Hodge point out, such a variety of subject positions is reduced to "a single object" upon which "the centre" acts. This centre, now not the imperial eye of the colonizer, but the academic eye of the First World intellectual, makes use of the post-colonial subject(s) purely for its own textual gains. I should further note that the critique of liberal humanism Mishra and Hodge make of *The Empire Writes Back* is strikingly similar to that made by Ahmad in his critique of *Orientalism*: "what Said posits are the most ordinary, the most familiar values of humanist liberalism: namely tolerance, accommodation, cultural pluralism and relativism" (164). I bring both these critiques to the foreground because of the contexts from which they arise. Mishra and Hodge challenge Ashcroft et al. not simply as a way of furthering postcolonial critique, but because arguments made in *The Empire Writes Back* have the potential both of reducing the postcolonial to a singular entity to be consumed by First World intellectuals, and erasing (or at least eliding indefinitely) the material conditions from which these texts are

produced. And Ahmad, on very similar grounds, disputes Said's position, suggesting that while the texts under scrutiny may change, the attitudes do not and the liberal academic machine reproduces itself, all the while self-congratulatory about the way it has "radicalized" the discipline.

Recent work by Anne McClintock, Deepika Bahri, and Rey Chow furthers these criticisms. McClintock echoes other critics when she reflects upon the lack of "multiplicity" when the term "postcolonial" is considered. But her most important insight is in her questioning of the very term itself, which she says exists at least partly because of its "academic marketability." The term "postcolonial" is one least likely to offend and

> is arguably more palatable and less foreign-sounding to skeptical deans than 'Third World Studies'. It also has a less accusatory ring than 'Studies in Neo-colonialism', say, or 'Fighting Two Colonialisms'. It is more global, and less fuddy-duddy, than 'Commonwealth Studies'. Their term borrows, moreover, on the dazzling marketing success of the term 'post-modernism' (299).

McClintock goes on to suggest that it is this "marketing success" that allows for the proliferation of postcolonialism through the publication of books, hosting of panels, holding of conferences, teaching of courses — in short, the marketplace of the First World academy. And while her critique is correct, I believe it falls short in its concern for material realities. The titles she suggests would be too extreme for consideration by academia are themselves only *relatively* safe terms for the real conditions of global white

supremacy, corporate fascism, state-sanctioned genocide, as well as the continued legacy of violent imperialism (i.e. "commonwealth") with its perpetuation of atrocities against the powerless.

Taking this even further, Deepika Bahri writes that the academic machine perpetuates itself, both through its realms of study, as McClintock suggests, *and* through its constituents. Bahri writes that issues of representation are held to a "*particular type of representation,*" namely a) self-representation of minority subjects, and b) dissemination of these representations through institutional means which are inherently and unflaggingly liberal and humanist. And more important, these "minority positions" are to be taken uncritically with no consideration of potential (and vast) differences supposedly accounted for by singular voices (73). But perhaps even more insidious in its ability to co-opt positions that have never had adequate (or any) space in First World academies is the constituency argument which suggests

> [t]he hiring and promotion of [Third World] individuals in "postcolonial studies" as alibis for real social change circumvent the need to acknowledge the marginalization and exploitation that continues unheeded while the academy produces "highly commodified distinguished professors" such as Spivak and racks up points on the score-card of cultural diversity. The erasure of considerations of class or the realities of the disenfranchisement of native Americans or second- or third-generation African Americans and Asian Americans are masked by academic gestures of acceptance of the visible difference presented by Third World postcolonials. (71).

While I find myself resisting Bahri's focus on the American academy exclusively — which tends to see itself as liberatory in practice but is often *seen* outside the United States as a new empire — I agree with her frustration over the erasure of certain considerations.[22] This critique of the "Third World" academic is also made by Rey Chow in her "Against the Lures of Diaspora" chapter (99-119) in *Writing Diaspora*, and in her cautionary tale of the "story of O," where a student from a Third World country tells her American colleagues "that she is from poor peasant stock in order to enhance her credibility as a 'third-world' intellectual" ("Fascist" 40). Ahmad, too, makes note of the situation of the Third World petty-bourgeois intellectuals who, in migrating to the West in the 1960s "needed documents of their assertion, proof that they had always been oppressed. Books that connected oppression with class were not very useful, because *they* neither came from the working class nor were intending to join that class in their new country" (196). Chow contends this lends itself toward the construction of the Third World as a region of oppression from which *all* peoples

---

[22]A cautionary note is due here: Bahri's resistance to the hiring and promoting of "Third World postcolonials" should not be read as an academically-couched xenophobic response. True, she shows her concerns for various communities of "Americans," but her real concern here is that certain individuals are anointed with the label of "the postcolonial," thereby excusing their respective institutions of seriously negotiating the differences *between* postcolonial peoples. Rey Chow, looking at the situation from the perspective of the so-called postcolonial, writes: "'Third World' intellectuals, on their part, acquire and affirm their own 'consciousness' only to find, continually, that it is a 'consciousness' laden with the history of their objecthood. This history confronts them all the more acutely once they live in the 'first world' where they discover that, regardless of personal circumstances, they are beheld as 'the other'" ("Fascist" 115-16).

occupy the same subject-position, regardless of vastly different histories.

I have recounted above an extremely brief history of current postcolonial constructions, concentrating on the more recent debates about its monolithic nature, its terminology, and its relationship to discourses and material realities outside the academic institutions of the First World. I have looked at only some of the critics of postcolonial literature and theory, and then only briefly to account their positions and their alignments. I have refrained from any sustained critique of their work because it is within the discussion of anti-racism and not so much within the already-set parameters of postcolonial theory, that I think the productive work needs to be done. However, I hope my own reading of the current debates plaguing the postcolonial predicament will foreground adequately the discussion that is to follow. What I intend to do now is to move into issues of race in general and specifically toward the practice of anti-racism through various South Asian writers.

This process begins with a close look at the history of names and naming in chapter two, paying particular attention to the South Asian diaspora in Canada. This historical trajectory will trace the literal and figurative shifts that accompanied patterns of immigration and settlement in Canada. To illustrate the process of racialization as an ongoing social and political project, I then perform a close reading of a self-published chapbook by Krisantha

Sri Bhaggiyadatta. In this section I also discuss a commentary on self-naming by Phinder Dulai and close with a brief overview of nationalism as constructed by Vancouver poet, Sadhu Binning.

Chapter three begins with a movement away from traditional critical methods by introducing the first of several story-telling sections. These lengthy anecdotes are preceded and proceeded by a critical analysis of the story, a method designed to incorporate these stories in the center (rather than before or after) of the critique, thus incorporating them *as part* of the critique. I should reiterate that the intention of these stories is not to startle — in fact, I would agree with readers who find these stories relatively mundane and I will address this concern in the telling of these stories — but to illustrate how the experience of racialization in a white supremacist system *and the telling* of that experience can contribute to an anti-racist struggle. From this position of a pronounced brown gaze, I then shift to a subjective five-step general analysis of the particularities around teaching anti-racist literature from the position of a person of colour, drawing on the multiple stories teachers of colour often tell. This analysis shifts to a commentary on how critical race studies and critical white studies can influence educational systems.

Chapter four investigates the role of queer sexuality through South Asian diasporic literature, keeping in mind the importance of integrative anti-racism and its demands for a strong analysis of multiple frameworks of oppression. Beginning with a critique by

queer/race activist Ian Rashid, this chapter moves into a self-reflexive story to articulate shifting privileges and then focusses on a poem and comment on "queerness" by Shani Mootoo. This chapter expands on issues around gender construction and the development of a sexual identity *within* racialized communities by closely analyzing Mootoo's critically acclaimed *Cereus Blooms at Night*. I continue this analysis with a return to Ian Rashid, reflecting on my self-imaging through his poetry. This lengthy chapter concludes with a further close reading on a poet whose language work complicates issues of race and sexuality, jam. ismail.

Chapter five reflects on still more possibilities, this time on the internet, beginning by theorizing the potential for progressive work using this new medium. To exemplify, I look at the interactive work produced by Suniti Namjoshi and, in my analysis, try to show how I integrate myself into this process. I also look at some of Namjoshi's fables which, although not on the internet, are part of her sustained sense of community and interaction. I then turn my attention to *Project X*, a web-based publication by Toronto internet innovator Damian Lopes, and show how the internet is here utilized to provide a type of critically informed reading whose effect would be radically different and lacking substance were it presented solely as a print media project. The method I undertake in this chapter, a reflective mode that dwells on my experience of wandering through these internet projects, is itself a form of storytelling intended to portray a way of anti-racist viewing.

The first section of chapter six is, in its entirety, an attempt to counterstorytell *and* an address of institutional inabilities to come to terms with anti-racism in the academy. Following Namjoshi's use of the fable, and continuing with a form I first co-developed for a special issue on race and a South Asian arts conference,[23] this fable (or fairy tale) attempts to challenge the inequity still functioning even within liberal institutions. The characters of Preston Terre Blanche and Snow White are buffoonish and some of their conversations are admittedly silly; however, the content of their discussions is of pre-eminent importance when addressing systemic racism and white supremacy at the site of the university. From here I move to a reflection on critical race theory, anti-racist activism, and integrative anti-racism by looking at several critics active in the field of critical and feminist pedagogy. This chapter continues by recounting stories of anti-racist activism over the past few years and ends by pondering the possibilities of alliances in anti-racist activism.

In chapter seven, I summarize the ways which brown gazing has performed through the writing of this dissertation. But, more importantly, I suggest that this particular format can point to radical interventions in pedagogy and practice that will facilitate anti-racist possibilities. By reviewing the conclusions of many prominent critical race theorists and educators, I address the

---

[23] The original piece of writing, co-written with Aruna Srivastava, was produced for "Colour. An Issue," a special issue of *West Coast Line*. A version of this work was performed at the 1994 Desh Pardesh conference in Toronto as a narrated slide-presentation.

potential trajectories possible in terms of anti-racist theory, pedagogy, and practice. My conclusion will suggest specific directions, strategies, and programs that can create an effective anti-racist practice inside and outside the site of the university.

CHAPTER TWO

Aay Wha' Kinda Indian Arr U?

I.

The only good Indian is a well-named Indian

Black. Hindoo. Oriental. Asian. East Indian. (Indo-, Pakistani-, Sri Lankan-, Bangladeshi-, Indo-Caribbean-, Indo-African-Canadian). Indian. Paki. South Asian. Canadian of Indian Origin. Visible Minority. Of colour. Brown. Racialized.

This chapter is named for Krisantha Sri Bhaggiyadatta's chapbook/epic poem by the same name, a text I will discuss at some length in the next section. The question might be amended to ask what kinda Indian *were* you, since questions of identity and self-naming are so utterly dependent on critical understandings of social space and history. The list of "namings" above, hardly exhaustive, makes a vain attempt at creating a time-line of namings of the peoples of South Asia in North America. I say "vain" since any such list is bound to be incomplete and inaccurate in some form, and even attempting to conform to some linear notion is problematic in that many of these names re-surface in different periods and places. So perhaps this is a futile exercise, but I think it

merits some consideration if only to understand how powers of imperialism, nationalism, racism, and anti-racism function in the question of naming.

I begin this list with the term "Black," although I might have started with a term more anthropological like Dravidian or Aryan if I wanted to refer to pre-European-colonial times. However, I start with Black, an interesting moniker for the peoples of South Asia, for a few good reasons. First, I want to link the histories of South Asian peoples in North America to both colonialism (mostly British) and diasporic experience. The term "black" came into use to distinguish colonizers from colonized, indentured, enslaved, or indigenous peoples. In other words, having more melanin than the invaders, the colonized peoples of East Asia, South Asia, and Africa became known as "black." This usage, of course, was arbitrary and shifty, but common enough to engender a connotation continued to this day which suggests that "black" is either inferior to, or oppressed by "white." I want to emphasize this because contemporary North American usage of "black and white" as it pertains to race is often narrowly focussed on African and European ancestries.[1] This was

---

[1]In a footnote to "Aay Wha' Kinda Indian Arr U," Bhaggiyadatta complicates this colour-denotation: "For many years i have seen myself as and called myself Black, much to the chagrin of the 'grant-ed,' and those who honestly felt it was a phenotypically African term, forged by the hemispheric experience of slavery. What i have learned is that there is a history of state repression, coming out of the genocidal history of the First Nations, which has characterized a 'Black experience,' a set of laws and practices, which have inexorably shaped whatever relationship the state may have with me" (fn23).

not always the case — witness, for instance, the use of the term "black" in reference to South Asian people in the writing of folks like Kipling and his contemporaries which abided by paradigms that still hold force today, such as the linking of binaries like black-white with evil-good. Indeed, in Kipling's "Gunga Din," the narrator notes the title-hero as a member of "them blackfaced crew" and later eulogizes Gunga Din for his dying act of saving the life of his (white) commanding officer: "An' for all 'is dirty 'ide / 'E was white, clear white, inside" (Kipling, internet). In such language-use, blackness is associated not with an African phenotype as much as an antithesis to Britishness. And the term "black" in the U.K., until recently yet with continuing effects, was used officially and unofficially to refer to all peoples, British citizens or not, who were "non-white."[2]

But if the term "black" is seen as sweeping and, perhaps, somehow mistaken, it is only necessary to look at the next term on this list, "Hindoo," to realize that such a problem is quite consistent. Susan MacMahon notes that most of the early South Asian immigrants to Canada and the U.S. were Sikh labourers from the

---

[2] U.K. education theorist Paul Connoly writes: "There has emerged, for instance, a growing critque of the use of the term 'black' as a political identity to refer to all minority ethnic groups in a bid to signify their shared experiences of racism. [T]he term 'black' is largely the product of the African Caribbean experience and does not adequately address the very real differences that exist between that and the diverse experiences of South Asian people" (3).

Punjab,[3] yet they were labelled "Hindoo"[4] by the mainstream. Curiously, it was not until the early part of this century when a large proportion of immigrants from South Asia *were* Hindu that the term fell into disuse. The term "Oriental," with its etymological roots of "facing eastward," has experienced a popular revival (or perhaps anti-revival) since the publication of Said's *Orientalism,* but it has suffered and suffers from the some of the same complexities as does the term "Black." In dominant discourse, the term "Oriental" describes peoples of East Asia, although due in part to critical works such as *Orientalism,* the term "Asian" has gained greater currency to "name" peoples of South Asia and East Asia. Curiously enough, while contemporary usage applies "Asian" to peoples of *East* Asia, it is often "withheld" from peoples of *South* Asia as if Asia, perhaps, ceases to be Asia at the Himalayan mountains. Similarly, the term "East Indian" was concocted by the British in the sixteenth century as it was busy trying to colonize both parts of North America and the Caribbean, which it had named the "West Indies" through a much-popularized misnaming of

---

[3] McMahon, bibliographer for the Berkeley South Asian Diaspora Project web site, writes that by 1908 there were more than 5,000 South Asians in Canada, almost all of whom were Sikh labourers. However, the passing of the infamous "continuous voyage" legislation, physically enforced most visibly with the detainment and explusion of the Komagata Maru, resulted in immigration to Canada from South Asia reduced to a mere 879 from 1909 to 1942. (http://www.lib.berkeley.edu/SSEAL/SouthAsia/overview.html)

[4] I would suggest that the term "Hindoo" is probably less a case of misidentifying religions and more a reference to the peoples of the Indus valley, known by outsiders as "Hindus," and later modified to "India."

indigenous peoples of the "new world." In many communities — and this is reflected as well through the official language of government bureaucracy — the term "East Indian" sticks, a strange result of South Asian peoples migrating to a part of the world where the *same* colonizers who controlled India for two centuries had *already* named peoples of the First Nations as "Indian" and, as such, some distinction needed to be made between the two racialized groups.

With the creation of Canada's multiculturalism policy in 1971, hyphens became very popular, which accounts for the parenthesized list of monikers at the beginning of this chapter. Unlike counterparts in the U.S. — who, taking their lead from certain quarters of the civil rights movement, shifted *away* from hyphenated identities and advocated the use of "African American"[5] and began using Indian, Chinese, Japanese, Lebanese, and other nations of origin as adjectives, all modifying "American"[6] — people of colour in Canada were named (and, to some degree,

---

[5] The term "African American," as a designation for U.S. citizens of African ancestry, has its own trajectory, arising from a series of terms ("coloured," "Negro," "Black," "Afro-American") intended to move away from historically entrenched pejorative values toward a less stigma-producing term.

[6] A further liberal extreme is enunciated by Bharati Mukherjee in her desire to see herself as "American," without any modification. In a patriotic (and hyphen-filled) ramble, she lauds the American dream and rants against her detractors: "My rejection of hyphenization has been deliberately misrepresented as 'race treachery' by some India-born, urban, upper-middle-class Marxist green-card holders with lucrative Chairs on U.S. campuses [who] publicly denounce American ideals and institutions.... They direct their rage at me because, as a U.S. citizen, I have invested in the present and the future rather than in the expatriate's imagined homeland" (136).

named ourselves) with a hyphen, creating a compound noun that acted as a hybrid of sorts, but all with a base construction. That is, we were all "[Ethnic name here]-Canadians" which served to diminish and dismiss issues of, say, racism faced by various peoples of colour in Canada by insisting that "we" [read: white mainstream] were all Canadians of a variety.[7] Of course, in the case of South Asian peoples, the further complication was our multiple nations of origin, often too easily subsumed under the heading of "Indo-Canadian," erasing historical conditions of colonialism which partitioned India and created whole new countries in 1947 (i.e. Pakistan, Bangladesh), and prior to that, pre-20th century indentured labour which, in fact, initiated South Asian diasporic movement through Africa and the Caribbean.[8]

This brings me to the sometimes liberating, sometimes constricting, often frustrating term "South Asian." Its first use to describe a people, rather than a geographic landmass, dates back to before the Second World War:[9]

---

[7] A recent conversation I had with a bureaucrat with Heritage Canada proves that there are differing perceptions vis à vis the hyphen within various Canadian institutions. He informed me that Heritage Canada has, for some years now, dropped the hyphen, preferring the American model of the nation-status modified by the ethnic adjective. It might be worthwhile to note here that Heritage Canada was also the department responsible for pulling $22,500 of promised funding from the Writing Thru Race conference in 1994 on the grounds that this event "excluded" white Canadians (see report by Joy Hall, ed.)

[8] See McMahon's South Asian Diaspora Project website, for a comprehensive history of indentureship.

[9]Quoting Roy Sawh, Bhaggiyadatta refers to WWII as the "2nd european tribal war" (19fn), an example of re-framing dominant historical versions

> The first South Asian Studies program in the United States began in the early 1940s at the University of Pennsylvania, taking its place among earlier programs of Oriental and Indic Studies in the United Kingdom and elsewhere. The branch of academic inquiry referred to as South Asian studies carries the undeniable legacy of the political and economic maneuvers of colonialism, themselves buffered by Oriental scholarship. (Bahri 3)

There is some suggestion, too, that the term "South Asian" has a militaristic history and was a way for the U.S. military to distinguish between the Indian subcontinent and the far more contentious political arena of East Asia, the subject of various military operations for the U.S. and its allies following the Second World War (Bhaggiyadatta, *Aay* 11fn). But I would suggest that the adoption, certainly within academic and non-academic political circles, of the term "South Asian" comes from a desire to locate a people within a geographic rather than a nationalist space. That is, if naming a people "Indian" because of their racial characteristic rather than anything to do with their national history is problematic because India since 1947 is a political reconstruction of the British Raj, then naming a people "South Asian" looks further back than issues of partition. Bahri and Vasudeva suggest that the term

---

parlayed through media interpretations with a type of brown gaze, a vision from outside the industrial and so-called First World.

> is today deployed in Anglo-America for various purposes: to gain visibility in the sociopolitical arena; to speak out against racism and misrepresentation from a position of collectivity; to initiate social action for the economically depressed and systemically alienated among the group; to open an avenue for the exploration of lost or receding cultural ties with the country of origin; to provide a forum for expressing and investigating experiences and feelings of displacement, alienation, and other forms of cultural anxiety; and to gain a more equal footing, perhaps even an advantage, in market value and economic opportunity. (7)

They go on to say, however, that the term "South Asian" is often not the term of choice for self-description by various "microcommunities" who choose to ally themselves on regional, religious, and linguistic lines. Nonetheless, we can see from their descriptions of the term "South Asian" how it might be used for myriad purposes whereas other terms, such as "East Indian," may name a nation-history, but are also more limited in their focus. It could, of course, be argued that India-as-nation was around much before the first rickety ships of the East India company actually approached its shores, but, as with many issues of terminology, today's India is certainly perceived as not just as part of the huge peninsula of South Asia but as a democratic state replete with its own governmental and other political concerns. Further, much of the writing coming from the South Asian diaspora originates from people who are three or more generations removed from South Asia.

Their position differs from the situation of those of us whose families emigrated from South Asia directly to Canada and thereby might have direct links to our country (in South Asia) of origin. Many people who originally hailed from South Asia have histories of immigration to South and East Africa and the Caribbean from over a century ago, and are only recent immigrants to Canada, tracing their connections to the geographic space of South Asia over several generations. Such a detail becomes relevant, certainly within progressive communities, because it creates a substantial difference in a people's sense of history and a sense of *desh*, or homeland. A writer such as Shani Mootoo, for instance, may talk of herself as South Asian with a Hindu background, but she also looks to Trinidad as her originary homeland (in many ways) and her sense of self is, in many ways, Trinidadian more than it is Indian. Similarly, writers like Ian Rashid and Yasmin Ladha are, in the truly literal sense, African writers since this is their family history, *despite* the fact that their families were forced to leave Africa precisely because they were considered to be non-African. Indeed, Moyez Vassanji has this to say about the term, "South Asian":

> In response to the marginalization and racism suffered by immigrants, and *partly also because of the presence of strongly identified groups such as "Blacks" and "Natives" and the racial politics and political advantages perceived for them,* in Canada there have been attempts to formulate an entity called "South Asian." ...These attempts, mainly by political and literary activists, to identify and congeal a new minority

> group have so far been only partly successful. One reason is that the term "South Asian," imported from academia, is *purely geographic, artificial, recent, and entirely devoid of any imaginative force in the way, for example, "Indian" and "South African" are,* and tends to be both confused and confusing. [my italics] (116)

Vassanji goes on to say that the "loss of postcolonial identities," and by this he means the identifying the self with nations who have struggled and won independence, in favour of "this ethnic or racial marginal label [read: South Asian] is a letdown and even a betrayal of our previous ideals and home countries" (116). Of course, speaking *as* one of those political and literary activists, I find Vassanji's position disconcerting to say the least. I have argued above that the use of the term "South Asian" does indeed, as Vassanji suggests, have its origins in geography. However, how is, I wonder, the naming of oneself or one's community as "South Asian" "*purely* geographic, artificial, recent, and entirely devoid of any imaginative force in the way for example, 'Indian' and 'South African' are" and, for that matter, how is the retention of a nationalist identity somehow an unparalleled "imaginative force"? By this I mean to suggest that the term "South Asian" is certainly not devoid of such an imaginative force although it may lack (perhaps with good reason) an allegiance to a particular nationalist identity.

Arguably, any term of identity carries with it a *certain* history but is also quite likely, in an era of shifting political boundaries and postcolonial states, to be recently coined and, in that sense, artificial. But to say that the term "South Asian" somehow betrays a putative homeland may amount, perhaps, to an admission that those of us who choose a *non*-nationalist identity are doing so, not to forget or ignore our ancestors' struggles, but in a sense to *carry on* what amounts to a revolutionist struggle. That is, if the British Raj or other colonial powers were able to maintain rule largely because the people they colonized were kept factionalized and prevented from organizing, then such *refusal* to maintain national/factional identities (which would occur if we hold on to labels of "Indian" *versus* "Pakistani" *versus* "Sri Lankan" etc.) can function as a strategy that emphasizes working together as a way of resisting dominant forces.

All this both complicates and complements what it means to be a diasporic South Asian in Canada. Essentially, in contrast to Vassanji, I would argue that the term "South Asian" is, in part, imaginary, no longer a word to describe a geographic landmass but a term that exists as a sort of internal *desh*scape.[10] Salman Rushdie, in the title essay of *Imaginary Homelands,* writes:

---

[10] I use this term here to try to blend the concept of a "landscape" with the notion of a *desh*, a home or homeland.

> It may be that writers in my position, exiles or emigrants or expatriates, are haunted by some sense of loss, some urge to reclaim to look back, even at the risk of being mutated into pillars of salt. But if we do look back, we must also do so in the knowledge — which gives rise to profound uncertainties — that our physical alienation from India almost inevitably means that we will not be capable of reclaiming precisely the thing that was lost; that we will, in short, create fictions, not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands, Indias of the mind. (10)

But I want to emphasize that Rushdie is discussing the single-generation experience of exile/emigration/expatriation, a sense of loss made all the more real by its immediacy, its retention within the individual's memory. The homeland to which I refer, this *desh*scape, is one that tries to account not just for the migrant and his or her experience, but the diasporic subject who may be several generations removed from this "original" nation. This is not to suggest a racial essentialism, that those who call themselves/are called South Asian are doing so out of a sense of common racial heritage, but I would suggest that there is something to being South Asian that exists in a sense of history and culture as well as within the body or how the body is perceived. While I do not wish to dwell on the essentialist/non-essentialist debate, I agree with Omi and Winant and their definition of "*racial formation* as the sociohistorical process by which racial categories are created, inhabited, transformed, and destroyed" (55). However, the danger with such an argument about constructed identities is the liberal

assumption that "race" does not, therefore, exist. This tactic can be useful, incidentally, to an anti-racist project that combats prejudicial acts made on the basis of a putatitively non-existent category. However, the liberal extension to this tactic is to suggest that the solution to racism is to ignore or erase race, to argue that a "colour-blind" society is not just an ideal but a reality. A social structure, then, "cannot suddenly declare itself 'color-blind' without in fact perpetuating ... differential, racist treatment" (57).

To return to terminology, then, "South Asian" is often used *strategically* as a form of resistance to other more pejorative terms. For instance, the term "Paki" came into use in North America in the early to mid-1970s in response to what a dominant mindset perceived to be excessive immigration from Pakistan. Interestingly enough, the term itself has its origins in the nationalist Indian discourse, also used as a shorthand pejorative[11] for Pakistan — a nation that India still considers an unfriendly and aggressive military neighbour; their hostility is greatly exacerbated now that both countries are nuclear powers. I should note, however, that like many terms whose original meanings are demeaning, the term "Paki" has been recuperated by Pakistanis of the diaspora. The

---

[11] On a trip to India some years ago, I was startled to note the popular use of the term "Pak," mostly in newspaper and other media references — startled because of the effect the term "paki" has as a racial epithet in Canada, England, and the United States. The word became reconfigured for me, no longer used in pejorative reference to me, but to a nationalistic "other," in effect placing me in the position of *perceiving* the term as something distinctly other to me.

term, then, might have migrated with South Asians to the U.K., been used by British Indians against British Pakistanis, and made its way into the mainstream British lexicon, migrating from there to North America.[12]

Other terms that have not been in common usage include "Canadian of Indian origin," an ungainly description which emphasizes Canadian citizenship while harking back to a different nationalism. The term is sometimes still used as a polite and slightly more politic way of saying "Indian" by first-generation immigrants and older generations. A still broader set of terms completely resists concepts of India, Canada, and even South Asia — "visible minority," "of colour" and what I am using more frequently here, "brown." These are all conflationary terms, lumping together vastly diverse groupings of peoples, often for bureaucratic ease but also for a type of popular (and political) shorthand. This is not without its problems, as indicated by Anthony Synnot and David Howes, who suggest how the term "visible minority" "is now widely used in Canadian public discourse, and the concept has been enshrined in affirmative action, employment equity, and multiculturalism legislation" (137). They go on to say that, while "visible minority" was originally coined "with a descriptive and

---

[12] I should note, however, that such recuperation of a pejorative term is not unproblematic; it is always a question whether there are any real benefits to continued use of previously "marked" terms used to demean and dehumanize a people.

egalitarian purpose in mind . . . to avoid some of the pejorative connotations of such terms as 'non-whites' and 'coloureds'" (137), the term itself is too sweeping in its inclusion of peoples who differ markedly in their socio-economic conditions. These "visible minorities" are also affected by racism and white supremacy in quite different ways. Synnot and Howes proceed to illustrate this with a series of tables and statistics that supposedly proves that such differences show the inefficacy of such a term. However, while they concede the prevalence of racism in contemporary Canadian culture, they are also prone to liberal assessments such as "almost everyone is in favour of equity" (155-56), ignoring the profound legacies of the Reagan (in the U.S.) and Harris (in Ontario) administrations where the elimination of affirmative action and employment equity were hailed as a better way to achieve equality. My point is that the term "visible minority" has been manipulated by many people, even those genuinely concerned with issues of racial dominance such as Synnott and Howes, to suggest, in effect, that race either does not matter or that it matters so *differently* to various peoples subsumed under the name "visible minority" as to render the term useless. I would agree with this latter position, although I would challenge some of the arguments that lead to this analysis. I agree with Bannerji's perception on how this term comes into being and how it then operates:

> This category of visible minorities is perplexing. On the surface it seems a simple euphemism; it seems to work as a way of classifying or categorizing, without appearing to be in any way racist. . . . Some people, it implies, are more visible than others; if this were not the case then its triviality would make it useless as a descriptive category. There must be something 'peculiar' about some people which draws attention to them. This something is the point to which the Canadian state wished to draw our attention. . . . This well-blended, average, 'normal' way of looking becomes the base line, or 'us' (which is the vantage point of the state), to which those others marked as 'different' must be referred, and in relation to which 'peculiarity' is constructed. ("Popular" 148)

By a somewhat different route, the term "of colour" has come to mean all of us who self-identify, or are identified through the popular imagination, as non-white. Rather than *use* the term "non-white," however, with its negating values, and rather than (re)turn the term into an adjective (i.e. "coloured") with its historical connotations of servitude and slavery, the term "of colour" denotes some degree of respect and pride. Similarly, the term "visible minority" still defaults to a white gaze: "visible" to whom, and in what way a "minority"? In other words, to be "of colour" is to be independent of being defined solely through whiteness, although, of course, in the sliding scale of race, any and all terms of racial designation come to be known through differentiation from one another. That is, the term "of colour" is understood only through the hegemonic power of whiteness — without whiteness, there would be no such term. The earliest contemporary reference I have come

across to "of colour" is in the work of Frantz Fanon[13], although the term was used as early as 1803.[14] Of course, what I have failed to mention so far, but which I believe is obvious, is that the term "of colour" also allows for, or at least suggests, an alliance between diasporic peoples of different races. Nonetheless, the term has its detractors. In Lawrence Hill's novel, *Any Known Blood*, one of the characters, an African journalist now living in the U.S., writes the following as a column for a Winnipeg newspaper:

> Some people today prefer the term *people of color*. This choice baffles me. You have a noun, a preposition, and another noun. Normally, such a construction would suggest belonging, such as People of France, or Jesuits of Italy, or Knights of Columbus. But it's an awkward construction. The preposition weighs down the term. Do we say People of Left Hands?...If one sets aside historical nuance, little remains to distinguish between *colored people* and *people of color*. The difference resides in the attitude of the speaker. If you use *colored people*, you convey that you don't care whether the word offends black people today. If you use *people of color*, you wish to celebrate color. But to this writer, *people of color* rings with self-importance. (258).

The character, Yoyo, goes on to suggest the term "people of pigment" since it does not harbour the negative connotations of

---

[13]Fanon uses this term in "The fact of blackness." *Black Skin, White Masks*. Trans. Charles Lam Markman. London: Pluto, 1952. Rpt. in Donald and Rattansi. 220-40.

[14] See "An Act to Prevent the Importation of Certain Persons into Certain States, Where, by the Laws Thereof, Their Admission is Prohibited" at The Avalon Project where it is decreed that no one shall "import ... any negro, mulatto, or other person of colour." (http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/statutes/slavery/sl003.htm)

"coloured." The Winnipeg newspaper editor reads this editorial as wonderful satire, even after being informed that the writer intended no satirical slant. Yoyo's position, I suggest, is commonplace when people have not thought through the historical rationale for the use of particular terms. For these reasons, I have tried to elucidate the history of the terms that address people of the South Asian diaspora and why I have arrived at discussing terms which are far more inclusive of other "peoples of colour." I will close this section with a discussion (or, perhaps a return to an earlier discussion) of the terms "brown" and "racialization." Very simply, "brown" is what I am using in the title of this work and is shorthand for people who are coming from outside a European history.[15] Similarly, "racialization" refers to that process by which people are "brought into" race, that is, into an awareness of *having* a race.[16] I should point out that this term is very slippery in that it shifts fairly quickly through history. In *general*, people of colour do not readily become deracialized in North America because "colour" carries forth through the generations. And, in *general*, people who have been designated as an "other" race by a dominant majority,

---

[15] I acknowledge that this definition is at once too broad — including peoples of East Asia, South Asia, Africa, Latin and South America, the Middle East, and various indigenous peoples — and too limiting, automatically excluding all peoples of Europe despite the racialization of many of these peoples through history. But this is a strategic use of the term and, I hope, understandable in the context of this larger work.

[16] Michael Omi and Howard Winant use the term "racial formation," described earlier in this chapter as a matrix of socio-historical conditions that lead to the construction of "race."

which includes people who are now perceived as white, such as Italians and Irish, can and do slip into "being white" quite quickly, sometimes within a generation if socio-economic and political climates are willing. This is not to ignore the history of racialization. As Cleaver points out about the Irish:

> Early in the nineteenth century, it was an open question among the native born [American] white Protestants whether these Celtic immigrants belonged to the white race. Vilified, segregated, excluded, and castigated, the "paddy" was believed to be an inferior race. "Bestial," "simian," "savage," and "wild" were descriptions repeatedly applied to the Irish immigrant, who was ridiculed as a "nigger" turned inside out. The connections drawn between blacks and Irish did not always favor the Irish. (160)

It is equally important, however, to be aware of what Cleaver refers to as a "fierce appropriation of whiteness" by Irish immigrants because of the "'public and psychological wage' that whiteness promised to desperate immigrants in an industrializing society that held them in contempt" (161).

While some folks are more readily and more frequently "racialized" through various forms of Althusserian interpellations, or hailings,[17] *all* people in contemporary culture are on the verge or

---

[17] Althusser writes: "ideology 'acts' or 'functions' in such a way that it 'recruits' subjects among the individuals (it recruits them all), or 'transforms' the individuals into subjects (it transforms them all) by that very precise operation which I have called interpellation or hailing, and which can be imagined along the lines of the most commonplace everyday police (or other) hailing: 'Hey, you there!'" (145). Fanon anticipates Althusser's ideological hailings in racial terms in the opening of "The Fact of

possibility of being racialized. For those who are considered "white," the process of racialization is both more difficult and more confusing because it often means exploring one's own history to discover how one "became" white, whereas for people of colour, that historical route can be somewhat easier to track. For white folks, too, this often means becoming a white ally as part of the process of racialization.[18] The danger in this entire process, of course, is the re-introduction into race discourse of the fictional "level playing field." Simply put, if everyone can be subjected to a racialization process, then the inequities brought about by different types of racialization might be ignored, willfully or not. I suggest, however, that effective use of counterstorytelling, narrating against the grain, so to speak, can combat this problem. In order to address the need to consider racialization as an ongoing social and political project, I want to turn my attention to the self-published text of Krisantha Sri Bhaggiyadatta.

Blackness" where he writes: "'Dirty nigger!' Or simply, 'Look, a Negro!'" (220).

[18]Noel Ignatiev and John Garvey discuss this at greater length in their work, *Race Traitor*. Their central argument is that it is necessary to "abolish" the white race because of the hegemonic power of racialization.

II

Me, a name, I call myself and what is all this stuff about nations anyway?

Krisantha Sri Bhaggiyadatta's self-interrogation is the foundation not only of his self-proclaimed "epic" poem that titles this chapter, but of a self-critical structure that reflects a social concern which comes from and embraces, but is not limited to, the schemata of identity politics. Accentuating Bhaggiyadatta's desire to intersperse history and politics within the poetic scope of the text is the fact that fully eight pages of this 24-page chapbook are comprised of notes and comments on the text. These notes, read aloud and recorded, comprise the entire second side of the tape accompanying this chapbook. By bringing these not-so-tertiary notes into the performance of the text, Bhaggiyadatta impresses upon the reader/listener the importance of history and politics that permeates his poetry.

Every line of this poem answers the question posed by the title, but Bhaggiyadatta's answers are also posed interrogatively; he inverts the semantic positioning whereby the subject enunciates his being-ness ("I am") with a more self-questioning structure ("am I?"). With this technique, Bhaggiyadatta is able to list a variety of "Indians" based on geography, the politics of naming, individual

and collective histories, class awareness, mythology, and racial complexity. The cultural referents are plentiful, but are not acts of "culture-dropping"; rather, the main referents create a multiplying, exponential effect so that, no sooner has a certain "type" of Indian been named than it is re-placed with another and another and yet another:

am I the part-time temporary Indian summer
    in your permanent fulltime winter
the original Indian heroine in the original mucho music video
    slinking hips around a plastic coconut tree
    in a mississippi motel -yaaah!!!
a hollywood Indian or a bollywood cowboy
    or a kollywood rajnikanth
a cigar store Indian or corner shop Indian
the holy smokes Indian or the holy cow Indian
the hostile or the friendly indian
the tenth Indian in the ten little Indians, or
    am I the one and only in a nation of one billion (3-4)

This segment begins with the poet comparing himself with the seasons, but the concept of an Indian summer is a type of "not-summer" that occurs in the fall and its association with the term "Indian" is obscure.[19] Already the poet is focussing on the

---

[19] From *Take Our Word For It: The Web's Only Etymology Magazine*: "The origin of this term is not known with certainty, but William and Mary Morris [Dictionary of Word and Phrase Origins. New York, HarperCollins,1988.] suggest that the term arose due to the use of the term Indian as a synonym for 'bogus.' Therefore, an Indian summer is something which appears to be summer but is not. There are other similar terms which arose about the same time as Indian summer (the 17th century), such as Indian corn (not what the colonists considered true corn) and Indian tea (again, not true tea). The

misnamings that occur through contact and colonization. Further, he situates himself as a doubly insignificant "part-time temporary," an allusion not just to the presence of South Asians as perceived by an official white history, but to the various class distinctions and categories that maintain a certain type of abuse within a labour force. All this is placed "in *your* fulltime winter" [my italics] where the second-person plural possessive indicates again a colonizing power which possesses the season of winter as well as the concept of time and permanence. Yet the next line immediately slips from labour and seasonal concepts to those of film, alluding here to Mira Nair's *Mississippi Masala*, one of the first films to represent a sexual relationship between an African American and South Asian American. Negotiating a space between differently racialized peoples within a contemporary (read: liberal) American landscape, the film portrays traditionalist cultures (the immigrant South Asian family from Uganda) as repressive and intolerant against the backdrop of a sexually liberated United States.[20] But, as

---

Morrises suggest that the Indians' occasional use of trickery in their dealings with the white man may have been the source of the 'bogus' association."

[20] Seetha Ramachandran writes: "Racial difference between communities of color also plays an enormous role in the way the narrative exoticizes [Choudary]. By placing Indian and Black characters whose identities are represented as racialized stereotypes in opposition to each other, *Mississippi Masala* produces Indianness and Blackness as two essentialized categories. *Mississippi Masala* locates racial tension between two communities through a sexual relationship, endowing every cross-racial interaction between Meena and Demetrius with themes of miscegenation, which in turn invokes notions of both racial and sexual purity. Assimilating into American culture is

Ramachandrin points out, that does not prevent the film's star, Sarita Choudary, from being presented "as an exotic, sexual object. From the moment she is 'unveiled' at the grocery store when she flips her hair back from her face, she exudes sexuality, yet remains marked as different" (Ramachandrin, internet).

To return to Bhaggiyadatta's text, his reference to Canadian music videos on Much Music and the ironic use of "original Indian heroine" harks back to representations of Indian women which are produced for and by the male gaze. Moving from there, but staying with film, the poet brings in the Hollywood Western and its two-dimensional representations of First Nations people ("a hollywood Indian") *and* Bombay- and Madras-produced films ("bollywood cowboy" / "kollywood rajnikanth") which also offer various misrepresentations of escapist order to an Indian audience.

Moving back and forth across the *kala pani,*[21] the poet makes reference to two urban economic stereotypes, that of the wood-carved, feather-adorned pseudo Indian chief set in front of cigar

---

symbolically represented through the dissolution of racial communities, leaving us with a 'masala,' a mix of spices ground up together, or yet another way of saying 'melting pot.'" See also Savita Nair's "Masala in the Melting Pot: History, Identity, and the Indian Diaspora" for a critical investigation of the sociology and history of the film.

[21] This can be translated from Hindi as "black water," a reference used by South Asian communities for the ocean crossed by South Asian indentured workers and immigrants — Toronto playwright Ramabai Espinet produced a community theatre play for Desh Pardesh on this theme in 1994. It is also well-known as the title of the 1958 film of the same name directed by Raj Khosla, about an infamous penal colony off the coast of Calcutta at the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, also called *Kala Pani*, where Indian prisoners of the British were exiled and often executed.

stores in North America and the "corner-shop Indian," a common if somewhat pejorative term for South Asians who frequently act as proprietors for the many corner shops / convenience stores in the U.K., the U.S. and Canada. So popular a representation is this that the U.K. alternative bhangra band took on the name CornerShop[22] with the understanding that British music fans would immediately understand the racialized shorthand. The next line parallels this store-front analogy with more reference to Hollywood constructions of Native peoples and their so-called traditional communication via "smoke-signalling," along with another shorthand reference to Western stereotype of the "holy cow" Hindu. Bhaggiyadatta ends this segment with still another reference to Hollywood and its binary structure where "Indians" can only be "hostile" or "friendly" to white settlers, and then comes to yet another popular representational mode, this one in the form of a children's song, where he posits himself as the "tenth" of ten little Indians, the last one to be enumerated as a way of teaching (white) children how to count. His final line questions the the West's valorizing of "uniqueness," particularly under capitalist perspectives of achievement, "the one and only" amidst the real recognition that the Indian subcontinent now is home to almost one billion people, close to 20 per cent of the world's population.

---

[22] The band has a strong political take on existing as South Asians in England. For more information, see their website at http://www.cornershop.com.

What I want to point to in the preceding reading is the abundance of political, social, and historical information Bhaggiyadatta packs into his poem. In a sense, the footnote-worthy information is overflowing from this twelve-line excerpt, as it does from much of the rest of the poem. I suggest that here the poet acts as political agitant and social activist, asking not just what kinda indian is *he*, but what kind of readers/listeners are we – do we "get" all the historical and cultural baggage the poet refers to; do we *want* to get it; and behind all this, if we *don't* want to get it, what is it in our own personal/collective histories of reading, thinking, and pedagogy that might cause us to resist what the poet is presenting to us? I would suggest, again, that Bhaggiyadatta is very conscious of taking the form of enumerating endless detail in the hopes of "occupying" the readers' minds with a surfeit of facts and allusions. It becomes up to us how we position ourselves vis à vis his poetry and his charge. For instance, as a South Asian critic with more differences than similarities with the poet in terms of cultural history, I find myself stumbling over the mountain of facts and half-facts (although *not* half-truths) and wondering why it is I am unaware or only slightly aware of much of the research imparted by Bhaggiyadatta. Additionally, I am excited that such work is not only "out there" but is being performed and played out for folks whose empathies might be greater or lesser than mine and who, I can only hope, will learn from the poet's work and be encouraged

to take this knowledge into their own worlds and attempt to affect social change. Listening to the tape, I am reminded of a Much Music delivery (itself satirized by the poet) that raps out previously unspoken histories and encourages listeners to do their own digging, to make their own additions, to "name yo'self!!"[23]

Such direct language leads Himani Bannerji to write, in a preface to Bhaggiyadatta's third book of poetry, *52nd State of Amnesia*: "These are political poems and Krisantha Bhaggiyadatta is not squeamish about what he says. He is not afraid to be political" ("Preface" 1). Bannerji's words raise several questions: first, what does it mean to be political; second, what exactly is a "political poem"; and, third, what does it mean not to fear *being* political? In the context of Bhaggiyadatta's poetry and the critical stand taken by both Bannerji and Bhaggiyadatta in their work, I would suggest that "being political" is an act of resisting existing hegemonic structures and fighting for social change. Resistance, in this case, takes the form of simply naming those hegemonic structures and encouraging an audience — comprised, in the case of Bhaggiyadatta's oral poetry, of urban-dwelling youth from a variety of class and racial backgrounds — to challenge these structures wherever they might be encountered. For instance, if a

---

[23]The last words in the chapbook are: "Please do not just take my word for these historical recounts, check it out for yourself. I have tried to give you the sources for these assertions. As for the various names which this poem lists, many of us know that on every street we turn on, in every office we file through, we are called a whole variety of names. NAME YO'SELF!!!" (24)

South Asian listener learns from Bhaggiyadatta's poetry about the diversity and multiple specificities of South Asian culture in Canada, perhaps she or he will be motivated to question why it is in a Canadian multiculturalist government's interest to de-politicize these specificities. That is, such a listener might first question the reasons that certain political histories remain untaught in government-funded schools and then question herself/himself about what can be done to challenge these hegemonies imposed by a government interested in suppressing such histories. I should point out, of course, that I am not suggesting that "being political" is only a progressive act, that the neo-conservatives of recent years are somehow *not* political, just that in a contemporary setting, being political is a way of resisting the conservative impositions of government or institutional systems. Political poetry, then, is that poetic voice which challenges the status quo, which actively resists norms shaped by the dominant powers, which suggests a tearing down of hegemonic structures and replacing them with ones that serve not just those in power, but the general citizenry.[24] However, to be afraid of those politics is to refuse to speak in such a way that those same dominant powers will recognize as challenging their position; that is, a poet can *think* about creating positive social change and can *write* about it in ways that are non-confrontational

---

[24] Paulo Freire calls this *conscientizacao* (conscientization) referring "to learning to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality"(*Oppressed* 19).

and easily assimilable, but this in itself does not comprise political poetry and in fact demonstrates what being "afraid" of being political is all about. I would extend this argument to arenas outside the poetic, most notably, the academic, where there is often a lot of talk about making change, but little is done to actually create this. Fear, I suggest, of putting oneself or one's community on the line results in a too-easy acquiescence to the system's demands. In a later storytelling section of this dissertation I show how that fear can operate, how, for instance, liberal white cultural producers can pretend to be progressive without actually challenging their own privileges accorded by whiteness.

But to further illustrate this point of a liberal rhetoric that talks about social change but will not act on it, I will look briefly at one of Bhaggiyadatta's poems from *52nd State of Amnesia*, "Racists quoting Paulo Freire" (30). The title refers to critical pedagogy advocate Paulo Freire whose published work is widely read but, I would suggest, whose ideas are narrowly practised. Bhaggiyadatta seems to suggest just this attitude in his title and goes on to write that "in a fit / of exuberance / i forgot who i was / & told my employer / what i think / and they encouraged it / and eventually fired me" (30). Bhaggiyadatta refers here to Freire's notion of empowering students[25] so that they think critically, that is, they

---

[25] In addition to Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* and *Pedagogy in Process: The Letters to Guinea-Bissau*, see also Ira Shor's case-study work in *When*

think with critical attention as opposed to allowing themselves to be empty receptacles filled appropriately by their teachers. Freirean pedagogy encourages a student challenging the authority of a teacher (if, of course, the challenge is not simply defiance but a way of learning and thinking critically). In the case of the poetic voice here, however, the employers follow Freirean logic to the point of "encouraging" critical thought; however, in deference to hegemonic systems, they end up getting rid of the troublemaker, the one who was thinking critically. Eliminating the symptom rather than addressing the root of the problem is endemic in issues around *any* hegemonic system, but is particularly noticeable around those dealing with inequities of class, race, gender, and sexuality. I suggest an entire system of namings is at work here: the narrator of this poem "names" the problem to his employers; his employers "name" his problem-speaking positively ("they encouraged it"); *but* they eventually fire him, thus "naming" the narrator as a troublemaker and one who no longer deserves to be employed. This strategizing, I suggest, is similar to the practice of dominant systems allowing, indeed encouraging, dissent to a certain degree as long as the proverbial line in the sand, that which may be approached, is not crossed. In anti-racist theorizing and education, crossing this line entails troubling the white power structures to

---

Students Have Power: Negotiating Authority in a Critical Pedagogy and *Critical Teaching and Everyday Life.*

the degree that they must either interrogate their own whiteness and the power they derive from it,[26] or, and this is unfortunately more likely, they rid themselves of the troublemaking, anti-racist forces.

I return now to the question of naming through association with nation, a concept Bhaggiyadatta brings up in his work as he troubles issues of nationhood. Such a troubling is also foregrounded by two other poets to whom I now turn. This is what Phinder Dulai, a Vancouver-based poet, has to say about identity and nation:

> I call myself a South Asian, but I am concerned about the notion of ethno-cultural purity that seems to be part of the lexicon this word relies on in the English language. I am no purist and never will be one. My cultural influences go well beyond the boundaries of being either Punjabi, Indian or South Asian. The term South Asian is for many of us politicised within the Canadian paradigm, a political label in which I admittedly use as a form of protest against the Canadian literary establishment. In my forward to *Ragas* I said I was a South Asian foremost and within that is my Canadian identity. In a way it was little tongue-in-cheek. I am not happy with the current Canadian literary paradigm in the areas of poetry. There are virtually no poetic voices that have been celebrated as Canadian poets from the South Asian culture. (e-mail)

Dulai talks of the term "South Asian," a term he chooses to call himself, as one that is "politicised within the Canadian paradigm"

---

[26] Such strategies of interrogation are enumerated by theorists of white studies such as Mike Hill, Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic, Peggy Macintosh, Robert Young, Richard Dyer, as well as by anti-racist theorists and activists.

which I take not just as a rallying cry against the Canadian literary establishment, but against the type of Canadian nationalism that attempts to subsume historical, social, and racial histories. Indeed, in his introduction to *Ragas from the Periphery,* Dulai makes a similar statement: "I say I am first and foremost a South Asian writer — and within this exists my Canadian identity" (11). In that statement, Dulai is careful to avoid the erasure of a nationalist consciousness by suggesting his "Canadian identity" exists, in a sense, within his South Asian-ness. Traditionally, and certainly within a multicultural framework, the reverse is true: we all have "ethnic" identities which are then hyphen-linked to the "true" identity, the second and more pronounced part of the compound noun, the present nationalist as opposed to past nation/race, that of "Canadian."

I want to reiterate here the linguistic usefulness of the term "South Asian" to those who resist, or actively oppose, a Canadian nationalism built on capitalist, imperialist, and oppressionist logic. I mentioned in the introductory chapter that the term "South Asian" is linked to a geographic land-mass instead of an existing political terrain. Thus, unlike "Indo-Canadian" (or any other nation-state hyphenated to "Canadian") the term South Asian resists easy hyphenation or appendage to the term "Canadian." For example, in the Canadian scene, these are some of the more contemporary and public uses of the term "South Asian": the *Toronto South Asian*

Review, *Rungh: a South Asian journal*, and Desh Pardesh: a South Asian festival. All these organizations are situated within Canada and feature the administrative and creative work from people holding Canadian citizenship (primarily, if not exclusively). In this sense, then, the very act of self-naming as "South Asian" is a type of political act that resists easy incorporation into nationalist structures as ethnic and/or multicultural sub-sets. This is not necessarily a situation shared in other contexts. For instance, the ease with which the American academy incorporates the term "South Asian" along the route of Asian- and African-American can be seen in the following example. A recent book published by Temple University Press, *Between the Lines: South Asians and Postcoloniality*, is remarkable in two ways: first, in that the subtitle purports a far more widesweeping sense of "south asian-ness" than is reflected in its high U.S.-based academic content (fifteen of nineteen contributors) with the three Canadian contributors of South Asian descent — Moyez Vassanji,[27] Sukeshi Kamra, and Uma Parameswaran — not exactly representative of the array of critics

---

[27]Vassanji's article is itself written for a clearly American audience, yet with a rather odd form of Canadian nationalism. For instance, he quotes from "a prominent cultural column in the Canadian national newspaper, the *Globe and Mail*" (113), introducing the newspaper with a description that would do the editors and owners proud, although such is hardly the description most of us living and working outside Toronto would use. His later rhetorical question, "Wasn't it a Canadian who said that the world is now a global village?" (114) appears out of context and has rather the same nation-nostalgia moment as a "CBC minute" celebrating McLuhan and this "great" Canadian's contribution to world (sometimes read as "American") knowledge.

available,[28] particularly since the editors note that the history of South Asian immigration and culture has a longer and more resonant sense in Canada than it does in the U.S. Second, on an administrative note, the Library of Congress cataloguing information lists the book under the categories of South Asian Americans, South Asian Americans—Ethnic identity, South Asians—Canada, South Asians—Canada—Ethnic identity, Oriental literature (English)—History and criticism, Decolonization in literature, and Culture conflict in literature (iv). I note with interest that the term "South Asians—Canada" is contrasted with the way "Americans" is modified with the ethno-racial category of "South Asian." Apparently the use of the terminology differs enough between the nation-states to confer a different status of library coding, as well as actual naming. I do not mean to sound a patriotic bell here, merely to suggest that *within* existing nationalist structures and associated academic positionings there is often a striking difference in how a term of identification resonates.

To illustrate the differences in self-naming, I want to close this chapter with a brief look at another writer — like Phinder Dulai, a Punjabi poet living in Vancouver — who addresses this issue somewhat more discreetly although he proclaims a sense of

---

[28]A fourth Canadian, Ranita Chatterjee, listed in the contributor notes as working on her dissertation at Western Ontario, is nonetheless defined as an instructor at the University of Utah, thereby placed within the American academy.

nation and identity with considerable fervour. I refer to Sadhu Binning, an activist for some years within the Punjabi community of Vancouver. His first book of poems published in English (along with Punjabi translations or vice versa) is *No More Watno Dur*, itself a mixture of English and Punjabi where *watno dur* refers to being "far away from the motherland." I quote the title poem in its entirety:

NO MORE WATNO DUR

letters that I wrote
to my family
to my friends
in the last one century
were all written
from a foreign land
to the motherland

but the letter I just wrote
about the news of my father's death
is written
from my country to another country

I wrote:
My father left his home a long long time ago
he lived with the dream of
one day returning to his fields
to spend the last of his days in peace
now along with his body
all his dreams are melted into this land

I have dropped his ashes
in icy river water
he has become part of this soil (53)

In terms of nationalism and naming, this poem is fascinating in its refusal to name nations or to name selves. Instead, what Binning gives us is "a foreign land," "the motherland," "my country," "another country," "his home," "this land," and "this soil." A nationalist reading of this poem could replace any of the aforementioned nouns with names of nations, states, or regions. However, a reading aware of the politics of immigration, race, and insistence on belonging, must be cognizant of the way these nouns are used. The poetic voice tells of how past letters were mailed from the land he lives upon to the land he comes from ("from a foreign land / to the motherland") and yet, upon the death of his father, the land he lives upon becomes "my country" and the land he comes from becomes "another country." I want to spell this out to dispel illusions that the current home supplants the home of origin. Important in this poem is that this land of origin, does not now become a "foreign land" but simply "another country," not at all erased or made strange in the eyes of the poet. Instead, the poet recounts the disposal of his father's ashes in "icy river water," presumably a Canadian river that stands in for a river in South Asia. Nonetheless, as the father "becomes part of this soil" in death, the son allows himself to name the country as his. In other words, through the passing of the generations in this land, the son becomes, as his father does literally, "of" this land. He is "no more"

far away from the mother country — however, even with this bilingual title, we cannot lose sight of the fact that the poet has made no allusion to being *closer* to a mother country or home country. If Bhaggiyadatta's question, "wha' kinda indian arr u," were to be posed to the narrator of Binning's poem, I would speculate that his answer would be "a changing one, changing with every member of my community who dies here, who is born here, who lives out a life here." This issue of mutability, of identities that shift depending on history and community, is one that I will address through the question of various forms of "substitutions" in the chapter that follows.

CHAPTER THREE

Some substitute stories, out of school

I.
Introduction

In my introductory chapter, I discuss how some of the ensuing "interruptive" narratives will "gloss," or explicate, the critical work in order to present a text that creates a socio-politically challenging reading. I repeat this notion here because I want to point to the tenuous nature of "glossing" — both through footnoting, which renders one reading quite literally subordinate to another, and through storytelling or anecdote, which often occurs as "illustrative" of a particular argument, but not part of the argument itself. In the associated text that follows, I have tried to move, perhaps not seamlessly, from an analysis of story through to story and back through a further analysis. What I hope to accomplish is a reading of these stories/anecdotes/critiques that does not valorize either story-telling or critically analytical modes. I should emphasize that these stories are, of course, constructions that, because of their playfulness with language and syntax, may not seem to "belong" in a research-based project. Further, the very subject matter of these stories may not cater to the desire for

"drama" that readers come to expect from "race-stories" from people of colour. Here I follow bell hooks as she echoes words so often heard in a hegemonic discourse where the dominant and dominating subject attempts to contain and "understand" the dominated or subaltern :

> No need to hear your voice when I can talk about you better than you can speak about yourself. No need to hear your voice. Only tell me about your pain. I want to know your story. And then I will tell it back to you in a new way that has become mine, my own. . . . I am still author, authority. I am still the colonizer, the speaking subject, and you are now at the center of my talk. (*Yearning* 152-53)

For people of colour to give in to a white desire to "tell me about your pain" is to avoid anti-racist action, furthering a white supremacist logic. Therefore, the stories that follow are quite *lacking* in drama, and simply articulate the everyday experience of people of colour in this country, focussed through the lens of an individual student.

In the previous chapter, in Bhaggiyadatta's work, I discussed the politics of naming. In the following segment (and in segments two and three to some degree), I try to point to this re-articulation of self-naming. I will start with the obvious, that the act of naming is a method of recollecting shared knowledge through language. On a simple semiotic level, then, when I utter a word such as "man," it conjures up a mental image and/or some concept for others who share my language structure. The concept of "man" conjured up by

my friend may differ from my concept of "man," but, depending on our language-base and cultural similarities, there will be some such entity that we both agree upon to be signified by the word "man."[1] I belabour this point to illustrate the types of naming and name-calling that occur in the following story. I argue that what occurs is an interpellation of the subject in that "ideology 'acts' or 'functions' in such a way that it 'recruits' subjects among the individuals . . . by that very precise operation which [Althusser calls] interpellation or hailing, and which can be imagined along the lines of the most commonplace everyday police (or other) hailing: 'Hey, you there!'" (Althusser 144). My critique, my "reading" of this story comes before and after the "telling" of this story, so that the story is prefaced and post-scripted with this commentary and, I hope, integrated into this analysis.

The "substitute" in this story (that is, one who "stands in for the 'real'") interpellates Ashok as "you-the-troublemaker." Important to recognize, but not "named" in this story, is the implicit power structure of teacher-to-student, although this is complicated by the fact that this particular teacher is "standing in" and this particular student "stands in" in a different way for the teacher. I want to focus on "substitute" stories here to show how authority is not necessarily earned or learned by any substantial degree of interaction (as might occur, for instance, if the teacher-student

---

[1] In her article, "Colouring the Pronoun," Sonia Smee puts forth the term "man," and then asks the reader to reflect upon her/his own mental constructions — i.e., what racial characteristics the reader might imagine and why.

relationship was a lengthy one). At any rate, also implicit are the race relations: the teacher is white, the student is brown. Ashok is an unknown quantity (as are the rest of the students) to this particular substitute teacher, and she brings him into being for her as a troublemaker. Goli Rezai-Rashti notes that multi-racial studies of young students and their parents show that participants frequently observe that "[t]eachers brand visible minorities and immigrants as troublemakers" ("Multicultural"16). A "troublemaker" to this particular substitute teacher is a student who requires *particular* attention, someone whom the teacher will "keep an eye on."[2] But foregrounding this knowledge is the circumstance of race. A quick scan of the classroom by the substitute reveals the racial demographics of the classroom, namely that this is an all-white suburban class — all white save for one student. Critical pedagogy research[3] informs us that white teachers tend to target students of colour as less intelligent, culturally inferior, and more trouble than their white counterparts. I would argue, incidentally, that racialization works to *single out* and encourage students of colour to perceive themselves as not worthy

---

[2]Rinaldo Walcott, discussing the lyrics of Canadian hip hop artist Devon, writes: "[i]t is the police and/or those who enforce 'law and order' (i.e., Immigration officers, security guards, *teachers, etc.*) that continually recur as the principle [sic] 'administrators'" (84, my italics) of disciplinary action. Reading Walcott through Althusser, then, the teacher is the authority figure hailing the (racialized) subject as "Hey, you there."

[3] See Roxana Ng's article, "Woman Out of Control," Arun Mukherjee's *Oppositional Aesthetics: Readings from a Hyphenated Space*, and Goli Rezai-Rashti's article, "Connecting Racism and Sexism," where she writes: "the actions of many school principals, teachers, and guidance counsellors are still very much influenced by the ideology of colonization" (90).

of considerations due to their white colleagues. Consider this example of students facing a difficult deadline:

> White students who were overwhelmed and unable to finish the paper asked for an extension. Several of them took an extra 24 hours and turned in A papers, receiving an A-. Black students also reported lack of time as a major difficulty in completing the paper; however, none of them considered asking for an extension, which as one black woman said, 1) would put [the teacher] in an awkward situation and 2) would feel like "asking for welfare." (Powell 8)

I am wary, here, of homogenizing "students of colour," and of being inattentive to varying racial and national histories; however, it is worth noting the above as one example of how racialization *can* operate in the classroom. In the following "substitute story," I will examine another way this "singling out" can occur and the ensuing repercussions:

> ONE: grade seven, not by any means a troublemaker or even, at least by that time, a class clown, Ashok sitting in his homeroom in his assigned seat (4th from the front) in his assigned row (furthest to the right, by the door) and a substitute teacher walks in. She looks stern. She frowns. She glares at the students. Lesson begins. She asks us what their regular teacher had planned for them, what they were reading, that sort of thing. A student volunteers some information. Someone else adds to that, embellishing it somewhat. Somewhere in the recesses of his mind, Ashok remembers something their homeroom teacher had told them they would be doing today and Ashok volunteers that

> information. Don't forget, this is grade seven, a roomful of pubescent boys and girls, and this is a substitute teacher, the ultimate permission for even the goodest child to act his or her baddest. So Ashok supposes he somewhat embellishes his story too, yet, not too good at lying, Ashok is grinning ear to ear when he tells her what their regular teacher had planned for them today. The substitute teacher frowns further, determines there could not possibly be an element of truth to what Ashok is saying (which is, of course, not true) and then points an accusatory finger at him: "I'm going to be keeping an eye on *you*" she says. The class thinks this is hilarious. Ashok normally speaks only when spoken too and has, in all likelihood, never been reprimanded in his school life. The substitute teacher's finger wags slightly as she continues to point. "What is your name," she demands. The class laughs even harder. Ashok looks around. Ashok swallows. "Jim," Ashok says still smiling. "My name is Jim." And the class continues to laugh, this time at his obvious lie, but the sub dismisses this as simple childish class behaviour and goes on about the business of her lesson plan.

To be interpellated as a "you" who requires supervision by an authority figure that either "fingers" or watches over excessively is to be hailed as someone worthy, often in a pejorative sense, of such an intense and potentially panoptic[4] gaze. But what happens when

---

[4] I refer here to the Bentham's concept of the panopticon, a prison structure where the inmates are visible at all times, unable to escape the gaze of the

that interpellated subject either refuses such an interpellation, or, if that seems impossible, resists such a hailing? In this story, Ashok renames himself as "Jim," an act of defiance of a (substitute) authority, taking on a Christianized name — perhaps not with wilful intention, but nonetheless, taking a name derived from a version of the Bible itself — to supplant a Buddhist-cum-Hindu name. Elsewhere in this dissertation I suggest that, in Shani Mootoo's *Cereus Blooms at Night* a Christian missionary's desire to re-name his Hindu student is received openly by this student who wants to shed all indicators of his past identity. Similarly, I think, Ashok's utterance is one that tries to slip away from the teacher's interpellation. By bringing himself into being as "Jim," and, thus named, becoming somehow *less brown* under the gaze of the substitute teacher, Ashok's defiance is a self-protective gesture, beating the authority figure to punch, so to speak, saying "I can bring myself into your (white) world by uttering myself as such."

This is not unlike the concept of passing, whereby an individual of a subjugated class might attempt to "pass" for, or might be perceived by the dominant gaze as, a member of the dominant group. In racial passing, the individual may possess certain physionomic attributes (e.g. fair skin) that allow him or her to pass for an individual from the dominant group, thereby

---

authority figure. In terms of race, and to once again invoke Dubois, I suggest this is the case experienced by racialized people, always aware of the white gaze which names them as "other." Bhabha writes of the racialized body "whose very presence is both 'overlooked' — in the double sense of social surveillance and psychic disavowal — and, at the same time, overdetermined — psychically projected, made stereotypical and symptomatic" (*Location* 236).

inheriting the privileges or preferential treatment not normally afforded to an individual of a subjugated class.[5] Of course, it is important to recognize that passing is not limited to race, nor need it even involve race. Women who pass for men in patriarchal systems, queers who pass for straight in homophobic systems, working class people who pass for middle-class or aristocracy are all involved in this process of shifting from one social position to another.

The question of passing and its virtues is explored and complicated by Jenny Livingstone in her film, *Paris is Burning*, where the director shows the complex nature of Venus — a queer, transgendered, black male who passes as a straight woman (with aspirations toward whiteness as well)[6] — who is murdered when s/he is found out as a biological male.[7] However, in the story above, the attempt at passing, moving from the "foreign"/Hindu to the "familiar"/Christian, is much less fraught (and less life-threatening)

---

[5] James Weldon Johnson's *Autobiography of an Ex-Coloured Man* is a story of such passing.

[6] This attempt at passing for white is challenged by bell hooks who points to the dangers of "worship[ping] at the throne of whiteness, even when such worship demands that we live in perpetual self-hate, steal, lie, go hungry, and eve die in its pursuit. The 'we' evoked here is all of us, black people/people of color, who are daily bombarded by a powerful colonizing whiteness that seduces us away from ourselves, that negates that there is beauty to be found in any form of blackness that is not imitation whiteness" (*Black* 149).

[7] Judith Butler writes this about Venus, the transgendered murder victim featured in Livingstone's film: "As much as she crosses gender, sexuality and race performatively, the hegemony that reinscribes the privileges of normative femininity and whiteness wields the final power to *re*naturalize Venus's body and cross out that prior crossing, an erasure that is her death" (*Bodies* 133). That is, deeply entrenched hegemonies disallow Venus from passing *and* continuing to live.

than the circumstances described in Livingstone's film. Yet this classroom situation, highly charged by racialization, is equally credible in its ability to address hegemonies. As Venus casts a new identity for herself based on aspirations toward a model of success (middle-class, white womanhood), Ashok attempts such a self-naming to elide his racial position. Ashok does not *truly* re-name himself, neither thinks nor wishes himself as Jim (or white), but utters this name as a facade, as a trick to deceive what he perceives as a particularly unfair threat based on preconceived notions of race and identity.

The second story consists of two important components: first, how Ashok reacts to the appearance of a South Asian substitute teacher; second, how the colleagues of this brown student articulate their perceptions of race through associative valuing. In the first instance, Ashok notices, presumably as do his co-students, the *differences* between the "regular" teacher and his substitute. Most important are the racial differences — the substitute is immediately racialized, thought of as "brown" or "East Indian" or in some un-named form, "non-white." Important to this train of thought is that the "regular," or perhaps I should say "normal"[8] teacher, is not brought into being as a white man *until* a brown man stands in for

---

[8] Although numerous critics comment on such normalcy being attached to whiteness or other forms of domination, I think one of the best examples can be found in Peggy McIntosh's "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack," an article I and many others have used for anti-racist workshops and anti-racism in the classroom. In her 26-point list, McIntosh articulates the ways that white people (in white culture) have privileges that are, for the most part, unacknowledged — that is, carried in an invisible knapsack.

him. This occurs, again in varying degrees, for both Ashok and his white colleagues — an indication that people of colour in a white supremacist society are also quite susceptible to normalize whiteness and distinguish race as something somehow only possessed or "worn" by non-whites. In this case, the very appearance of a South Asian substitute creates a fear of self-awareness for a South Asian student. He is afraid other students are turning to *him* as some sort of extension of the substitute, occasioned by the two of them simply *being* brown in a white realm.[9] Further, Ashok hopes desperately that the South Asian substitute will not differentiate himself further from "whiteness" by marking himself with an accent that is recognized as "other," which, curiously, would mark him as closer to the "type" of brown person Ashok wishes *not* to be identified with. But the South Asian substitute *does* speak with an accent and does occasion a certain form of derision from the class as indicated in this story:

> **TWO:** Scoot ahead three years, from the first year of junior high to the first year of senior high. Grade ten now, chemistry class. Their aging and somewhat crotchety chem teacher doesn't shuffle through the doors of the lab and make his way up to the front of the class. Instead, there is a replacement teacher, the substitute, resembling their regular teacher only in gender. This substitute is some years younger than our

---

[9]In a slightly different context, Jane Tompkins writes about herself, as a student, identifying with a fellow student being punished by the teacher: "I did not distinguish between myself and the unhappy scapegoat for the teacher's wrath" (5).

regular teacher. And he is dressed somewhat snappier, not like the absent-minded, inside-out professorial clothes of our regular teacher. And he is brown. Not just any brown, South Asian brown, or, as Ashok thinks at the time, Indian-brown, me-brown. In his designated seat in his designated row he shrinks down from an already diminutive-for-high-school size. Ashok imagines (or does he?) a dozen sets of eyes taking in their new substitute turn to taking in him. The substitute begins to speak. He speaks — *oh let him sound like our regular teacher, don't let him have, don't let him speak* — with an accent. All ears attune to him and, Ashok imagines (?) attune to the way *he's* supposed to speak. In the substitute's first few utterances Ashok thinks of all the times he's scurried his friends through his home lest they meet up and listen to accented extended family. So, un-Canadian. And so the class goes, a lecture in Indian-accented chemistry. Afterwards, his friends gather round him. Their eyes laugh and dance around him. They make very bad attempts at imitating this substitute accent. Then Bruce, one of his closest friends, turns to him and says, "Ashok, too bad he wasn't our regular teacher." Why? "Cuz then you could have gone—" and he gestures high-fivish like we've seen the basketball and black sitcom stars do on tv —"hey, bloood, wha's up?" And Bruce laughs. Friends laugh. Ashok, an unlikely substitute, laughs.

What seems important here about Bruce's response to the substitute is the way the presence of another brown body accentuates and refines the way the class perceives the brown student. However, within a white environment where race is rarely recognized on a conscious in-our-midst form, any form of articulated "non-whiteness" is one of racialization. In this case, Bruce suggests there *should* be some sort of racial bond between the brown substitute and the brown student, but most outrageously infers that the language accompanying this bond would be a type of learned-from-television ebonics.[10] That is, after all, how white culture learns about racialized people in largely white communities: through the media images that are largely controlled and operated by white corporate interests. The brown student *becomes* the substitute in that student/teacher are racialized as one individual and, much further, the brown student substitutes for, becomes the embodiment of, racialized people within the white imagination.

This white imagination, though, does possess the ability to differentiate racialized groups when it deems it necessary. In the following and last story about substitutions, the brown student and a white student are both similarly hazed in a frosh initiation process. The rite itself is fairly innocuous and certainly non-violent, at least in terms of the physical gesturing. However, the

---

[10] See *Enlightened racism: The Cosby Show, audiences, and the myth of the American dream* by Sut Jhally and Justin Lewis for an excellent example of racial portrayals on mainstream television. Jhalley and Lewis note that white America is able to accept the reality of an African American family that transcends racial barriers (entering into a professional, middle-class, suburban world), and yet performs "Blackness" for a white audience.

accompanying racial epithets are far more damaging to the brown student. Just as the unknown substitute teacher interpellated the student as a troublemaker, here the perpetrators interpellate the student as a "paki" — the student is unknown to these perpetrators, yet becomes *accessible* because of his racial markings:

> **THREE:** Back up to the beginning of this school year, Grade ten, week two or three or whichever week they call frosh week (this, years before frosh "activities" are banned in many places). Walking across the overpass to Dr. E. P. Scarlett High School (named after a famous Calgary heart surgeon), and from the hill leading down from the overpass they can see the back entrance of the school, only a soccer field away. And as they approach (Ashok and his friend, Hank) they notice three students sitting by the back entrance, sitting on the rail, hands sullenly behind backs. By the time they get to the asphalt circling the school moat-like, the three students, the "young toughs," move from their rail perch and lean toward the frosh students. Their eyes are liquid and excited. They have weapons, not the type you hear about in inner-city danger zone schools, but the weapons of frosh week in suburbia, cans of shaving cream ha ha ha. They converge. Hank pulls away first; it takes Ashok a second more to break the grasp of the Grade eleven student who grabs his coat collar, shaving cream just barely foaming off the side of his head and down his shoulder. But when he breaks free, Hank

> just a few feet ahead of him and well within earshot, the Grade eleven student's voice rings clear: "Get him, get the paki, don't let the paki get away." Ashok is more covered in words, words that he has never *heard* before in association with himself, than in shaving cream. Hank and Ashok get past the school entrance doors, into the safe haven of high school. Words are still sounding in his ears, but now they are from Hank, his friend Hank, Hank who thinks it's so funny he keeps repeating those words, "Get the paki," he says. "Wasn't that funny? Get the paki. Get the paki. Get."

Once they have made it through the gauntlet, Ashok still hears the racial epithets resonating in his ears. But it is the *re*utterance of this demeaning epithet by his friend, the reiteration of this interpellation *as if* it were humorous, that is, ultimately, more damaging. To be called down by someone who hates you or mistrusts you, through a lack of knowledge or familiarity, is one thing; to be called down (and called "up" in the sense of a hailing) in the same way by a trusted friend is another. This particular form of naming the brown student — and the way it is *shared* among white folks who do not know each other — brings Ashok into a place of raised awareness about the privilege of whiteness. If the brown student can see whiteness operate at levels that are intimate (from his friend) as well as hostile (by the hazers), the following connections can be made: (white) friends can easily be hostile in their intimacy *and* (white) strangers can be intimate in their

hostility. That is, the power of whiteness allows Hank into the world of the white aggressors, in a way shifting their aggressive actions away from him, with whom *they* share a common bond, the aggressive actions toward a non-white, a "paki." But also, and in some ways more insidious, the white strangers enforce an unwelcome intimacy by bestowing upon Ashok a name that insinuates a familiarity with *who* he *is.* Put another way, the white strangers bestow upon themselves a degree of power and privilege by hailing the brown student in a way that puts them in an already-familiar relationship with him in a way he does not have toward them.

Seen still another way, this time linguistically, the term "paki" as used by the white people (both friend and strangers) takes on the familiar value of the French *tu*, albeit with an added component of threat or contempt. In return, the brown student cannot reply with a similar familiar taunt, because calling the white people "paki" would border on the ridiculous.[11] And there is no term that carries with it a similar degree of the hostile and the familiar for white people within a white supremacist regime. Thus, the brown student becomes resigned, in a way, to accept that familiar interpellation each and every time it is uttered for his benefit. The theoretical and practical question is, of course, how can we work

---

[11] Two excellent texts on hate speech and their implications are *Words That Wound : Critical Race Theory, Assaultive Speech, and the First Amendment (New Perspectives on Law, Culture, and Society)*, edited by Matsuda et al, which works out of the position of critical legal studies, and Judith Butler's *Excitable speech: a politics of the performative.*

ourselves out from under such a weighty system of oppression? This next section, dealing less with interpellations than academic questions of race, is an attempt to *begin* to articulate a way through this precarious issue.

II

I'm gonna take my field and go home: reading critical white studies and critical race studies

Some stories occur with such frequency that I would think they would begin to lose their effect. But they don't. If anything, they have a cumulative effect, these stories of how white people defend themselves against charges of racism, how they resist even the approach of a critical discussion of race that might affect their ways of knowing. Over the past decade — since finishing my MA in English and entering into the teaching profession, first as a teaching assistant and then as a sessional or contract worker — I have had the opportunity to talk to numerous progressive scholars of colour working at postsecondary institutions in the Humanities.[12] The

---

[12]Although this list is not exhaustive, some of the scholars I refer to include Roy Miki, Aruna Srivastava, Himani Bannerji, Karlyn Koh, Monika Kin Gagnon, Louise Saldanha, Sharron Proulx, Scott Toguri McFarlane, Chris Olbey, Rita Wong, as well as those who teach creative writing in non-institutional settings: Hiromi Goto, Larissa Lai and Claire Harris.

stories we tell each other are sometimes funny, sometimes harsh, but ultimately, they are stories of how we, as people of colour studying and teaching in the academy, survive white institutions and continue the work we do. Rather than listing these stories in detail, however, I will take their salient moments and present an overview, a template if you will, that creates a particular story out of multiple stories. Theoretically, what follows is a counter-hegemonic discourse that resists traditional research approaches that, in the language of critical race theory, "embrace universalism over particularity [and] abstract principles and the 'rule of law' over perspectivism (an approach characterized by an emphasis on concrete personal experience)" (Delgado, "Introduction" xv). Following Lyotard's claim that such an embracing of the universal or "objective history" leads to de-authorizing and, in fact, dismissal of "the victim's testimony," Vijay Mishra writes: "[o]ne has to return to disarticulations, to silence, to feelings, to the corporeal, and not simply to the mental, for counter-hegemonic positions" ("Diasporic" 41). Such positions, Mishra goes on to write, "do not seek legitimation purely through facts" (41), and it is this refusal to rely on facticity alone that I present in the following analysis.

1) a scholar of colour is teaching a literature course;

2) having theorized the various positions of race, racialization, racism, and anti-racism, the scholar feels confident that whatever

readings of particular literary works studied in the class will be informed by such theories and theorizing;

3) students are discussing a particular writer of colour who, in some manner or form, writes about the interactions between people of colour and white people;

4) one or more (usually white) students will claim variously that the writer is being "racist toward whites," is practising "reverse racism," or is being, plainly and simply, "racist";

5) the scholar is deflated and (almost) defeated.[13]

I will go through these five points individually and at some length because it is worth analyzing this structure to unveil an oppressive system and, potentially, ways to overcome it.

Number one: *a scholar of colour is teaching a literature course.*

It is worth keeping in mind that a scholar of colour teaching a Humanities course is still perceived as anomalous, that he or she is somehow suspect in her/his training/research/knowledge/ pedagogy/motivations. To illustrate, three brief comments from scholars of colour follow. In his insightful book, *Confronting Authority*, Derrick Bell notes that as a professor of colour he felt obliged

---

[13] This list has a macro-parallel, put together by Tator, Henry and Mattis in *Challenging Racism in the Arts*. Instead of dealing with the individual-teacher, as I do above, they deal with collective-art-movements. The lists are strikingly similar, most notably on the point where the majority-position digs in with a strong resistance, what Tator et al call the "counter-resistance by the majority."

> to overcome [students'] apprehension that because [he] was the one black in an otherwise all-white faculty [he] might not be competent. It is a presumption most minority teachers must face and overcome as they seek to teach students who, in all their lives, have never had black teachers.(35)[14]

And Anuradha Rakhit writes of an early education experience in England:

> I applied to do a Postgraduate Certificate of Education (PCGE) with English as my main subject, but was advised during my interview to study mathematics instead of English, being told: "don't forget that you trying to teach English to our kids will be like carrying coal to Newcastle." (56)

Finally, Roxana Ng states that

> [t]o be a minority teacher in a higher education institute is to be continuously at risk. The risk increases when minority teachers try to instill critical consciousness among the students. (137)

The above three examples come from American, British, and Canadian scholars, illustrating — without intending to erase national differences — the similar experiences of scholars of colour across borders. Note that these examples address, from the perspective of the scholar of colour, the attitudes of students and administrators, but I suggest that such attitudes prevail among colleagues and those outside these institutional roles as well.

---

[14]"[I]n many institutions," writes Sherene Razack, "the numbers of faculty members of colour have not changed for a decade and, in some, have even dropped," citing her own institution, the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, which has only four professors of colour in a faculty of one hundred and twenty (*Looking* 162, 206fn).

One colleague, a person of colour and a teacher, tells me that one of her student evaluation forms contained glowing comments about her pedagogy although the student admitted that he was a bit wary about taking her class because, after reading her non-Anglo name on the course outline, he thought he would not understand her accent. Another colleague, a person of colour and a writer, tells me she can sense who is racist because "it's in their eyes." On the surface, such a statement appears simplistic and ludicrous, recalling, perhaps, debunked attempts to assess social and criminal behaviour on phrenological data. But on another level, one that takes into account the normalized context of racialization, such a statement gestures toward a sensitivity to the everyday enactment of white supremacy.[15] I will not begin to suggest that my colleague, myself, or any other person of colour would (or should) take such an observation as empirical evidence. However — and I emphasize this particularly for white readers[16] of this text — my colleague's observation is one not readily dismissed by people of colour. Indeed, to a large degree, this is not unlike what W. E. B.

---

[15]Although I have earlier defined my use of "white supremacy," it is useful to reiterate here how others use it. In her article "White Supremacy (And What We Should Do About It)," Frances Lee Ansley writes that she uses the term to refer to "a political, economic, and cultural system in which whites overwhelmingly control power and material resources, conscious and unconscious ideas of white superiority and entitlement are widespread, and relations of white dominance and non-white subordination are daily reenacted across a broad array of institutions and social settings" (592).

[16]While I am uneasy at making such apparently clear-cut demarcations — how, for instance, do people of colour living in a culture that emphasizes whiteness as the ultimate goal *not* function as white readers — I think this is an important distinction to make. Progressive white scholars, for instance, cannot help but read themselves *as* white through this text and I do not wish to elide these racially complex readings.

Du Bois wrote in *The Souls of Black Folks* about a "second sight . . . this double consciousness" (although Du Bois is writing particularly about the "Negro" seeing himself through white eyes). And Homi Bhabha recalls Fanon whenever a racial epithet "is not said at all, but you can see it in a gaze, or hear it in the solecism of a still silence" (*Location* 236). And Larissa Lai introduces a similar notion: "I have a sixth sensory organ, a way of knowing the world beyond what eyes, ears, nose, tongue or touch can tell me. It runs in my family" (31). In this article, Lai discusses the various forms of activism that, for those of us involved in anti-oppression discourse and struggle, become quite literally a "sixth sense."

But Lai's article, arguably a critical inquiry into the nature and history of activism, is also a story playing with timelines of personal, mythic, and prehistorical proportion. Her technique brings me back to the value of storytelling, used both to foment political change as encouraged by CRT proponents, and as a mechanism for survival and a device that enables people of colour to share our sense of looking at the (white) world.

These stories of encountering racism in subtle ways — a feeling you get when you're in the elevator, how people talk to you in the halls, or how people avoid saying your names or pronounce them badly without apology — are crucial to recognize because they point to the normalized nature of white supremacy, which is evident not just in burning crosses and racist epithets, but in every aspect of the world around us. True, most of the people around me

are *not* racist in that individual way, either by my definition or theirs. But white supremacist culture is so naturalized, made so transparent, that even those informed by critical race studies and critical white studies may not even call a particular environment "poisoned" — it's just normal. And that is the environment lived "in" by the scholar of colour.

Number two: *having theorized the various positions of race, racialization, racism, and anti-racism, the scholar feels confident that whatever readings of particular literary works studied in the class will be informed by such theories and theorizing.*
How do we adequately prepare ourselves with the tools of anti-racism, and how do we ensure they are always there? In short, we don't. As a matter of fact, perhaps we (as scholars of colour) would be better prepared if we simply acknowledged that we were going into the classroom having always *inadequately theorized* these treacherous arenas of race, racialization, racism, and anti-racism. Anthony Chavez, an anti-racism workshop co-ordinator, suggests to seminar participants that just when they think the problems are solved, that ingrained and dominant world perceptions are being renegotiated, "white happens."[17] What Chavez means by this phrase is that, in order to avoid difficult, systemic change, individuals will often retreat into the world of race relations and hierarchies they know the best — that is, the conditions of white supremacy. I should point out here that "white" can "happen" to just about

---

[17]Chavez made these comments during an anti-racist teaching seminar held in Burlington, Vermont in the summer of 1997.

anybody, regardless of their race, although I emphasize that there is a direct relationship between such "happenings" and the degree to which individuals have been exposed to whiteness in terms of structures, ways of thinking, and self-privileging. I use the term "white" here not as a simple racial denomination, but as a way of describing a learned way of seeing the world from a racially privileged perspective. Marta Mahoney writes: "[b]ecause the dominant norms of whiteness are not visible to them, whites are free to see themselves as 'individuals,' rather than as members of a culture. Individualism in turn becomes part of white resistance to perceiving whiteness and indeed to being placed in the category 'white' at all" (331). It is this resistance of "whiteness" by white people that compels Michelle Fine to demand a removal of what she calls "the white glaucoma that has ruined scholarly vision" (58). When the invisibility of whiteness is threatened, even those in alliance with anti-racist projects can "backslide," as is all-too-frequently witnessed at anti-racist workshops and seminars. So, we shouldn't be surprised — although perhaps the alternative, that of walking unprotected into what might at any moment turn into a pedagogical race-warzone with a zealous willingness — when the well-known "*anti*-anti-racism" strategies of denial, diversion, silence, defensiveness/anger, minimization, discounting, and tokenizing[18] are practiced. But perhaps we are being *strategically*

---

[18]These are seven of the strategies focussed on in the article I co-wrote with Aruna Srivastava, "Preston Terre Blanche, Snow White, and the Seven Deadly

naive in order to give ourselves the motivation to enter such a dangerous place. Deborah Waire Post writes that as people of colour teaching at the university, "the problem is not ours. The problem is institutional" (423). She goes on to say that "[w]e realize that our scholarship is suspect because our areas of interest our unacceptable. . . . We cannot afford to make mistakes because everything we do is scrutinized with such attention to detail and minutiae that it would paralyze most creative people" (423). Given this unappealing reality, instructors of colour, I suggest, take action we know will be challenged, but to *not* take those actions would also be unacceptable. Indira Karamcheti suggests that the racialized instructor who problematically refuses the mantle of race

> can cast himself or herself as the traditional authoritarian personality, the hard-driving, brilliant, no-nonsense professional for whom the personal has nothing to do with anything: John Houseman in racial drag. . . . Denying the visual evidence of race or ethnicity, this role insists on the authenticity of guild membership — card-carrying status in the union of academic professionals, usually demonstrated, at least in the current time, by the use of complex poststructuralist concepts, language, and theory to analyze the postcolonial, minority subjects. Caliban can speak with the master's voice, even be transformed into Prospero. (143-44)

Number three: *students are discussing a particular writer of colour who, in some manner or form, writes about the interactions between people of colour and white people.*

Disclaimers, or The Dos of Racism (a not so far off fairy tale)" *West Coast Line*, Spring, 1994.

When writers of colour talk about colour, we are often tackled on the subject, often not directly, but attacked nonetheless. One writer of colour tells me she is periodically asked whether her next novel or piece of writing will *again* deal with people sharing her racial background. Why, she wonders out loud, do people not constantly interrogate Margaret Atwood about whether her next protagonist is going to be a white woman? A writer only faces questions about "race," it would seem, if he or she is a writer of colour. Write about race in a *critical* way and you, the writer of colour, are too whiney, sensitive, aggressive, indeed, too critical, or so say your detractors. "Write about what you know," implore the "becoming a writer" self-help books. But what they leave out is that sometimes such self-knowledged writing will make your audience feel defensive, uncomfortably so. There is a flip-side to this: the desire from a mainstream audience for the writer to "tell me about your pain" as bell hooks puts it (*Yearning* 152), so that in that telling the reader can understand and, in the world of literary imaginations, "own" that pain and, when the time is right, tell it back into the world, their world, a world which may render a more sympathetic reading to one of their own. Also important in this renewed interest in the "other," is a demand from white students and a white academy to see themselves reflected in the work of writers of colour. Often this identification occurs, I suggest, when white readers begin to identify with the "whiteness" of a particular character and, more

often than not, it is a revelation of "whiteness" they would prefer not to see.

Number four: *one or more (usually white) students will claim variously that the writer is being "racist toward whites," is practising "reverse racism," or is being, plainly and simply, "racist."* The claim, that the racialized writer, particularly if he or she narrates a power imbalance, is somehow the "real" racist is not just a kill-the-messenger response, but an adamant refusal of the message itself. Make no mistake: racism *can* be talked about; indeed, for most self-proclaimed white liberals and progressives, it *must* be talked about. But there are well-defined modes of containment: racism is perpetuated in another time (old Canadian immigration laws and head-taxes are good to trot out), in another place (those people in the U.S., in Britain, in *South Africa* are the really awful racists), in another mode (the "real" problem is that all cultures are inherently racist and once we acknowledge that we can deal with the problem, can't we?), or, as a last resort, by other people (i.e., none of us in this class, or maybe some of "them" but not me). The moment of understanding, however, the point of self-critical awareness, comes if and when the reader implicates herself or himself as an agent within a white supremacist system. Consider, for example, Joy Kogawa's *Obasan* — one of the first novels by a Canadian writer of colour to be taught widely at secondary and post-secondary levels — which foregrounds the history of the Japanese-Canadian internment during the Second World War. It is

possible for a white reader to refuse self-implication in this text, to presume that the actions of the Canadian government were either from another time and place and therefore irrelevant to the reader's life, *or* to claim that the government's actions were legal and responsible under the assumption that Japanese-Canadians were some kind of threat. Either of these readings buys into a white supremacist ideology that allows the *individual* white reader to absolve himself or herself from the repercussions of this racist act. The reader disallows self-critique that forces him or her to recognize his or her role as a perpetrator of racism (inasmuch as she or he is structurally implicated in the system). Claims of "I wasn't born then," or more interestingly, "how long do we have to pay for the sins of our fathers," refuse to recognize that white supremacy lives on precisely through such utterances. I should emphasize that such a self-critique is very different from the confession of *individual* racist practice — such a recognition *can* be a first anti-racist step, but is often simply a cathartic moment with no further articulations.[19] The moment that comes far more frequently, however, is an incendiary reflex response ("this is reverse racism/they're being racist") that at once undercuts the

---

[19] Such articulations can only come about when readers/students understand "how people and social groups use language as a way of mobilizing resistance, challenging dominant forms of cultural authority, and creating democratic social relations" (Giroux, "Cultural Studies" 239). The critical pedagogy work of Henry Giroux and Peter McLaren follows the writing and "liberatory" practice of Paulo Freire and Ira Shor in moving toward democratic ideals in the classroom. Elizabeth Ellsworth, however, critiques the work of Giroux and McLaren as too theory-based and not truly empowering for students in practice. (See Ellsworth, "Why Doesn't This Feel Empowering: Working Through the Repressive Myths of Critical Pedagogy.")

value of the text at hand *and* absolves white individuals/systems of responsibility. As Mahoney notes, the "shift in vision that makes whiteness perceptible is thus doubly threatening for whites: It places whites in a category that their whiteness itself requires them to be able to ignore, at the same time that it asks them to admit the perceptions of those defined outside the circle of whiteness" (331).

Number five: *the scholar is deflated and (almost) defeated*

This feeling of deflation, of having run out of strategies, of feeling drained of energy and, in that moment, being told that we are no good at what we do, repeats itself every time we try to bring anti-racism into the classroom. For scholars of colour, this may mean coming face to face with despair. Sherene Razack writes:

> Unlikely to acknowledge their oppressive practices, dominant groups merely deny that such practices exist. To insist on being seen, that is, to contest the dominant group's perception is — for an oppressed person — to be smashed in the process by a wall of denial that makes of one's existence an illusion, an imagined story of unfairness and injustice. (*Looking* 24)

But I have parenthetically modified "defeat" with "(almost)" for a particular and important political purpose. What keeps us going, against the odds, is the somewhat grandiose assertion that *doing* anti-racism, in this case through literary production and pedagogy, is not just a good thing, but a matter of survival and resistance. So we do another class on anti-racism, we teach more books by writers of colour, we stand up (shakily sometimes) at conferences and panels and book festivals and say we have a problem with

such and such. We do it because we know we are in a position to do it and we know we would have benefited from such a pedagogical approach when we were studying English literature. And perhaps we carry these anti-racist principles beyond our classroom walls, into other realms we inhabit. Roxana Ng writes that critical teachers of colour "must recognize that a classroom is not separated from the society at large. . . . Ultimately, we need to link the theoretical understanding derived from the classroom context to the real-life struggles of minority peoples occurring outside the classroom" (150). Ng continues to advocate activism on campus that brings an awareness of anti-racism to the university and, perhaps more importantly, the construction of anti-racism networks and alliances that bring together teachers, students, and the university and community populations.

At this point I want to reiterate how important white alliance is to any anti-racist project performed in a white-dominant culture. Fran Lebowitz writes that it is critically important

> to seriously consider what it is like to be white. That's something white people almost never think about. And what it is like to be white is not to say, "We have to level the playing field," but to acknowledge that not only do white people own the playing field but they have so designated this plot of land as a playing field to begin with. White people *are* the playing field. The advantage of being white is so extreme, so overwhelming, so immense, that to use the word "advantage" at all is misleading since it implies a kind of parity that simply does not exist. (220, 222)

This is not hyperbole. Lebowitz is accurate in portraying the "level-the-playing-field" argument as trite and bordering on meaningless. The question that begs to be asked is "how does white operate?" and yet white scholars need to ask that without falling into a narcissistic abyss. White resistance paralyzes potential white allies, causing them either to maunder on endlessly about themselves and their past and present racial indiscretions ("I just realized I'm a racist") or to back off from the debate, often content to take what they may feel to be a well-deserved break from the nasty arena of race. All this turns potential white allies back on themselves so they simply manifest white privilege.

Perhaps this is the entry point for meaningful critical white studies, although I want to exercise caution here, for the pursuit of such an area of study has the potential to re-centre the gaze on the dominant. Performed critically, of course, such a white gaze turned inward can do the anti-racist work of alliance. However, bell hooks notes that:

> [s]earching the critical work of post-colonial critics, I found much writing that bespeaks the continued fascination with the way white minds, particularly the colonial imperialist traveler, perceive blackness, and very little expressed interest in representations of whiteness in the black imagination. (*Black* 166)

When such interest *is* expressed, it comes as a surprise to institutions and peoples whose belief systems are predicated on the assumption that whiteness is not a category for discussion. The extreme of this position is the insistence — from a white

supremacist perspective — of white people that they be involved in, if not actually at the centre of, any discussions of race even as they refuse to recognize whiteness as a racial category.[20] I would further argue through hooks's expression of an alternative gaze, that of "whiteness in the black imagination," and, by the brown gaze proposed in this dissertation, *how* people of colour look (back) on whiteness has the potential to change the way racialization works inside and outside the academy. The degree to which such a brown gaze can affect the power-base of whiteness, however, is questionable, and it is through the networks and alliances such as Ng suggests above that such a change might begin to occur.

I return, then, to the importance of critical white studies performed by and for white scholars. If recent conferences, publications, and public debates are any indication, the case for critical white studies is gaining momentum.[21] Critical white studies (and not "white studies") can contribute considerably to an anti-racist struggle in the academy and beyond. However, it behooves us — as people of colour with an anti-racist agenda — to beware of the

---

[20]Paul Kivel and Peggy McIntosh, both strong white allies and critics, discuss the many pitfalls that white people encounter when they first enter into discussions of race. Kivel lists the difficult steps potential white allies must take to unlearn their ways of dominance and McIntosh points to the many invisible privileges of whiteness in our culture.

[21] Following Richard Dyer's *White*, there have been a number of anthologies dedicated to critical white studies (*Off White*, edited by Michelle Fine et al, and *Critical White Studies: Looking Behind the Mirror*, edited by Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic to name just two.) In 1994, the *Village Voice* literary supplement was dedicated to "Whiteness." Recent conferences exclusively dedicated to Critical White Studies have occurred over the past few years in the U.S. featuring race theorists such as Michael Omi, Howard Winant, and Noel Ignatiev.

potential of "race" once again becoming commodified and sanitized for the sole use of privileged white folk. That is, I wonder if the widening acceptance of critical white studies gives new permission for white folks to talk about (or *not* to talk about as the case may be) writing and other work by people of colour. Within a critical framework, of course, such a change to a curriculum, for instance, would be welcomed by anti-racist theorists; however, if this new permission is just another way for white academics to increase their cultural capital, then the same problems of uncritical whiteness will still exist in the academy. Pierre Bourdieu's concepts of economic, cultural, and symbolic capital are useful here. The white academic who publishes and speaks widely in the area of critical white studies is building up his or her cultural capital (i.e. a powerful curriculum vitae in a growing area of interest). However, what is important here is how those various forms of capital convert from one to another. In this case, the cultural capital of acquired knowledge and publications can be turned into economic capital (tenured appointment at a well-funded research university) and symbolic capital (invitations to speak at prestigious conferences or to make appearances as a visiting fellow). However, this is assuming that the cultural capital acquired is perceived in the field as valuable (Bourdieu, *Language* 61-62). Potentially, then, a white scholar who does critical white studies that unsettles his or her white colleagues, unsettles notions of whiteness as a dominant

practice, may have a harder time converting that cultural capital into anything substantial.

Elizabeth Ellsworth, in her article, "The Double-Binds of Whiteness," writes that such a double-bind occurs "when academics trying to produce antiracist scholarship fail to metacommunicate about how academic discourses and writing are themselves structured by racial relations" (264). She calls this a "no-win" relationship to whiteness which creates

> paralyzing double binds for academics when we fail to question the racialized paradoxes produced by certain academic practices. These include academic attempts to define whiteness in the name of antiracism without recognizing that the definitional process itself is a part of the problem of racism. (264)

Ellsworth's point is that the very articulation of whiteness gets caught up in its own articulated history of white supremacy. The danger of this double-bind, of course, is that white critics might choose to turn away from anti-racist scholarship or, as Razack points out, might entrench themselves in a defensive position, insisting it is *their* livelihood and/or reality that is being threatened.[22] Bell hooks writes:

> White women who have yet to get a critical handle on the meaning of "whiteness" in their lives, the representation of whiteness in their literature, or the white supremacy that shapes their social status are now explicating blackness

---

[22]"Quoting Nancy Miller, [Jane Roland] Martin writes that white women scholars now live in fear — a fear of other women's critiques. It is clear that Martin and Miller are referring to women of colour, although there are many white women scholars who make anti-racist critiques" (*Looking*162).

> without critically questioning whether their work emerges from an aware antiracist standpoint. (*Teaching* 104)

I would suggest, however, that a series of failures in the tricky arena of critical white studies will prove more productive than failing to move at all. White critics need to provide for themselves a rationale for the anti-racist work they do while being prepared constantly to re-evaluate that rationale and change its parameters, despite the risks it might pose. In other words, while I agree with Ng that anti-racist networks and multi-racial alliances are crucial in advancing an anti-racist pedagogy, white critics will also have to work within their own networks of whiteness to create change. In answer to his self-imposed question as to what constitutes a politically engaged pedagogy, Giroux writes that "[u]nless [teacher] authority is problematized by both teachers and students, the crucial practices of naming and listening will not take place in the classroom" (*Disturbing* 121). Similarly, I would suggest, unless anti-racist white activists (alongside activists of colour) problematize the authority of whiteness — not just in the classroom but in other pedagogical sites[23] as well — it will prove difficult to enact any progressive change around racial hierarchies.

---

[23] Giroux suggests that educators and cultural workers need to think of the term "pedagogy" as "beyond a limited emphasis on the mastery of techniques and methodologies. . . . Pedagogy represents a form of cultural production implicated in and critically attentive to how power and meaning help construct and organize knowledge, desires, values, and identities" (*Education* 242).

CHAPTER FOUR

How do you say "Queer" in South Asian?[1]

I

An initial queery

> How does the emergence of an out South Asian lesbian and gay presence in the West intersect with the now established concept of queer politics and cultures? Can we be queer on 'our' own terms? Do we need to be? If they exist, what do these interstices of South Asian and queer look like? And what might they be called? ("Introduction" 7)
> — Ian Rashid

In his introduction to a special "Queer" issue of *Rungh*, Rashid brings to bear a number of provocative questions and allows the answers to filter through his tacit responses or through the work produced in the issue. In the above brief passage, Rashid plays with language so that the pronouns take on various meanings and points of reference and the question marks punctuate statements rather than questions. Formerly a Toronto-based poet and activist who has made London (England) his home since the early 1990s, Rashid knows full well that these are hardly unproblematic or simply rhetorical gestures. Further, as a founding member of Khush,

---

[1]This chapter title is borrowed from a 1995 special issue, guest-edited by Ian Rashid, of *Rungh* magazine — a Vancouver-based journal on arts, politics, and culture in the diasporic South Asian scene.

Toronto's first gay South Asian organization which became the first sponsor of Desh Pardesh,[2] largely through the leadership of Rashid, he knows all too well the problems and complications of the "interstices" of queer and South Asian identities. Rashid raises ominous questions: "Can we be queer on 'our' own terms? Do we need to be?" The initial "we" used as subject of both sentences remains unmarked, apparently making (self-) reference to queer South Asian communities. Yet the "our" in that first sentence is set off with single inverted commas, a way of accentuating, ironizing and/or calling into question any sense of unified "us-ness" as a cohesive queer South Asian community.

His next sentence: "If they exist, what do these interstices of South Asian and queer look like?" comments insightfully on the historical separation of these two terms, or at least an apparent mutual exclusion (i.e. unless otherwise noted, "South Asian" reads as "straight" and "queer" reads as "white" indicating the way both terms have gained popular recognition in the West). Yet Rashid queries the intersections of these terms and how they are named. Those familiar with how gay/lesbian/bisexual communities construct themselves within the South Asian diaspora are also familiar with attempts at self-naming, efforts which, because of homophobia in traditional South Asian communities and racism in gay and lesbian communities, create considerable dificulties. In

---

[2]Desh Pardesh is now an independantly-run organization, but it was initially run through Khush, the first year as "Salaam Toronto" in 1990, and the second as "Desh Pardesh."

some form or another, people and organizations often try to combine these communities in the act of naming. For instance, the term "khush" is a Hindi word that can be roughly translated as "ecstasy," which, in turn, evokes the English use of "gay." In San Francisco, one South Asian gay community refers to its organization as "Trikone,"[3] a Sanskrit word which can be translated as "triangle," again a reference to the image made popular by gay and lesbian cultures in the West following the Nazi regime's attempt to identify and persecute gay and lesbian people by forcing them to wear the pink triangle.

I walk into the old Euclid Theatre on Toronto's College Street and it
begins to dawn on me. No, not everyone here is brown-skinned,
but the critical mass certainly is. And this is just the warm-up,
the sound-test, not even the real thing. The real thing.
The real thing is the following night. The first
person I meet is the stage manager. Later I
will say to my co-presenter that the stage
manager seemed pretty straight, and
by this I mean straight-laced, a bit
uptight perhaps, but she laughs at
my choice of words, "straight,"
and responds with "so to
speak," and I realize the
history, the realization
of this first Desh
Pardesh still
hasn't sunk
in to me
as yet.
It

---

[3] Originating in San Francisco, *Trikone* is located online at the Queer Resources Directory website: http://qrd.rdrop.com/qrd/orgs/TRIKONE/magazine.

won't
be for
a couple
of more years
that this festival
of progressive South
Asian arts and culture
performance becomes its
own organization; for now,
it's all done through the auspices
of Khush, and I fast-forward now to
something I read a few years later: "To
import and paraphrase the words of the poet
June Jordan, there would not be a South Asian
Canadian cultural activism without South Asian
Canadian lesbians and gay men"(Rashid "Naming" 7).
This is what brings Desh Pardesh to fruition and sustains it
for the years to come. And I think back on my statement on being
straight and reflect on the reflexive voice: who is being straight,
really? On performance night we take the stage and run
through our dialogue on being South Asian on the
Canadian Prairies and, despite hot stage lights
blinding my view, I can see, sense
really, that the audience is
virtually entirely
made up of
South Asians.
The
last
time, the last time, I think to myself, I was in a room with this
many brown people was, well, never. The last time I was in a room
with only brown people, regardless of number, was probably some
extended family event, or maybe some family-cum- multicultural
affair. We finish our piece. I look up to and through the bright stage
lights and spot reflections of brown everywhere. Hands come
together and I rejoice in the sound and I think of the koan about
the sound of one hand and I wonder to myself, or I am in wonder,
as I speculate on the sound made by
brown hands
clapping.

In hindsight, my observation of being so caught up by this South Asian context clouds one of the distinct realities of my first Desh conference in May of 1992. In addition to finding myself in the midst of other progressive South Asians, this was the first time I was in a situation where I was privileged in *all* major arenas. That is, outside the context of a white dominant norm, within the confines and arguably safe space of the Euclid Theatre, I embodied other forms of privilege that, in other contexts, are mitigated by race. For instance, in that room, I inhabited a straight, male, middle-class, youthful and able body; *outside* that room I still possessed those attributes, but *always* within a racialized context. However, my presence in a brown, queer-defined space forced me to recognize, first, that I did indeed situate myself within a number of highly privileged identities in that room, and, second, that while such privileges might be mitigated in the context of white-normalization, they were still very present, tangible, and distinctly advantageous in the world. It is with this understanding that I move on to the following statement from Shani Mootoo, responding to a request from *absinthe* magazine[4] to submit work for its Queer issue:

---

[4]*absinthe* magazine began publication in1988 as *Secrets from the Orange Couch* with editorial collectives in Edmonton, Red Deer, and Calgary. Following a split in editorial vision, the Calgary members continued to produce the magazine under the new name from 1992 to 1998. The editorial collective decided to produce special issues focussing on communities normally excluded from the "little magazine" circuit but, in keeping with a spirit of empowerment, sought out groups who would be willing not just to contribute to these issues, but who would take on the challenge of editing

It is unbelievable that you would ask for a submission on queering right now from me, because I have been toying with the following poem for some time and you gave me the opportunity to work it out. It (the poem) takes a very particular view of the notion of queer and I wonder, then, if it would be suitable for what you want to do in this issue. Of course — and I don't think I really have to tell you this — that I understand the politics of queering. On a personal note, I basically have never ever been comfortable with being called queer which has become a catch all for lots. But much more importantly, the times have changed drastically since the term became fashionable eight years or so ago and the point of its use needs re-assessing. Its usage has had some very positive results but I believe that the fascistic element that is a real threat to those who would call themselves queer is metamorphosing into a much less obvious and visible force that needs to be dealt with differently and somehow at this time to call myself or others — who hang out in the same general camp as I do — "queer" seems just a little too fun-like, almost irresponsible, for me. Reclamation actually feels like a luxury that we can't really afford to indulge in anymore. It didn't use to be like that. "Queer" has become — has become because of the times — too easy a designation, in my mind. It's mostly that things are changing so quickly and not always generously — seriously, when skin heads are right there next to us but we can't see them because their hair is now grown and they no longer wear the visible trademarks . . . it's serious! This really is the raison d'être for the turn around of the poem below. Also how one names things has so much to do with where one positions one's self. Positioning is crucial. I really do believe that it is urgent that we, those of us who are elbowed to the edges, that we theoretically, at least — for we don't have the power to do much else — as a political strategy, reposition ourselves. I have been saying this in my work in various ways for some time now and feel that there is still

---

and producing the magazine. Thus, the Calgary Women of Colour collective produced "Sistahspeak," a group of aboriginal writers produced "writing brings healing close," and a collective of community/academic, white/of colour lesbian activists produced "Queering absinthe," to which Mootoo contributed.

> the need to suggest this. Of course there are all kinds of strategies and all are necessary— and all must be carried out at the same time. In the end, a forum for this kind of discussion is, and will be for a long time, invaluable. From the point where I chose to look out I do not see myself, or most people(s) — who fall under the catch all — as queer, but I do see certain particular others and ideas as such. (Mootoo, email)[5]

As is reflected in Mootoo's poem itself, her position around queer identity challenges the concept of use of a term like "queer" in the material reality of gay and lesbian lives. Judith Butler writes:

> [a]s expansive as the term "queer" is meant to be, it is used in ways that enforce a set of overlapping dimensions: in some contexts, the term appeals to a younger generation who want to resist the more institutionalized and reformist politics sometimes signified by "lesbian and gay"; in some contexts, sometimes the same, it has marked a predominantly white movement that has not fully addressed the way in which "queer" plays — or fails to play — within non-white communities. (*Bodies* 228)

While she is not opposed to the use of identity categories, Butler is attentive to the risks of their static and unproblematized nature, suggesting that if a term like "'queer' is to be a site of collective contestation . . . it will have to remain that which is, in the present, never fully owned, but always and only redeployed,

---

[5] "Recent intellectual fashions in North American scholarship," write Bryson and de Castell, "dictate an emphasis on the performative function of sexual affinities. Carnival, transgression, and parody are in, and essentialist appeals to an unproblematized or coherent identity are out. From these sites, the greatest danger one faces as a speaker consists in a charge of essentialism" (270).

twisted, queered from a prior usage and in the direction of urgent and expanding political purposes" (228).

In this sense, Mootoo's poem refutes, emphatically, a "queer" identity, but it is a refutation that affirms her lesbian identity and attends to Butler's sense of redeployment for political ends:

> Queery.
>
> queer? i am not queer.
> skinheads are queer.
> the kkk is queer.
>
> i am not queer.
> ernst zundel is queer.
> the blue chip and censorship,
> and newt gingrich are queer, quite queer.
> not i. i am not no way queer.
> C.O.P.S., America's Most Wanted and all the other way too
> many tv shows that
> martial viewers into siding with police authority are
> so queer that they are queerer than queer.
> preston manning is awfully queer.
> ralph klein and easter bunnies are pretty damn queer.
> so is the church, valentine's and christmas shopping.
> What makes me queer? i am not.
> the so-called queen's english language, co-optation, 187 and
> 96 are
> blinketyblink queer
> and last but certainly not least,
> (for the list of dumdeedumdeedumdeedums is endless)
>
> queerest, absolutely queerest of all
> are the skinheads who have grown their hair
>
> (as an aside, i know a lesby-
> (well, she's distantly and awkwardly related. . .)

(an ex's current, if you must know, and to make a long story short. . .)
(a nepotistic moment in the midst of my poem, you have every right to say. . .)
so i know this lesby, as i was saying (who, by the way, is not queer)
who thinks that the cn tower. . .
(the cn tower for crying out loud and can you believe)
is queer.
phew! all i can say to this is "dear, dear!"
(please note that the rhyming is merely unfortuitous coincidence.)

p.s. neither she nor i . . . and while we're at it, i might as well add . . . nor
virtual reality,
cyberspace nor parapsychology . . . none of these, in comparison, is remotely
queer.
(Mootoo, "Queery" 4)

In this poem, Mootoo takes the innovative step of inverting the notions of what is "queer." Her initial reservations, I should add, are questions that haunt contemporary queer theory which, in its caution-bordering-on-paranoia around identity politics, displaces the notion of "queer" to the point where the material experiences of gay and lesbian lives are often perceived as not directly relevant to the queering project. Even where a pedagogy focussing on the material reality of gay and lesbian lives *is* practiced "homophobia rules the classroom and instructors must expect to encounter it" (Martinadale 61).[6] The danger, as Mootoo points out, is a serious

---

[6] Martindale, in an article published shortly after her death, writes that her discussion of gay/lesbian issues is often met with students walking out or

lack of positionality in the theorizing of "queerness." In some theoretical circles, to "queer" a project may, while recognizing lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered lives per se, have little to do with the *existence* of these lives, focussing instead on frames of reference extending far beyond, and possibly ignoring, the individual or community.[7] Once again, this can perform an "elbowing to the edges" of people whose material lives are profoundly affected, not just by their sexuality, but by how their sexuality is perceived by an oppressive, dominant, and intolerant system of compulsory heterosexuality.

To return to Mootoo's poem, what she accomplishes here is a curious double-performance of the word "queer." Etymologically, she traces it back to the notion of being "strange, odd, peculiar, eccentric, in appearance or character" (Oxford English Dictionary) somehow out of place and disturbingly so. The term "queer" then was placed on those whose homosexuality could not be condoned as normal by a dominant order. But Mootoo re-places that term, not in conjunction with progressive politics surrounding queer theory, but

---

other disruptive gestures, and that speakers on topics of queer sexuality often have to field questions around bestiality (61). My own experience in teaching texts by lesbians of colour met with similar student response: one student, on a class electronic discussion group, equated the "queerness" of Larissa Lai's *When Fox is a Thousand*, with the woman-animal relationship in Marian Engel's *Bear*, noting of the latter text: "now 'that's' queer!"

[7] In a report brought to the Faculty-Senate of the University of Wisconsin-Madison, Keeling et al note: "Though still committed to the study of 'lesbian,' 'gay' and 'bisexual' authors, queer research tends to bracket those terms in order to open the topic of sexuality into larger frames of reference: the historical construction of "heterosexuality," as a "majority" sexuality; the regulation of colonial sexual relations; the impact of sexuality and sexual (sub)cultures on social and political theory; the intersections between sexual and other forms of "minority" identification."

as a continuing pejorative, placed by her on those "oddities" who might have substantial support and/or power in current systems. Thus, right-wing politicians and hate-mongers[8] are designated as queer: skinheads, the Ku Klux Klan, Newt Gingrich, Ernst Zundel, Preston Manning, and Ralph Klein. Not coincidentally, these groups and figures stand in for an officious right wing (self-proclaimed as the "popular") that has gone on record in opposition to gay and lesbian rights, and some go to homophobic extremes to condemn anyone who does not conform to Christian-based heterosexual monogamy. For instance, in the United States, the term "family values" is touted by the Republican right (Gingrich) and Christian fundamentalists (Pat Robertson) as an ideal, but this term is coded to exclude (and condemn) gay relationships and single-parent families. In Alberta, the Klein cabinet, fearing federal legislation that would allow gay and lesbian couples the right to marry, insisted that it would go so far as to use the "notwithstanding clause" of the Canadian constitution to prevent such legislation from occurring in this province.

But within all this discussion of queer politics, what should not be lost in a reading of Mootoo's poem is that the intolerant groups and individuals (who stand as metonyms for systemic

---

[8]While right-wing politicians often publicly decry racist positions — the Reform Party, for instance, has ousted members for racist utterances or actions — I contend that such right-wing movements create an atmosphere of tolerance for extremist ideologies to proliferate. Therefore, while such mainstream parties may not espouse white supremacist slogans uttered by Aryan Nation and KKK groups, they *do* stand behind an ideology of white supremacy.

oppression) whom she designates as "queer" are not only homophobic but right-wing extremists on issues of race, gender, and class (to various degrees). This is to say, Mootoo remains conscious of racialized processes through this poem and her prologue, not as a separate issue, but as an included issue in the politics of queerness.[9] Mootoo's political gesture, humorous as it is, resonates with history and contemporary art practice. For instance, in a tight two-line succession, she states: "skinheads are queer. / the kkk is queer." For readers, activists, and others who are aware of the recent history of art and oppression, there are some immediate connections here. The term "skinheads" evokes everything from neo-nazi imagery to progressive anti-racist movements to gay desire to gay bashing to racial violence. Take, for example, the work of Attila Lukacs, much of which presents the image of the skinhead not only larger than life but far "queerer" than life; that is, the skinheads of Lukacs's art are fetishized as objects of gay male desire, reconfigured from positions of threat (or perhaps configured within those positions) as gay subjects:

> Despite introducing troubling symbols, Lukacs keeps the considerations of the real world at a distance in most of his works by often keeping his figures nude. Skinheads lose much of their visual effect without pants. As well, pictures of

---

[9]This refers back to Dei's concept of integrative anti-racism, the recognition that the fight against oppression must be conducted on many fronts, while it also utilizes the CRT concept of counterstorytelling to resist and reframe master narratives. And, as Keeling et al note, "many legal scholars writing on LGB questions have been influenced by larger trends in academia (especially critical legal theory and LGB studies)."

> groups of naked bald men still tend to invite giggles and nervous discomfort rather than fear and outrage, whatever their tattoos might say. (Klages, internet)

Given this particular moment of art history — Lukacs's work is currently very much in demand and known — Mootoo's comment that "skinheads are queer" is not so much a suggestion that the skinhead movement is an odd one (going back, once again, to the etymology of "queer"), but a reificatory statement alluding to Lukacs's skinheads and/or the image of skinheads through particular gay readings. Her three-word line, then, acts as both an enforcer of a (certain) truth and an act of opposition that plays off elements of schoolyard reaction: *I'm not queer* — you're *queer!*.

But to follow that sweeping queerification of the skinheads is the statement that the Ku Klux Klan is also queer. Here two neo-fascist groups are linked together not through right-wing extremism but through queerness. To further that link, both skinheads and the KKK are known for violence, to a certain degree homophobic but to a far greater degree racial. Most recently, skinheads in New Jersey have adopted the nickname "Dotbusters"[10]

---

[10]Read through a lens of popular culture, the term "Dotbusters" takes on even more sinister proportions. Clearly aligned with other "busters" drawn from commercial promotions for such items as "dustbusters" and Hollywood images of "Ghostbusters," the so-called "dot" can be seen as that-which-"we"-wish-to-rid-ourselves-of. This is to say, that which needs "busting" is the undesirable, the dirt, the indescribable — even the alien (i.e. ghosts don't "belong" in the world of the living). But the sinister builds on the sinister and here we have a complete anglicizing of the putative "problem," translated as it is from *bindi* to "dot." Traditionally, in Hindu society, the *bindi* is worn by married women and denotes a certain status which, again in traditional terms, would be respected. Here, the bindi-cum-dot works more

because of a number of violent events where skinheads have attacked traditionally-attired South Asian women wearing a *bindi* on their foreheads, part of a trend of increasing anti-Asian violence in the U.S. (B. Mukherjee 133).

Further to this, Uma Narayan notes that the immigration of South Asian people to the U.K.

> resulted in a national dyspepsia, whose most pronounced symptoms were Enoch Powell and the National Front, and the development of the pastime of "Paki-bashing," a sport now as English as cricket. Apparently, Macaulay's Anglicist hopes for the pedagogical production of brown Englishmen in the colonies failed to prevent a national blanching in the face of contemporary Indian immigration.[11] (173)

Similarly, the KKK — created in Tennessee by former Confederate army officers who gave their society a name adapted from the Greek word *kuklos* (circle) (Hedrick et al., internet) — is publicly perceived as an extremist group of white-hooded crackers from the deep south that terrorizes Black communities. To re-configure the KKK as queer, however, as Mootoo does in her poem, not only links its politics with the skinheads' of the preceding line, but does so disparagingly (i.e. as they are both queer they are not worth worrying about).

---

like a mark of Cain; that is, read through Dotbuster eyes, the bindi is seen as a sign of evil, of punishment, of the to-be-punished.

[11]Narayan refers here to the well-known quotation from Thomas Babbington Macaulay's "Minute on Indian Education" where he pronounces that a solidly British education would create "a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals and in intellect" (249).

However, this method of pushing the term "queer" into new terrain is something that Mootoo does in much further detail in her fictional work, particularly her 1996 novel, *Cereus Blooms at Night.* This next section shows how this novel continues to challenge the concept (if not the term) of queerness in highly charged and imaginative ways. Of particular note here is the close attention Mootoo pays, throughout the novel, to the complex matrices of identity that comprise a person and/or a people. As I mentioned above, this attention clearly follows the patterns outlined by advocates of Critical Race Theory (counterstorytelling), Integrative Anti-Racism (recognition of intersecting oppressions) and Anti-Racist Activism (bringing this work into a literary, historical, and material setting.)

II

What did you call me, again (again)? Re-naming, cross-dressing, and identity formation

In her first novel, *Cereus Blooms at Night,* Mootoo furthers this narrative of queerness, continuing to contextualize issues of sexuality with issues of race (and concomitant issues of colonialism and imperialism). Consider this reflection by Tyler, the novel's narrator:

> After much reflection I have come to discern that my desire to leave the shores of Lantanacamara had much to do with

> wanting to study abroad, but far more with wanting to be somewhere where my "perversion," which I tried diligently as I could to shake, might be either invisible or of no consequence to people to whom my foreignness was what would be strange. I was preoccupied with trying to understand what was natural and what perverse, and who said so and why. (47-48)

Here Tyler ascertains that emigration from the Caribbean (presumably to a "white" nation such as the U.K. which is what "study abroad" would be a euphemism for) would serve him well by making invisible what he perceives to be his obvious gay sexual identity. This would be accomplished, he surmises, because people abroad would be preoccupied by the strangeness of his "foreignness" and thereby ignore any signs of queer identity. Notwithstanding the apparent falseness of this assumption, inasmuch that people of colour who identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, and/or transgendered in white-dominant cultures often speak, as does Du Bois,[12] of a double-consciousness brought about by a double-oppression (rather than either racial or sexual identity being ignored), Tyler seems convinced that race can supplant sexuality in certain conditions.[13]

---

[12]Du Bois's notion of a double or dual consciousness, introduced in his *The Souls of Black Folks*, is one of the major reference points for critical race and cultural studies theorists.

[13]Film critic Kobena Mercer argues, however, that "rather than conceptualize our politics in terms of 'double' or 'triple' oppression, it should be seen as a hybridized form of political and cultural practice . . . at the intersections of power relations determined by race, class, gender, and sexuality" (239).

But there is a further twist to the issues of sexuality and race in Mootoo's novel. Tyler hears the story of Chandin Ramchandin who is extricated from his biological (Indo-Caribbean) family to live with the family of a white reverend who runs a seminary for Indo-Caribbean students. He hears how Chandin is "adopted," in a manner of speaking, into the Thoroughly family and ends up falling in love with the daughter, Lavinia. Chandin's affection is spurned, however, by Lavinia, and harshly rebuked by Lavinia's father who claims that Chandin and Lavinia should think of each other as brother and sister. Chandin ends up marrying and having two daughters by Sarah, a fellow Indo-Caribbean student and Lavinia's best friend. Tyler then hears how, some years later, after Lavinia breaks off her own engagement in the Shivering Northern Whetlands, she returns to Lantanacamara where she and Sarah fall in love and run off together. Chandin, utterly distraught by the fact that his wife leaves him for the woman he loved, turns to drink and begins to sexually abuse his two daughters.

What I find fascinating here, and why I choose to narrate this storyline which I will comment on later in greater detail, is the way Mootoo tells a very different story than the heterosexist construction of the origins of abuse. That is, a narrative repeated through popular media is that a gay or lesbian sexual identity is "caused" by the individual experiencing childhood sexual abuse. A standard internet search, for instance, produces several hundred sites that cross-reference "homosexuality" and "abuse," and most

present arguments, forcefully and with no evidence, such as: "[a]n extremely high number of homosexuals and lesbians are child molesters and were molested as children also" (Lewis); "the root of female homosexuality ... may be compounded by repressed trauma such as adoption and sexual abuse" (Saunders) and, "[while] abuse by itself does not cause lesbianism, it can certainly be found in the background of many lesbian women and has in many cases been a contributing factor to their orientation" ("Child"). While there are also refutations from psychology journals and related articles,[14] the appeal of such an erroneous causal relationship is reflected in popular media.

Based largely on ill-informed speculation and fear, such popular "sources" present the occurrence of childhood abuse as a primary cause for non-heterosexual identities — indeed any sexual identification outside of a heterosexual norm is attributed to some pathology.[15] Mootoo's novel, however, turns this notion on its ear: two women fall in love with each other and a man is left behind. This man, this *heterosexual* man, begins to abuse his children. I do not intend to suggest that Mootoo buys into a type of fictional foreshadowing whereby the actions of two lesbian lovers *cause* the sexual abuse of one of the partner's children; rather, I suggest that

---

[14]See Wajakowski's reference to the Brannock and Chapman study of 1990, finding that "[b]oth lesbians and heterosexual women reported the same number of traumatic experiences (incest, molestation, rape, physical abuse)." <http://vub.mcgill.ca/clubs/lbgtm/info/myth.html>

[15] I acknowledge that the sources here are extremely biased, most of them from a fundamentalist Christian and/or right-wing philosophy; however, what I am trying to show is the popular milieu in which Mootoo is writing.

the dominant perception of "child + sexual abuse = adult queerness" is subverted in the context of this novel.

But I return now to the last segment I quoted from Tyler's narrative, his preoccupation "with trying to understand what was natural and what perverse, and who said so and why." Read against a later statement where he talks about having "a shared queerness with Miss Ramchandin" (48), one of the abused sisters, Tyler's voice is one that at first seems ambivalent in its politics of sexuality. After all, although fundamentalist and moral majority circles might argue for a shared history between queer sexuality and surviving childhood sexual abuse, progressive critics and writers (such as Mootoo herself) would argue that such correlations have no bearing in reality.

However, I think it is important to note that in the earlier statement, Tyler does not so much talk of himself as *being* perverse as he does about being *perceived* as being perverse, this notion accentuated by the use of inverted commas around the word itself, a use of punctuation that "makes ironic," and, indeed, entirely subverts the meaning of the word in quotation marks.[16] Further, Tyler seems politically concerned not just with the concept of so-called perversion but with "who said so and why"; that is, who has the motivation and the power to ask such questions? As to the concept of the "shared queerness," I return to Mootoo's e-mail statement challenging the use of "queer" and its attendant politics:

---

[16]Linda Hutcheon discusses the problem and use of irony in *The Canadian Postmodern: A Study of Contemporary English-Canadian Fiction.*

"On a personal note, I basically have never ever been comfortable with being called queer which has become a catch all for lots" (e-mail). Responding, it would seem, to her own criticism, Mootoo allows the term "queer" to stand in, in the case of the novel and its narrator, for a) a person's gay or lesbian sexuality, *and* b) a person who has survived childhood sexual abuse. I would contend that it is such use of the term "queer" that radically questions how we read it, how we understand it to move, and how we choose to use it. I reflect back to the complicated series of "queerings" Mootoo performs in her poem, where the term "queer" becomes a "calling," not just one that hails someone into a gay or lesbian identity, but that challenges the use of the term itself.

As I mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, gay/lesbian/bisexual/transgendered people from communities of colour have often found it difficult, and often not desirable, to "fit in" to organizations or movements founded by and for white communities. Yet many such communities of colour find themselves in a curious double-bind: being told by straight and/or conservative communities of colour that they are unduly influenced, and thereby a product of, a "white" culture which is variously touted as having invented and/or actively promoted alternative sexualities; and being told by white gay/lesbian/bisexual/transgendered communities and organizations that, in order to have *any* supportive community, they should acquiesce to the demands and rules laid down by these

"queer" white communities.[17] This double-bind becomes a type of push-pull relationship, whereby communities of colour who profess sexualities that are not straight are subjected to various interpellations by communities *with which they share some common bond.*

This last point is crucial. Although queer white communities might be, for instance, condemned by a white right-wing fundamentalist movement, "whiteness" often functions invisibly. This leads critic Richard Dyer to the following paradox: "Whites must be seen to be white, yet whiteness as race resides in invisible properties and whiteness as power is maintained by being unseen" (45). The paradox rests in the desire for whites to be *seen as* white, and yet to be invisible *through* their whiteness. Thus, the conflict between (white) right-wing fundamentalists and (white) queer activists is not discussed through racial parameters. Rather, it is seen (by a public which is constituted of white communities and communities of colour) as the dispute over sexuality, sexual identity, and alternative sexual practice. Race, in this case, is not an issue; or, rather, race is not brought into discussion as an issue. An example of this is the annual controversy over the presence of a float celebrating gay identity in New York's St. Patrick's Day Parade. Each year gay Irish Americans seek to place a float addressing their

---

[17]Pratibha Parmar writes: "we have had to constantly negotiate and challenge the racism of the white gay community, and at the same time confront the homophobia of communities of colour" (5) and Kobena Mercer comments on "our lived experiences of discrimination in and exclusion from the white gay and lesbian community, and of discrimination in and exclusions from the black community" (239).

sexual identity in the parade and each year the parade organizers deny that request. I would argue that the public discussion around this issue is constructed upon a gay-straight dichotomy and the fact that these are both white constituencies is never brought into play. Certainly, however, the issue of race is omnipresent, as this homophobic exclusion simultaneously refutes the legitimacy of queer white identity and *possibility* of queer non-white identity.

This (im)possibility of queer identity outside of whiteness is reflected *within* communities of colour. The question of queer[18] communities of colour and the issue of *sharing a common bond*, inevitably means that queers of colour are "called" by their various communities of colour as buying into (or selling out to) whiteness. Note that, for the most part, white queers will be called by their various communities as buying into, not white, but queer values. Again, whiteness remains unstated. Yet that common bond, as I mentioned before, also provides an uneasy link between queers of colour and white queers. Uneasy because, like many social justice movements which are founded with an existing power balance already in play, those who have the most *relative* power in general society tend to have the most power within these movements. This means, for instance, that in the American civil rights movement, those with power at first tended to be white men, albeit white men

---

[18]Here I am adopting the practice of using the term "queer" to stand in for alternative sexualities of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered peoples. I am aware, however, of earlier cautionary notes I have made against the popularization of queer theory that separates this identity category from lived experience.

who were fighting for racial justice. When Black people gained more power within the movement, the straight Black men tended to be the ones who had the most influence[19] — straight women, gay men, lesbians, not to mention those without varying amounts of class privilege, were designated lesser roles in the movement.

Thus, queers of colour who were and are allowed access to generally white queer movements are given such access at the expense, often enough, of their racial history. That is, queers of colour are allowed in, but issues of race, if discussed at all, are discussed as if they are *variables* of the queer movement, notwithstanding that the parameters of the queer movement have already been defined as white. As Pratibha Parmar notes: "[a]s a lesbian I have searched in vain for images of lesbians of color on the screen but I very quickly realized that they exist only in my own imagination" (6). Her self-proclaimed task, then, is to create and make available such images. But, as she and Kobena Mercer point out, this was only possible through the development of organizations that focussed on queer artists of colour. Again, the double-bind is at work, resulting frequently in queers of colour forming their own space to discuss issues of their own concern, forged from their own experiences even when those experiences are not entirely "foreign" to the white queer movement (e.g., coming out to family, queer-bashing, queer rights).

---

[19] See Hull et al for their historical accounting of the Black Civil Right movement and feminism: *All the women are white, all the blacks are men, but some of us are brave: Black Women's Studies.*

The above analysis is a prelude to my reading of Mootoo's *Cereus Blooms at Night* and her construction of various formations of queer desire within communities of colour. What I aim to suggest is that Mootoo plays out some very interesting strategies of sexual identity that end up "queering" all kinds of people in ways she mentions in her e-mail commentary on her poem. To begin with, however, I want to take up a moment of identity (re)formation that occurs early in the novel and is not directly about or around sexual identity, but which sets the stage for later acts of re-naming. Chandin Ramchandin is the young boy who is essentially removed from his Indo-Trinidadian family and "adopted" by the aptly named Reverend Thoroughly, a white missionary who sets up a school on the fictional Caribbean island of Lantanacamara (in the town of Paradise) for Indo-Trinidadian students. Consider the implications discussed by the island residents:

> "But that child lucky! What is the family name again?"
> "Ramchandin. The child name Chandin. Chandin Ramchandin."
> "Well, the father and wife lucky!"
> "You think so? I hear they did have to convert. That was the condition if they wanted the child to go to school. I can't do that. No, I just don't want to do that."
> "What you talking? What you mean you don't want to do that! If it is the only way for your child to get education and not have to work like a horse sweating and breaking back in the hot sun for hardly nothing, you wouldn't convert? I will say my piece now. Listen. Since the Africans let go from slavery, all eyes on how the government treating them. It have commissions from this place and from that place making sure the government don't just neglect them. They have schools, they have regular and free medical inspection. Now, you see any schools set up for our children, besides the Reverend's

> school? . . . All he want from us is that we convert to his religion. If I had children, I would convert!" . . .
> And so the news of Chandin's fortune spread, and even before he entered the Reverend's seminary he was unwittingly helping to convert Indians to Christianity. (28-29)

I first want to comment briefly on the naming[20] of the character. When queried as to the "family name," that is the surname, the anonymous island resident reminds us that the child's given name, Chandin, comprises part of the family name, Ramchandin. Not too much later, this act of naming itself comes into question. But connected to this is the issue of conversion to Christianity, a tradeoff expected by the Reverend not just of Chandin but of his entire family as a precondition of Chandin's acceptance into the mission school. Note, too, how prevailing social conditions for Indo-Caribbeans convince not just at least one of the two speakers in the above excerpt, but many of the islanders, to convert as well.

Thus, the so-called salvation of the soul becomes not just a religious issue, but an economic one. Additionally, this position becomes borne out of a desperation that is actually encouraged by a colonizing divide-and-rule strategy. Since the African people were released from slavery, notes one of the speakers, the position of the Indo-Caribbean people is *relatively* worse off since the ruling

---

[20]"Uncommon names can generate hostility that can be a severe handicap," writes Regina Austen. "I like to think that the names are in part an expression of group solidarity and self-affirmation, and not the by-product of the mothers' unfamiliarity with and isolation from the dominant group" (435).

government must now deal with ex-slaves who have attained a different status (although not with the full rights of citizenship), and the formerly indentured labourers of Indian descent find themselves in competition with the ex-slaves for what little resources are available to people of colour on the colonized island.

Mootoo continues:

> A name change for Chandin was briefly discussed by the Reverend and his wife. Mrs. Thoroughly thought that a Christian, if not Wetlandish name, was more suitable for a son of theirs. Chandin was eager to have his Indian name replaced. Mrs. Thoroughly suggested Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John.... The thoughtful Reverend, however, suggested that Chandin Ramchandin would one day be a Christian teacher, theologian and missionary whose success in the field would be due, certainly to the blessings of God, but also to the novel idea that people were most likely to be swayed by one of their own kind. (30)

His Christian education, together with his new home and wealthy surroundings, begins to fill Chandin with an "immense distaste for his background and the people in it" (31-32). This amounts to a certain amount of self-loathing as well, which would account for how eager Chandin is to have his name replaced with not just a Westernized name, but with one that comes straight out of the New Testament. Keep in mind that changing his given name, which is part of his surname, is tantamount to forcing Chandin to relinquish his identity and family history in favour of a more favoured, Christian, and whiter one. Equally important is that the Reverend maintains Chandin's Indian name not out of any respect for a

family history or tradition, but because maintaining the Hindu name will, thinks the Reverend, give Chandin more influence in converting his people to Christianity.

However, through his "adoption" into the Thoroughly household — and I emphasize the artificial nature of the adoption since Chandin's Indian-ness prevents him from actually becoming thoroughly incorporated by the Thoroughlys — Chandin is given a certain status that is used for racist ends by the Reverend. That is, when Chandin's romantic interest in the Thoroughly's daughter, Lavinia, becomes quite obvious, the Reverend takes him aside: "Do we not feel like a family to you?" (36) the Reverend asks Chandin, followed by: "I have, in good faith, taken on the role of your father. Mrs. Thoroughly has done a good job of being a mother to you, hasn't she?" and then, finally, much to Chandin's despair: "Look here. You are to be a brother to Lavinia and nothing more. A brother. She is your sister and you her brother . . . . You cannot, you must not have desire for your sister Lavinia. That is surely against God's will" (37).

Thus, the Reverend puts a new spin on the old racist adage that *I have nothing against brown/black people, but I wouldn't want my sister to marry one* by admonishing Chandin, the dark son, not to marry his *own* sister, even though the Reverend uses such familial relationships merely to ensure his family remains white. Chastised, Chandin seeks out Lavinia to tell her of his love, to which she responds with language similar to her father's: "You are

nothing more than my brother" and "I disapprove and do not consent" (41). However, as readers we may at this point feel compelled to see Lavinia as her father's child, full of racism and anti-miscegenist fervour, we are later to see differently. Stung by Lavinia's refusal, and upon hearing of her impending marriage to a white Wetlands man, Chandin decides to marry Sarah, another Indo-Caribbean student at the mission school and Lavinia's best friend.

As I mentioned earlier in this chapter, Lavinia breaks off her engagement and returns to Lantanacamara where she renews her friendship with Sarah and becomes a loving aunt to Chandin's and Sarah's two daughters. The twist in the plot, however, occurs when one of the daughters, Pohpoh, discovers that her mother and her "aunt" have become lovers. In a gothic-description, Sarah and Lavinia decide to run off together, attempting to take the girls with them, only to be foiled by Chandin who returns home early and drags his daughters back into the house. What is troublesome about this scene is that, following this violent conflict, Sarah and Lavinia disappear from the novel, never to be heard of again. Thus, the only lesbian couple in the novel, shortly after proclaiming their love for one another, fade off into that proverbial sunset. What might trouble readers[21] is that after Sarah and Lavinia are forced to leave the two daughters behind with Chandin they never

---

[21] Several students in a class I taught in 1998 on "Racialized Writing in Canada" read Mootoo's novel and contended, in their journals, that the abandonment of children by a mother comprised a serious moral flaw.

attempt to contact them again. True, this places the lovers on a mythic plane whereby they *could* be enjoying a fulfilling existence in their new lives together, but it creates an unsettled response precisely because of what mothers "should" do: namely, stay with their children, or at least bring their children with them should they be forced to leave. Of course, what creates an even more troubled reading is that, although Sarah could not have imagined this consequence, leaving her children with Chandin makes them vulnerable to sexual abuse from their father.

I want to use this episode to move into a discussion of the so-called "queer" characters that *do* remain as the novel develops. Further, I want to link the construction of these characters — most notably Nurse Tyler and Otoh (Ambrosia) Mohanty — to my earlier discussion of queer communities of colour and Mootoo's sensibility of what "queerness" is and how it performs. Early in the novel, we have fairly clear indications of Tyler's sexuality, signs noted by his colleagues in the nursing home where he works. Being the only man on Lantanacamara in what is clearly designated as a "woman's" profession, Tyler is assigned menial cleaning chores rather than duties more befitting his nursing training. This, too, causes him problems when, for instance, the handyman whom he is assisting "made no effort to hide his disdain for [his] ways. At the end of the ordeal he told [him] plainly that he was going to leave the job if he was ever put to work with this pansy again" (10).

At times, Tyler curbs the utterance of his sexual desire, as when the ambulance attendants come to the home bearing Mala Ramchandin on a stretcher: "[h]e gave the impression of having Herculean size and strength, and a rustle of not-so-discreet ooohs and ahhhs came from the gathered nurses. I was in full agreement with their admiration but I, more prudently, merely smiled good-naturedly" (9). At other times, Tyler's sexuality is tinged with a sadness and futility, as when the gardener, John Hector, tries to give him the clipping from a plant:

> "Well, you want it? Take it, na. It pick already. No sense it go to waste."
>
> It was an awkward moment, for no sooner had he offered it than he became uncomfortable. His eyes, whose aqueous tranquility I was noticing for the first time, now glanced across the yard.
>
> "I don't mean nothing by that, you know! I mean, don't take it the wrong way. I married and thing. I not funny, you know. Is just that the thing picked already—" (69)

Unlike other characters, like Toby the handyman and some of the nurses, who are pronounced in their homophobia, John Hector, all the while professing his heterosexuality ("I not funny, you know"), is nonetheless unwilling to withdraw his gesture of kindness toward Tyler. This is an important moment because, we are to find out later, although John might not be "funny," his brother, with whom he has long since lost contact, *is* gay. The importance of this information is to keep the character of Tyler from being isolated as an anomaly, perhaps even read as a character who *learns* to be gay by studying abroad, which would absolve this particular South

Asian community the responsibility of dealing with "white" issues of homosexuality and homophobia.

Indeed, the effect on Tyler is profound when John Hector does confide in him about his brother:

> "He was kind of funny. He was like you. The fellas in the village used to threaten to beat he up. People used to heckle he and mock his walk and the way he used to do his hands when he was talking."
>
> That he was brave enough to say it suddenly lifted a veil between us. Unexpectedly. I felt relief it was voiced and out in the open. I had never before know such a feeling of ordinariness. (73).

Tyler's response to John's taking him into confidence explores numerous modes of "outness." First, the veil between the two men is lifted, a connection between them is forged; second, with Tyler's relief is a sense of something being "out in the open"; and third, Tyler experiences a "feeling of ordinariness," again a stated goal in queer activism, to cease the stigmatization attached to queer identity. But working in an interesting parallel to the main narrative of the novel, John's brother is delivered by their mother to the "church mission down south," which can be read as a placing of "queerness" *into* the church, *into* the West, from a place most decidedly South Asian. Again, this subverts the wrongly-placed notion that homosexuality is imported from sources white and Western into communities of colour. Such a notion, as alluded to by critics such as Parmar, Mercer, and Rashid, maintains the ideological separation between gay/lesbian identity (configured as

white) and the "of colour" identity (configured as straight and often hypo/hyper sexualized).[22]

While I may have focussed too earnestly on this interchange between Tyler and John, I think it is worth noting that it is *during* their discussion that Mala Ramchandin, Tyler's charge, wanders off and, inspired by this conversation about sexual identity, re-appears carrying a gift for Tyler: "She whipped the bundle from behind her and revealed a nurse's white uniform and a pair of nylon stockings the colour of black tea. She offered me the dress. My first thought was that we would surely get into trouble" (75). Yet Tyler recognizes the importance of this event to the otherwise withdrawn Mala Ramchandin. He asks her:

> "Do you want that uniform?"
> She said nothing but now I knew there was more in her head than bird and cricket and frog imitations and childhood chants.
> "Well, do you want to wear it?" I asked, using a tone of gentle defiance to match hers. There was no harm in a little indulgence as long as we could get the uniform back on the clothesline before morning.
> "You." She looked at the ground.
> "Me? Me what?"
> "You. You want to wear it." She produced it from behind her back again, shook it out and held it toward me. "You want to wear it." (76)

---

[22] Richard Fung's article, "Looking for My Penis: The Eroticized Asian in Gay Video Porn," shows how Asians have been variously "seen as Oriental and therefore sexless" and as "having an undisciplined and dangerous libido" (147).

Here we have a different form of naming, an articulation by Mala Ramchandin which re-genders Tyler. Although it may be simplistic to suggest that clothes make the gender, so to speak, in this case Tyler "metamorphoses" from a man to a woman: "My behind felt flesh and rounded. I had thighs, a small mound of belly, rounded full breasts and a cavernous tunnel singing between my legs" (76). Once he actually wears the dress, however, his initial feelings are far from liberating:

> At first I felt horribly silly, like a man who had put on women's clothing for sheer sport and had forgotten to remove the outfit after the allotted period of fun. I felt flat-footed and clumsy. Not a man and not ever able to be a woman, suspended nameless in the limbo state between existence and non-existence.(77)

What begins for Tyler as an enticing prospect becomes a bit of self-mockery. He is wearing the (female) nurse's outfit, but sees himself as a fraud. Further, his is a type of existential angst like that expressed by the stereotype of transgendered individuals who talk of being "trapped" in a body of the wrong gender.[23] Yet for Tyler it becomes a suspension not just between genders but "between

---

[23] In her essay, "The 'Empire' Strikes Back: A Posttranssexual Manifesto," Sandy Stone writes that transsexuals wishing male-to-female surgery, while cognizant that the performance of gender was more complicated than posited by an either-or dichotomy, were nonetheless forced to acknowledge such a binarism in order to qualify for surgery. Thus, "they unambiguously expressed Benjamin's original criterion in its simplest form: The sense of being in the 'wrong' body," although, as Stone wryly notes, those transsexuals wanting surgery had only to read the only textbook on the subject of transsexualism, Harry Benjamin's definitive 1966 work, *The Transsexual Phenomenon*, " which was passed from hand to hand within the transsexual community, and they were only too happy to provide the behavior that led to acceptance for surgery."

existence and non-existence," as if his very being depends on "fitting" the dress Cinderella-like. But what becomes the ultimate reinforcing revelation for Tyler is Mala's seeming lack of concern with the way he looks: "The reason Miss Ramchandin paid me no attention was that, to her mind, the outfit was not something to either congratulate or scorn — it simply was. She was not one to manacle nature, and I sensed that she was permitting mine its freedom" (77). Assisted by Mala Ramchandin — whose own life history, we come to realize, goes a long way toward understanding her caregiver — Tyler senses that she recognizes and validates his sense of self. But whether Tyler is then revealed to himself (or, perhaps, liberated as himself) as gay or transgendered is not as important here as the act of negotiation of that identity facilitated by Mala Ramchandin.

Later, she also acts as a sort of conduit for Tyler's relationship with Otoh Mohanty. Tyler first perceives Otoh, standing beside his father, Ambrose: "the young man at his side was tall and slim. At one glance he had the angularity and sprightliness of a girl reluctantly on the verge of becoming a woman, and at the next the innocent feyness of a young boy who would never quite grow into the glove of manhood" (100-01). In a way, this whimsical description is a very literal portrayal of Otoh who was, we find out later, born a girl named Ambrosia who, because of the lack of "male-ness" in the family, decides to become a boy. Quite literally, then, Otoh/Ambrosia *is* "a girl reluctantly on the verge of becoming

a woman," although, arguably, s/he is a young woman always at the precipice of becoming a young man. Tyler becomes quite fond of Otoh, whom he perceives to be a young man. We have, then, the following pair of characters: the first is Nurse Tyler, variously described as "funny" and perceived as being gay *and*, through the assistance and insistence of Mala Ramchandin, garbed in clothes that usually signify the wearer as a woman; the second is Otoh Mohanty, who is born to parents Elsie and Ambrose *as* a girl whose "arrival in the midst of one of his (*her*, then) parents' regular tirades profoundly affected all three. . . . By the time Ambrosia was five, her parents were embroiled in their marital problems to the exclusion of all else, including their child. They hardly noticed that their daughter was transforming herself into their son" (109). This act of cross-gendered identification is supported by a collective will of amnesia in a community that is perfectly happy to watch Ambrosia transmogrify into Otoh (abetted by the fact that Otoh's father, Ambrose, is really only awake one day per month, and then only to take provisions to his true loved one, Mala Ramchandin). Through a complex series of relationships — Mala Ramchandin pining for the loss of her sister, Asha, and, indeed, her own child-self of Poh-poh; Ambrose Mohanty pining for the loss of Mala as his lover; Elsie Mohanty pining for the loss of her husband and therefore "hungry for a male in the house" (110) — the girl Ambrosia turns herself into the boy Otoh so convincingly that "Elsie soon apparently forgot she had ever given birth to a girl [and

Ambrose] seemed not to remember that he had once fathered one" (110).

What seems useful to a political reading of this text, in terms of race and sexuality, is that such a gender-switching, a re-naming and re-establishing of one's self, so to speak, is accomplished with relatively few problems:

> Hours of mind-dulling exercise streamlined Ambrosia into an angular, hard-boiled creature and tampered with the flow of whatever hormonal juices defined him. So flawless was the transformation that even the nurse and doctor who attended the birth, on seeing him later, marvelled at their carelessness in having declared him a girl.
>
> Ambrosia's obviously vivid imagination gave him both the ability to imagine many sides of a dilemma (and if it weren't already a dilemma, of turning it into one) and the vexing inability to make up his mind. Ever since the days of early high school, where he excelled in thinking but not in doing, this trait of weighing "on the one hand" with "but on the other" earned him a name change. (110)

Here, Ambrosia bends and finally switches gender simply by articulating herself as a male, that is, by doing male things. But this leaves Ambrosia the vestiges of "both" genders, read here as an ability to see things from "one hand" and the "other," a predilection for "double-vision" that earns him/her a name derived acronymously from his/her expression, "on the other hand." Indeed, it is just when Ambrosia/Otoh is on the verge of defining his/her sexuality through the *act* of sexuality with a woman — fully recognizing that, despite his/her relative lack of interest in the woman he/she is certainly interested in exploring sexuality even if

it means "risk[ing] the wrath of Paradise" (111) — Ambrosia/Otoh is pressed into service due to the injury of her/his father who was on his monthly delivery to Mala Ramchandin. Pulled suddenly away from his/her first sexual encounter, Otoh becomes embroiled in the patterns surrounding Mala Ramchandin and her/his own father.

Later, in explaining this enchantment to Tyler, Otoh says that, unlike other townsfolk, he had no intention of bothering Mala Ramchandin:

> "Everyone used to fraid Miss Ramchandin . . . but I was the only one who used to go up into her yard, not to torment the lady, but to take food for her, and I wanted her to know that I wasn't frightened and I didn't have a bad mind for her. I didn't want her to think I was like everybody else" (124)

he tells Tyler. "You really aren't, you know," (124) Tyler responds. This articulation of difference, a shared difference, encourages Otoh to continue:

> "I felt as though she and I had things in common. She had secrets and I had secrets. Somehow I wanted to go there and take off all my clothes and say, 'Look! See? See all this? *I am different!* You can trust me, and I am showing you that you are the one person I will trust.'" (124)

It is this sharing of gender secrets that, read through the earlier renamings of Chandin and Mala, allows Tyler — and, through extension and identification, the reader — to recognize the importance of slipping back and forth between, in this case gendered identities, but also identity-formations of various kinds. And, unlike the resistance encountered earlier in the novel when gender or sexual difference was articulated, as Ambrose watches

the friendship between Tyler and Otoh grow he openly acknowledges and implicitly approves of the fondness between them: "'Mr. Tyler appears to be painting his face more diligently as time goes by,' [Tyler] heard him whisper — albeit loudly — to Otoh. 'My boy, I think Mr. Tyler fancies you, wouldn't you agree? Then he whispered more softly, 'He is a Mr., isn't he?'" (125). Knowing, although this knowledge is apparently erased with time, that his son was born a daughter, Ambrose easily questions whether the effeminate Tyler, who is becoming more womanly in appearance, is actually a man.

Similarly, Elsie, noticing that something is bothering Otoh surmises that her "son" wants to settle down and suggests a girl that might be interested in him. Otoh is at first "thrilled" that his mother has apparently so fully accepted him as a man, and indeed she has in all aspects except the biological. She seeks confirmation from Otoh that his supposed bride-to-be knows that "you don't have anything between those two stick legs of yours? Don't watch me so. You think because I never say anything that I forget what you are? You are my child, child. I just want to know if she know" (237). She then confirms her acceptance of Otoh: "You think I am stupid or what? Now the fact of the matter is that you are not the first or the only of your kind in this place" (237). Elsie Mohanty here suggests, as John Hector did earlier, that issues of alternative sexuality and/or transgendered realities are not unique in the community, and her insistence on approaching Otoh's girlfriend's

mother to arrange a marriage suggests that, far from being ostracized, Otoh would be accepted as a valuable member of the community. What is interesting is Mootoo's construction of a type of community that is highly supportive of alternative sexualities, a construction that, while it may not be borne out in a material reality, becomes easily acceptable in this fictional space.

Tyler, meanwhile, further explores his own transgendered reality: "Lately restraint and I have been hostile strangers to one another. . . . I have powdered my nose on days that were not visiting days" (246). His confidence in his own sexuality builds, at least in part, because of his budding relationship with Otoh. There is no mention in the novel of Elsie Mohanty's reaction to this relationship, nor does she seem aware that as she sets up Otoh with a straight woman, his father is busy setting him up with a gay man. In the final visit by Otoh and his father to the Paradise Alms House, Tyler describes himself and the ensuing scene:

> I wore lip colour more thickly than usual, shades brighter than my dark lips. With powder I blotted the shine that tends to develop on my nose and cheeks on hot days. I tied a flower-patterned scarf around my neck, and on my temples I daubed enough scent to make a Puritan cross his legs and swoon. Miss Mala grinned and clapped her hands when I entered her room. She squealed when I pulled the nurse's uniform from behind her dresser and put it on.
>
> They arrived. I could hardly look him in the eyes, suddenly thinking I was about to cross a line. . . .
>
> We walked slowly to a bench. I could see the nurses had come to a halt and were watching us. I held my head high. (248)

Tyler has crossed a line in front of his work colleagues, of the man he wants to impress, and even of himself. All in all, the expressions of racial and queer (and/or transgendered) self-awareness and desire that are presented in *Cereus Blooms at Night* are multiple and complicated. But it is this last image of transgendered relationships that I find the most compelling and complicated of all. Through an organic development, however fantastical the individual components, the characters of Otoh and Tyler are drawn out (as detailed individuals) and drawn "out" (in terms of sexuality) as the novel progresses. Perhaps the inspiration is the almost legendary cross-racial lesbian love story of Lavinia Thoroughly and Sarah Ramchandin, two people who redefined who they were through their love for each other.

But with Otoh and Tyler we have the following somewhat surprising scenario: the girl, Ambrosia, convinced that her mother wants a (conscious) man around the house, converts herself into a boy and then a man, cross-dressing from youth and going as far as to have sexual (but, as is suggested by his relationship with Mavis, non-genital) relationships with women; Tyler, apparently cognizant from the beginning of the novel of his gay identity, finding the courage through Mala Ramchandin and Otoh Mohanty to take on feminine attributes and to finally "cross a line" to a transgendered identity. What is most fascinating in terms of "queerness," however, is the visual reading that we encounter at the novel's end: Otoh as the gentlemanly masculine suitor and Tyler as the

feminine nurse, courting his affections. Tropes of straightness have been turned upside-down, queered in some very literal ways in that the woman plays the man, the man plays the woman, the sexualites of both of them so far articulated in the novel are that of lesbian and gay respectively, and yet here they are almost in each others' arms like some scene out of *Twelfth Night.*

Judith Butler writes that "if to identify as a woman is not necessarily to desire a man, and if to desire a woman does not necessarily signal the constituting presence of a masculine identification, whatever that is, then the heterosexual matrix proves to be an *imaginary* logic that insistently issues forth its own unmanageability" (239). Mootoo, then, does not create or suggest a new queering project; rather, she points to the relative illogic (or unmanageability) of heterosexual normative values. She is also able to exemplify how "the homophobic terror over performing homosexual acts . . . is also a terror over losing *proper gender*" (Butler 238, my italics). It is this "proper gender," this sense of gender performed as it "should" be, that Mootoo challenges through this relationship between Otoh and Tyler and their movements through gender roles.

To bring this section to a close, I return to Mootoo's earlier comments on what "queerness" represents. In her poem, she articulates various forms of identities that, to her, are "queer," that is, odd in their manifold forms of intolerance. Here, at the end of this novel, she presents the *visual* aspects of straightness (and not

just "straight," but a type of *exemplary* straightness in terms of rigid gendered roles, ultra masculine and feminine roles), and yet she presents this level of straightness as ultimately queer. To sum up then, straight is queer. Without falling into the pitfalls of tautology, then, what can we make of "queer"? I would suggest that presenting such a "straight" scene and "queering" it, Mootoo leaves us with the resolution that the identities of sexuality forged by the characters of *Cereus* are complex and independent of white, straight identities.

III
Re-envisioning and other acts of elision

I want to return now to the poet whose critical words begin this chapter: Ian Iqbal Rashid, a gay South Asian poet, curator, critic, and activist. As I mentioned before, Rashid was a founding member of Khush, the gay South Asian collective which was, with Rashid as a driving force, responsible for initiating Desh Pardesh, now the largest South Asian festival of its kind (with a politically progressive cultural focus) in the world. I think it is important, if not imperative, to locate Rashid in such a way for it is this locating (as defined through histories and actions) which serves to position racialized writers *as* racialized writers. Such locating also helps me to read this poetry through the political framework he works from.

I will look at Rashid's politics of positioning through a poem in his most recent book before focussing on another poem which appears, in different versions, in both of his full-length poetry books. "Coming to Canada" (43) appears on the page, like many of the other poems in *The Heat Yesterday*, in prose-format with left and right justified margins. As part of a suite entitled "Knowing Your Place," whose other poems make references to Africa, India, and Scotland in their titles, this is the first poem to bring in a Canadian context. But the content of this poem is not what might be expected, an immigrant's arrival at or passage to Canada. Instead, this is the Canada of the "international" imagination, a land of wilderness, wildness, nature.

"This drive to nature confounds me" reads the first line of the poem. The self-referential pronoun reappears through the poem: "the kindness of strangers who brought me here"; "the quiver of light and shade . . . unmood me"; "this nature reminds me holds me unables me to claim this." Already having located the poet (and the poet's voice) as South Asian — and because I share a similar racial history — I find myself reading this "me" as a racialized (South Asian) man. But I am dislocated by reading of the aversion to nature, forcing me to recognize the different processes of racialization that construct us as South Asian men in Canada. That is, raised in an urban centre but relatively sparsely populated province, I am *comforted* by the same "drive to nature" that "confounds" the poetic voice. However, when I come to the line,

which functions as a full and separate sentence near the end of the poem, I experience a different reality: "*Pakis live in suburbs, pakis live in ghettos.*" In that short sentence resides a wealth of information, pointing to historical patterns of ghettoization and containment of immigrant and/or racialized populations. Both ghettos and suburbs suggest spaces of containment and, while they signify quite differently — ghettos generally refer to inner cities and lower economic/social status whereas suburbs generally refer to a middle class reality outside the centres of cities — they are both points of recognized reference for racialized peoples. As Bhabha writes, "it is to the city that the migrants, the minorities, the diasporic come [and] it is the city which provides the space in which emergent identifications and new social movements of the people are played out" (*Location* 169-70).

What I find invaluable in Rashid's work is that, as I reflect upon my own South Asian/middle-class/suburban background, I read this poem as a *de*homogenizing force so necessary for racialized writers to articulate. That is, I find myself disagreeing with Rashid's generalization about where "pakis live," a disagreement that is at once liberating and connecting, for it allows me to rise up against homogenizing impositions (from racialized practices and histories) while finding a curious delight in differentiating myself from this "South Asian" text. Kobena Mercer notes that the struggle to imagine a politicized/racialized community begins with the "transformation from 'I' to 'we" (238),

from the isolated individual to the *sense* of community belonging. But further along that process, and equally important, is the recognition that such communities are monolithic neither spatially nor temporally, that any putative "we" is constantly "negotiating a plurality of different spaces" (240).

I should stress here that I do not believe Rashid's poetic voice to be one that *generally* generalizes. Quite to the contrary, his voice tends to shift between particularities, allowing the reader of colour or white reader to find various places of connection. The poem "Another Country," for instance, draws on popular culture — the televised version of Paul Scott's *The Raj Quartet* — to create what I would call variously triangulated readings:

> Now I watch you watch Sergeant Merrick watch poor Hari Kumar. And follow as the white man's desire is twisted, manipulated into a brutal beating. You are affected by the actor's brown sweating body, supple under punishment. What moves you? . . . . A private fantasy promised, exploding within every bead of sweat? Or is it the knowledge of later: how my body will become supple for you, will curve and bow to your wishes as yours can never quite bend to mine. (34)

The triangles appear in two ways: the first, more obvious, is the relationship between the narrative persona, his lover, and the colonial gaze occurring on the screen; the second, more hidden, is that of the physical poem, the reader, and his/her knowledge of the televised mini-series. The gaze suggested in these triangulations is multi-directioned but emphasizes distinct hegemonies. The narrator, even as he gazes upon his white lover, recognizes the political and racialized power wielded by whiteness. The narrator

will become Hari Kumar to his white lover's Sergeant Merrick, and it is this unconscious expression of racial desire/oppression that is brought to painful visibility.

But it is this second version of triangulation suggested that I find even more intriguing. The straight, the gay, the white, the "of colour," the South Asian, the male, the female readers of this poem will find themselves variously implicated, erased, and targeted by "Another Country." And even while the poem's narrator is in a potential position of being exploited, it is his recognition of this fact that challenges this hegemony. The reader, then, whatever her/his position, is similarly challenged to negotiate his/her own presence and absence in the poem. The question that might be posed is: how do I see or not see myself in this poem and how does that affect my political/historical/social responsibility for the conditions described? However, this cannot be read as a simple "blame" or "colonizer=bad, colonized=good" poem as indicated by the narrator's self-positioning: "Yet this is also part of my desire." Further, I would suggest that the importance of agency, defined as a fluid (not fixed) sense of self-awareness and self-action, is highly present in the process of the poem, as it changes from its initial version in *Black Markets, White Boyfriends* to its revised inclusion in *The Heat Yesterday*. For instance, a title shift from "An/other Country" to "Another Country," alters the reader's entrance into the poem. Commenting on this title-change, Rashid writes:

> Partly I de-po-mo'd because it was a strategy that seemed more acceptable a few years ago and has become overused

> and kind of irritating. It seems to alienate readers more than help them into a poem. Also the need to isolate the word 'other' seems unnecessary. That sense of distance and difference is already there in the poem and the title 'Another Country' itself. (e-mail).

Here Rashid moves from a politics of naming that was (and in some situations still is) current in literary, visual, and other cultural art practice. What self-respecting cultural organizer in the 1980s, for instance, did not get away without a slash or two (and the occasional parenthetical prefix) in a conference or festival title? And in moving with the times, so to speak, Rashid allows his particular brown gaze to fall on the now-undivided phrase, "another country" (the same two words, incidentally, used by Sadhu Binning in his poem "No More Watno Dur" from his book of the same name). It is such a return gaze, I suggest, that is in keeping with what Razack calls an interruption of that totalizing moment of the hegemonic forces where "white gazes are returned by subordinate groups" (*Looking* 15).

Another obvious edit Rashid makes is from definitive line-breaks to a less staccato prosaic structure creating a fluidity in the revision not present in the original:

> I wanted prose because the line breaks in the original always seemed arbitrary, they weren't adding any other dimensions to the poem. And throughout the new book I wanted to try and write in prose, to create miniature narratives (rather than write traditional prose poems) and 'Another Country' seemed to lend itself to that strategy. I felt that the stories and ideas/issues I was writing about required easier access to the readership that I imagined for my work — many of whom

> claim (from readings, teaching etc.) that they are alienated or even frightened by poetry. I hope that doesn't sound patronising but the whole thing was an attempt to create spaces on the page that seemed less intimidating, more friendly, while still maintaining a distance from traditional narrative fiction. (e-mail)

And, finally, there are certain word-edits that bear discussion. The last line of the original, a poetic play on the supposed "survival advice" given by Queen Victoria to her daughter on her wedding night, reads: "I must close my eyes and think of England," reflecting an order that "must" be obeyed. However, in the revised version, the "must" is deleted, an omission which heralds a further complicity but also a greater sense of self-control exercised by the narrator. Yet both versions hold within them an interesting re-taking of identity. This brown, gay man, submitting to his white, male lover, shares a position similar to the memsahibs of the British Raj, reflected in the Victorian concern for nationalism even at the expense of the body. Both submit to their male sexual partners. But more interesting in this shared position, to me, is the vastly different positions of relative power between a gay brown man and a white memsahib. The former, in terms of a social status designated by race and sexuality, is subject to various forms of oppression, both material and pyschological. The latter, while certainly subject to her husband and, perhaps, controlled by him, exercises considerably more social power in her role as a white woman living in India during the British Raj.

Therefore, the "I" of "Another Country" is, in a sense, taking the power of that memsahib onto himself. In itself this is not a wholly desirable position as it consists of a type of self-fetishizing and self-disempowerment, but it also proposes a type of anti-racist action in *becoming* the woman who, through her British-ness and certainly her whiteness, controls those who are beneath her socially, which includes *all* Indian nationals regardless of gender or sexuality or social caste/class. This is itself a form of "elision," a word which is part of the subtitle of Rashid's first book, *Black Markets, White Boyfriends, and other acts of elision.* The narrator allows himself to elide, that is, to slide over (and I would suggest, into) the identity of another. This constitutes a form of identity re-formation, a type of refusing to be cast in an identity that is shaped entirely from the outside.

The final section of this chapter takes on the matter of a "queer" politics rather obliquely. I include it here, however, because it describes the practice of a writer who lives and works *between* the definitions of racial and sexual designation(s). I would not propose that such writers are somehow at an advantage in describing this in-between status; however, I would go so far as to suggest that the admixture of history, colonialism, sexuality, class, gender, and yes, race, goes a long way to providing individuals with the cultural data, so to speak, to begin to address the complicated terrain of late twentieth-century ventures into the politics of identity.

IV
On the whole very asian —the poetry of jam. ismail

Finding the published work of jam. ismail is not an easy task. Often self-published and lacking the library and marketing criteria of ISBN numbers, much of her work is not readily available in bookstores or libraries. As a matter of fact, apart from some material published in *Many-Mouthed Birds* and the *Transporting the Emporium: Hong Kong Art and Writing Through the Ends of Time* issue of *West Coast Line*, very little of her poetry is in the public domain. This raises some pertinent questions: if a writer, or someone who calls herself a writer, or someone who is called a writer by some "readerly" community, does not seek nor attain relatively wide or frequent publication, can this person still be taken "seriously" as a writer. There is a lot to unpack here, but for now I want to look at just four elements: 1) whom do we call a writer? 2) who or what constitutes the "we"? 3) what constitutes wide or frequent enough publication? and 4) what is meant here by "serious"? Such questions, of course, and the dilemmas rising from them are not unique to issues surrounding racialized writers and/or an anti-racist approach to writing and teaching. But I suggest that these questions most certainly do affect racialized

writers (and readers) and have further implications on anti-racism, whether in writing, teaching or elsewhere.

I propose some answers to these questions. In literary terms, whether based in media, academic, professional, or popular circles, the "we" is most often used as a consensus pronoun. That is, "we" allies itself with a Gramscian "common sense" notion whereby that which a given group *generally* perceives to be a truth is put forth and rarely questioned. Therefore, the "we" who hails someone as a writer has considerable power as to whom "we" bestow that title upon. Connected to this title, of course, is how we consider a writer to be "serious" and to be somehow "anti-serious" or perhaps more or less frivolous or dilettantish. I would suggest that in today's writer-market, someone who self-publishes work on photocopied scraps and rarely performs or sends her work off for anthologizing except when solicited, is someone who would not garner the reputation of being "serious." I should add that there are numerous writers I can think of who, despite consistent journal- and book-publishing records, are *also* deemed "not serious" by the various "we" speakers of media, academic, professional and public circles. I would further suggest that many writers who are more transparent in their politics are often perceived as "not serious," that is, "not writers" to varying degrees in these circles.[24] That is, the question

---

[24] In their analysis of the Writing thru Race conference, Tator, Henry and Mattis note a review in the *Toronto Star* of bell hooks's books and a column by Crawford Kilian in the *Vancouver Sun* as exemplary of a mainstream belief "that resistance, protest, and dissent, in writing and in other art forms, are antithetical to intellectualism . . . . Many White/Anglo literary critics have great difficulty accepting the centrality of cultural and racial

of who is "serious" and who is a "writer" is, to some extent, linked, or at least played out along some sort of linear path where, at one end there is the non-writer, further along is the less-than-serious writer, followed by various gradations of "writer" up to the "very serious" writer.

This question around degrees of seriousness is particularly relevent in terms of disenfranchised groups such as racialized writers (although this question comes up in discussions around gender, sexuality, class, and other power dynamics as well). For instance, white, male poets may also claim, quite legitimately, that their work is *also* not widely published, read, or distributed.[25] Poetry, goes the argument, especially in Canada, is a marginalized art form, hence its practitioners are marginalized artists. On the surface, I have no disagreement with this general claim. Poetry, unless published by extremely well-known writers and/or mainstream presses, does not sell well[26], is not widely read in the Canadian context. But as with *any* argument of this kind, I am compelled to say, yes, but what about the poet who is *also* a woman

---

identity in the work of any writer" (101). This point is echoed by Charmaine Perkins when she refers to the defensive reaction of *The Globe and Mail* columnist Robert Fulford who compared the Writing thru Race conference to "apartheid" (249). And I can add here my own experience, reading a review in *The Globe and Mail* of my first book, where Cary Fagan dismissed the text as simplistic in its constructions of racialization.

[25] Most evident are debates on the floor of the Writers' Union annual general meetings, post-Writing thru Race, where inevitably someone will stand and point out his/her marginalized position to contest social justice work being proposed by progressive elements of the Union.

[26]Those few small presses that regularly publish poetry — Turnstone Press and Wolsak and Wynn are two examples — rarely produce a first print run of more than 500 to 750 copies, and much more prevalent are shorter runs of 100-200 from non-profit chapbook publishers.

and/or a person of colour and/or lesbian and/or working class and or/ a person whose first language is not english, and so on?

Within this framework, I turn now to the work of jam. ismail. Like Sadhu Binning, who published several books of poetry in Punjabi before his first book including English poems, jam. ismail is well-known in particular quarters of the Vancouver literary community. But in contrast to Binning, ismail does all her writing in English, and as a mixed-race, lesbian writer does not have roots in a single community — indeed, until recently even her geographic space was split between Vancouver and Hong Kong. I add these personal biographic details to accentuate the differences that can and do lead to a style that, I suggest, is admired and read carefully by critics of colour.

The title of this section on ismail comes from a line that ends a poem from her self-published "Scared Texts," where the poetic voice articulates the various forms of identity placed upon her in different contexts. This "variation" of an identity-poem is exemplary of the etymological concern of jam. ismail. But before discussing her poetry, I want to detail how she publishes her work. My copy of "from the Diction Air" is photocopied on unevenly-quartered sheets of standard eight-and-a-half by eleven inch 20-lb white bond. It is bound by a single staple in the top right corner. And it was acquired directly from the author on a trade, this particular work being contained with a couple of other similar pieces stuffed inside a standard lunch bag, her name hand-lettered

on the front. These matters of format are important because I read them as commentary on the image of a standard poetry book (perfect bound, four-colour or at least glossy cover stock, typeset and trimmed, available in literary sections of bookstores). But this very lack of preciousness, of perfection, goes further in that the text itself is a parody of an english dictionary, the official container of words, language, and, in being such a vessel, of an imperial voice. In this text, ismail is steadfastly disrespectful of the history (and currency) of the english language. Her running commentary, often not even intending to remain disguised as word-definitions, gets underneath the meanings of words to the meanings, impressed and imposed, of imperial cultures.

Sometimes her "definitions" are cast humorously as in the following examples:

> patriarchly 'am i going to be a father', she wondered.
> patriarchly. gi- / ving herself heirs.
> . . . . . .
> race 3 leak of nations.
> . . . . . .
> resist *Where There's a Wont, There's a Way*
> . . . . . .
> sex a latin word meaning six (6) which has been pared down to two (2). this may not be a bad thing, especially during family reunions and other group fares.

In this brief series of definitions, she comments on: the absurdity of male-domination and the gender-bending that is required to challenge this hegemony; the uncertain quality of race and the notion of miscegenation through the coming together, the "League"

of nations; a play on resistance, elsewhere discussed in her poetry in terms of anti-colonialist movements which often reacted to a denial from colonizing powers, a declaration of "will not" or "won't," paving the way for independence fighters; and sex, its rigid categories ridiculed by the poet. But always within that sense of humour is an intense struggle, both with language and its roots and, for ismail, a woman of colour with a mixed-race background, a struggle against being co-opted into socially constructed/accepted norms.

In an entry for word-endings, she writes:

> suffix, e. g., -sibling (A. S.), gene'sis. 19 sensibling o, a sis. 18 responsibyl tran'sis'tor. 9 invisibling the sibling who isn't
> seen; also, solip'sis. 16 possibling takes courage, or heartage, sometimes by way of neme'sis. (np)

In this word and punctuation play she creates patterns of resistance (a re'sis'tance?) within already-constructed patterns of language. The inverted commas, so often used in contractions to indicate something left out, are used here to emphasize and, in effect, insert new meaning into the text at the single-word level. Such a series of definitions slows us down to the so-called letteral level, where meaning conglomerates around the use and misuse of each letter, allowing for new envisionings of words, new "possiblings" that, once again, creates a sense of self- and other-reinvention.

But, like others who feel compelled to respond to their own poetic impulses, ismail also writes about her methods of writing.

Having earlier defined "serendipity," for instance, she goes back to the word in an afterword to "diction air":

> about serendipity. oxford & brittanica hav it that sarandib, a former name of ceylon (now sri lanka), is an arabic 'corruption' of the sanskrit simhaladvipa (dwelling-place-of-lions-island); & that an englishman hitched -ity onto serendip to make serendipity. well, that's one way to do it. english a word by romanizing an arabesque of sanskrit & grafting on a latin tail. it's a tail that wags the dog, for latin sends on its imperializing ways. but a colonizing onomatopoeia (ceylon became a crown colony in 1802) needn't be an onomatopooper. one could learn by it to resuffix paris-ian with an -ite, or decline 'british' to 'brutish. me i like e.s.L. trip, such as 'united sates'.[27] (np)

In this whimsical discussion, ismail shows the historical mutability of language, suggesting that if so many before her have altered a word like "serendipity," why should she refrain from further changes? She is also able, through this discussion, to talk about some very real consequences of the colonized (sri lanka), the colonizer (the british/brutish), and the neocolonizer (united sates), even while she insists on applying the rules (or breaking them efficaciously) to such spaces.

---

[27]I note with some irony how, because ismail's work so often plays with the structures of words and because her work is not all that well-known, typographical errors are commonplace when she is reprinted. "Scared Texts," so clearly punning on "sacred," actually appears as "Sacred Texts" in the header accompanying her excerpt in *Many-Mouthed Birds*. And in a reference to ismail's work in *Returning the Gaze* either an overzealous proofreader or an unchecked spellchecker decided to "correct" the aforementioned "e.s.L trip" back to "united states" (117), completely erasing any sense or possibility of meaning.

The final example of ismail's work that I quote comes from "Scared Texts":

> 1. ratio quality young ban yen had been thought
> italian in kathmandu, filipina in hong kong, eurasian in kyoto, japanese in anchorage, dismal in london england, hindu in edmonton, generic oriental in calgary, western canadian in ottawa, anglophone in montreal, metis in jasper, eskimo at hudson's bay department store, vietnamese in chinatown, tibetan in vancouver, commie at the u. s. border.
>
> on the whole very asian. (np)

In this listing, which like much of her work plays out very differently in performance than on the page, she is able to point not just to the particularity of being mixed-race, but to a dominant order's desire and, indeed necessity, of being able to locate any "other." In effect, what ismail does here is beat the questioner to the punch; that is, before she can be asked where she is "from," what Bhaggiyadatta calls "the famous dislocuter, "'W'e r u from?" ("Aay" 17), she pre-answers with a litany of mistaken identities, many racial in their specificity, but many not.

jam. ismail's work performs on a stage, for the most part, of her own creation. The bulk of her available work is self-published, as mentioned before, and much of that material goes straight from her hand to her reader's — her work tends not to be carried in even speciality bookstores. While this allows ismail to maintain a certain dimension of control, it also reconfigures the commodity-value of her poetry. In a sense, then, every time ismail reads and/or sells

her work, she controls her space through how she tells her stories. Indeed, that sense of being inside one's own story is constantly foiled, for effect I should add, by the poet's choice of positioning: "[t]he proximity of that romantic autobiographical realism is still only deflected momentarily by a reading of syntactic and punctuative gesture"(Wah 78). In other words, rather than holding on to what Wah calls that "inherited lyric bag," ismail "punches it," and, by so doing, creates not just new story but a new way of storying. This, I contend, is exactly what counterstorytelling has the potential to do, to open up a narrative in such a way that it is recognizable even as it refuses to submit to conventional tropes of what is considered normal and proper by a dominant force. Trinh T. Minh-ha writes that the problem of telling stories from positions of non-dominance to dominant listeners is that of giving them "what they most anxiously yearn for: the possibility of a difference, yet a difference or otherness that will not go as far as to question the foundations of their beings and makings" (*Woman* 88). I suggest that ismail, in her complex storytelling that undermines dominant history and language, *does* go this extra distance, troubling the foundations of the dominant and gesturing toward a dismantling of that power structure. By itself, of course, textual production, no matter how radical, will not affect the dominant social order. However, as I will argue in subsequent sections, textual production that disrupts a normative vision of race used *in conjunction* with anti-racist teaching and practice can, indeed, effect social change.

CHAPTER FIVE

Surfing Diaspora: Dudes or Duds?

I

Trying not to get hyper about theory . . .

From its early days as a mode of communication for the U.S. military[1] to its recent use as a deposit, retrieval, and marketing device for commercial material (ranging from computer software to pornography), the internet is now being used widely by a vast number of people[2] with disparate interests. Perhaps the earliest "literary" use of the internet was to provide a library of information —Susan McMahon's Berkeley South Asian Diaspora Project, for

---

[1] "In 1973, the U.S. Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) initiated a research program to investigate techniques and technologies for interlinking packet networks of various kinds. The objective was to develop communication protocols which would allow networked computers to communicate transparently across multiple, linked packet networks. This was called the Internetting project and the system of networks which emerged from the research was known as the 'Internet'" (Cerf, http://www.isoc.org/internet-history/cerf.html).

[2] Robert Hobbes Zakon estimates that web has grown from 23,500 sites in June, 1996 to more than 4 million sites in March, 1999. The current rate of growth is approximately 200,000 sites per month or 7,000 per day (http://www.isoc.org/guest/zakon/Internet/History/HIT.html).

example, provides a wealth of information about diasporic history — but that has quickly evolved to include not just the storage of previously-published archives but also the distribution and display of new literature. The amount of material available, including critiques and theorizing of internet technology, is growing exponentially on the internet; however, it is not my intention here to focus on such a critique at the expense of my general purpose of viewing South Asian literature through progressive anti-racism. Rather, I will use this space to foreground some of my general concerns about the web-based practice of internet literature and then move to two specific South Asian web examples and some of their hardcopy counterparts.

Internet theorist Komninos Zervos presents a comprehensive overview of web literature in his article, "Techno-literatures on the internet" (http://www.ins.gu.edu.au/EDA/text/OCT97/KKZTEXT.HTM). Zervos suggests there are seven distinct categories of such techno-literatures, which he identifies as follows: 1) hypertext[3] poetry which involves one piece of static text linked to another, 2) hyperlinking features but not contained to text: "image, sound, video and animation are linked to or used as links to blocks of text," 3)

---

[3] Max and Sticle clarify internet publishing: "[e]ach Web Site is much like a magazine in that it has a Cover Page, called the Home Page, and other pages of related information that can be connected in whatever way the author wishes. This 'document' is in a format called 'hypertext' which allows information in the web to be linked by words or pictures viewed on the computer....The Web is broken up into a large set of pages, called 'Web Pages', of information connected by hypertext 'links' which let you click on a highlighted word or picture to call up a page of related information" (8).

random poetry generators, 4) sound manipulation, 5) spoken word/performance poetry, 6) visual poetry, 7) animated text poems.

I quote these categories in full to point out that for Zervos, what seems to take primary importance in theorizing about the internet is the *presentation* of the form rather than the rationale(s) behind it. In other words, what defines a poem or piece of creative prose is *how* it is put on the internet. To be fair, Zervos does mention Suniti Namjoshi's internet work as "pioneer[ing] an interesting concept" but he leaves it to co-contributor[4] Susan Hawthorne, Namjoshi's publisher at Spinifex, to articulate the politics and hence the rationale for creating the Building Babel site. Hawthorne writes that on the Spinifex home site

> Suniti Namjoshi invites readers to send their own creative contributions and responses to her novel Building Babel (1996) to us. We then add them to the site. This creates an electronic conversation between readers whose hypertextual musings and connections become available to other readers. The potential is for a forever changing combination of responses and connections.

Interesting in this description is Hawthorne's focus on the process and result of the Building Babel site, rather than on the technical building blocks that create the site. I will return to Hawthorne's

---

[4]Both Zervos's article and Hawthorne's "Topographies of Creativity: Writing and Publishing Digitally" appear in the on-line journal *TEXT: The Journal of the Australian Association of Writing Programs* (1.2, 1997) http://www.ins.gu.edu.au/EDA/text/OCT97/KKZTEXT.HTM and upon mention of Namjoshi's text, either Zervos or his editors created a hyperlink to Hawthorne's article.

analysis of Namjoshi's site, but first I refer to Hawthorne's insistence on the use of technology for progressive ends:

> What I want to mention here is the way in which we as writers, teachers, publishers and activists can use electronic media for creative and political purposes. I have elsewhere written about what defines cyberfeminism. Using the media in unexpected and creative ways is one aspect of that. Another is using it for political ends, activism and campaigns. The third aspect of cyberfeminism is a constant critique which follows you around in your mind, always questioning whether what you are doing is a misuse, or whether you are challenging others who simply perpetuate the current power structures.

This self-critique brings me back to the purpose of this dissertation and the adamant need to foreground the critical process over the technical one. I do not mean to play the luddite game of insisting that the internet is worthless and far too trivial to concern ourselves with — far from it. But neither am I trying to present a "utopian rhetoric once used to promote radio ... now being used to promote the Internet" (Spinelli 2). Rather, in agreement with Hawthorne, I suggest that those of us interested in progressive politics need to use technology but to use it critically. And one of the most important steps in that process is what Hawthorne points to in her "third aspect of cyberfeminism," that "constant critique which follows you around in your mind."

It is this same element of self-critique that is advocated by critical pedagogues, feminist scholarship, anti-racist theorists, and other advocates of progressive politics to ensure that the work we do is productive. In the section that follows, what I do is to narrate my

own reading of these sites in an attempt to articulate my own process of "gazing" through these hyperlinked stories. In a sense, what I ask is for the reader of this dissertation to watch me watching the web stories and to watch me theorize my own viewing practice. Partly what I explore here is a linear narration of what I argue is a non-linear presentation. It is with this in mind that I want to explore two hypertexts produced by diasporic South Asians: the *Building Babel Site (The Readers' Site of Building Babel)* by Suniti Namjoshi and *Project X: 1497-1999* by Damian Lopes.

II
Building Babel, switching roles, and the meme generation

Suniti Namjoshi's Building Babel website purports to be like any other homepage with its title, a colourful graphic, and a list of links. However, the true interactivity of this site (as opposed to others which claim such a purpose but merely re-create the presentation of printed forms with readerly choices of direction) becomes apparent once I get past this opening page. I learn that Namjoshi's hypertext appeared on the Spinifex website at the same time as Spinifex printed a hard copy of her book. Indeed, the web-text comprises only the final chapter of the original text, although it is added to in a variety of ways not present in the paperback edition.

The first words on the Building Babel website, following the publisher's information, are: "The Reader's Text /of Building Babel / A novel with interactive hypertext links / by Suniti Namjoshi." This immediately sets up an expectation, fulfilled shortly, that the readers of this website may claim a type of proprietorship over this site, this text. For instance, immediately following Namjoshi's name are a series of hyperlinks, the first of which is called "Switch Roles?" hyperlinked to the following text which I will show here in its entirety (underlining indicates further hyperlinks):

> The Architectural Plans for Babel.
> The Music to which the walls of Babel rose in the air.
> Intelligent Conjecture on the true identify of The Black Piglet
> The Graffiti inscribed on the bricks of Babel.
> What Skis or Motorbikes Sol and Shy used for surfing the sand dunes - a plausible design.
> Bedtime Conversations between Cinders and the Prince.
> The Contents of Verity's Fire of Intelligent Question.
> A Transcript of anything at all Charity ever said.
> Altitude's Aspiration. (Who was Altitude? Her friendships and relationships and what finally became of her.)
> Surprise me with something I didn't know I liked. On my part I promise to read anything readable. After all, that was the extent of your commitment. If it's good - my judgement - I am now exercising your prerogatives - I'll have a word with the publishers, get them to include it, try for payment. We're on the same side - more or less.
> More <http://www.peg.apc.org/~spinifex/Babel1.html>

Namjoshi's hyperlinks are fairly basic: clicking on any one of them (indicated above by underlining) takes me to an entirely new page, either temporarily interrupting my reading of the "Switch roles?" page, or permanently displacing me if I decide to pursue further links. However, what is so interesting about this project is the question of authorship that arises with each click on a hyperlink. Music takes me to a musical score by Juliet Davey, accompanied by a text that quotes Biblical sections referring to Babel; walls takes me to an image of graffiti with a commentary on violence below written by, I presume, Namjoshi; The Graffiti brings up a computer-brick design with the words "Memesis Rules! Okay" written across it a serif font; Motorbikes Sol and Shy brings me to a poem called "Astrologer Iyam," a narrative piece that describes a Hindu matchmaker checking astrological signs using a computer; Charity takes me to a poem by Jenny Strauss called "Conversing with Charity"; Surprised brings up a poem called "Transfixed" by Debbie Robson; word brings me to a circular link where a brief text by Karen Little:

> WORDS WORDS, SOMETIMES I SPEAK AND I WANT TO SWALLOW MY WORDS, THEY COME OUT all by themselves and I want to get them back in one big gulp. Sometimes words trip off our tongues and float in bubbles upwards and into the sky, these are light words. Light words are better that dark words, words with weight, words that have to be dragged out of the mouth, words have to be light for me now. That is all . . . for now <http://www.peg.apc.org/~spinifex/karen.html>

The hyperlinked "words" in the above tract links to this text by "Laura" (no last name given):

> How could we build a tower of words? Whose words would they be? [And who are we we we anyway?] And what kind of phallusy is it that wants to build a tower? Let's have a mound - a heap - a great swelling of words . . . not an upright upstanding tower of words at all. My words running into her words . . . a flowing and merging which defies the established rules of what may and may not be said. Can we have new ways of speaking? and not just new words new vocabularies like these NETWORKED words falling into the top of her lap . . . what?
> <http://www.peg.apc.org/~spinifex/laura.html>

Here, the hyperlink on "words" leads back to Little's text. And, finally, More links the reader to different sections of the novel which are themselves hyperlinked to readers' contributions.

I wanted to present a record of the links from one page to show the sense of multiplicity created from this single source. Not only does the subject matter and form shift from a listing of events to lyric and narrative poems, visual art (including computer-generated models), and debates on language, but the sources of contributors are multiple as well. This creates a type of community text, of democratized text (although I recognize as critic, as does Namjoshi as creator, that those contributions are limited first by access to technology, second by the ability to find the Building Babel site, and third and most importantly, by the editorial decision about what should appear on the site). I would like to analyze more closely

two of these links before moving to a more general anti-racist analysis. The Graffiti link addresses one of the central issues of this text: how memes,[5] which Namjoshi elsewhere defines as " bits of culture" ("Meme"), work to create and unravel the text itself. When I click on The Graffiti, what appears first is a brick wall, or, rather, a computer simulation not unlike the pseudo-brickface that constitutes some computer desktop background patterns. Already I am facing not just an artifice (which would be a photograph or drawing of a brick wall), but a computer-generated representation of an artifice. As it draws on my screen, I see the words "Memesis rules. Okay" appearing *as if* they were scrawled on the wall, graffiti-like. Again, these words, written in a serify font that only roughly approximates hand- or spraycan-drawn graffiti, is clearly a computer-generated simulacrum of what "real" graffiti on a "real" brick wall might look like. But then there is the context of the words which also have the sense of graffiti (whereby someone will write out the band, gang, or concept they feel "rules"), but in this case it is memesis itself that

---

[5] Richard Dawkins, credited with creating the term in his 1976 book, *The Selfish Gene*, writes this about the subject: "The new soup is the soup of human culture. We need a name for the new replicator, a noun which conveys the idea of a unit of cultural transmission, or a unit of imitation. 'Mimeme' comes from a suitable Greek root, but I want a monosyllable that sounds a bit like 'gene.' I hope my classicist friends will forgive me if I abbreviate mimeme to meme. If it is any consolation, it could alternatively be thought of as being related to 'memory,' or to the French word meme. It should be pronounced to rhyme with 'cream.'... Examples of memes are tunes, ideas, catch-phrases, clothes fashions, ways of making pots or of building arches. Just as genes propagate themselves in the gene pool by leaping from body to body via sperm or eggs, so memes propagate themselves in the meme pool by leaping from brain to brain via a process which, in the broad sense, can be called imitation" (qtd in Shalizi).

rules; that is, the building blocks of culture. In other words, this statement tells me: that which is the basic component of cultural construction (memesis) is that which is the acting subject (memesis rules). The simulation, then, (the computerized words on a computerized image on a computer screen on the internet) creates the real (the text).

In a similar vein, the words link takes me first to Karen Little's text which tells me of the autonomous nature of words, an independence that allows them to create themselves using "our tongues" as vehicles to transport them, spirit-like, skyward. And within this context of writing about words, she creates her own link, also on the *word* words to take me to Laura's text. Her feminist reflection on building a tower of words critiques this "phallusy" and suggests, instead, "a mound - a heap - a great swelling of words" that will, in turn, create "new ways of speaking." Her text, too, links back to Little's text on the link words, creating, if I so choose, a circular reading whereby I can shuttle back and forth between these two complementary texts on the building blocks of language and its possibilities. Both these words and The Graffiti pages suggest a type of re-visioning, a re-building that, I suggest, is entirely compatible with — and, indeed, indicative of — modes of anti-sexism and anti-racism. And while they may not be explicit, acts of anti-racism occur, I argue, throughout the Building Babel site, producing the sort of counterhegemonic discourse discussed in critical race theory and

emphasizing the interrelatedness of oppressive structures as in integrative anti-racism.

The cacophony of voices on the polyphonic Building Babel site is a way for Namjoshi to present her work in a non-individualistic way: "All writing is made of other writing. Words are common currency. They are taken out of the common hoard," writes Namjoshi:

> The original offer from the Writer: "Out of the shards of my poem, write your own poem", is made very easy to do.
>
> Then says Reader, "Okay, but you've published your poem. You're shoving it under my nose. I want the power to broadcast."
> ...
> Everyone on the Net, is not just a receiver, but quite easily a broadcaster as well. The average radio listener doesn't have a transmitter.
> ...
> It is at this point then that the Writer/Reader engages with the Publisher, who, of course, has problems of her own. It is at this point also that I discard masks; and, as myself, as Suniti, I say to Susan and Renate of Spinifex, "Please, please I want the last chapter of Building Babel put on the World Wide Web, with an invitation to the Reader to contribute to it. Please. It's the logical conclusion to my book, which is about the process of building culture in the teeth of Crone Kronos. It's aesthetically right, and what's more it's cost effective!"
> (http://www.peg.apc.org/~spinifex/invitation.html)

How Namjoshi accomplishes this is to publicize her publisher's e-mail address and request that readers contribute text and images to the Building Babel site, noting how and where they would like their contributions linked. These memes are added to the text and, as

Hawthorne points out above, makes for a continuously changing text. I would suggest, then, that this form of cyberfeminism, as Hawthorne notes, also creates a form of cyber-anti-racism, in that the forms of participatory knowledge, as those promoted through critical pedagogy, are part of a democratic principle that, constructed as they are by Namjoshi, have the potential to address and confront racism and other forms of oppression. Hawthorne writes: "In many ways the contemporary form of electronic creativity is most suited to those who have previously been marginalised, oppressed, and powerless. I say this because what has always defeated us is pulling the knowledge together. Pooling it. And keeping it public. This is now potentially possible."

I further contend that Namjoshi attempts a similar practice in the hardcopy edition of her book, although her intention clearly is to provide us the opportunity of an interactive text. For instance, the book consists of two introductions — the first titled "An explanation" which positions the author in terms of her Hindu background and politics; the second titled "An Invitation: The Web as a Medium for Poetry and Dense Text" where she discusses the parameters of the text and its internet possibilities — and a "Prologue/Epilogue" which comments on a range of characters and the situation that brings them to build Babel. What begins as Cinders's fantasy for "a palace in the air and under the sea, a structure that was both real and impossible" (35) is more than a language project: "We are not

engaged in constructing a dictionary or even an encyclopedia. We are constructing the universe itself!" (36).

In her article, "A Meme of Great Power, or, What the God Vishnu Has to do with the Internet," Namjoshi writes: "What is happening on the Internet for better or for worse is a powerful part of the cultural process. My central point here is that educationists, poets, writers — all those of us who are vitally concerned with the process of building culture and community — should learn to use the new technology." She thereby encourages those of us who are interested in functioning as creators and, of a sort, propagators of our culture, to take up the challenge and use the technology. Here she echoes Hawthorne's admonition that the internet can and should be used for critical and progressive purposes, a concern I share, not just concerning the internet, but also the practice of critical race theory and progressive anti-racist action.

III
An animated interruption

I'm at the Leighton Studios, a contemplative space in the mountains/woods at the Banff Centre. This affords me the opportunity to write at length, but also to consult various technological sources as I put together an essay and series of animated-concrete poems — what Zervos called "dimocopo," or digital moving concrete poetry, before settling on the term

cyberpoetry — for a conference at month's end in Vancouver. My critique of print-version concrete poetry and cyberpoetry is that overt social and political commentary is often neglected, excised from or never inserted into the creative process, in favour of what I would call the cool, the hip, the techno-gimmicky focus on language. So I'm creating a series of race poems to query the apparent absence of these politics in the history of the concrete and cyberpoem. But I'm worried at the same time, worried that this work I'm doing will be seen as too literal, too didactic (a critique frequently levelled at so-called political creative writing), and not informed enough by the history of this art form. For instance, I've created moving text where the word "brown" is over-run by the word "white," which then does a little computer-dance after its erasure of brown. Another piece plays on Hollywood tropes and histories of naming — the word "Indian" transforms itself into an arrow-like animation and flies into the barrel of a gun held by John Wayne, exploding it cartoon-style, covering the cowboy's image in smoke and ash. But when I'm sitting in the computer studio re-visiting Suniti Namjoshi's Building Babel website, thinking of what I can do in response to her open invitation for contributions to the text, I'm overcome by a different impulse. Unlike the race-poem project, where I believe I have to start from scratch, where so little work has been done to address socio-political issues that I feel I need to act as an initiator and

agitator, the Building Babel project is a piece of political writing already well in progress. What this means is I don't think I *need* to introduce key issues, because that's already been done; the politics of gender, race, power are already in place. So, instead, I allow myself the luxury of dwelling on Namjoshi's central metaphor, the revisioning of Babel. I think of the Roman alphabet and how it creates the word across the page (or the screen) and how that in itself is a construction that we, as readers, are being asked to reconsider. How does, I wonder, the alphabet contribute to our reading of this word, this concept? I open the animation application and write the word "babel," all lower-case, in the frame window. I think of shifting importances, shifting values, the precedent placed, in english language and syntax, on the first letter of a proper name or the first word in a sentence. I make a second image, this one with an uppercase "B": "Babel." Then I question what will happen if the uppercase is allowed to run freely, to occupy non-traditional spaces: "bAbel, baBel, babEl, babeL." And just as suddenly I think of the way the meme changes in my mind from alphabet to sound and how the name "Babel" is the sound of "babble" and I create further animations so that the "l" of "babel" appears to leap over backwards and to take up position before, instead of after, the "e." And I let a second "b" drop from the top to land beside the "le," bumping that pair of letters over to spell out "babble." Finally, I think of the noise of

babble and how it crescendos but also subsides and how to represent this on a computer screen, and I scale down the image of these letters so they look like they're being squashed and the "babble" condenses to an almost unrecognizable line of scrunched letters across the screen. What I realize when I've completed this animation is that, because of *context*, I was able to play with the animation, able to assume that the readers of this animation, if it is added to the Building Babel site[6], will connect this to the concept of Namjoshi's polyphonic text. Like anti-racism, then, this is about reconfiguring the world around us, refusing to let it be, insisting that it change but that it change as a result of collective action. I reflect on this process, playing the animation in front of me so the uppercase letters appear to be cascading along the length of "babel" before it turns to "babble" and then subsides to silence. This, I think, is how collective action can be liberating. I send the animated text to the Spinifex site.

I V
Blue Donkeys, One-Eyed Monkeys, and other identity politicians

I return Namjoshi by referring back to some of her earlier, printed poetry. As with her internet work, Namjoshi's "hardcopy"

---

[6] This animation was later added to Namjoshi's site, replicated several times over and made to look like so many "building blocks" of Babel (http://www.peg.apc.org/~spinifex/babel7.html).

poetry artfully resists categorization. In *The Blue Donkey Fables*, Namjoshi takes the form of the fable (a favourite form of hers), which traditionally espouses moralistic issues, and places specific social and political emphases upon them. The effect of this is powerful in that it indicates to the reader who *expects* a moral to be attached to the fable that what Namjoshi is presenting has a specific message promoting some sort of moral virtue. And while this is exactly what the fables in this collection do, I want to emphasize the ways in which Namjoshi legitimizes her progressive politics through humour and satire.

What is of particular interest is the way Namjoshi chooses fairly innocuous details (e.g. the blueness of the donkey) and imbues them with importance vis à vis political issues around race and sexuality. For instance, in the opening fable, the fantastic colour of the donkey is brought into debate by the local councillors who note the donkey clashes with the red bridge it lives beside. But rather than beginning by questioning the irregular colour of the donkey, I am immediately struck by the councillors' desire that the donkey "must be of the purest and silkiest white" (1) another fantastic colour for such an animal. I then quickly translate this focus on colour into an issue implicating race (and/or difference), particularly when the councillors raise the question of "becoming" white: "'Just because donkeys have never been known to be white,' they pointed out patiently, 'it does not follow that a donkey is incapable of achieving whiteness'" (1). This statement presents, perhaps, not just

a will toward deracination but another moment in Macaulay's "Minute on Indian Education." When the donkey insists that she "can't and won't" become white, the councillors are outraged: "'There, you see,' cried half the populace. 'Obviously wilful!' 'No, no,' cried the other half. 'Patently flawed.'" (1). My reading of this interchange reminds me of the demands placed on people of colour to "fit into" a white world, to *become* white in how they act. This creates a curious and uncomfortable double-reality for people of colour, addressed by bell hooks when she writes of her African American students who "express frustration, anger, and sadness about the tensions and stress they experience trying to conform to acceptable white, middle-class behaviors in university settings while retaining the ability to 'deal' at home" (*Teaching* 182). Namjoshi's text, however, also allows me to think of the refusal of people of colour to back down and who continue to raise concerns about race in circumstances which are not always comfortable.

Elsewhere in her book, Namjoshi makes reference to one-eyed monkeys and other curious creatures to craft counterstories that effectively undercut dominant narratives. Her fables (both in *Blue Donkey Fables* and *Feminist Fables*) take a popular form of pedagogical story, reconstituting it with a highly progressive content. Her re-writing, as I discuss earlier in this section about of her internet site, does not then simply construct stories that speak back to earlier narratives; she actually takes those earlier narratives, some of them epic stories such as *The Panchatantra,* and rewrites them, or

retells them in the tradition of a storyteller who, in each telling, makes them new again. In essence, and to go back to references I made earlier in my discussion on sexual identity, Namjoshi "queers" the traditional forms and conservative narratives and plays them out again in such a way that promotes these progressive political re-tellings which might ultimately persuade her listeners/readers.

V

Re-inscribing a colonial voyage:
maps, journals, & point-and-click travel

Approaching Damian Lopes's Project X: 1497-1999 website <http://www.interlog.com/~vasco/> is a different aesthetic experience entirely, although, I will argue, there are politics at work here similar to those of Namjoshi. When I come across the Project X site, billed on the title page as "a poetry multimedia installation exploring discovery, technology, colonialism," I am greeted by several images and animations on the so-called title page. Underneath a large "X" which dominates the page is what appears to be a woodcut image of a whale or sea creature, not unlike a cartographic image denoting an ocean. But the "X" signifies, too, as "marking the spot," as much as it stands for the unknown quantity. Next to the "X" a red-text animation draws my attention with more map-making signifiers: "you . . . are . . . here . . . " slowly appears

on the screen, each word appearing in order and separately until the entire phrase exists on the screen, much like an indicator on a shopping mall directory or a hiking signpost. But the animation is not yet complete. The word "here" remains on the screen even after the "you are" is erased. Appearing under the "here" are two more words, also familiar to me from seeing early western maps: "be dragons," a phrase again demarcating the unknown, the unexplored, the unconquered. Apart from these visual devices, I am drawn by one more relatively innocuous textual reference. The dates 1497-1999 exceed by five centuries the actual duration of Vasco de Gama's journeys and journals which, as Lopes shows on a later page, are from 1497 to 1499. And so this is how the journey into Lopes's Project X begins.

Although there are no clues as to the location of hyperlinks, I assume, correctly it turns out, that by clicking my mouse on the "X," I will be taken forth into uncharted terrain. I come to a page divided into two columns, or frames, the right side containing a rendition of a woodcut image of a sailing ship, the left side containing a facsimile of what I discover is the 19th century English translation of *The Roteiro da Viagem de Vasco da Gama.*[7] Simultaneously, as a Java script loads

---

[7]In his "Sources" page, Lopes writes: "*The Roteiro da Viagem de Vasco da Gama* is believed to be an anonymous journal kept on the first voyage of Vasco da Gama. It was printed for the first time in 1838, in an edition edited by Diogo Kopke and Dr Antonio da Costa Paiva . . . . A second edition was published in 1861, edited by A Herculano and Baron do Castello de Paiva (*Roteiro da Viagem de Vasco da Gama em MCCCCXCVII.* Segunda edito. Lisboa [Imprensa Nacional], 1861. 8vo, pp. xiv, 182) . . . . The poems in Project X 1497-1999 attributed to the Roteiro da Viagem de Vasco da Gama have been edited out of an English translation, *A Journal of the First Voyage of Vasco da Gama,* 1497-99, edited by

in, I am greeted with ocean sounds emanating from my computer, reconfiguring my aural space as I enter the text. I click on the left side facsimile and I am drawn into Lopes's poetry, culled, as he admits, from the sources already acknowledged. But what makes this truly a hypertext is Lopes's insistence on historicizing this context continuously and thoroughly.

Take, for example, the Dec. 7, 1497 journal entry I come across after clicking on the facsimile. The two-stanza, eight-line poem describes how the sailors in Vasco de Gama's crew erected a cross on the African coastline and then "today / we watch ten or twelve caffres / demolish both / as we set sail." In a "normal," that is, non-hypertextual, text, I could expect the word "caffre" to be parenthetically glossed to give me an understanding of its meaning; or, the same word could be foot- or end-noted (either which would serve to disrupt my reading if I turned to the note) giving me more information about the history of the word and its contexts; or, the word and its history could be noted through bibliographic references. Rarely, however, would all three occur, mostly because many publishers would feel it to be a waste of space to include excessive information to reference the poem. And even if a generous publisher had included all these references, it is unlikely that I would arrive at them all in a hard cover version of this text. However, in Lopes's text, when I click on the word "caffre" I do not lose my place in the text,

---

EG Ravenstein and published by the Hakluyt Society, London, in 1898. Some footnotes are quoted directly as glosses."

nor do I find myself shortchanged for information. The right frame of the text fills with detailed historical information about the word "caffre" from a 19th-century dictionary.[8] Filling two entire pages in small-point text when I download this entry, the information from the Hobson-Jobson gives me yet another perspective on the history of colonialism and race.

What I want to point to here is the interactive nature of this text which is also exhaustive in its extensive research. The text is all drawn from historical resources, from the journals and from Victorian dictionaries, but it is compiled in a contemporary, postcolonial, and, I would argue, anti-racist format. I say this because elsewhere, Lopes chooses to link/gloss words such as "sugar," "spice," "rice," and other signifiers of colonial practice. Lopes's text also "performs" on a stage often rife with techno-gimmicky, apolitical projects, so to see a colonizing explorer revisited in such a way in an internet-available hypertext is compelling for those of us who wish to see such technology used in the progressive ways suggested by Hawthorne. I do not wish to make any claim here that internet texts are superior to conventionally-bound texts, but I should reiterate that what *is* important here is that the technology, which is bound to

---

[8]Lopes notes: "Hobson-Jobson is a Victorian dictionary of Anglo-Indian terms, that is words that had come into common usage by Anglo-Indians (in the Victorian sense, meaning Britons in India, rather than denoting so-called mixed race as it tends to be used now). The first edition was edited by Henry Yule and A. C. Burnell, and was published in 1886. A second revised edition was edited by William Crooke, and published by John Murray, London, in 1903. The entries offered here are from the second edition which retains the first edition's entries, updating them with additions marked in square brackets."

be used in numerous ways, takes on a progressive politic in Lopes's project.

As with Namjoshi's *Building Babel* site, Lopes's *Project X* performs an act of counterstorytelling that works against the grain of conventional narrative. Again, this is not to say that hypertextual practice is *necessarily* more progressive in intention or design than more conventional formats, but that — used critically — internet technology *can* perform a progressive function. In his discussion on diasporic narratives, Vijay Mishra writes that diasporic history contests master narratives by turning time "back on itself in order that alternative readings, alternative histories, may be released" (9). I would suggest that Lopes's hypertext creates these contestations by such an "active re-membering (as opposed to the mere recalling) of traces and fragments, [and] opposes the tyranny of linear time and blasts open the continuum of history to reveal moments, fragments, traces that can be re-captured and transformed into another history" (Mishra 9). Lopes is strategic in the story he decides to retell and the method he decides to employ. Critical race theorists insist that normative patterns of narrating "truths" cater to a dominant way of seeing and that insufficient attention is paid to the details of the lives of people of colour. Richard Delgado writes that these theorists "have been trying out new forms of writing and thought" ("Introduction" xv) to counter dominant perceptions. By using internet resources in the way he does, Lopes manages to present a counterstorytelling narrative that, through its excessive attention to detail, does not

simply present itself as *another* perspective of conventional history, but as a research project that undermines that conventional story. The reader/viewer of *Project X* is treated to such detail through the narrative — and much of this detail is gleaned from "official" sources of dominant history — that it allows for a seeing-through, for instance, a story of exploration to its origins in colonization, imperialism, and racism.

V I
Surfing for Social Change

I close this chapter with a brief reflection on what I have tried to accomplish in my "discussion" of the internet and, in particular, the two internet sites of Namjoshi and Lopes. Clearly, I have not dealt exhaustively with the presence of internet literature and the implications of such "new" technology for creative work and publishing. Nor have I made the argument that internet publishing is inherently more or less successful in its attempts to produce writing for social change. Rather, what I have attempted to do, is to present a *story* of my reading, a representation of my process as I encounter(ed) these particular sites. So, unlike my critical reading of Mootoo's text, for instance, where I present a reading of its anti-racist potential, here I present a type of story, one that reflects my own reading of these sites. In other words, I write this chapter in a way that asks the reader to "watch me watching the internet

literature," a practice that I suggest emphasizes the brown gazing I allude to throughout this dissertation.

This chapter attempts another type of the storytelling advocated by CRT proponents and critics such as Razack who suggest storytelling can be an agent of social change: "[i]n the context of social change storytelling refers to an opposition to established knowledge, to Foucault's suppressed knowledge, to the experience of the world that is not admitted into dominant knowledge paradigms" (*Looking* 36). But rather than tell a story *about* myself, a story that creates an entrance for white others to "my world," this process allows those others to see a scene "through my eyes." There is an incredible danger in this, of course, in that it can confirm the false transparency of a dominant gaze which perceives itself as now *knowing* the perspective of the minority, the racialized subject. Roy Miki reminds us of "Trinh T. Minh-ha's warning to be wary of those from the centre who work from an authority that cannot leave a stone unturned and who, accommodating the language of humanism, may enact a kind of liberal 'pilgrammage' to borderline sites in order to extend its dominant forms of power" (105).

However, Paul Kivel writes about the need for white people to develop what he calls "cultural competence," that is, an ability to "empathize and appreciate other people's ways of doing things" (208). Again, while there are dangers in advocating empathy — which can encourage a person to take up space, become the "expert" — Kivel is right to note that such cultural competence is difficult for white

people because they live in a white-dominant culture. But if there is something to learn from Kivel, I think it is that white people can become allies in anti-racist struggle and vision — and yet, as I suggest earlier in Chapter Three, the danger exists that whiteness per se will become the focus at the expense of erasing issues of importance to people of colour. This is all terribly complex terrain, but I close with this problem of whiteness which I will pick up in the next and final major chapter of this dissertation. In the ensuing chapter, I present a fairly lengthy "story" that challenges the white dominance of universities in particular and follow it with an analysis and critique that comments further on this concept of brown gazing inside the academy.

CHAPTER SIX

Row, row, (rock) your boat gently through the tenure-stream

I
A Wary Introduction

This chapter is perhaps the most contradictory section of this dissertation. In one way, it is the most relevant chapter, putting to practice the counterstorytelling techniques, the "call to context," of critical race theory in challenging institutional racism and undermining hegemonies that prove so damaging to people of colour. But in another way, it is also most distant from the academic project at hand, namely, the focus on anti-racism through South Asian writing in Canada. Indeed, I refer to no specific South Asian writers in this chapter, nor to any literary works at all. I make these observations not by way of apology, but in order to articulate a particular crisis of representation — *can* the ensuing block of writing, one that interrogates the academy and other institutions through storytelling (rather than through the hard evidence of social science research or the strategies of literary theory and analysis) perform a constructive role in a larger body of work such

as this? In short, does this chapter belong? This question is obviously rhetorical, since those reading these words are finding them *within* the dissertation, but the problem is nevertheless compelling.

Cheryl I. Harris, reading the anti-colonialist sentiments of Chinua Achebe, writes that she takes his words "to underscore the inherent risks in embracing the central task of social transformation, which is the work of the artist, the poet, and the scholar in any imperfect, unjust society" (101). Perhaps, then, this chapter is a risk, an attempt to embrace social transformation using whatever strategies are available. I cannot say, with any confidence, that these strategies will be effective, nor can I assuredly state that, rather than transforming, these strategies will not further entrench resistance to anti-racist methodologies. However, I have hope as I read Harris's words:

> The challenge for scholars of color in the academy, like the challenge to the poet in the unjust society, is to render the invisible visible and tangible, to move what is in the background to the foreground; to tell a different story that is neither known or familiar and indeed may be disturbing, annoying, and frightening.... As the scholar of color discovers the transformative power of the law, a necessary tension is implied in her relationship to the academy, so that in performing her task, like the poet, she must not only survive, but tell a story that is both hers and larger than hers — a story that undermines the prevailing order — thereby risking "trouble with the king." (101-02)

The following section is titled a "fairy tale," with its "once-upon-a-time" opening and reference to that fairy-tale legend of

purity and goodness, Snow White. But it also draws on the sense of contemporary fable (as I suggest elsewhere in this dissertation) as used by Suniti Namjoshi, where current political issues and language are brought to the forefront playfully — but with serious intent. Following this fairy tale section, I will discuss the relevance of such a counterstorytelling technique to explicate the conditions of white supremacy in academic and non-academic institutions.

II

Preston Terre Blanche and Snow White Go Back to School, or, Some More *Dos* of Racism (a not so far off purely academic fairy tale)

Once upon a time, in a land not far far away, we told you a story about a nation of peoples who lived together in what many of them called universal-multicultural-we're-all-the-same-under-the-skin peace and harmony. Periodically, as we told you, small bands of these people would gather to discuss the colour of peace, harmony, and other things, and everyone was supposed to live happily ever. There were many such events that occurred in many places.

Many people said many things, mostly about peace and harmony and the freedom of the imagination and of the intellect and individual creativity and why we can't all just get along and

other nice universal themes. As we told you then, although many, many people were saying these things, two of them had especially loud voices. They were called Preston Terre Blanche and Snow White. They had lots of loud things to say. And for the life of them they couldn't figure out why there were a few people who just didn't get all the talk about peace, harmony, and all those nice universal themes. In fact, these few people, the dark folk, got downright mad.

You see, some voices were just beginning to make themselves heard; they were called anti-racist activists, and they were dark folk with a few lighter, even snow-white tones. They used bothersome words like *power, privilege, history, colonialism, inequity, race , access* — and not words like peace and harmony. Because Preston's and Snow's ears were beginning to hurt from all this unpeaceful and unharmonic banter, they devised a diabolical plan they called the Seven Deadly Disclaimers. Now, we told you all about how they laid all of their Disclaimers (all with their own names — Denial, Diversion, Minimizing, Tokenization, Silence, Defensiveness/Anger, Discounting) on a nice white table and travelled from event to event, exhibiting their Disclaimers at the slightest provocation from these *anti-racist* troublemakers.

And they were quite successful, as we told you, once upon a time, and were fairly content until they hit on the idea, almost at exactly the same time, about how they could be even *more* successful.

"I have an idea," exclaimed Preston Terre Blanche. "Let's get an education!"

"I was thinking exactly the same thing," Snow White exclaimed back. "Let's go to University."

And so Snow White and Preston Terre Blanche bought identical briefcases and packed up their Disclaimers and trundled off to the registrar's office. As an afterthought (that is, a thought they both had after a moment or two) they decided to give their briefcases names. They both took out gold-leaf paint and sticking their tongues out in order to paint better, began lettering onto black leather the names their briefcases would carry with them. They both stood up triumphantly and, sticking their tongues back in their mouths after such hard gold-leaf painting, looked over at one another.

To their surprise, they had both given their briefcases the same name!

"I have called mine 'MIND'" said Snow White, "because that is what I shall use when I am in university." With that she spun the combination lock on her briefcase, thereby ensuring she would never be able to open it again.

"I have called mine 'MIND'" said Preston Terre Blanche, "because I keep inside here everything that is important to me." And with that, Preston took out some superglue and squeezed it into the seams of his briefcase, thereby sealing it shut for all time, and incidentally, because he also accidentally got some superglue

on his fingertips and because his eyelashes itched ever so slightly moments after that, sealing his eyelids shut for a considerable time as well.

"Let's go!" commanded Snow White, grabbing her briefcase and heading off down the road to University.

"Let's go!" concurred Preston Terre Blanche, grabbing his briefcase and promptly walking into a telephone pole because he forgot his eyelids were sealed shut. "Let's go," he re-commanded, grabbing his briefcase in one hand and Snow White's long flowing gown with his other.

And off they went to University.

Now universities are funny places. Some people there are students. Some people there are teachers. Some people there are administrators. But many of the people there are sometimes students, sometimes teachers, and sometimes administrators, and Preston Terre Blanche and Snow White found themselves cast in just these ways.

One day, in a classroom, a teacher was talking about something she called employment equity. This was, she explained, a way of ensuring that people were not discriminated against because of their gender or their colour (and this should also include, she said, their sexuality or their class among many other factors that were often left out). This was a way of making job hirings fairer, she told the class. Any questions.

Both Snow White and Preston Terre Blanche threw up their hands, partly in exasperation, but also partly so they could pose questions that were really not questions but they sounded like questions so that was good enough for them.

Preston: That means I'll never get a job!

Snow: Sounds like reverse racism to me!

Preston: Yeah, now *you're* being racist.

Snow: I never did anything wrong so why should I be prevented from getting a job?

Preston: Yeah, we're not prejudiced.

Snow: We should move beyond race and stuff.

Preston: And if we didn't let in so many foreigners there'd be enough jobs for real Canadians.

Snow: Besides, if foreigners and natives and stuff only worked harder, *they'd* get jobs anyway.

Preston: People should get jobs on merit.

Snow: Damn straight.

And with that, Snow White turned to Preston Terre Blanche and high-fived him as was their custom when they had won a debate, although, since Preston still hadn't worked the superglue out of his eyelids he more or less high-fived Snow White back with his forehead, but that was ok because the force of the blow allowed him to open up his right eye just enough to be able to see a smiling Snow White and her briefcase. "Cowabunga," he said.

"Cowabunga right back at ya," she said.

Having proved their mettle in their rigorous degree-getting process, Preston Terre Blanche and Snow White find themselves shortlisted for tenure-track jobs, a remarkable surprise considering all this namby-pamby talk of equity. They must be good. Even more remarkable is the back-slapping and eye contacting, possible now that Preston's eyes have come completely unsealed, that goes on with their soon-to-be colleagues. Before too long, the short-listed candidates are hirees, and as a celebration of their new jobs, they are taken on a midnight ride on the university lake. Needless to say, both Preston Terre Blanche and Snow White are ultra-careful to do their utmost not to rock the boat at the conclusion of this eventful day — or, for that matter, anytime in their careers. They carry their worn briefcases everywhere, still unopened from their undergraduate days, and this is what they say of teaching on their fast-track up the administrative ladder:

Preston: All this contemporary reading is good, but we *have* to teach the classics.

Snow: To me, great literature is great literature, no matter where it comes from; it just so happens most of the great, universal literature is stuff I learned as an undergrad.

Preston: Some of these colourful students are so angry.

Snow: Some of these colourful students are troublemakers.

Preston: These colourful students try to hijack the classroom.

Snow: This class will get beyond race and talk about ethnicity.

Preston: This class will get beyond race and talk about literature.

Snow: If colourful students are interested in race stuff, it's only natural that my class on white studies only has white students.

Preston: Sheesh, half my class are ESL students — well, they *look* like they're ESL students.

Snow: I decided to broaden my horizons and teach a course on aboriginal literature and then all these unqualified aboriginal students tried to get into the course!

Preston: I decided to broaden my horizons and teach a course on African literature. Umm, how many African writers, good ones I mean, are there?

Snow: Your thesis topic on theorizing First Nations literature really should be grounded in Derrida.

Preston: Since postcolonial is a hot topic I thought I'd switch my area of specialty.

Snow: Now that we're tenured and on the appointments committee, who can we find to work with us, keeping in mind that midnight boat ride on the lake?

Preston: These colourful students know lots about colourful writers. Let's ask them for their bibliographies.

Snow: Yes, but what can *we* do about these issues. You can teach us.

Preston: I *am* a white man, through no fault of my own.

Not waiting to see whose fault it *is*, Snow White and Preston Terre Blanche are told to pick up their briefcases, which they still haven't opened since arriving at the University, and go straight from their classrooms to their new digs over in Administration. As University Administrators, Snow and Preston have numerous responsibilities, most of which involve saying yes or no, usually by form of memo, to various university applicants for grants, tenure, and other similar matters. So, sitting behind big oak desks with giant computer monitors displaying screensavers portraying mortar boards with little wings flying by, Preston and Snow thoughtfully tap their expensive pens on the gold-leaf lettering reading "MIND" on both their unopenable briefcases, and begin dictating memos.

Snow: While your project seems very interesting, and while anti-racism is of great concern to this administration, we feel your project is rather limited in its scope. Therefore, no.

Preston: Your project fails to address *wider* university concerns.

Snow: You must understand that budgets are being reduced university-wide.

Preston: We are concerned with your level of professionalism.

Snow: We are concerned with your level of expertise.

Preston: You colourful professors will have to work harder for tenure.

Snow: You colourful professors should spend more time publishing in the right places.

Preston: We would be comfortable funding this project if *other* departments had expressed interest.
Snow: Your course on "racialized writing" does not fit into any of the pre-ordained areas of specialization for English majors.
Preston: Your course on aboriginal writing is too 20th century.
Snow: You have too many graduate students vying to work with you. Don't be greedy. Share students with your colleagues.
Preston: Your concern about there being only one First Nations student and no other students of colour in the incoming graduate student body of 40 is — legitimate. Tell us what to do about it.
Snow: But our equity figures are *much* better than they used to be.

At which time, Snow White and Preston Terre Blanche, fatigued from all this dictation and briefcase-tapping and out-the-window-staring, call it a day. If their briefcases had ever been opened, they would now close them. They withdraw to the faculty club for a good cigar and an aperitif to discuss the future of the university in these terrifying times of special interest groups, tenured radicals,[1] and illiberal educators.

---

[1] "[T]he notion of the tenured radical," argues Cary Nelson in his parodically referential *Manifesto of a Tenured Radical*, "first popularized by Roger Kimball [through his right-wing book, *Tenured Radicals: How Politics Has Corrupted Our Higher Education*] has now established itself within popular common sense" (2). And Michael Bérubé points out that the term derives some of its popular impact from the idea that "tenure is also thought by both left and right to be antithetical to political progressivism" (qtd in Nelson, 217fn).

III

A reflection on critical race theory, anti-racist activism, and integrative anti-racism

> In the fall of 1985, the *Harvard Law Review* published Derrick Bell's "Civil Rights Chronicles" as the foreword to its Supreme Court issue. The prestigious designation of foreword authorship had never before produced such an unusual piece of writing. With its tone of dead seriousness, Bell wrote of an encounter with an apparition. Bell told a story. He abandoned the law review form, using instead fantasy, narrative, and dialogue to tell a bitter tale of law. Some thought this a self-indulgent and bizarre act. Others described it as brilliant, moving, and incisive. These early mixed reviews bear telling resemblance to first accounts of any new art form, including various stages of American jazz. (Matsuda, *Where* 49)

I quote from Matsuda to contextualize my use of a fable, a story, as part of my critical dissertation. Bell was followed a few years later by Charles Lawrence who used storytelling to describe a dream account of his encounter with a racist law professor. "Using stories, testimonials, and accounts of personal and mythical experience," Matsuda writes, "writers of color evoke a worldview that challenges the status quo in legal thought" (51). I would suggest that such a challenge needs to reach beyond legal studies to other parts of academia and the world at large.

The preceding fable grows out of a previous tale of Preston Terre Blanche and Snow White, constructed by Aruna Srivastava and myself when we were invited to submit an article for a special number of *West Coast Line* entitled "Colour. An Issue." We decided

simply to list off all the "*anti*-anti-racist"[2] statements we had heard at various arts, academic, and cultural events over the preceding few years. Although most of these statements were constructed through memory, we both found it amazing that there was no need to create, or for that matter, even embellish, the appalling nature of these anti-anti-racist statements. True, we did magnify their impact by lining them up, so to speak, end to end in dialogic fashion, but these statements were uttered, usually in public, and always in response to anti-racist contexts. In live performance,[3] the "Snow White" piece worked on numerous levels. First, in re-stating what so many (anti-racists and others) had heard before, it created a level of levity, of laughing at the all-too-familiar. Second, in placing the anti-anti-racist rhetoric in the mouths of these characters, the audience was able to recognize "commonsense racism" in terms of a popular fairy tale[4] and a populist political movement in Canada (linked through "Terre Blanche" to a radical white-separatist movement in South Africa). Third — and here is where I hope anti-racist theory turns into a praxis of a kind — the audience and readership, recalling the humour and the politics of the piece, learn to recognize it and act against it when they

---

[2]I acknowledge that this term is somewhat redundant; however, I choose the double-negative prefix because I feel there is a substantial variance between articulations of racism and the response elicited when a racist or white-supremacist mindset encounters the unsettling discourse of anti-racism.
[3]The piece was performed first as a poly-vocal reading at the launch of "Colour. An Issue" at The New Gallery in Calgary and second as a slide presentation accompanied by a live reading at Desh Pardesh in Toronto.
[4]*Critical White Studies*, edited by Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic, has as its epigraph: "'Mirror, mirror, on the wall, / who is the fairest of them all?' / The Brothers Grimm, 'Snow White'" (iii).

encounter anti-anti-racism (or when they find themselves practicing it themselves).[5] This suggestion might approach an *anti*-anti-anti-racism action, but I prefer to think of it as a political sensibility that is able to undermine attempts to attack anti-racism and, in so doing, get on with the practice of anti-racism itself which has as its roots the impetus for social justice.

However, one problem which I noted from talking to various readers and listeners of the original piece was that, despite our inclusion of several academic and/or academically-linked events, many people working inside the academy seemed to distance themselves from the actual existence of these statements within academia. That is, while progressive and/or liberal academics agreed that this sort of anti-anti-racist rhetoric occurred, they would suggest that it happened in circumstances other than academia itself, or that "it isn't so bad" in academia. For these reasons, I created the tale which precedes this section, focussed expressly on the situation in post-secondary institutions. I wanted to insist that this was about today's academy, that these statements and the ideas they support are current and, if anything, gaining

---

[5] A revealing moment occurred for me recently when I learned that a former student at The Alberta College of Art and Design, where I used to teach — who had taken an appointment to the board of The New Gallery the same year I left that artist-run centre — was severely offended by several of the statements made and attributed to New Gallery board members in our original Snow White fable. What was so revealing was that he was assuming these statements were attributable to certain people who "didn't mean it that way." However, upon carefully reviewing the time-frame, I realized that he was referring to board members I had never *met* nor ever *heard* utter such anti-anti-racists statements. Clearly, statements we had used from utterances we had heard in previous years were still being uttered.

currency in today's post-secondary institutions. "Political efficacy in the university," writes Roy Miki,

> is constrained by various academic and administrative procedures that neutralize, or otherwise devalue, critiques of racism, sexism, classism, and ethnocentricism within the system. The perils of oppositional or resistance scholarship have become even more compelling in the wake of neoconservative reactions to the influx of "difference" as a perceived threat to "business-as-usual" forms of knowledge production. A climate of real (and not imagined) hostility has arisen towards "minority" voices that press for social transformation and inclusiveness. (162)

I admit that some of the language in the statement in my tale is somewhat flippant — for instance, even the most insensitive administrators are unlikely to present themselves as boorishly as do Snow and Preston. And few professors would racialize a space by talking about "colourful" students or professors, although I should add that this particular adjective was indeed drawn from the title of a particular graduate class at Simon Fraser University.[6] But the particular phrasings in this current version of Snow White

---

[6]For an insightful look at the circumstances surrounding this graduate class at the Simon Fraser University English Department, see Charmaine Perkins's pamphlet, "Any More Colorful We'd Have to Censor It" in the *Race in the Class* series, 1996, republished in de Castell and Bryson's *Radical In<ter>ventions* in 1997. In this course, entitled Women of Colour, Colourful Women, "the expert, this professor, included white female writers on the course as 'women of color,' and thereby robbed the term of its specificity. Being of color is usually acknowledged as a strategy of alliance between groups of *racialized* peoples who experienced discrimination, a term of empowerment that makes explicit its potential for political struggle; in this classroom, the term was emptied of its significance" (262). Roy Miki calls the circumstances of this course a "crisis of legitimation" that resulted in a neoconservative movement in the department that blamed the students of colour for disrupting an acceptable class and victimizing its white, male professor (163-66).

and Preston Terre Blanche should not detract from the fact that in the university system there is a particular, sometimes virulent, resistance to anti-racist advocacy, and, as Miki suggests above, activism of *any* kind, — particularly anti-racist and other anti-oppression activism that threatens to create substantial change in the university environment.

Henry et al. identify several key ways that universities specifically practice racism and resist anti-racism: a lack of representational hiring from communities of colour; promotion and tenure decisions that discriminate against faculty of colour, particularly those who work in fields of "minority" specialization; abysmal recruitment figures for students of colour, particularly at the graduate level (and those who are recruited are often international students paying higher fees); a curriculum that is extremely Eurocentric in form and content and a lack of corresponding anti-racist or "minority"-content courses; a campus climate that is hostile to students of colour through incidents of racial harassment; and an overall system which often ignores the existence of racism and/or acts slowly to interrupt such racism (196-204). "The university, like other institutions, has resisted anti-racist change and until fairly recently has denied that racism could exist in a place of learning" (Henry et al. 204).

Despite this weighty argument, I reflect upon some ideas from Roxana Ng. Her article, "Teaching Against the Grain: Contradictions and Possibilities," makes use of the same phrase as

critical pedagogue Roger Simon does in the title of his book, *Teaching Against the Grain: Texts for a Pedagogy of Possibility.* Why I find this worthy of note is that an abbreviated version of Ng's article that appeared earlier (1991) was subtitled "Contradictions for Minority Teachers." I find it more interesting that Ng has chosen to include "possibilities" in the expanded version, drawing from Simon's book title, than that she uses the "against the grain" metaphor which gained currency in critical pedagogy far before Simon's book actually appeared.[7] I mention this because I admire the fact that Ng (along with academics and theorists such as Matsuda, Delgado, Bell, Razack, Miki and others), working in the face of intense and often vicious adversity, choose to see possibilities rather than dead-ends. Matsuda, addressing the Members of the Law and Society Association, says that the "[p]ostcolonial university is one which the formerly colonized can teach and learn, study and write, without abandoning their culture. . . . Commitment to this vision of the university is my work, and it is a privilege to share this work with you" (128-29). I think this is worthy of mention, too, because if there is one thing that critical race theory, anti-racist activism, and integrative anti-racism all share, apart from their obvious connections to race and

---

[7] Elsewhere, Ng writes: "To work against the grain is to recognize that education is not neutral; it is contested" ("Woman" 50), and she later notes that critics such as Cochran-Smith and Simon have used the phrase to denote "educational practices aimed at instilling critical perspectives and consciousness in students in the classroom. I suggest it should be extended to our work in other settings" (55fn).

racism, it is this sense of hopefulness beyond the despair, of delight in sharing a vision.[8]

Yet this optimism, necessary as it is, may not be easy to maintain. Ng notes that "sexism and racism, as relations of domination and subordination that have developed over time and saturate all interactional contexts, are operative in educational settings" (133). Perhaps this is stating the obvious: if such forms of oppression do indeed saturate dynamic contexts, then how can educational settings be set apart? But I think Ng's point is that certain quarters will exempt themselves from any self-reflection that necessarily implicates them as agents in a racist system. Such a refusal to reflect is like an ethnographic gaze[9] which can see only outside itself, and/or one that can only problematize issues outside its immediate and protected circle. Homa Hoodar writes that "[a]nthropology has grown out of the geopolitics of colonial domination, in particular British imperialism" (215) and, referring to Edward Said's *Orientalism*, that the Western anthropologists' "focus was on phenomenological differences which were perceived as subordinate" (216).

Such a perspective can be translated from cultural to disciplinary milieus. A few years ago, for instance, at the *Blurring Genres* conference held at the University of Calgary, when panel

---

[8]Charles Lawrence III, one of the founders of Critical Race Theory, writes that: "the scholar who would also be a freedom fighter must not be afraid to dream. . . . [f]or dreams are by their nature liberating" (350).

[9]I refer here to more traditional methods of anthropology, not to post-structuralist and post-colonialist schools of anthropology led by critics such as James Clifford and Trinh T. Minh-ha.

members at a large plenary session began discussing the issue of systemic racism within the conference itself, an audience member rose to dismiss such attempts to bring the problem inside, suggesting we examine instead "those people out there," referring to a business conference occurring simultaneously in the same building. While he was right in that the problems would certainly be evident in such a corporate world (and may indeed be even harder to identify and to overcome) the suggestion that racism does not occur "here" is fallacious and increasingly dangerous in academic circles.

I would further argue that structural racism is part of a university system that is informed by a nationalist notion of race and white supremacy. Ng comments that "gender, race, and class are relations, not just analytical categories that are sutured into the development of Canada as a nation" (133), echoing Dei's model of integrative anti-racism in which the interrelationship of modes of domination are also emphasized. One of Ng's examples refers to Chinese immigrant labour on the railway, a type of indentureship whereby the government required the labour of immigrant Chinese men while refusing to admit immigrant Chinese women, even as wives, or other relatives (133). This sense of nation-development relates directly to academic structures. The creation of Canadian studies, through various university disciplines, is part of the development of Canada as a nation, complete with the suturing of various relations of dominance, showing how thoroughly these

interrelationships permeate the academy. In other words, it is in the interest of Canadian studies departments (and other departments such as literature that often use national boundaries as genre boundaries) to maintain the myth of nation-building as a progressive act. This occurs precisely because those same departments are *part* of this nation-building and, as such, cannot or will not choose to reconstruct themselves outside these national divides. In his book, *National Dreams: Myth, Memory, and Canadian History*, Daniel Francis writes that the myths of nation-building, while not necessarily outright lies, are rarely

> a precise record of events. Myths idealize. They select particular events and institutions which seem to embody important cultural values and elevate them to the status of legend. In Canadian history that would be the Mounties, to take an example, or the transcontinental railway. (11)

Francis goes on to elaborate how his purpose is to help his readers "unlearn history," a process I would suggest runs parallel to unlearning racism in our past and present. Unlearning history and unlearning racism are parallel acts if, for instance, we look at how liberal multiculturalism was introduced, enforced, and assimilated into our national consciousness. Peter McLaren argues that liberal multiculturalism, insisting upon a "natural equality" among races, "often collapses into an ethnocentric and oppressively universalistic humanism in which the legitimating norms governing the substance of citizenship are identified most strongly with [white] cultural-political communities" (124). Matsuda echoes this concept of the construction of citizenship when she writes:

> As scholars of color, we feel as though our presence in the academy is akin to the legalized noncitizens. 'You can live here, but don't get too comfortable.' Becoming a citizen means passing a test in cultural norms, denying one's own indigenous knowledge, abandoning one's home locations, and naturalizing the dominant worldview in one's own body and soul and teaching and scholarship. (128)

Read through McLaren and Matsuda, citizenship, that sense of belonging to a particular nation-state with full rights and privileges, is denied to people of colour who profess an anti-racist sensibility. Further, Himani Bannerji writes:

> "Canada" then cannot be taken as a given. It is obviously a construction, a set of representations, embodying certain types of political and cultural communities and their operatons. These communities were themselves constructed in agreement with certain ideas regarding skin color, history, language (English/French), and other cultural signifiers — all of which may be subsumed under the ideological category "White.". . . We (people of colour) are pasted over with identities that are extraneous to us. . .originat[ing] in the ideology of the nation, in Canadian state apparatus, in the media, in the education system, and in the commonsense world of common parlance. . . .One might say then, remembering Althusser, that they are appellations for interpellation. . . They help to construct " Canada" and to place us in certain roles and niches of the nation. ("Geography" 24-25)

All of this leads me, in circuitous fashion, to the Gramscian notion of "commonsense." Dependent on already-placed socio-economic and cultural practices, "common sense" allows us, in effect, to see what we want to see, to act *as if* we knew the whole story when, in fact, we are privy only to the shorthand version of

events that are given to us. For example, while there might be a general consensus that racism exists and that it should be eradicated, "the more problematic aspect for us is this common sense racism which holds the norms and forms thrown up by a few hundred years of pillage, extermination, slavery, colonization and neo-colonization," writes Bannerji. She continues:

> These norms and forms are so much a daily currency, they have been around for so long in different incarnations, that they are not mostly (even for the anti-racist person) objects of investigation for they are not even visible. They produce silences or absence, creating gaps and fissures through which non-white women, for example, disappear from the social surface. Racism becomes an everyday life and 'normal' way of seeing. (*Thinking* 45)

Paralleling, and drawing from Bannerji, Ng writes: "Commonsense racism and sexism can refer to the norms and forms of action that have become ordinary ways of doing things of which people have little consciousness, so that certain things, to use Bannerji's term, 'disappear from the social surface'" ("Teaching" 133). What Ng and Bannerji both refer to is not just the historical invisibility of racism, but the ongoing invisibility that allows such racism to continue.

Most important here, in terms of common sense racism, is that ignoring common sense racism *creates*, the existence and flourishing of racism. The "social surface" appears unscuffed precisely because those who would challenge the authority of that surface have effectively disappeared — or, in the case of the academy, are never allowed to appear, or allowed to appear only in

certain organized fashions and arrangements that suit the dominant powers.

This problem is addressed by Eric Foner in his self-reflective analysis of whiteness:

> Thirty-two years ago, I graduated from Columbia College. My class of 700 was all-male and virtually all-white. Most of us were young men of ability, yet had we been forced compete for admission with women and racial minorities, fewer than half us would have been at Columbia. None of us, to my knowledge, suffered debilitating self-doubts because we were the beneficiaries of affirmative action — that is, favored treatment on the basis of our race and gender. (24).

Foner points to the common sense arguments that have been used to prevent women and people of colour from being present in certain privileged spaces, in this case Columbia law school, and counters that *any* actions taken in terms of hiring, recruitment, acceptance, tenure, etc. have *always* affirmed some group or another. For the most part, the groups affirmed have accrued a type of social status and cultural capital that makes them the likely — and usually the only — group with enough "merit" to gain such admittance. Foner rightly refers to himself and his colleagues as "beneficiaries of affirmative action," but goes on to debunk one of several right-wing arguments which suggest that if people "ride" affirmative action policies they will inevitably suffer from the knowledge that they did not accomplish this "on their own." He and his colleagues, suggests Foner, do not suffer from debilitating self-doubts because of their "affirmative treatment." While Foner is

right in attempting to debunk this argument, I would suggest that he, too, is falling prey to a type of common sense argument. That is, while many of us who are people of colour in the academy acknowledge our right to be here (see my five-point analysis of anti-racism in the classroom in Chapter Three), that self-doubt remains, largely fostered by a hypercritical white gaze. I refer back to the quotation from Derrick Bell where he talks of the need for him as a black teacher to convince (white) students that he is indeed competent (35).[10] Note here that Bell refers directly to the perceptions of the (white) students and his need to convince *them* — that is, despite his power and privilege as a professor, Bell still finds himself needing to address the power and privilege the students possess through their whiteness. Elsewhere he does implicate (white) faculty and (white) administration. My point here is that when we, as people of colour, do "appear" on the social surface, we are seen as anomalous and, often enough, antithetical to that surface. We somehow do not belong, disparaged because our research methods are inadequate, our ways of teaching are ineffectual, and yet, curiously enough, accused of getting to where we are *because* of our race. Fran Leibowitz has a humorous take on the historical use of affirmative action as proposed above by Foner, suggesting that the whole point of such action is to displace the

---

[10]Deborah Waire Post refers to another difficulty she encounters as a professor of colour: "I am diminished in the eyes of my women and minority students who perceive the difference in the amount of respect I receive from students as compared to my white counterparts" (424). Here we can see how not only the professor of colour, but her students, must endure racist and sexist gazes.

incompetent (but white-privileged) folks from their undeserved positions: "[w]e will have equality when dopey black people get into Harvard because their chair-endowing grandfathers went there[,] . . . when incompetent black people buy their way into the Senate[,] . . . when larcenous black union plumbers start not showing up in greater and greater numbers[,] . . . when the unjust deserts and ill-gotten gains are spread around impartially" (224).

My argument about the existence of common sense racism and its implications for people of colour in the academy is, interestingly enough, often accepted in liberal circles. With a strong leftist tradition in the humanities, individuals in university departments are familiar with Gramscian "common-sense" and know how it operates. However, *acting* upon this knowledge, moving into the position of an active and engaged social reformer, is where the challenge lies. As Matsuda writes: "[s]enior faculty can take the role of opinion leaders in supporting white feminists, women of color, men of color, and radical reform in curricula and pedagogy" (128). She suggests that only such a radical intervention can be effective since even the neutrality that feigns passing interest will discourage any serious social reform. However, even with such support from senior faculty, implementation and practice of anti-racism *within* the academy is no easy task. I would argue that unless there is a concerted anti-racist activist movement within the academy, all theoretical notions, however solid and

accepted they may be, will not result in real social change in the academy. It is this point about advocating anti-racist activism inside and outside the academy that I turn my attention to now.

IV

Troublemakers in training

In my introductory chapter I noted how those who call themselves anti-racist activists — engaged in what they would call a "street reality" — might look upon the practitioners of critical race theory, integrative anti-racism, or any form of academic disciplinary anti-racism, as being too caught up in ivory tower worlds to make any "real difference." I gather this from the resistance to theories produced by academic institutions that is often evident at rallies, festivals, and other congregations of anti-racist activism. For instance, question-and-answer sessions at Desh Pardesh have resulted in comments from the audience suggesting that certain presenters were "too" academic and therefore not in step with the festival.[11] This has, in fact, resulted in the de-academicizing of events such as Desh Pardesh when, I suggest, festival organizers pander to initiatives to produce events that are not connected to academic discourse. The problems with this are

---

[11]The comments I refer to come from numerous formal and informal feedback sessions at the Desh Pardesh festival, held annually in Toronto since 1991.

many. Most notable is that much of the theoretical foregrounding of issues around race, gender, labour, sexuality and the like has occurred in the academy. This is not to suggest that the academy "does" the theory and the various arenas outside of the academy then act upon it — far from it. Rather, as with most anti-oppression movements, I think various people inside and outside of the academy work at developing models that are then put into practice, in some form or another, in general social and cultural arenas. To use a local example, the work of Calgary-based writers Claire Harris and Hiromi Goto has been taught in English courses at several post-secondary institutions, from introductory to graduate levels, and has been the focus of a growing body of academic articles. But both writers have also worked closely with community-based organizations, most recently as writing-workshop facilitators for the Calgary Women of Colour Collective. In the academy, then, their anti-racist literary work enters into the curriculum and, presumably, becomes part of the literature *of* the academy. In the community, these writers, through their anti-racist pedagogical participation, become known as part *of* the community. While this example infers a split between how Goto and Harris are textually present — in the form of their literary works in the academy — and pedagogically present — in the form of themselves as writing teachers in the community — I would rather suggest that these forms of presence create a cross-pollination of sorts. Crossing the borders between the academy and the community, these writers

and their works carry a presence in both worlds, their work operating within academic structures and their teaching selves operating within collectives that function almost entirely outside the academy.

What I hope this example interrupts is the notion often supported within the academy that "social change," however it is defined, begins and ends with the academy. Carrying and perpetuating this concept of isolated development, I suggest, helps to contribute to so-called "outside" forces, such as anti-racist elements who are not housed in the academy, believing that the academic world is "out of touch" and has little to contribute or gain from non-academic experiences. I propose two ways of addressing this separation from an academic perspective: first, we should recognize that practising anti-racism begins, so to speak, at home. Like *any* practitioners of anti-racist activism, we should address and seek to eradicate the practice of racism that thrives not "somewhere else" but right where we exist — in our institutions and in our selves. Second, in doing so, we should expect that much of our work happens in the midst of the academy, although we should never become so self-absorbed that we avoid entering other non-academic avenues of anti-racism. This said, however, we can hardly hope to formulate our theories of anti-racism solely inside the bowels of a library, stepping outside only to "present" these perfected ideas to a public we assume should be grateful. If anything, part of the academic process of anti-racism should be to

work to dissolve or at least diminish the boundaries between the academy and that entity often misnamed as the "real world." I begin by addressing these issues together, rather than dealing with them separately, as I think the crossover between the two is considerable.

Regina Austin, who is in many ways a central figure in Derrick Bell's *Confronting Authority: Reflections of an Ardent Protester* and central, too, to the intense events leading to his book, writes that there has been a none-too-subtle shift between the practice of social protest from the 1960s to the 1980s. Speaking from her position within Critical Race Theory, she identifies the difference as the shift from Aretha Franklin demanding "R-E-S-P-E-C-T" which, she suggests, was a direct address to white America, to Bobby McFerrin's ambiguous, albeit tongue-in-cheek laissez-faire attitude with "Don't Worry, Be Happy" (which, Austin notes, was co-opted by the Republican campaign machine for its own purposes). "Somewhere along the line, we lost confidence in the political efficacy of cultural critique as a basis for the continuing struggle" writes Austin, alternatively suggesting that people "foolishly thought that we would be better off if we dispensed with social protest for a while and just relied on law" (427). Keeping in mind that Austin, along with most Critical Race Theorists, is addressing the specific context of U.S. law, I think her warning bears heeding by all of us interested in social change.

To move this closer to home, I look to the writing of Derrick Bell who paraphrases one of his colleagues, Gerald Frug:

> Academics, [Frug] suggests, are intellectual puritans, working in purposeful and solitary shelter. They believe, as a matter of faith, that pure thought, free of instrumental considerations, will flourish of its own inherent logic. Strong, determined action taken to advance their ideas not only sullies these ideas, but undermines their transformative power. Thus, while the academic can "persuade" — demonstrating the moral and intellectual soundness of their philosophy — they cannot "pressure" others to adopt or act upon their ideas. (105)

Bell writes that Frug compares this intellectual puritan position against the "instrumentalism" of the activist "which the academic sees as unprincipled and anti-intellectual" (106). Bell concedes that Frug's positioning of the academic versus the activist is realistic and perhaps even helpful. But Bell goes on to argue that the

> academic who admits that his or her role is that of a social critic, not a social reformer, at least honestly assumes the function of theorist. Academics who claim that, simply by writing about the need for change, they are fighting to make that change set a standard for judging themselves which they will not and cannot meet. (106)

Two points which I emphasize here are Frug's notion of "sullying" and Bell's articulation of an armchair or, if you will, keyboard social reformer. In the first case, the academic resists seeing her or his ideas taken into an activist mode where the heretofore "pure" ideas will become sullied with the deeds, and perhaps misdeeds, of their practitioners. Maintained on their "pure"

level, however, the ideas remain totally ineffectual. Bell's premise that the keyboard social reformer is fighting the good fight is somewhat more difficult to condemn. After all, there is a large tradition of journalists, essayists, speechwriters, and other wordsmiths apart from academics who use language as a weapon against oppression. However, I think Bell's point is that the academic who steadfastly refuses to back his or her words with *some* form of action is a social reformer in name (or, perhaps, position) only.

To illustrate this point within the framework of critical race theory and counterstorytelling, I relate a story of my interaction with a colleague and a local writer. Several years ago, this writer was conducting an interview, for a writers' magazine, with my colleague and myself in a bookstore about the particular merits of teaching creative writing at the university level. I found the topic engaging since there are numerous arguments to be made about the possibilities and problems of so-called "creative writing" ensconced within the university. A discussion about how creative writing, for instance, could be taught at a university site as a means for social change and activism would have proved most fruitful and engaging. What was most disturbing about this interview, however, was its absolutely uncritical and laudatory nature. This was not an intellectual discussion that might raise concerns about how "creative" writing situates itself in the university environment, but an excuse for thoughtless praise. What ultimately discouraged me

was my colleague's willful admission that she continued to study at the university (as opposed to pursuing creative work outside the institution) because she found herself completely entranced by the environment of the university, something she termed being "seduced by academia." Interpreting this phrase in the spirit in which it was intended — that is, a revelling in the *academy* as a site of irreproachable delight as opposed to, say, pursuing intellectual knowledge outside such institutional sites — I find some persistently abhorrent ideology, most notably that the academy is *the* place to be and should not be criticized. How, I wonder, can someone function so uncritically within an institution that purports to teach critical teaching? And yet, this is exactly what Gramsci's "common sense" is all about.[12] Pierre Bourdieu suggests that an entry-level academic performs much the same role as the "oblate," the lower-level priest of medieval times: "[t]hey offer to the academic institution which they have chosen because it chose them, and vice versa, a support which, being so totally conditioned, has something total, absolute, unconditional about it" (100-01).[13] This is the cocoon of academia that Bell rails against and it is only countered, according to Paulo Freire, when educators "occupy the

---

[12]Omi and Winant define Gramscian common sense as a ruling group's consolidation of hegemony in "a popular system of ideas and practices," resulting in a system to which a society gives its consent. That is, rather than the use of force, a ruling group "manufactures consent" (to borrow from Noam Chomsky) so that society fully believes it has made its own choices.

[13] Clint Burnham, in *The Jamesonian Unconscious*, more fully explicates Bourdieu's claims of how class background and trajectory affect strategies in the academy.

space that is the apparatus of the school ... not as faithful servants but as invaders of the bourgeois state" (Gadotti 95). It is such an invasion that, I think, is necessary for any form of critical engagement with the academy and its principles.

The story above has a follow-up story, also featuring my colleague and myself in this particular bookstore, chatting after a reading. The bookstore proprietor comes up to us, ignores my colleague and begins berating me because he has heard I have said he and his bookstore do not provide for diverse community involvement. I admit that this is true, both in what I have said and in the fact that he and his bookstore appear unconcerned with certain issues. I point to his upcoming readers' lists which feature no aboriginal writers or writers of colour. I remind him that he has, in the recent past, refused to carry community-published literary work that focusses on race and racialization. (I do not point out, although perhaps I should, that I have noticed that he *does* carry and display prominently the populist and racist pseudo-science text, *The Bell Curve*, even while at least one other independent bookstore in Alberta refuses to carry this or like-minded titles, despite the obvious business benefits of carrying a popular title.) However, my point here is not simply to condemn this bookstore proprietor's politics which are, after all, produced by a particular set of economical and ethical decisions. What I wish to point to is the fall-out of this engagement: during the course of this now-heated discussion, my colleague turns her back and walks away.

When I ask her about this action later, she explains that she "didn't want to get in the middle of things," an apt comment, I think later, from someone so seduced by academia that *any* action taken is antithetical to the "academic position" of letting things be. Again, I want to stress here that my intention is not to accuse *individuals* of racism, but to comment on how systemic racism performs and is supported on an individual level. As Matsuda comments in her vision of a postcolonial university, the creation of such a site is improbable so long as those with power refuse to *use* that power in progressive alliances.

I want to emphasize, however, the effects of systemic racism beyond the academy, to suggest moments of anti-racism and alliance that *were* effective. In broadening the scope of this critique beyond the academy, then, I turn to the following two stories:

> What if I were to tell more stories, here, stories about race and writing and alliance, of how each one inflects the other? What if the first story was about a writing celebration that was to occur in 1992 and what if I had pretty well ignored the publicity surrounding it, the celebration sounding just not my style. But what if Fred Wah had called the writing celebration to my attention, had said, Ashok, did you notice anything about the programme and it was only upon a careful reading of the list of writers that I saw what he was talking about: that of the twenty-one Alberta writers invited to

participate, each one of them was white? And what if I brought this observation to the attention of the organizers of the "Alberta Boundaries" conference and what if they said they hadn't particularly noticed such a bias in the programme themselves and, besides, it was too late to change anything? And what if I had taken this rebuttal back to a group of artists and writers of colour working in the city, a group which called itself Minquon Panchayat[14] after the national organization of the same name. And what if we had decided, collectively, to re-mount our concerns to the organizing group at Mount Royal College (Calgary) which was hosting the conference through the auspices of the Writers' Guild of Alberta? And what if we had taken our cause to the opening day's speakers — Mary Howes, an Edmonton poet; Sharron Pollock, a Calgary playwright; and Rudy Wiebe, an Edmonton writer and educator? And what if they — or, at least Howes and Pollock — responded quickly and affirmingly of our protest, offering to follow whatever we deemed an appropriate plan of action? Oh, yes, and what if, by this time, the conference organizer's got wind of our upcoming protest action and *now* decided it was not too late, after all, for them

---

[14] The term "Minquon Panchayat" comes from two distinct sources: "Minquon" means "rainbow" in the Maliseet language and is one of the given names of artist Shirley Bear, who subsequently loaned it to the artist's coalition which was trying to bring about progressive change to a national organization of artist-run centres. "Panchayat" means "council of five," and refers to a traditional Hindu village governing structure where five elders held equal power. For a full description of the work performed by Minquon Panchayat (national), see *Parallelogramme*.

to invite *one* of our number to speak on the opening panel? And so, come opening night for this prestigious $20-a-ticket affair, what if a group of 60 people of colour and white allies gathered at the entrance to Mount Royal College, all of us sporting buttons that queried: "Are Writers of Colour outside Alberta Boundaries?", and what if we, having given advance notice to the organizers, marched into the room and faced off an angry crowd of (mostly) white attendees? What if invited speakers Pollock and Howes, after addressing the audience briefly, graciously turned over the stage so that Suzette Mayr could speak and so that a strongly-worded speech by Claire Harris could be read out (so the words of Alberta women of colour could become part of this evening)? But what if, at the end of these presentations, the angry audience lashed out, criticizing the protestors for invading this hallowed (white) writing space? What if the defensiveness in the room was palpable and if the exclusionary political positions now more deeply entrenched? What if all of this made noise but no advancement to a systemic shift? What if?

A second scenario. We are at the second Crowsnest Writers Workshop and Retreat in 1994. After much discussion by the organizing collective, we have decided to invite three well-known writers as facilitators — a First Nations writer, a Chinese-Canadian writer and an African-Canadian writer —

making this the first writing workshop of its kind (in western Canada at least) to have no white facilitators on the temporary faculty. Three days into the workshop, the news comes across the telephone: the minister for Heritage Canada, Michel Dupuy, has stood up in the House of Commons and publicly withdrawn a commitment of $22,500 his department made to the Writing thru Race conference, sponsored by the Writers' Union of Canada. His reason for such an unprecedented recanting of promised funding is that the conference is "exclusionary" in that its objective is to bring together writers of colour and First Nations writers from across Canada. Evening reading and discussion sessions are open to the public, but the daytime presentations and workshops are for the invited writers. This means that white folks will not be attending the daytime sessions. Pressure from the Reform Party mounts, exacerbated by conservative elements of the Writers' Union who publicly deplore the principles of the conference. Our group nestled away in the Crowsnest mountains mounts its own defenses. Fax lines whir, telephone calls made in the middle of the night to whoever will listen. Facilitators and participants alike pledge money and get similar pledges from their contacts across the country. This bit of activism is repeated from various communities in a variety of ways. The end result from this and similar actions across the country: pledges and

contributions more than cover the shortfall created by the conservative backlash. But another result here in the mountains: a week of writing retreat time is cut into deeply and what should have been a space for reflection and production becomes a space once again invaded by racism. Many of us at the retreat attend the Writing thru Race workshop later that summer. But, I have to wonder, at what cost?

V
Pondering Alliances

It is imperative that I state my position here as a form of activism informed by academic research, or, put another way, academic work catalyzed by activism. I do not want to appear to essentialize and thereby separate the two. But, to draw further on my stories above, I think it is also important here to emphasize the absolute importance of alliance. No activist cause, including that which occurs inside the academy, can have effect without seriously considering how crucial alliance and coalition are. In fact, I suggest that Bell's own activist charge, whereby he took one, then two, years of unpaid leaves of absence from Harvard to protest the administration's refusal to hire a woman of colour in a tenure-stream position, suffered from the individualism of the protest. Bell

himself acknowledges that had others joined him in such a protest, the administration might have been forced to reconsider its refusal which resulted, eventually, in Bell's course of action that ended with his dismissal from Harvard. Further, students who allied themselves with this cause drew up a petition asking their colleagues to write their final exams but "to place [the exams] in escrow, rather than turning them in for grading, pending a substantive commitment by the Law School to hire more minorities" (58). The plan failed, not because there were too few students to support the principle, but because too few students felt it worth risking their own futures for the institution of social justice.

In the three incidents I relate above, the importance of alliance is critical. In the follow-up to the first story, set as it is within the body of the general text, alliance is not forthcoming. The white colleague, who would be at some, but not considerable, risk in challenging the privileges of whiteness she shares with the bookstore proprietor, refuses to do so. This is a type of "circling the wagon" scenario where the white agent finds herself in alliance with other white folks even if she might disagree with their politics in some form or another. Rocking the boat, in this instance, is not her choice of action. In the second pair of stories, however — which I set off from the body of this text as a strategy to differentiate them from the earlier stories — the outcomes are considerably different because of a strong collective action by communities of

colour and their white allies. In the Alberta Boundaries case, at least half of the protestors were white allies, including some professors at Mount Royal College, and support from them and, notably, from Pollock and Howes, allowed for intervening action to have some form of effect. Race entered into the mindset of a mostly white, mostly middle-class community of writers so that the following year, organizers made concerted efforts to include the construction of racial identity on the annual meeting agenda. In the second story, again over half the participants at the Crowsnest retreat were white allies — most (although not all) took it upon themselves to write letters, send faxes, and otherwise support a cause that *might be* construed as an issue only of interest to writers of colour and First Nations writers. Dionne Brand writes that those who so vehemently opposed the Writing thru Race conference were

> responding to a general panic running through white Canadian society about the presence and claims of people of colour and the self-destructive outcomes of years of enduring racism. That this presence has finally drawn the attention of the cultural elite, which dismissed, ignored, discriminated against, and did not notice that we were not in rooms when they were meeting, and didn't call it exclusion or apartheid when their gatherings were lily-white, that we have drawn their attention speaks to the depth of the panic. How else would we explain the white frenzy over a conference of First Nations and writers of colour. (178).

And while the protest that rolled through the country had lasting positive effects — the Writing thru Race conference was an

extremely successful gathering — I note that both of my stories end on those questions: what if? and at what cost? I end on those notes, and I end this chapter on those questions, precisely because I want to show that the work of anti-racism is not easily done, that it has obvious costs and, all too often, no obvious results. And yet, without this work, I suggest, those of us concerned with the politics of everyday life would be disappointed constantly as the work we read, we write, we do, would fail to meet our expectations. I end this chapter with a lengthy quotation from Cornel West, a challenge to formulate a "prophetic criticism" that is able to move beyond the bounds of standard and acceptable patterns of academic behaviour:

> This challenge holds for all prophetic critics, yet it is especially difficult for those of color. The widespread European denial of the intelligence, ability, beauty, and character of people of color puts a tremendous burden on critics and artists of color to "prove" themselves in light of norms and models set by white elites whose own heritage devalued and dehumanized them. In short, in the court of criticism and art — or any matters regarding the life of the mind — people of color are guilty (i.e., not expected to meet standards of intellectual achievement) until "proven" innocent (i.e., acceptable to "us"). . . . Notwithstanding inescapable jealousies, insecurities and anxieties, one telling characteristic of critics and artists of color linked to the new prophetic criticism should be their capacity for and promotion of relentless criticism and self-criticism — be it normative paradigms of their white colleagues that tend to leave out considerations of empire, race, gender, and sexual orientation, or the damaging dogma about the homogenous character of communities of color. . . . It certainly helps to have some trustworthy allies in this system, yet most of those who enter and remain tend to lose their creativity, diffuse their prophetic energy, and dilute their critiques. . . . And though

there are indeed some white allies conscious of the tremendous need to rethink identity politics, it is naive to think that being comfortably nested within this very same system—even if one can be a patron to others—does not affect one's work, one's outlook, and, most important, one's soul. . . . The most desirable option for people of color who promote the new cultural politics of difference is to be a Critical Organic Analyst . . . a person who stays attuned to the best of what the mainstream has to offer. . . yet maintains a grounding in affirming and enabling subcultures of criticism. Prophetic critics and artists should be exemplars of what it means to be intellectual freedom fighters, that is, cultural workers who simultaneously position themselves within (or alongside) the mainstream while clearly being aligned with groups who vow to keep alive the potent traditions of critique and resistance. (West, "Cultural" 20-22)

CHAPTER SEVEN

Anti-racism at the end of the day

I.
Introduction

If discourse is a device of power controlled by elites and utilized against other groups, then racist discourse can be seen as one "that advances the interests of Whites, and that has an identifiable repertoire of words, images, and practices through which racial power is directed against minorities" (Tator et al. 27). But, following Goldberg, we need also to recognize that such a discourse is not limited to easily identifiable qualities and must also take into account the ineffability of the following: general principles about the nature of the human race held by a majority; ethical choices to dominate or otherwise control a constituted group of society; and institutional regulations, in the legalistic sense, as well as in the way terms and behaviours are perceived by those in power. Given this weighty set of parameters, the question begs to be asked: is an anti-racist discourse possible? Or, more accurately, how can reacting against racist models not incorporate racist ideology into its own agenda? If Dei is correct that "anti-racism is a challenge to the status quo" (122), then it is imperative that those

of us who express a work-ethic of anti-racist practice be constantly engaged in such a struggle.

On the surface, such a practice will not bode well, for if we are in such a sisyphusian dilemma, we become engaged in (and enraged by) what amounts to a meta-practice — that is, doing anti-racism is in and of itself an oppositional practice, always situated against a racist status-quo. Those of us so engaged can be likened to the police cadets on an academy "obstacle course," popularized by Hollywood and television alike, where the cadet walks through a mock town, gun at the ready, firing at will at "enemy" pop-up targets and having to be quick on the reflex not to fire at so-called "innocent" targets. Of course, the problem with anti-racist activism, to carry this analogy further, is that the targets *all* profess their innocence, few of them carry unconcealed weapons, and the prevailing attitude is that we anti-racists are simply trigger-happy cops who should holster our guns for good. But, then again, for whose good? Dei writes that the "political project of anti-racism is to destabilize conventional knowledge and modes of producing," a practice which "is bound to create dissonance in the ... minds of those who benefit from the status quo" (128). And, in order to deal effectively with the renewed right-wing resistance to anti-racist practice, Dei argues, "anti-racist workers will need a grounded knowledge of the multiplicity of social oppressions, as well as an appreciation of the saliency of certain forms of oppression" (131)

which is, of course, the mainstay of his theory of integrative anti-racism.

Dei concludes with a renewed interest in identity politics, even though he understands the arguments of theorists such as Butler who remain suspicious of what they perceive as essentialist and illogical in that the subject is constituted only through her/his actions, constructions, and performance. "Knowledge and social practices are understood in relation to one's subject position and interests," Dei writes. "The notion of identity cannot, therefore, be dismissed in a progressive politics of social change" (134). This re-focussing on identity is, at least in part, what this dissertation has set out to trace.

Sherene Razack points to the problem of a politics of anti-essentialism:

> Along with bell hooks I am suspicious of those who warn of the dangers of identity politics, race essentialism, or ethnic particularism without paying attention to the specific relations of domination and subordination in any one context, and without contextualizing the response subordinate groups make to domination, thus distinguishing acts of resistance from acts of domination. (*Looking* 169)

Razack goes on to suggest that "those who talk about their differences are likely to be heard as essentialist, while those who listen to the talk about differences get to sit in judgement" (169). It is this rhetorical strategy that confronts people of colour when we try to challenge the myriad forms of white domination — everything from studying at institutions informed by white

supremacist logic to being interpellated through racial epithets at school, on the street, or even in places of supposed safety and refuge.

Further, and in direct relationship to our various lives in the academy, Razack writes:

> when we confront the whiteness of the academy and note that an overwhelming majority of professors are white, we cannot change this situation by responding that white professors also belong to subordinate groups — some are women, some are disabled, some lesbians. Such a response amounts to a statement that race does not matter, an outright denial of the impact of white supremacy on the lives of people of colour. (161)

This does not suggest that people of colour pursuing critical race studies within the academy should easily dismiss the oppression of various subordinate white groups — indeed, following Dei and others who call for an integrated resistance to oppression, we must be careful not to submit to such hierarchies of suffering — but that we must be careful not to let particular identity politics relegate issues of racialization to a subordinate place. "Strategic essentialism," writes Razack, borrowing Spivak's term, "is less of a defence at sites where it is employed by dominant groups in order to exclude subordinate groups" (168). Indeed, when Spivak writes that "there is nothing necessarily meretricious about the Western feminist gaze" ("Politics" 182), she is also suggesting that a particular subordinate yet progressive theoretical position (e.g., white feminism) may be as unable to conceive of the social positioning of subordinate groups (e.g. women of colour) in ways

that differ substantially and/or progressively from the dominant patriarchal gaze.

Roy Miki addresses this dilemma of present, dominant (white) voices "speaking for" absent, subordinate (of colour) voices: "[t]hey may do so in the guise of discourse — but only in disguise when they still retain their position of privilege in the production of knowledge based on their textual sojourn" (168). Part of the problem, Miki suggests — and it is from here I will begin to address potentially difficult although necessary rectifications — is that "the abundance of creative and theoretical work by writers, artists, and community-based activists of colour" is severely imbalanced by a "scarcity of non-white academics of colour engaged in anti-racist scholarship, especially so in literary studies" (167).

If the problem, then, is a paucity of anti-racist theorizing from scholars of colour, largely predicated on the scarce numbers of scholars of colour present — I am tempted to say "allowed" — in the academy, then the solution is at once too simple and too complex. Get more scholars of colour teaching anti-racist theory, critical race theory, theories of racialization *inside* the academy — that is the simple answer. But how easy is this to accomplish when whiteness, both in representation and practice, is the force that overdetermines the functioning of the academy? This is where the solution becomes far too complex — if students of colour are reluctant to enter certain sectors of the academy (and here I mean departments such as English literature) to study anti-racist theory,

it is because there is nothing to attract us in substantial numbers to a profession we read as, at best, troubled by our presence and, at worst, fearful of our *potential* to disrupt and rearrange existing ways of knowing. Given these conditions, how *can* more scholars of colour enter the academy, not as representational pawns hired to fulfill a department's desire to meet the standards of employment equity, but as critical race activists empowered[1] to create social change?

Following British anti-racism education theorists such as Cole, Brandt, Troyna, and Sarup, Jon Young writes that the development of any anti-racist educational framework

> has to be informed by black formulations based upon black experiences of racism. Politically, anti-racist education requires that dismantling racism within white society is the priority and it therefore values collective action that forges links across and outside the school system as the appropriate strategy for achieving this end. (53-54)[2]

Young is particularly critical of the Canadian scene which has not seriously entertained multicultural and/or anti-racist models in its education faculties (56). While Young focusses specifically on education faculties at postsecondary institutions, his analysis is useful in understanding how other university faculties take on the

---

[1]I use the term "empowerment" not to refer to individuals — although individuals from particular groups should, of course, notice positive changes in their personal lives as well — but to social and political contexts as per Giroux and McLaren and the school of critical pedagogy. Giroux and McLaren use the term as an echo of Freire's *conscientization*, a development of critical thinking within students (and others) in general, rather than in individual cases (229).

[2]Young is using the term "black" in the British sense, to refer to all people of colour.

challenge of anti-racism within their ranks. Echoing Freire, Young writes:

> [a]nti-racist education requires that teaching be conceived as a political and moral activity before it is regarded as a technical or vocational one. As such, a task of anti-racist education thus becomes the analysis of the political, historical, and social processes of society that have institutionalized and worked to sustain unequal power and the ways in which schools and the people who work in them are implicated in, and may contest, those power relationships. (61)

In order to produce anti-racist initiatives, Young suggests, universities need to conduct vigorous student recruitment campaigns, "a radically different approach to the passive recruitment practices of the main campus, with it preoccupation with grade point average and the bureaucratic and alienating procedures that students generally face on entry into teacher education programs" (62).

And while it may seem foolhardy to suggest that active recruitment take hold of the profession at a time when critics of affirmative action have succeeded in striking down such legislation in the United States, for instance, I believe that nothing short of such an insistent campaign will bring anti-racism into the academy with any force. I should point out, here, that I am not relying once again on an essentialist argument that students (and professors) of colour will *naturally* make better anti-racists in the academy, nor that white students (and professors) can not be equal to the task of anti-racism. But I *do* suggest that until people of colour enter into the academy in numbers that reflect demographic realities, the

type of "organic intellectualism" advocated by Antonio Gramsci will never be realized in the realm of anti-racism. As Miki suggests, white intellectuals will constantly remain as "textual sojourners" (168) in the area of race studies, existing on the level of "the intellectual element [that] 'knows' but does not always understand and in particular does not always feel" (Gramsci 418).

To return, then, to the conflicts I addressed in the introductory chapter between grassroots anti-racist activists and university-based anti-racist theorists, it seems imperative that these "groups" not be kept separate. And while Rezai-Rashti suggests that university anti-racist educators "can help support front-line workers such as those progressive practitioners who sometimes feel helpless in the face of structural limitations" (18), I contend that such a relationship, while necessary in many circumstances, must be pushed further in order to integrate grassroots and university-based activism so they are able to effect actual social change.

II
The Rudeness of Racist Intrusion

This section interrupts what was an optimistic conclusion, a progressive approach to the inclusion of anti-racist action in the

academy. However, world events have a nasty way of intruding on such positive thoughts and it would be unfair of me not to address those negative effects here. I can only hope that my telling of the following stories leads into the final section and shows how absolutely critical it is to take radical anti-racist action now in the university and elsewhere.

Yesterday, one of my house-mates, Tamai, came upstairs to interrupt me as I revised my writing on anti-racism in the academy. She knew I was working and it is unlike her to insist on making her presence known in this way, so I knew something was up. "Did you hear the news?" she asked me. I shook my head, not knowing what she was talking about. "There was a shooting in Colorado," she said, "at a high school." I sat in silence as she related the breaking news about how two white students entered Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado and began shooting students. "And," Tamai added at the end of the story, "witnesses say they were targetting ethnic minorities." Today I am reading the paper which details the atrocity. It's hard to get my mind around the enormity of the violence. But, in the middle of trying to wrap up tidily the loose ends of a dissertation on anti-racism and white supremacy in pedagogical terms, what am I to make of the statement attributed to Evan Todd, one of the witnesses to the shootings: "They shot a black kid; they called him a nigger. They said they didn't like niggers so they shot him in the face" (Obmascik A7). I am pacing the room trying to figure out what to *do* with

words such as these, words that maim, words that kill. A phrase from Patricia Williams comes to mind: "[h]ow can it be that so many well-meaning white people have never thought about race when so few blacks pass a single day without being reminded of it?" (*Seeing* 28). She does not even mention white people who are far from well-meaning nor the fact that reminders of race can be deadly.

Later in the day, I receive an e-mail bulletin informing me that forty-three students at the University of California, Berkeley campus, were arrested on April 14 when they staged a peaceful sit-in to protest the "systematic decline" of Chicano Studies, Asian American Studies, Native American Studies, and Comparative Ethnic Studies, resulting from the University's reduced-funding policy toward these programs. L. Ling-Chi Wang, chair of Ethnic Studies at UC Berkeley, released the following statement in support of the arrested students:

> the faculty of Ethnic Studies fully understand the frustration and anger of the protesting students. We consider their demands reasonable, legitimate, and necessary, if Ethnic Studies is to remain a viable intellectual enterprise on this campus and the centerpiece of University's commitment to diversity. We stand in solidarity with our students. Accordingly, we will not engage in negotiations toward resolution of our department's predicament until the Administration grants full amnesty to all students who were arrested and meets with our students to hear out their needs and concerns. (Wang, internet)

These racist interruptions, I hope, do not stunt anti-racist progress but, rather, encourage those of us who insist on such a process to fight for a strong and visible anti-racist agenda wherever and

whenever we can. While I support Wang and his colleagues in remaining allied with their students, I recognize that their actions are barely stopgaps, attempts to keep a racist environment from becoming worse, rather than working toward the development of a future, credible anti-racist environment. Granted, given the circumstances at UC Berkeley, perhaps the protestors follow the only path left open to them — however, I cannot help but hope that anti-racist action does not simply become visible when overt racist actions appear, and it is this desire that shapes the next and final section.

III
Looking Back and Forward

In my opening chapter, I discussed the failure of postcolonial theory to adequately address issues of race, but I did not propose a radical (and realistic) alternative. Rather, I wanted to show how postcolonial theory gestures toward race theory and I tried to use the remainder of the dissertation to illustrate ways in which this gesturing could turn into an actual practice. Now at the conclusion, I propose the following at the risk of sounding grandiose (and perhaps a bit delusional) — universities must take on the task of

doing anti-racism, of normalizing anti-racist practice to the same degree that white supremacist systems have been normalized thus far. This is a radical movement, and one that demands an enormous re-thinking of how we want universities to operate. Of course, such a movement is hardly likely to occur in any great hurry, if at all, so what I will try to formulate here is one avenue of critical intervention that I believe *is* possible to achieve in the short term.

Having spent the majority of this dissertation discussing anti-racist practice of one type or another, but focussing most specifically on critical race theory, I suggest that it is time we incorporate such an area of study into the academic faculties and departments that we inhabit. That is, critical race theory must infiltrate the whiteness of the academy not just *in* theory, but in the practice of what we teach, what we read, and who we are. The "we" I have been using in this section refers to those of us who have some form of access to the academy, as undergraduates, graduate students, sessional workers, faculty, and administrators. As critical thinkers and educators, we need to take on the tenets of critical race theory in order to alter our systems of learning and teaching. Granted, CRT is an approach developed for and by those within legal education, but I suggest that there is nothing to prevent the useful and productive importation of these principles into other areas of study.

Chandra Mohanty, addressing her involvement in a forum at the New School for Social Research in New York City organized to

discuss a protest staged by the Coalition of Concerned Students and Faculty, notes a distinct "disjuncture between the university's stated goals of diversity . . . and its actual practices" (xiii). She continues:

> If the academy, the classroom, and other educational contexts are not mere instructional sites, but are fundamentally political and cultural sites that represent accommodations and contestations over knowledge by differently empowered social constituencies, then the processes and practices of education lead to profoundly significant notions of self, identity, and community. ("Dangerous" xvi)

The CCSF listed six focus points that I repeat here since they are worth analyzing in terms of an integrated anti-racist agenda:

> (1) dismantling practices of institutionalized white supremacy, white hegemony and white power in its curriculum [and] hiring practices . . . (2) ceasing all forms of class and labor exploitation; (3) [eradicating] discriminatory practices towards female employees and students; (4) ending the proliferation of an intellectual and social environment that is heterosexist; (5) dismantling non-participatory, non-democratic decision making processes; and (6) beginning the process of rethinking the curriculum. (xv)

In tandem with Henry et al., who suggest that "[o]f prime importance in the anti-racist institutional process is a commitment to the empowerment of racial minorities both within the organization and outside of it" (301-02), this brief six-point list offers universities strong advice toward developing a progressive and anti-racist community. I note with some optimism, too, that these principles were repeated so recently by students protesting

the university's funding cutbacks to the Ethnic Studies Faculty at the University of California at Berkeley (Wang, internet). Yet I note with little surprise that such demands — accompanied by non-violent civil disobedience — have resulted, in the short term at any rate, in the arrest of forty-three students who are activating for an anti-racist agenda at Berkeley.

What I am trying to emphasize here is the absolute need for systemic change if universities and other institutions are to address the pressing needs of racialized people. In my opening chapter, I detailed the theoretical models that we need to use to create such a social change. Critical race theory has made inroads into legal theory and practice since its beginnings just over a decade ago. However, unless such strategies are practiced widely, they will have little or no effect. That is, in order to dismantle systems of white supremacy as demanded by the CCSF, universities need to be training people — students of colour and white students — to recognize what whiteness is, how it operates, and how it works to dominate and oppress. Additionally, all the "citizens" of a university community would benefit from adopting one of the basic tenets of critical race theory: counterstorytelling, entering into the record stories told by racialized people, and not just stories of their oppression for the consumption of white colleagues and professors, but stories of their perceptions and world views. Some of these stories I have tried to tell in various sections of this dissertation — from the anecdote to the fictionalized memory, from the self-

reflective commentary to the dialogic fable of systems of power — are performances of this counterhegemonic discourse. But unless such acts of storied resistance are sanctioned by universities and other sites of knowledge production — meaning the validation of critical race theory through a radical reconstruction of the curriculum, the hiring of faculty of colour who practice critical pedagogy, and the institutionalized practice of an integrated anti-racist education — these changes will be slow in coming.

I closed the previous chapter with an extensive quotation from Cornel West and his challenge to formulate a prophetic criticism. He emphasizes the need for scholars and artists of colour to hold onto the Gramscian ideal of the organic intellectual, never leaving sight of the communities and principles that keep us connected to a politically progressive practice. For me, this sense of staying connected has come from the confirmation offered by the many critics of colour whose work I have long perceived to be this "prophetic criticism," and so it seems fitting that I close with their words. From Himani Bannerji:

> The possibilities for constructing a radically different Canada emerge only from those who have been "othered" as the insider-outsiders of the nation. It is their standpoints which, oppositionally politicized, can take us beyond the confines of gender and race . . . In their lives, politics, and work, the "others" hold the possibility of being able to expose the hollowness of the liberal state and to provide us with an understanding of both the refined and crude constructions of "White power" behind "Canada's" national imaginary. ("Geography" 37)

From Sherene Razack:

> As long as we see ourselves as not implicated in relations of power, as innocent, we cannot begin to walk the path of social justice and to thread our way through the complexities of power relations. . . . I would say that when we are in a dominant group we must remember the power relations that regulates why those insubordinate groups would not want to look us in the eye. (*Looking* 22)

From Roy Miki:

> Today we are moving through a shifting mine-field of terminological cross-dressing and theoretical instabilities. Now more than ever there is an urgency to devise malleable critical methodologies that can adjust themselves to difference and relativity. . . . Perhaps, for the foreseeable future at least, the shaping of cultural theories (I emphasize the plural) to understand the workings of "racialization" in the production of texts must be an on-going negotiation process. . . . What is important for a culture to thrive is a renewed belief in the viability of agency, so that writers from a diversity of subject-positions can develop the conditions in which social justice can be achieved through a language free from the tyranny of hegemonies of all kinds. (122-23)

And from Mari Matsuda:

> A postcolonial university is one in which the formerly colonized can teach and learn, study and write, without abandoning their culture. It is one in which the objects of so much of our study — the poor, Native people, working people, women of all races, and men of color — will make up more than just the topics of research. They will make up not only the students who are allowed to listen to the lectures but also the full citizenry, studying, writing, and producing knowledge in an academic world that has recognized their claim to citizenship. (*Where* 128-29)

Critics such as Bannerji, Razack, Miki, and Matsuda articulate the need for the presence and activism of people of colour inside and

outside the site of the university. In his "ten-point primer" on race research, Miki notes that those of us who inhabit the university must move beyond the "liberal humanist gestures" of attempting inclusivity on our courses but going no further toward adopting an anti-racist practice. Agreeing with Matsuda's vision of a postcolonial university, Miki writes that

> [t]he possibility of an "inclusive university" depends not only on the inclusion of racialized texts and writers on the curriculum, but calls for the expertise of academics of colour in a critical mass sufficient to transform literary studies into a vital mode of social and cultural critique. (178)

This, I suggest, is a call for the entrance of a "brown gaze" into the site of the university, one that looks not just upon histories of whiteness, but upon a curriculum, an administration, a system of governance, and which, *by* so looking, begins to effect a radical anti-racist revision.

Works Cited

Adam, Ian and Helen Tiffin, eds. *Past the Last Post: Theorizing Post-Colonialism and Post-Modernism*. Calgary: U of Calgary P, 1990.

Ahmad, Aijaz. *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures*. London and New York: Verso, 1992.

Allen, Lillian. "Tranforming the Cultural Fortress: Setting the Agenda for Anti-Racism Work in Culture" *Parallélogramme* 19.3 (1993): 48-59.

Althusser, Louis. "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes Toward an Investigation)." *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*. Trans. Ben Brewster. London: New Left Books, 1971: 121-73.

Ansley, Frances Lee. "White Supremacy (And What We Should Do About It)." Delgado and Stefancic 592-95.

Anthias, Floya, and Nira Yuval-Davis. *Racialized Boundaries: Race, Nation, Gender, Colour and Class and the Anti-racist Struggle*. New York: Routledge, 1992.

Ashcroft, Bill, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin. *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures*. London: Routledge, 1989.

Austin, Regina. "Sapphire Bound." Crenshaw et al. 426-37.

The Avalon Project : The Statutes of the United States. "An Act to Prevent the Importation of Certain Persons into Certain States, Where, by the Laws Thereof, Their Admission is Prohibited." Online. Internet. 1998. http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/statutes/slavery/sl003.htm

Bad Object-Choices, ed. *How Do I Look? Queer Film and Video.* Seattle: Bay Press, 1991.

Bahri, Deepika. "Once More with Feeling: What is Postcolonialism?" *ARIEL* 26.1 (1995): 51-82.

Bahri, Deepika and Mary Vasudeva. *Between the Lines: South Asians and Postcoloniality.* Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1996.

Bannerji, Himani. "Geography Lessons." Roman and Eyre. 23-42

---. "Popular Images of South Asian Women." Bannerji 144-52.

---. Preface. Bhaggiyadatta, Krisantha Sri. *The fifty-second state of amnesia.* Toronto: TSAR, 1993.

---, ed. *Returning the Gaze: Essays on Racism, Feminism and Politics.* Toronto: Sister Vision, 1993.

---. *Thinking through: Essays on feminsim, Marxism, and anti-racism. Toronto: The Women's Press, 1995.*

---. *The Writing on the Wall: Essays on Culture and Politics, Toronto: TSAR, 1993.*

Bell, Derrick. *Confronting Authority: Reflections of an Ardent Protester.* Boston: Beacon, 1996.

Bentham, Jeremy. "Panopticon Papers." *A Bentham Reader.* Ed. Mary Peter Mack. New York: Pegasus, 1969. 194-208.

Bhabha, Homi K., ed. *Nation and Narration.* London: Routledge, 1990.

Bhabha, Homi K. *The Location of Culture.* London and New York: Routledge, 1994.

Bhaggiyadatta, Krisantha Sri. "Aay, Wha Kinda Indian Arr Ya?" Toronto: Up Press (Un)Ltd, 1997.

---. *The fifty-second state of amnesia.* Toronto: TSAR Publications, 1993

Binning, Sadhu. *No More Watno Dur.* Toronto: TSAR, 1994.

Bourdieu, Pierre. *Homo Academicus.* Stanford: Stanford UP, 1990. Trans. Peter Collier.

---. *Language and Symbolic Power.* Trans. Gino Raymond and Matthew Adamson. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1991.

Brandt, Godfrey L. *The Realization of Anti-racist Teaching.* London, New York, and Philadelphia: The Falmer Press, 1986.

Bryson, Mary and Suzanne de Castell. "Queer Pedagogy?!: Praxis Makes Im/Perfect." de Castell and Bryson 269-93.

Burnham, Clint. *The Jamesonian Unconscious: The Aesthetics of Marxist Theory.* Durham and London: Duke UP, 1995.

Butler, Judith. *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex.* London and New York: Routledge, 1993.

---. *Excitable speech: a Politics of the Performative* . New York and London: Routledge, 1997.

---. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity.* New York and London: Routledge, 1990.

Carter, Robert T. "Is White a Race? Expressions of White Racial Identity." Fine et al. 198-209.

Cashmore, Ellis and Barry Troyna. *Introduction to Race Relations.* London: The Falmer Press, 1990.

Cannon, Margaret. *The Invisible Empire: Racism in Canada,* Toronto: Random House, 1995.

Cerf, Vince. "A Brief History of the Internet and Related Networks." Internet Society (ISOC) home page. http://www.isoc.org/internet-history/cerf.html

"Child Abuse and Lesbianism." [no author] The Foundation of Human Understanding home page. Online. Internet. 1998. http://www.fhu.com

Chomsky, Noam and Edward S. Herman. *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media.* New York: Pantheon, 1988.

Chow, Rey. "The Fascist Longings in Our Midst." *ARIEL* 26.1 (1995): 23-50.

---. *Writing Diaspora: Tactics of Intervention in Contemporary Cultural Studies* . Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1993.

Chrisman, Laura, and Patrick Williams, eds. *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: a Reader.* New York: Columbia UP, 1994.

Clarke, Tony and Maude Barlow. *MAI : the Multilateral Agreement on Investment and the Threat to Canadian Sovereignty.* Toronto: Stoddart, 1997.

Cleaver, Kathleen Neal. "The Antidemocratic Power of Whiteness." Delgado and Stefancic 156-63.

Clifford, James and George E. Marcus, eds. *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography.* London: U of California P, 1986.

Clifford, John. "A Burkean Critique of Composition Praxis." *Pedagogy is Politics: Literary Theory and Critical Teaching.* Ed. Maria-Regina Kecht. Urbana and Chicago: U of Illinois P, 1992.

Cole, Mike. *The Social Context of Schooling.* Lewes: The Falmer Press, 1989.

Connolly, Paul. "All Lads Together? Racism, Masculinity and Multicultural/Anti-racist Strategies in Primary School." *International Studies in Sociology of Education*, 4.2 (1994):191-211.

---. "Introduction." *Researching Racism in Education: Politics, Theory and Practice.* Buckingham and Philadelphia: Open UP, 1998.

Connolly, Paul, and Barry Troyna, eds. *Researching Racism in Education: Politics, Theory and Practice.* Buckingham and Philadelphia: Open UP, 1998.

Crenshaw, Kimberlé; Neil Gotanda, and Gary Peller, eds. *Critical Race Theory: The Key Writings That Formed the Movement.* New York: The New Press, 1996.

de Castell, Suzanne and Mary Bryson, eds. *Radical In<ter>ventions: Identity, Politics and Difference/s in Educatonal Praxis.* New York: State U of New York P, 1997.

Dei, George Sefa. *Anti-Racist Education: Working Across Differences.* Toronto: OISE, 1994.

Delgado, Richard. "Introduction." Delgado xii-xvi.

---. "Legal Storytelling: Storytelling for Oppositionists and Others: A Plea for Narrative." Delgado 64-74.

---. "Rodrigo's Sixth Chronicle: Intersections, Essences, and the Dilemma of Social Reform." Delgado 242-52.

Delgado, Richard, ed. *Critical Race Theory: The Cutting Edge.* Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1995.

Delgado, Richard and Jean Stefancic, eds. *Critical White Studies : Looking Behind the Mirror.* Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1997.

Derksen, Jeff. "Making Race Opaque: Fred Wah's Poetics of Opposition and Differentiation." *West Coast Line*, No. 18 (29/3) Winter 1995-96: 63-76.

Dobbs, Michelle, Tim Hunter, Cydney Keith, Scott McFarlane, Charmaine Perkins, and Geneffa Popatia. "A Report of the Problems Surrounding ENG 806: 'Women of Colour/Colourful Women." Unpublished report submitted to Evan Alderson, Dean of Arts, Simon Fraser University. Feb. 25, 1994.

Du Bois, W. E. B. *The Souls of Black Folks*. New York: Bantam, 1989. First printed 1903.

Dulai, Phinder. *Ragas from the Periphery*. Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp, 1995.

---. Unpublished interview with the author. 1997.

Dyer, Richard. *White*. London: Routledge, 1997.

Ellsworth, Elizabeth. "The Double-Binds of Whiteness." Fine et al. 259-69.

---. "Why Doesn't This Feel Empowering? Working Through the Repressive Myths of Critical Pedagogy." *Harvard Educational Review* 59.3 (1994): 287-324.

Fagan, Cary. "Dealing with the Personal in Poetry." Rev. of *The Words I Know* by Cathy Stonehouse; *Loveruage: A Dance in Three Parts* by Ashok Mathur; and *Everything Arrives at the Light* by Lorna Crozier. *Toronto Globe and Mail* 28 April 1995.

Fanon, Frantz. "The Fact of Blackness." *Black Skin, White Masks*. Trans. Charles Lam Markman. London: Pluto, 1952. Rpt. in Donald and Rattansi 220-40.

Fine, Michelle. "Witnessing Whiteness." Fine et al. 57-65.

Fine, Michelle, Lois Weis, Linda C. Powell, and L. Mun Wong, eds. *Off White: Readings on Race, Power, and Society*. New York and London: Routledge, 1997.

Foner, Eric. "Hiring Quotas for White Males Only." Delgado and Stefancic 23-26.

Foucault, Michel. *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977*. Ed. Colin Gordon. New York: Pantheon, 1980.

Francis, Daniel. *National Dreams: Myth Memory, and Canadian History*. Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp, 1997.

Freire, Paulo. *Pedagogy in Process: The Letters to Guinea-Bissau*. Trans. Carman St. John Hunter. New York: Seabury, 1978.

---. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* . Trans. Myra Bergman Ramos. New York: Continuum, 1993.

Fung, Richard. "Looking for My Penis: The Eroticized Asian in Gay Video Porn." Bad Object-Choices 145-68.

Gadotti, Moacir. *Reading Paulo Freire: His Life and Work*. Trans. John Milton. New York: SUNY, 1994.

Gagnon, Monika, and Scott McFarlane. "Writing Thru Race." *Parallélogramme* 20.2 (1994): 6-9.

Garneau, David. "Beyond the Pale: Looking for E/quality Outside the White Imaginary." *Parallélogramme* 20.1 (1994): 34-43.

Gever, Martha, Pratibha Parmar and John Greyson, eds. *Queer Looks: Perspectives on Lesbian and Gay Film and Video*. Toronto: Between the Lines, 1993.

Gilroy, Paul. "Managing the Underclass: a Further Note on the Sociology of Race Relations in Britain." *Race and Class* 22 (1980): 47-62.

Giroux, Henry. *Disturbing Pleasures: Learning Popular Cultures*. New York: Routledge, 1994.

---. "Is There a Place for Cultural Studies in Colleges of Education?" *Education and Cultural Studies: Toward a Performative Practice*. Ed. Henry Giroux and Patrick Shannon. New York and London: Routledge, 1997. 231-48.

Giroux, Henry and Peter McLaren. "Teacher Education and the Politics of Engagement: The Case for Democratic Schooling." *Harvard Educational Review* 56.3 (1986): 213-38.

Goldberg, David Theo, ed. *Anatomy of Racism*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1990.

Gopinath, Gayatri. "Notes on a Queer South Asian Planet." *Rungh* 3.3 (1995): 9-10.

Gramsci, Antonio. *Selections from Prison Notebooks*. Trans. Q. Hoare and G. Smith. New York: International Publishers, 1971.

Greene, Linda S. "Tokens, Role Models, and Pedagogical Politics: Lamentations of an African American Female Law Professor." Wing 88-95.

Grillo, Trina and Stephanie M. Wildman. "Obscuring the Importance of Race: The Implication of Making Comparisons between Racism and Sexism (or Other -isms)." *Critical Race Feminism: A Reader*. Ed. Adrien Katherine Wing. New York: New York UP, 1997. 44-50.

Hall, Joy, ed. "Writing Thru Race Conference Final Report." The Writers' Union of Canada, 1995.

Harris, Angela P. "Race and Essentialism in Feminist Legal Theory." Delgado 253-66.

Harris, Cheryl I. "Law Professors of Color and the Academy: Of Poets and Kings." Wing 101-06.

Hedrick, Mason, Darin Fuller and Charles Crandall. "Ku Klux Klan." Hate Crimes Website. California State University. 1998. Online. Internet. http://cjwww.csustan.edu/hatecrimes/kkk.html

Hawthorne, Susan. "Topographies of Creativity: Writing and Publishing Digitally." *TEXT: The Journal of the Australian Association of Writing Programs* 1.2 (October 1997). Online. Internet. http://www.ins.gu.edu.au/EDA/text/OCT97/hawth1.htm

Henry, Frances; Carol Tator, Winston Mattis, and Tim Rees. *The Colour of Democracy: Racism in Canadian Society.* Toronto: Harcourt Brace, 1995.

Herrnstein, Richard J. and Charles Murray. *The Bell Curve : Intelligence and Class Structure in American Life* New York: A Free Press, 1996.

Hill, Lawrence. *Any Known Blood.* Toronto: Harper Collins, 1997.

Hill, Mike. *Whiteness: A Critical Reader.* New York: New York UP, 1997.

Hoodfar, Homa. "Feminist Anthropology and Critical Pedagogy." de Castell and Bryson 211-32.

hooks, bell. *Black looks : race and representation.* Toronto: Between the Lines, 1992.

---. *Talking Back: thinking feminist, thinking black.* Toronto: Between the Lines, 1988.

---. *Teaching to transgress : education as the practice of freedom.* New York: Routledge, 1994.

---. *Yearning: race, gender, and cultural politics.* Boston: South End Press, 1990.

Hull, Gloria T., Patricia Bell Scott and Barbara Smith, eds. *All the women are white, all the blacks are men, but some of us are brave*. Old Westbury, NY: The Feminist Press, 1982.

Hutcheon, Linda and Marion Richmond, eds. *Other Solitudes: Canadian Multicultural Fictions*. Toronto: Oxford UP, 1990.

Hutcheon, Linda. *The Canadian Postmodern: A Study of Contemporary English-Canadian Fiction*. Toronto: Oxford UP, 1988.

Ibanex, Francisco. "From Confession to Dialogue." de Castell and Bryson 107-30.

Ignatiev, Noel. *Race Traitor*. New York and London: Routledge, 1996.

Ismail, Jam. *Diction Air*. Vancouver: self-published, n.d.

---. "Scared Texts." *Many-Mouthed Birds: Contemporary Writing by Chinese Canadians*, Ed. Bennet Lee and Jim Wong-Chu. Vancouver and Toronto: Douglas and McIntyre, 1991.

---. "(Translit) Transporting the Emporium: Hong Kong Art and Writing Through the Ends of Time. Ed. Scott McFarlane.*West Coast Line* 21 (1996-97): 49-58.

Itwaru, Arnold and Natasha Ksonzek. *Closed Entrances: Canadian Culture and Imperialism*. Toronto: TSAR, 1994.

Jhally, Sut and Justin Lewis. *Enlightened Racism : The Cosby Show, Audiences, and the Myth of the American Dream*. Boulder: Westview, 1992.

Johnson, James Weldon, *The Autobiography of an Ex-coloured Man*. New York: Alfred Knopf, 1973. First printed 1955.

Kala Pani. Dir. Raj Khosla. Distributed by Navtekan 1958..

Kaplan, E. Ann. *Women and Film: Both Sides of the Camera.* New York: Methuen, 1983.

Karamcheti, Indira. "Caliban in the Classroom." *Pedagogy: The Question of Impersonation.* Ed. Jane Gallop. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 1995. 138-46.

Kamboureli, Smaro. Rev. of *Funny Boy* by Shyam Selvadurai. *Rungh* 3.3 (1995): 36-37.

Keeling, Richard et al. Report to the Faculty Senate - Committee on Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Issues, University of Wisconsin-Madison. Online. Internet. April, 1997. http://www.stdorg.wisc.edu/lgbcc/lgbRept.htm

Kipling, Rudyard. "Gunga Din." Barrack-Room Ballads – Rudyard Kipling homepage. Barrack-Room Ballads, First Series (1892). Online. Internet. http://www.users.globalnet.co.uk/~munwin/ballads.html

Kivel, Paul. *Uprooting Racism: How White People Can Work for Racial Justice.* Philadelphia: New Society, 1996.

Klages, Gregory. "In the Company of Strong Men: the Paintings of Attila Richard Lukacs." *Id magazine* (April 18, 1996). http://www.idmagazine.com/arts/articles/lukas.htm

Kogawa, Joy. *Obasan.* Markham: Penguin, 1983.

Lai, Larissa. "Sixth Sensory Organ." *Queering absinthe* (special issue) *absinthe*, 9.1 (1996): 31-35.

Lebowitz, Fran. "Fran Lebowitz on Race: In Which the Famously Contrarian Humorist Spells It Out in Black and White" *Vanity Fair.* (October 1997): 220-224.

Lewis, Robert K. "Theory #11." Patriot Knowledge Base homepage. 1995. Online. Internet. http://www.micro.com/~pkb/theory11.html

Lopes, Damian. *Project X.* 1997. http://www.interlog.com/~vasco

Luo, Shao-Pin. "Translation, Transformation, and Transculturation: A Study of Selected Postcolonial Texts." Unpublished paper, 1998.

Macaulay, Thomas Babbington. "Minute on Indian Education." *Selected Writings.* Ed. John Clive and Thomas Pinney. Chicago, Chicago UP, 1972.

Mahoney, Martha R. "The Social Construction of Whiteness." Delgado and Stefancic 330-333.

Martindale, Kathleen. "Que<e>rying Pedagogy: Teaching Un/Popular Cultures." de Castell and Bryson 85-103.

Matsuda, Mari. *Where is Your Body? And Other Essays on Race, Gender, and the Law.* Boston: Beacon, 1996.

Matsuda, Mari, Richard Delgado and Charles R. Lawrence, eds.*Words That Wound : Critical Race Theory, Assaultive Speech, and the First Amendment (New Perspectives on Law, Culture, and Society).* Boulder: Westview, 1993.

Mathur, Ashok and Aruna Srivastava. "Preston Terre Blanche, Snow White, and the Seven Deadly Disclaimers, or The Dos of Racism (a not so far off fairy tale)." Miki and Wah 7-14.

Max, J. and W. Stickle. "Humanities and Arts: Sharing Center Stage on the Internet." Oct. 1997. Internet Society home page. http://www.isoc.org/inet98/proceedings/rfc/2100/rfc2150.txt

McClintock, Anne. "The Angel of Progress: Pitfalls of the Term 'Post-colonialism'." Chrisman and Williams 291-304.

McIntosh, Peggy. "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack." Schneider120-28.

McLaren, Peter. "White Terror and Oppositional Agency." *Critical Pedagogy and Predatory Culture: Oppositional Politics in a Postmodern Era.* London and New York: Routledge, 1995. 117-144.

McFarlane, Scott. "The Haunt of Race: Canada's *Multiculturalism Act*, the Politics of Incorporation, and Writing Thru Race." *FUSE Magazine*, 18.3, (1995): 18-31.

McKague, Ormond, ed. *Racism in Canada*, Saskatoon: Fifth House, 1991.

McMahon, Susan. Berkeley South Asian Diaspora Project. Online. Internet. 1996. http://www.lib.berkeley.edu/SSEAL/SouthAsia/overview.html

Melanie and Mike, eds. *Take Our Word For It: The Web's Only Etymology Magazine*. 1998. Online. Internet. http://bay1.bjt.net/~melanie/et_h-j.html

Mercer, Kobena. "Dark and Lovely Too: Black Gay Men in Independent Film." Gever, Greyson, and Parmar 238-56.

Miki, Roy. *Broken Entries: Race, Subjectivity, Writing*. Stratford: Mercury, 1998.

Miki, Roy and Wah, Fred, eds. *Colour. An Issue: A Special Double Issue of West Coast Line. West Coast Line* 13/14: (1994).

Mishra, Vijay. "Diasporic Narratives of Salman Rushdie." *ARIEL* 26.3 (1995): 7-45.

Mishra, Vijay and Hodge, Bob. "What is Post(-)colonialsm?" Chrisman and Williams 276-91.

Mississippi Masala. Dir. Mira Nair. 1991. Perf. Denzel Washington, Sarita Choudhury. Columbia TriStar Home Video.

Mohanty, Chandra Talpade. Preface. "Dangerous Territories, Territorial Power, and Education." Roman and Eyre. ix-svii.

---. "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses." *Boundary* 2 (1984): 123-31.

Monet, Don and Skanu'u (Ardythe Wilson). *Colonialism on Trial Indigenous Land Rights and the Gitskan Wet'suwet'en Sovereignty*. Gabriola Island: New Society, 1992.

Mootoo, Shani, dir. *Wild Women in the Woods* . Perf. Shani Mootoo, Shauna Beharry. Videocassette. 1992.

Mootoo, Shani. *Cereus Blooms at Night.* Vancouver: Press Gang, 1996.

---.*Out On Main Street.* Vancouver: Press Gang, 1993.

---.E-mail to Ashok Mathur. March 2, 1996.

---."Queery." *Queering absinthe* (special issue) *absinthe*, 9.1 (1996): 4.

Mukherjee, Arun. *Oppositional Aesthetics: Readings from a Hyphenated Space.* Toronto: TSAR, 1994.

Mukherjee, Bharati. "Beyond Multiculturalism: Surviving the Nineties." Schneider 129-40.

Mulvey, Laura. "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." *Screen* 16.3 (1975): 6-18.

Nair, Savita. "Masala in the Melting Pot: History, Identity, and the Indian Diaspora." *SAGAR (South Asia Graduate Research Journal)* 2.2, 1995. Online. Internet. http://asnic.utexas.edu/asnic/sagar/sagar.html#RTFToC5

Namjoshi, Suniti. *The Blue Donkey Fables.* London: Women's Press, 1988.

---. *Building Babel.* North Melbourne: Spinifex, 1996.

---. "Building Babel Site." Spinifex, 1996. Online. Internet. http://www.peg.apc.org/~spinifex/babelbuildingsite.html

---. Electronic mail to the author. Mon, 27 Jan 1997.

---. *Feminist Fables.* London: Sheba, 1981.

---." A Meme of Great Power, or, What the God Vishnu Has to do with the Internet." Unpublished paper. 1996.

Narayan, Uma. *Dislocating Cultures : Identities, Traditions, and Third-World Feminism (Thinking Gender).* London and New York: Routledge, 1997.

Nelson, Cary. *Manifesto of a Tenured Radical.* New York: New York UP, 1997.

Ng, Roxana, Pat Staton, and Joyce Scane, eds. *Anti-racism, Feminism, and Critical Approaches to Education.* Toronto: OISE, 1995.

Ng, Roxana. "A Woman Out of Control: Deconstructing Sexism and Racism in the University." de Castell and Bryson 39-58.

---."Teaching against the Grain: Contradictions and Possibilities." Ng et al. 129-52.

---."Teaching against the Grain: Contradictions for Minority Teachers." *Women and Education: A Canadian Perspective.* Ed. Jane Gaskell and Arlene McLaren. Calgary: Detselig Enterprises, Ltd, 1991.

Obmascik, Mark. "Laughing teens kill 25: Students on 'suicide mission' terrorize Colorado school." *Calgary Herald* 21 April, 1999: A1, A7

Omi, Michael, and Howard Winant. *Racial Formations in the United States From the 1960s to the 1990s.* London and New York: Routledge, 1994.

Parmar, Pratibha. "Desi Dykes." *Rungh* 3.3 (1995): 12-15.

---."That Moment of Emergence." Gever, Greyson, and Parmar. 3-11.

Paris is Burning. Dir. Jennie Livingstone. Prestige, 1990. 76 min.

Perkins, Charmaine. "Any More Colorful and We'd Have to Censor It." de Castell and Bryson 247-68.

Philip, Marlene Nourbese. *Frontiers: Essays and Writings on Racism and Culture.* Stratford: Mercury, 1992.

---. "sIGNIFYING NOTHING: The Selling of Bisoondath's *Selling Illusions.*" *Border/Lines* 36 (1995): 4-11.

Post, Deborah Waire. "Reflections on Identity, Diversity, and Morality." Delgado 419-27.

Powell, L. C. "The Achievement (K)not: Whiteness and 'Black Underachievement.'" *Off White: Readings on Race, Power, and Society*. New York: Routledge, 1997. 3-12

Rakhit, Anuradha. "Silenced Voices: Life History as an Approach to the Study of South Asian Women Teachers." *Researching Racism in Education: Politics, Theory and Practice.* Buckingham and Philadelphia: Open UP, 1998.

Rajan, Rajeswari Sunder. *Real and Imagined Women*. London and New York: Routledge, 1993.

Ramachandran, Seetha. "Isn't Sarita Sexy? (Collapsing Sex and Nation in *Mississippi Masala*)." *Asian Voices*, (Spring 1995). Korean Students' Association, Brown University. http://www.brown.edu/Students/Korean_Students_Association/asian_voices/spring95/sarita.html

Rashid, Ian Iqbal. "Barbie's New Home." *Rungh* 3.3 (1995): 17.

---. *Black Markets, White Boyfriends, and other acts of elision.* Toronto: TSAR, 1991.

---. Electronic mail to the author. Thu, 16 Jan 1997.

---. Rev. of *Her Sweetness Lingers* by Shani Mootoo. *Rungh* 3.3 (1995): 28.

---. "Introduction." *Black Film Review*. London: 1992. 13-14.

---. "Naming Names, or How Do You Say 'Queer' in 'South

Asian'?" *Rungh* 3.3 (1995): 7.

---. *The Heat Yesterday*. Toronto: Coach House, 1995.

Razack, Sherene. *Looking White People in the Eye: Gender, Race, and Culture in Courtrooms and Clasrooms*. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1998.

---. "Story-telling for Social Change." *Gender and Education* 5.1 (1993): 55-71.

Rezai-Rashti, Goli. "Connecting Racism and Sexism: The Dilemma of Working with Minority Female Students." Ng et al. 87-98.

---. "Multicultural Education, Anti-Racist Education, and Critical Pedagogy: Reflections on Everyday Practice." Ng et al. 3-20.

Roman, Leslie and Linda Eyre, eds. *Dangerous Territories*. London and New York: Routledge, 1997.

Rushdie, Salman. *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981-1991*. London: Granta, 1992.

Said, Edward. *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage, 1979.

Sarup, Madan. *Education and the Ideologies of Racism*. Stoke-on-Trent: Trentham, 1991.

Saunders, Peter and Rachael Pickering. "Cause." *Nucleus*, Christian Medical Fellowship's quarterly student journal, 1997.

http://www.cmf.org.uk/pubs/nucleus/nucoct97/cause.htm

Schneider, Bart, ed.*Race: an Anthology in the First Person*, New York: Three Rivers, 1997.

Serfozo, Barb and Henry Farrell. "From Sex-Vixens to Senators — Representation in Nazi Porn and the Discourse of the American Right Wing." *Journal of Social and Political Thought* 1.1, (1999).
http://www.yorku.ca/org/spot/jspot/volino1/hfarrell2.htm

Shor, Ira. *Critical Teaching and Everyday Life*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1987.

---. *When Students Have Power: Negotiating Authority in Critical Pedagogy*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1986.

Simon, Roger I. *Teaching Against the Grain: Texts for a Pedagogy of Possibility*. New York, Westport, London: Bergin and Garvey, 1992.

Silverman, Kaja "Masochism and Subjectivity," *Framework* 12: (1980). 2-9

Smee, Sonia "Colouring the Pronoun." Miki and Wah 239-42.

Spinelli, Martin. "Radio Lessons for the Internet." *Journal of Postmodern Culture* 6.2,1996. http://www.monash.edu.au/journals/pmc/issue.196/pop-cult.196.html#fortyseven

Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. "Can the Subaltern Speak?" *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture.* Ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg. Urbana and Chicago: U of Illinois P, 1988. 271-313.

---. "The Politics of Translation" *Outside in the Teaching Machine* , London and New York: Routledge, 1993. 179-200.

---. "Teaching Postcolonial and Commonwealth Literatures." *College Literature* 19.3 (1992); 20.1 (1993).

Srivastava, Aruna. "Re-imagining Racism: South Asian Canadian Women Writers." Bannerji 103-121.

Stone, Sandy. "The 'Empire' Strikes Back: A Posttranssexual Manifesto." 1993. http://www.actlab.utexas.edu/~sandy/empire-strikes-back. First published in Kristina Straub and Julia Epstein, eds.: *Body Guards: The Cultural Politics of Gender Ambiguity* . New York: Routledge, 1991.

Synnot, Anthony and David Howes. "Canada's Visible Minorities: Identity and Representation" *Re-Situating Identities: The Politics of Race, Ethnicity, Culture.* Ed. Vered Amit-tala and Caroline Knowles. Peterborough: Broadview, 1996

Tator, Carol, Frances Henry, and Winston Mattis. *Challenging Racism in the Arts: Case Studies of Controversy and Conflict.* Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1998.

Tompkins, Jane. *A Life in School: What the Teacher Learned.* Reading: Addison-Wesley, 1997.

Trinh T. Minh-ha. *Framer Framed.* London and New York: Routledge, 1992.

---. "Not You/Like You: Post-Colonial Women and the Interlocking Questions of Identity and Difference." *Making Face, Making Soul: Hacienda Caras: Creative and Critical Perspectives by Women of Colour.* Ed. Gloria Anzaldua. San Francisco: aunt lute foundation, 1990.

---. *When the Moon Waxes Red.* London and New York: Routledge, 1991.

---. *Woman, Native, Other: Writing, Post-Coloniality and Feminism. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1989.*

Troyna, Barry. "Beyond Multiculturalism: Towards the Enactment of Anti-Racist Education in Policy, Provision and Pedagogy." *Oxford Review of Education* 13.3 (1987): 307-20.

Varadharajan, Asha. *Exotic Parodies: Subjectivity in Adorno, Said, and Spivak.* Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1995.

Wah, Fred. "Speak My Language: Racing the Lyric Poetic." *The Sitelines Issue.* Ed. Roy Miki. *West Coast Line.* 24, (1997-98).

Walcott, Rinaldo. *Black Like Who? Writing-Black-Canada.* Toronto: Insomniac, 1997.

Wang, L. Ling-chi. "Response to Last Week's Student Protests & Arrests: A Public Statement of Ethnic Studies Faculty at UC

Berkeley." 19 April 1999. Online posting. Newsgroup aaascommunity@lists.uoregon.edu. 19 April 1999.

West, Cornel. "The New Cultural Politics of Difference." *Race, Identity, and Representation in Education*. Ed. Cameron McCarthy and Warren Crichlow. New York and London: Routledge, 1993.

---. "Paulo Freire." *Prophetic Thoughts in Postmodern Times*. Monroe, Maine: Common Courage, 1993. 179-80.

---. "Toward A Socialist Theory of Racism." Democratic Socialists of America homepage. Online. Internet. http://ccme-mac4.bsd.uchicago.edu/DSARace/West

Williams, Patricia. *Seeing a Color-Blind Future: The Paradox of Race*. New York: Noonday, 1997.

Wing, Adrien Katherine, ed. *Critical Race Feminism: a Reader*. New York: New York UP, 1997.

Wojakowski, Dot. "Dispelling the Myths of Homosexuality." Lesbian, Bisexual , Gay and Transgender students of McGill home page. Online. Interenet. http://vub.mcgill.ca/clubs/lbgtm/info/myth.html

Vassanji, Moyez. "Life at the Margins: In the Thick of Multiplicity." Bahri and Vasudeva 111-20.

Young, Jon. "Multicultural and Anti-Racist Teacher Education: A Comparative Analysis of Canadian and British Experiences in the 1970s and 1980s." Ng et al. 45-63.

Young, Robert J. C. *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race*. London and New York: Routledge, 1995.

Zakon, Robert Hobbes. "Hobbes' Internet Timeline v4.1." Internet Society home page. Online. Internet. http://www.isoc.org/guest/zakon/Internet/History/HIT.html

Zervos, Komninos. "Techno-literatures on the internet." *TEXT: The Journal of the Australian Association of Writing Programs* 1.2 (October 1997). Online. Internet. http://www.ins.gu.edu.au/EDA/text/OCT97/KKZTEXT.HTM