Re-Orientalism and South Asian Identity Politics

Orientalism refers to the imitation of aspects of Eastern cultures in the West, and was devised in order to have authority over the Orient. The concept of re-Orientalism maintains the divide between the Orient and the West. However, where Orientalism is based on how the West constructs the East, re-Orientalism is grounded on how the cultural East comes to terms with an orientalized East.

This book explores various new forms, objects and modes of circulation that sustain this renovated form of Orientalism in South Asian culture. The contributors identify and engage with recent debates about postcolonial South Asian identity politics, discussing a range of different texts and films such as *The White Tiger*, *Bride & Prejudice* and *Kama Sutra: A Tale of Love*.

Providing new theoretical insights from the areas of literature, film studies and cultural and discourse analysis, this book is an stimulating read for students and scholars interested in South Asian culture, postcolonial studies and identity politics.

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Abbreviations

Candle	A Candle or the Sun
Children	Children of the Book
IWE	Indian Writing in English
KBC	Kaun Banege Crorepati?
MCP	Malayan Communist Party
Millionaire	Who Wants to be a Millionaire?

1 Introducing re-Orientalism

A new manifestation of Orientalism

Lisa Lau and Ana Cristina Mendes

Re-Orientalism: theory, practices and ramifications

According to Edward Said's Foucauldian take on imperial discourse, the cultural construct of Orientalism was the European imperialistic strategy of composing a positive image of the western Self while casting the 'East' as its negative alter ego, alluring and exotic, dangerous and mysterious, always the Other. As such, 'the Orient has helped to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience' (Said 2003: 1–2), emerging as an intricate part of western culture itself and as a way to face internal contradictions. Self-evidently, Orientalism still persists in both popular and institutional constructions of culture and identity, but has developed in a rather curious trajectory over the last few decades. One direction of particular interest has been identified and designated as 're-Orientalism' (Lau 2009), where 'Orientals' are seen to be perpetrating Orientalisms no less than 'non-Orientals' and, moreover, perpetrating certain and selected types of Orientalisms. Where Said's Orientalism is grounded in how the West constructs the 'Orient' and the 'Occident', re-Orientalism is based on how cultural producers with eastern affiliations come to terms with an orientalized East, whether by complying with perceived expectations of western readers, by playing (along) with them or by discarding them altogether. As a consequence, the present critical project aims to situate itself within the reconfiguration of modes of cultural analysis that observe, identify and comment the operations of new Orientalisms in the twenty-first century. Re-Orientalist discursive practices and rhetorical strategies are often sites of subversion where meanings are in constant flux. In this sense, re-Orientalism theory exposes the power of Orientalist discourse while underscoring its instability and mutability, and as such provides avenues for questioning the endurance of Orientalist practices today.

One purpose of this collection is to observe how re-Orientalism is deployed, made to circulate, and perceived by cultural producers and consumers within the specific context of South Asian identity politics. The concept of re-Orientalism is applicable in a large number of Asian contexts; this volume case studies South Asia and South Asian diasporic cultural formations, illustrating the delicate negotiation of power and influence within the spaces of

South Asian textual practices, specifically in literary works and through the media of film and television. This collection therefore places itself at the centre of a politics of power and representation; one which does not pitting the 'West' against the 'East',[1] but strives for a much more complex and nuanced understanding – an understanding that could not be confined within those discursive structures – of postcolonial cultural production and its engendering of re-Orientalist perspectives. In fact, this project is attentive to the implications of the heterogeneity embedded in categories such as the West and the East, given that, as Said influentially argued, 'the ontological and epistemological distinction … between "the Orient" and … "the Occident"' (Said 2003: 2) resulted from a colonial discursive power structure devised for 'dominating, restructuring and having authority over the Orient' (Said 2003: 3).

Following the arguments of Said's foundational theorization, one way of approaching re-Orientalism theory is to note that it concerns the ontological and epistemological force of a conglomeration of discursive practices on the subjects it demarcates. In this sense, although this volume was sparked off by widespread interest and responses to Lisa Lau's 2009 essay 'Re-Orientalism: The Perpetration and Development of Orientalism by Orientals', the concept of re-Orientalism, even if under slightly different guises and in different terminologies, has been buffeted around for at least the last two or three decades. The most significant occurrence of this term (spelled alternatively as 'reOrientalism') dates back to Samir Amin's, Giovanni Arrighi's and Immanuel Wallerstein's 1999 counter-critique to *ReOrient: Global Economy in the Asian Age* (1998) by the economic historian and sociologist André Gunder Frank. In their responses titled 'ReOrientalism', Amin *et al.* dispute Gunder Frank's defence of a 'reOriented', non-Eurocentric economic historiography and social theory. This critical controversy has even reached the pages of Said's *Culture and Imperialism* (1994: 4–5), but this volume proposes a usage of the term which differs somewhat from its previous similar employments. In fact, albeit employing a variety of terminologies, the concept of re-Orientalism has been in circulation in academia for at least the last three decades, termed as 'ethno-orientalism' (Carrier 1992), 'self-orientalism' (Dirlik 1996), 'internal orientalism' (Schein 1997) and 'reverse Orientalism' (Tony Mitchell 2004), to name a few. Indeed, the current promotion and profiteering of a fashionable alterity as a marketing strategy that repackages the 'Orient' for global consumption has not failed to attract considerable critical attention. Spivak's concept of 'new orientalism' in *Outside in the Teaching Machine* (Spivak 1993: 277), Elleke Boehmer's assessment of 'neo-Orientalism' in the essay 'Questions of Neo-Orientalism' (1998), and Anis Shivani's reading in the article 'Indo-Anglian Fiction' (2006) of a 'new orientalism' in recent Indian Writing in English (IWE) novels have laid the foundations for the development of re-Orientalist theory. These and other postcolonial critics have raised the issue of how some Orientals – South Asian-origin authors, for instance – are aggressively promoted in order to make a marketable commodity out of exoticizing the 'Orient' or products from the 'Orient'.

Even if the concept of re-Orientalism, with its various terminologies, has been under discussion for some time, the recent lively response to Lau's article may signal that this is a concept ripe for further study. This project incorporates the historical understandings of re-Orientalism as well as extends its applicability and, perhaps more significantly, examines its ramifications and implications more thoroughly. Re-Orientalism theory investigates the *process* and *workings* of re-Orientalism in order to begin to address why it occurs: for instance, may 'orientals', perceiving that there is a demand for low quality, exotically flavoured fare, deliberately pander to this demand and voluntarily self-Other so as to provide an unsustaining diet which will leave the consumer ever hungry, ever insatiate? Shivani (2006: 3) writes of how this new form of Orientalism violates the integrity of the literature, recycling and reinforcing the shallowest of stereotypes; may this be the empowering and subversive (whether intentionally so or otherwise) response of 'orientals' who deliberately design material for easy even if non-nourishing consumption, as a response to being applauded and lionized not for the intrinsic value of their art, but out of postcolonial guilt? The success of the aggressive promotion of IWE and South Asian-influenced film and media depends on collaboration between western powers and elite 'Orientals', a new re-Orientalizing partnership which upholds that internal consistency of Orientalism. Re-Orientalism theory focuses on the fall-out of particularized promotions of only very select aspects of the orient at the expense of a more holistic representation of the 'Orient'. Interestingly, this very fall-out often reveals the subtle re-negotiation of power, some degree of humbugging, the setting up of straw men, and other such ingenious strategies in the jockeying for advantageous positions.

Often deliberately provocative, re-Orientalism theory is crucial to the critique of postcolonial cultural production today, in particular given the increasing complexity of global cultural exchange. Re-Orientalism (or the resurfacing of new manifestations of Orientalism) provides a fertile conceptual territory for exploring the pressures and contradictions of postcolonial cultural production, and for testing and exploring the limits of cultural self-fashioning and subversion in a South Asian context. The concept of re-Orientalism offers a more complex understanding of the power dynamics involved in postcolonial cultural production and of the ways that producers (be they creative authors or academics) and texts critically engage with those dynamics. This collection is particularly attentive to this dimension of the debate, and approaches artists' (at times self-conscious) willingness to engage in re-Orientalizing practices as, at least in part, a response to the pressures imposed by the global cultural marketplace. Contributors are particularly interested in the disruption and renegotiation of subversive representations within shifting notions of Orientalism and the resulting anxieties spelled out by postcolonial cultural producers.

The theory of re-Orientalism as used in this volume is in part based on three key and interrelated aspects of Said's 1978 Orientalism theory, which it draws on, builds on, but also extends.

First, Said speaks of Orientalism as a way of coming to terms with the 'Orient' which is based on the 'Orient's special place in European western tradition.

Re-Orientalism theory which focuses on the Orientals' role in perpetrating Orientalism, notes that curiously, even when in an elite position or positions of power, this elite group of Orientals still reference the West as centre and place themselves as Other. They are not just being Othered any more by western powers, they are in the process of self-Othering. And of course not just literally *them*selves; they also in the process relegating other orientals they are regarded as representing, as Other. As becomes quite apparent in Lau's and Tabish Khair's chapters, re-Orientalism theory is fascinated by why, when given a position of power in which to self-define to some extent, there is the process of re-Orientalism ongoing at all, and explores workings of deliberate self-Othering these in various forms. It also speculates that it may well be the *space*, a postcolonial space in particular, which having originally normalized the processes of orientalism, may now in turn be normalizing the processes of re-Orientalism.

The critique of re-Orientalism is also intrigued by where – relative to the Centre/Self – re-Orientalists are choosing to position themselves, and whether these 'peripheral' positions may in fact be covert vantage points. Just as the Orientalism of British rule in India 'sought to consolidate a traditional hierarchical society in India to legitimize their own position at the top of the hierarchy' (Ghose 1998: 25), this volume speculates on the probability that re-Orientalists may be perpetrating orientalisms to concretize their new-found (perhaps incessantly negotiated) positions at the top of the hierarchical order; an order, moreover, which in many cases is a direct legacy of the imperialist order. In a sense, the footwork of the re-Orientalists in self-positioning and re-positioning is what this volume wishes to place under scrutiny.

Second, Said pointed out that Orientalism is less to do with the Orient, and more to do with the West, meaning that how the West chooses to orientalize speaks more about the West than about the 'Orient'.

In like manner, the serious questions which re-Orientalism theory seeks to raise consider the positionalities of re-Orientalists themselves and the directions in which they are driving their sets of Orientalisms. What does re-Orientalism reveal about these particular groups of Orientals? What, collectively, does it depict of these elite groups? What does it say about the way this comprador intelligentsia, with the power of representation, chooses to deconstruct and then reconstruct their orient? Does it indicate perhaps a class dominance? This volume implicitly and explicitly notes that the re-Orientalists are motivated to no small degree by their tension-filled but continuing intimate relationship with their former colonizers, a relationship which may be closer and of more immediate significance to them than their relationship with their compatriots. (However, this volume does not wish to imply that South Asian-origin authors form a monolith, and the chapters here contained do in fact present a multitude of re-Orientalist strategies employed by various artists and producers of culture.)

Re-Orientalism also turns the spotlight on how, instead of turning the tables and normalizing the Self as may be expected, re-Orientalists instead faithfully keep to the tradition of Orientalism in maintaining the 'world-as-exhibition' (Timothy Mitchell 1998). Timothy Mitchell pointed out that making a spectacle of the East, producing the world-as-exhibition, was a technique of rendering supposedly imperial truths and claiming objectivity (Timothy Mitchell 1998: 461), and it could thus be extrapolated that continuing to serve up the East as spectacle may be a re-Orientalist technique of claiming cultural truth and authority in representation. Re-Orientalist theory explores the ways in which the East is rendered up as spectacle for consumption, and with which flavourings.

Third, Said has pointed out that Orientalism has a curious internal coherence in itself and in its ideas about the Orient; 'the phenomenon of Orientalism as I study it,' he remarks, 'deals principally, not with a correspondence between Orientalism and Orient, but with the internal consistency of Orientalism and its ideas about the Orient' (Said 2003: 5).

The workings of re-Orientalism, although found in a range of mediums across continents, as this volume demonstrates, show precisely that same curious internal consistency even when in the hands of such different agents. It does not show an exact replica of representations (that would suggest a conspiracy/collaboration and there is no suspicion of any such), but it does shows a consistent narrative, almost a meta-narrative, of which re-Orientalism theory advocates being particularly wary. Re-Orientalism theory therefore always has to take into account the radical instability of representation, and never more so than when Orientals are perpetrating (new forms of) orientalisms, and this in turn raises the thorny, problematic issues of accuracy and realism of representation or, in a nutshell, authenticity.

In one notable way however, re-Orientalism does depart from Orientalist tradition: in Orientalism, the voice of the narrator, the writer, the gazer, is often presented as objective and universal (as opposed to subjective and individual), the identity of the observer not revealed because not pertinent.

> The representation of the orient, in its attempt to be detached and objective, would seek to eliminate from the picture the presence of the European observer … To establish the objectness of the Orient, as a picture-reality containing no sign of the increasingly pervasive European presence, required that the presence itself, ideally, become invisible.
>
> (Mitchell 1998: 470)

For Orientalists, power lay in being able to see and represent without being seen in turn or having to declare themselves. Interestingly, it is the opposite for re-Orientalists, who utilize positionality to prove eligibility as representative and validity of testimony and authority. Their claimed status is almost that of 'witness', which is a far less empowered position than that of Orientalists who saw no reason to justify themselves; which implies perhaps they

perceived no higher authority which would necessitate justifications, unlike re-Orientalists. Once again, the position of the re-Orientalists seems to imply the (uneasy) awareness of a critical (perhaps western imperial) Other looking over their shoulders.

Our use of the 're-Orientalism' concept does not intend to erase the question of essentialism. This question is indeed crucial to re-Orientalism in the attempt to inquire critically into how Orientalism has been re-inscribed into the cultural imaginary, in particular, by South Asians themselves. Moreover, re-Orientalism theory critiques the continued attempt to hold the Orient as a completely separate entity, as separately Oriental, as *essentially* Oriental,

> the notion of the real, such a system of truth, continues to convince us. The case of Orientalism shows us, moreover, how this supposed distinction between a realm of representation and an external reality corresponds to another apparent division of the world, into the West and the non-West.
>
> (Mitchell, 1998: 472)

The question is then the extent to which re-Orientalists are prey to this paradigm, and the extent to which they been able to transcend it, even if only partially. Mitchell argues that Orientalism is not just a nineteenth-century phenomenon, nor even just an aspect of colonial domination, but an entire method or order 'essential to the peculiar nature of the modern world' (Mitchell 1998: 472), which if true, would imply that re-Orientalism is in fact the natural heir to Orientalism.

Re-Orientalism theory also critiques the relationship between East and West where the West continues to visit the East as tourist and in touristic mode, i.e. with a lack of engagement or, at least, engaging only at superficial levels, and where well-positioned members of the East act as tourist guides rather than flatly refuse to trade in such terms. So, although attentive to the implications of the heterogeneity embedded in categories such as 'the West', 'the East', 'South Asian authors', 'western readers' and 'orientals', the '*strategic* use of positivist essentalism' is, as Spivak observes (Landry and MacLean 1996: 205), sometimes unavoidable. But with this keen awareness in mind, we will be treading very carefully as we juggle such encompassing terms, and taking as much care as we can not to arbitrarily flatten the contours of cultural, social and class diversity.

It is not our intention to argue simplistically that there is an insidious pleasure principle guiding western publishing practices which has been feeding a voracious appetite in the West for cultural products by Third World authors, or even that the operations within the global literary marketplace are set in motion as always to advance the interests of corporate profit. As Deepika Bahri perceptively observes, '[n]otwithstanding the need to address the politics of exclusion and the provinciality of ersatz cosmopolitanism … a defeatist surrender of the putatively elite text to the politics of metropolitan

reception must likewise be resisted' (Bahri 2003: 3). To consider re-Orientalist practices of South Asian origin as having from the outset an intended western (i.e. non-South Asian) market would immediately prompt a thorny question: if non-South Asians consume re-Orientalist cultural products and are attracted to re-Orientalist tropes and imagery, are they 'guilty' of Orientalizing the East? As we have seen, it is sometimes unavoidable to essentialize for strategic purposes when describing the power relations between the discursively constructed oppositional categories 'the West' or 'the Rest', to borrow Roger Scruton's terms (2002), and in particular when re-Orientalism lapses into the binary, polarized logic of Orientalism.

The tendrils of re-Orientalism can be found in a diverse range of applications, played out in a multitude of ways, at different scales, in different levels. Re-Orientalism theory points out the pitfalls in the collusion of orientals in Orientalism. The collusion, for example, has a tendency to widen the chasm between Global North and Global South, rather than bridge it, which is its ostentatious aim. In a sense, re-Orientalists, who set themselves up as 'translators', translating one culture to/for the other, have the dual role of opening the channels of communication, but also of holding the two sides separate because it is this very separation which lends heightened significance to their role. Rather than focusing on commonalities across the East–West divide – such as commonalities of dire poverty, for example – re-Orientalists stress differences, as is illustrated in case studies of Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* or Danny Boyle's *Slumdog Millionaire*, where poverty in India is rendered exotic and exotically different, a point discussed at length in both Sarah Brouillette's and Jigna Desai's chapters.

In so doing, may re-Orientalists be short-changing not just themselves and the orient, but also their western audience and paymasters? In a South Asian context, is re-Orientalism offering up a middle–upper class, urban version of India, and if so, why? Does re-Orientalizing continue to offer up a second-hand version of South Asia, a fossilized South Asia, a South Asia mired in nostalgia, a wilfully misrepresented South Asia, a larger-than-life South Asia? This volume tackles many of these issues, examining which Orientalist tropes have been reconstructed by orientals, and with what impact. Among other issues, it investigates what happens when the Other is constantly being culturally stereotyped, and whether that would lead to the cultural stereotyping in turn of the Self also. The chapters in this volume tease out some of these implications in what is a self-assumed unfinished critical project. In effect, this critique of re-Orientalism implies a double movement: if, on the one hand, the explanatory and liberating potential of this concept serves to understand the workings of a renovated form of Orientalism, on the other hand, it is possible that its deployment might betray, even if unwittingly, a process of critical Orientalization, against which critics should relentlessly be on guard.

This volume attempts to inquire critically into how Orientalism has been recently re-inscribed into the cultural imaginary by Orientals themselves.

Case studying literary, film and television products through the lens of re-Orientalism throws light on the issues of taken-for-granted premises and perceptions and, as such, also deals with issues of misrepresentations, limited, partial and/or skewed representations, which may even amount to distortions, inauthenticities and Orientalisms in a variety of guises. Said identified many Orients: 'there was (and is) a linguistic Orient, a Freudian Orient, a Spenglerian Orient, a linguistic Orient, a racist Orient – and so on' (Said 1994: 22). It is likely therefore that there are many re-Orientalisms that will follow. In an increasingly globalized world, the Occident is no longer restricted to a western (European) sphere, while the Orient, similarly no longer confined to the East, can be found in traditionally Occidental spaces and spheres. Re-Orientalism, like Orientalism, continues to shape fragmentary representations of the East, in some instances displacing the primacy of the West and calling for a new non-Eurocentric cultural mapping where Europe is but one node among many others, and in other cases, reinforcing the primacy of the West and inventively producing new forms of so doing. As Ania Loomba anticipated more than a decade ago,

> If postcolonial studies is to survive in any meaningful way, it needs to absorb itself far more deeply with the contemporary world, and with the local circumstances within which colonial institutions and ideas are being moulded into the disparate cultural and socioeconomic practices which define our contemporary 'globality'.
>
> (Loomba 1998: 256–57)

The critique of Orientalism, far from being exhausted, must be rethought and continually developed. Re-Orientalism is more than a critical concept – it is a provocative concept. It is intended to prompt questions about the resurfacing of Orientalisms today, which may manifest themselves in new forms and guises in the circulation of re-Orientalist practices and discourses in the context of the global late-capitalist system.

Angles of approach

Contributors to this volume identify and grapple with pressing recent debates about postcolonial South Asian identity politics. Because these debates impinge on so many areas of cultural practice, this volume adopts an interdisciplinary approach. To this end, contributors offer fresh, in-depth studies of literary, cinematic, media and critical practices of re-Orientalism of South Asia and South Asians in particular. Re-Orientalist practices have in fact not been engaged with sufficiently by postcolonial critics. The purpose of this collection is precisely to draw together theoretical insights and critical approaches from the areas of literature, film and television studies, as well as from the field of cultural analysis in order to probe diverse manifestations of re-Orientalism. On an interrelated level, the very range of texts discussed in

this volume broadens and deepens conceptual understandings of the realities of South Asian identity politics.

Said's analysis of Orientalism has provided a crucial critical category, but it has also been criticized for producing analyses that re-inscribe the hegemonic discourses of metropolitan centres. Acknowledging this critical heritage, this collection places itself at the nexus of current issues of the co-option of South Asian cultural products by a 'globalized *condition of postcoloniality*' that includes, as Aijaz Ahmad argues, the process of description and discursive constitution by the postcolonial critic (1996: 9). In this context, the use of the term 're-Orientalism' might work strategically, both to invoke Said's conceptualization and to critique it.

One of the many connecting threads of the chapters in this volume is the quest for authenticity and its implications, and the need to question reductive notions of authenticity. Lau opens the debate around the critical study of re-Orientalism by addressing the authenticity debate raging over IWE for the past three decades. The chapter unravels the intertwining layers of influences – in particular the critical reception of IWE within and without India, and the role of western publishing houses – which have been (intentionally or otherwise) re-Orientalizing the genre for the last three decades. One of the difficulties of the ways in which re-Orientalist literary texts have been mobilized in the cultural sphere is precisely that the institutional frameworks through which they circulate are as yet under-theorized. To this end, the chapter makes a concerted effort to include the voices of female Indian writers working in English in India, inviting the opinions of three prominent contemporary Indian writers working in English from within India, Shashi Deshpande, Kavery Nambisan and K.R. Usha, who, although prolifically part of the IWE group, have relatively little connection with established western publishing houses and have therefore struggled with the issue of visibility on the global literary scene. This chapter seeks to redress some of the possible complicity of critiques of re-Orientalism with Orientalist assumptions by reclaiming space for these writers to speak on their own terms. Still, might not critics of re-Orientalism be inescapably complicit in the very discourses they seek to refute? Lau acknowledges the impossibility of a neutral critical perspective and the limitations of the 'locus of theoretical enunciation' (Mignolo 2000: 112) from which one speaks, whose epistemological location is in her case inescapably bound to a metropolitan context. As such, she accepts that in the very selection of interviews with Indian authors writing in English, there is inevitably a strand of re-Orientalism at work casting a shadow over Indian writers *not* writing in English. One may rhetorically ask whether it is at all possible for practices in postcolonial studies theory and research to overcome the complicity of that field with Orientalist notions, or whether Orientalism must continue to underlie or haunt the field.

The next chapters in the collection offer tentative answers to these questions concerning the operations of re-Orientalism within the context of South Asian identity politics. Brouillette's chapter on Adiga's *The White Tiger* reads

the novel as a manifestation of the self-critical zeitgeist of the creative elite, the vanguard post-industrial workforce to which its audience and its author belong. The chapter assesses features of the 'new economy' informing the author's characterization of his narrator as an entrepreneurial character. In Brouillette's reading, this characterization unsettles and mocks a biographical progress narrative, which gives centre-stage to the self-reflexive, self-managing and flexible entrepreneur of contemporary capitalism, and that is securely attached to an elite creative class to which Adiga himself inescapably belongs. In sum, the chapter's attention focuses on the contradictions that *The White Tiger* illuminates not just within conceptions of the entrepreneurial Self, but also within contemporary capitalist production more generally and within the mainstream 'Anglo-global literary marketplace' in particular. In this context, Adiga's self-critical articulation of opposition to his market positioning, as well as his own resistant relationship to the mainstream take on Indian entrepreneurialism, Brouillette posits, are clear sources of the novel's marketability. The chapter further examines the 'branding story' of *The White Tiger*: that is, the market circulation of the novel, based on the writer's turn against his work as a journalist and the insistence upon his novel's attention to the neglected reality of the underbelly of the Indian economy.

Following Brouillette's subject-centred approach, Wai-chew Sim's chapter offers a complementary reading of a text also charged with purveying a new form of Orientalism: the novel *A Candle or the Sun* by the Singaporean writer Gopal Baratham. While Brouillette concentrated her attention on the characterization strategy enacted in Adiga's novel, Sim adopts a contextualist perspective that takes as its focus of inquiry the question whether texts deemed re-Orientalist are recoverable within a wider historical or formal logic – in other words, within a logic attentive to the historical and social situatedness of texts as well as their formal intricacy or inventiveness. In a chapter that allows purchase on the South East Asian branch of the South Asian diaspora which has not heretofore received due representation or critical attention, Sim argues that *Candle* challenges a reification of ethnic identity which, in the context of the Singaporean ideological landscape of the 1980s, was set in motion for political purposes and underpinned by a thesis of cultural incommensurability. Sim contends that the social and historical situatedness of the novel makes essentializing or re-Orientalizing articulations understandable. In response to an oversimplification of the historical archive, Baratham's novel responds to that reification of ethnicity by emphasizing an aggressive interculturality that undermines the neat, disciplining categories dear to a re-Orientalist state discourse which presents Sinic/Asian cultures as a variation on the Protestant work ethic underwriting an ideology of unending capital accumulation.

This volume also foregrounds the ways in which re-Orientalism is constituted and contested in cinematic practices. In the first chapter of a thematic cluster inspired by film and television, Desai probes the various critiques, controversies and clamour surrounding *Slumdog Millionaire* to consider how

one might analyse the transnationalism of the film to understand it within the rubric of re-Orientalism. Because Desai contends that the film raises questions about labour and knowledge implicitly and explicitly, the chapter also asks how we might perhaps read against the grain to reorient *Slumdog Millionaire* to a different paradigm of interpretation, one in which possibilities arise not in terms of its position as a representation of India to the West, but with an engagement with questions pertaining to the situated nature of labour and knowledge that permeate the narrative, production and reception of the film. To this end, Desai's chapter – aptly entitled 'Pulp Frictions' – weaves together images of friction and the concept of 'pulp Orientalism' to uncover the social, economic, cultural and political encounters within complex of networks of power. Attending to the contemporary logics of neoliberalism and globalization within the film, Desai argues, gives us more insight about (re-)Orientalism within the frictional flows in which the film's lead character Jamal Malik, the neoliberal global citizen, is located.

Ana Mendes' chapter looks at two minority-based TV programmes to further examine the workings of re-Orientalism: *The Aliens Show*, featured in Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*, and *The Kumars at No. 42*. Aided by the success of *Goodness Gracious Me*, *The Kumars at No. 42* (2001–4) is part of a body of films and TV productions which managed to carve out an increasingly prominent niche in the cultural industries in Britain. Both Saladin Chamcha, the co-star of a grotesque TV sitcom in Rushdie's novel, and Sanjeev Kumar, the main host in *The Kumars at No. 42*, are relentless in their shared ambition of becoming TV personalities in Britain. In spite of the attempted assimilation to mainstream discourses, Mendes argues that both protagonists are aware of the provisionality of their self-construction.

Drawing on discourses on re-Orientalization as well as on current debates in adaptation theory, Tamara Wagner examines how the film *Bride & Prejudice*, by the diasporic Indian filmmaker Gurinder Chadha, a British-made Bollywood-influenced cinematic text based on Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, redeploys both Orientalist and Occidentalist motifs by simultaneously capitalizing into two burgeoning marketable genres: Bollywood film and period drama, specifically Austen adaptations. Concentrating on the various ways Austen's classic facilitates a re-Orientalization of British Bollywood in *Bride & Prejudice,* Wagner analyses the repackaging and marketing of the exotic – as much of Old England as of a typified 'Orient' – on which the film's international mainstream success unquestionably relies. Wagner reassesses what she sees as the overlooked significance of the film's intricate play with different literary and cinematic conventions for its self-conscious juggling with re-Orientalizing elements. Wagner perceptively concludes that the self-conscious triangulation of cinematic genres, shifting exotic locations (India, Britain and the United States), and criss-crossing levels of intertextuality in the film, operate as means to successfully satirize and dismantle the dichotomies often associated with culture-clash narratives.

Mita Banerjee sets out to read Bollywood as an Orientalist spectacle, but one not designed for the western eye. Against this backdrop, Banerjee argues that Bollywood's ambivalent relationship to a twofold hybridity, both western and intra-Indian, leads to a re-Orientalist visual writing out of this hybridity. She asks the reader to consider Bollywood as in part a narrative of the Hindutva, the puristic search by the religious right for a Hindu homeland, given that the intended recipient of Bollywood's re-Orientalist pleasure, Banerjee proposes, may not only be a West nostalgic for colour and for spaces unadulterated by the West, but may be an Indian Hindu majority wishing away centuries of Muslim rule. To answer the question whether re-Orientalism, as it is being practised in Bollywood film, is in fact a Hindu Orientalism, Banerjee focuses on the re-Orientalizing practices of Naseeruddin Shah's film *What If?* (*Yun Hota To Kya Hota*) (2006). With reference to this film, she concludes that Bollywood romances not the Orient as a fantasy for the visual pleasure of the western observer, but an Orientalized version of Hindu India where, following a nationalist agenda, Hindu kaleidoscopic exuberance triumphs over Muslim chromophobia and drabness. Banerjee identifies two layers of re-Orientalism taking place: (1) Bollywood consistently supplying the colourful spectacle expected of it as an Oriental extravaganza, and (2) Bollywood confirming for the Indian mainstream audience that Hinduism and its bright colours are the social norm, whereas Islam and its sombre shades are the Other. One of the questions which needs to be explored in this context, Banerjee posits, is the possibility of a counter-discourse to Orientalism which engages neither in re-Orientalism nor cultural essentialism.

While Banerjee compellingly demonstrates that Shah's film is a re-Orientalizing narrative for the Orient in which the West no longer figures quite as significantly, if at all, Khair's chapter draws a parallel between 'old Orientalisms' and current re-Orientalisms as manifest in what Khair dubs postcolonial 'soft fiction'. Khair's chapter has been placed as the last chapter of this collection because its broad theoretical perspective mobilizes a sprawling array of concepts, delving back to Gothic fiction in order to reframe, under a different light, the debate on the critical study of re-Orientalism. Khair begins by comparing 'old Orientalisms' with re-Orientalisms, in the sense that a definitive simplification of the complexities of place and the centring of (self-) perception and experience around a post-imperial West remain characteristic features of the latter. Khair illustrates his arguments with examples drawn from colonial Gothic/ized and recent postcolonial narrations of Otherness in order to argue what is implied in a variety of ways by many of the chapters in this collection – that the postcolonial desire to narrate difference leads to a privileging of the colonial bridge, and, as a consequence, to a re-usage of Orientalist narratives. In this way Khair's chapter brings us back full circle to one of the primary contentions of this volume: the re-Orientalist support and practice of the direction of mainstream contemporary IWE, which continues to prioritize storytelling over narrative, thus failing to challenge the narrative space of the Self. It is by consciously *creating* narrative space for the alterity of the Other,

Khair forcefully maintains, that we can avoid the 'softness' of current re-Orientalisms.

By concluding our volume with this chapter, which encompasses a wide-ranging conceptual territory, it is our hope that these controversial yet potentially productive questions will open up space for interventions into the problematics of conceptualizing the re-Orientalisms of today.

Notes

1 For the sake of readability, quotation marks will no longer be utilized when referring to 'West' and 'East' hereinafter.

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2 Re-Orientalism in contemporary Indian Writing in English

Lisa Lau

> An ash-smeared sadhu. The fragrance of cumin. I pulled them from my hat in earnest good faith when I first ventured into fiction. And my stories proved very popular with readers in the West. They wrote to tell me so. Your work is so exotic. So marvellously authentic. When the flatulent rumbles of self-satisfaction subsided, I saw that what I had taken for the markers of truth functioned as the signs of exoticism. The coloniser returns as a tourist, you see. And he is mad for difference. That is the luxury commodity we now supply, as we once kept him in cinnamon and sapphires. The prose may be as insipid as rice cooked without salt. No matter: call up a monsoon or the rustle of a sari, and watch him salivate.
>
> Literature as souvenir: I confess I traded in it. Tales as undisturbing as the incense peddled in every mall here in Vancouver; each trite sentence a small act of cynicism.
>
> (de Kretser 2004: 294)

I confess that I exploded with laughter when I first read this passage from Michelle de Kretser's novel *The Hamilton Case*, simultaneously surprised into mirth and disarmed by its candid, self-reflexive observations on cultural commodification and consumption. I begin the chapter with this quote because it contains within it many of the elements I wish to unpack here: the question of authenticity (and contained within that, the brandishing of exotica), the motivations of the author, the question of realism in Indian Writing in English (IWE)[1] and the value placed on that, literary works as marketable goods and tradable commodities; and the effects and impacts all the above have on IWE. One of the key questions this chapter seeks to address is the extent to which re-Orientalism is 'natural' and perhaps almost unavoidable, given the particular literary structure and/or system that IWE finds itself within. To this end, the chapter will therefore also take into consideration the expectation of realism in IWE, the critical reception to IWE within and without India, and the role of publishing houses. In the course of these discussions, this chapter will also examine the workings of re-Orientalism and some possible repercussions and ramifications in IWE.

For the last three decades, IWE has been re-Orientalized by the diasporic Indian writings from the US, UK, Canada and Australia. The reasons for this

are many, among them (1) the positionality of English as a global language, (2) the colonial and postcolonial heritage of India, (3) the reach and distribution available to the diasporic authors publishing with western publishing houses (Lau 2005), and (4) the need to 'explain' South Asia to a largely non-South Asian readership (Mukherjee 1971). This chapter seeks to redress, in a very small way, some of this imbalance by inviting and investigating the opinions of contemporary authors working from within India who, although part of the IWE group, have relatively little connection with established western publishing houses and circuits. Although well known and widely read within their own milieus and even across India, these authors have struggled with the issue of visibility on the global literary scene, particularly in comparison with hypervisible diasporic authors. This chapter will include previously unpublished interview material (conducted in the first quarter of 2009) with three prominent Indian women writers, Shashi Deshpande, Kavery Nambisan and K.R. Usha, who live and work in India, and who have participated in these interviews with the express purposes of lending their voices to this discussion. The discussion will also include some salient opinions of literary critic and reviewers from *Outlook India*, *New Statesman*, *The Hindu*, the *Guardian*, *Boston Review* and *Phalanx* (some of the leading online forums of discussion of IWE and related matters), to have a multiplicity of voices joining this discussion. However, even while this chapter attempts to critique re-Orientalism, it is aware that the group comprising critics, reviewers, academics and novelists that this chapter will quote from and drawn upon still invariably constitute the 'comprador intelligentsia' (Appiah 1992: 149) which continues to occupy that privileged position of informing the world about India, and which mints the currencies of Indian literary (and to an extent, social and cultural) identities.

IWE has become so well established over the last three decades that Rajan (1993) was justified in observing in the early 1990s that debates had already moved away from English versus vernacular (*bhasha*) languages, and towards a question of reception.[2] Reception is divided between that received in the perceived 'home' country of the author, and reception in 'literary centres', such as London, New York or otherwise centres set in the western world. Not unexpectedly, there is often a gap – sometimes chasm – between the two receptions, leading to rather prickly questions regarding the authenticity of the author as informant, the extent to which any given author may be subject to the pressure of publication and reception, and how far an Indian writer would be pandering to western reception and global sales at the expense of literary merit (whatever that may be supposed to entail and include). For example, in a biting article, Anis Shivani points the finger directly at IWE as a good example of 'Orientalism functioning in a more surreptitious form than its earlier blatant manifestations … that enact the commodification of exoticised Orientalism in global capitalist exchange' (Shivani 2006: 2). IWE stands accused, by Shivani and others, of selling out, reinforcing stereotypes, playing to the gallery, packing and trading pseudo-culture in return for easy profits,

and at the more academic end of the argument, of misleading, of misrepresenting and of bad faith. IWE is also seen as betraying its postcolonial roots: 'far from the former empire writing, let alone striking back, this new fiction goes out of its way to avoid creating any sense of discomfort or awareness of historical complicity in its western audience' (Shivani 2006: 3). In short, IWE stands accused not only of Orientalism and re-Orientalism, but of having cowardly, mercenary, western-approval-seeking motives for so doing. Therefore, at a point in time when IWE is celebrated and in great demand, it is also tremendously controversial, simultaneously widely acclaimed and roundly derided. The latter half of the chapter attempts to unpack the sources of these tensions by looking into the current debates on South Asian authorial intent, the pressures of the literary industry and community, the ever-thorny problem of authenticity, mixed receptions to IWE, and how publishers create and exacerbate these problems. However, before investigating intention and reception, this chapter considers the role and significance of realism in IWE, and particularly, in fiction and novels, and the curious set of expectations and implicit literary value system of this literary subculture.

Realism in IWE

In presenting Aravind Adiga with the 2008 Booker, judge Michael Portillo said, 'The book gains from dealing with pressing social issues and significant global developments with astonishing humour … [The White Tiger presents] a different aspect of India' (Portillo, 2008). In contrast with this warm praise, the reception of Adiga's novel by Indian reviewers Amitava Kumar (in Boston Review) and Jaidev Raja (in Phalanx) was significantly colder:

> The novelist seems to know next to nothing about either the love or the despair of the people he writes about. I want to know if others, who might never have visited Bihar, read the passage above and recognize how wrong it is, how the appearance of verisimilitude belies the emotional truths of life in Bihar. As I continued, I found on nearly every page a familiar observation or a fine phrase, and on nearly every page inevitably something that sounds false.
>
> (Kumar 2008)

> What does one make of this improbable yarn? While a novelist may demand that we suspend disbelief, we cannot be expected to hang it by the neck till dead.
>
> (Raja 2008)

Adiga's novel is by no means the only Indian cultural product to receive such a sharply dichotomous reception. Other Booker winners (such as Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* and Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss*)

and bestsellers, as well as Indian movies (e.g. Mira Nair's and Gurinder Chadha's films) have also received a similarly divergent reception from audiences in India and in the West. As Kumar's and Raja's reviews of *The White Tiger* disclose, much of the negative reception from Indian critics and reviewers has been based on the contestedly factually inaccurate representations of India that these writings and films contained. This is clearly an issue which vexes audiences, reviewers, critics and scholars, and the issue of factual truths is one which has come to be regarded as not just necessary but practically a prerequisite for 'good work' and 'good art'.

IWE, almost from its inception, but increasingly in the last three decades, has been scrutinized closely for, suspected and roundly accused of a variety of sins of representation. Authors writing about India but living outside India have been particularly vulnerable to accusations of having lost touch, not knowing how things work on the ground, being fossilized in their diasporically transported culture, being victims of fragmented cultural visions and personal and/or collective nostalgia; it is a long list of charges that IWE authors routinely face. These accusations have ranged from exaggeration, typecasting, stereotyping, exoticizing, pandering to western tastes, demands and expectations, selling out, having mercenary motives, playing to the gallery, to more sophisticated misrepresentations of totalizing, essentializing, subalternism, marginalizing and, most recently of all, re-Orientalizing. All these are in some form or other critical of IWE for failing to represent faithfully and comprehensively, of being guilty of skewed, partial and selective representation, or wilful misrepresentation altogether and, at worst, outright betrayal.

What is curious about all these charges is their deep concern with accurate representation, an insistence on regarding the writings as containing truth claims, and truth claims moreover which must be verifiable 'objectively'. While many of the contemporary Indian novels written in English belong to a category easily recognizable as realism novels, this insistence on authenticity as a yardstick of worth and value is still a puzzling one. The next section therefore investigates the origins of the realism movement, and the development of its criteria, and consequently, the expectations which have come to surround, even besiege, IWE.

Origins and implications of realism

Realism, as a movement, at first used to describe art, and then applied to literature, achieved wide currency around the 1850s. Critics contend that the emergence of realism is connected to significant changes in European worldviews as a result of the religious, technological and political upheavals of the age. Over the last two centuries, with the collapse of the feudal order, the collapse of Christianity as a dimension of government and as a universally held belief, the industrial revolution, scientific developments and advances (Cruickshank 1970), and the mid-1800s also being the age of the western

colonies in Asia and Africa, of nationalism and commercialism, and of revolutionary movements against the wealthy governing classes (Hemmings 1974), the very foundations of European faith and understanding had to shift. In J. Cruickshank's words,

> The development of the novel form is coextensive with the history of modern realism as it reflects this radical transformation of the culture; and realism has not only been the distinctive mode of the form but remains the dominant stylization of the novel, taken over all, up to the present day.
>
> (Cruickshank 1970: 37)

Originating in France as a literary movement during the nineteenth century, realism was characterized by four traits: first, that it is a literary technique which presents humanity in its complexity and allows for viewing life provisionally; second, that it serves as a pragmatic vision which would deflate the idealism permeating the arts which had insinuated false values; third, that realism shuns melodrama and miracle and moves into the ordinary; and last, that realism is descriptive and critical, but not prescriptive or dogmatic (Vanderilt, in Becker 1980: 188). Of these premises of realism, the second has proved the most enduringly problematic, that realism will move away from the idealist metaphysics of Romanticism and depict observable details of 'real life'. This is problematic on a number of levels. There was too often the oversimplified but commonly held assumption that a realist piece of writing simply reflects, mirrors and testifies to a series of events, which is relayed or even reported: 'The work of art must therefore reflect correctly and in proper proportion all important factors objectively determining the area of life it represents' (Lukacs 1970: 38). The words 'correctly', 'proper' and 'objectively' are all problematic in this assertion which seems to employ them in absolute, not relative terms. However, such a notion was widely accepted at the time, so much so that, among the early realists, there was often a concern that realists may be regarded as lesser in terms of creative power because they draw from what they observe, rather than create from imagination (Becker 1980), a concern which negates, or at least neglects, the inevitable process of interpretation in observation and articulation. In realist terms, the point of a novel mirroring the world objectively is that it should, 'through this impersonal mirroring, show "truth"' (Lee 1990: 11). This is very likely the point from which the accusations of the inauthenticity of IWE writings stem – that somehow those writings have failed in their realist premise of mirroring the world without distortion.

Many charges of inauthenticity (i.e. the failure of the authors and writings based on realist criteria) are based on three premises, which Alison Lee (1990) outlines. First, that there is a reality out there which can be 'objectively observable through pure perception' (Lee 1990: 12). Whatever 'pure' perception may be, even if an author should be single-mindedly committed to the

process of mirroring and rendering what she perceives to be the one common truth (supposing such a thing could exist), even then every novelist must still necessarily be in the business of invention and creation, not mere representation, because the process of writing, of translating life into text, of rendering people and time periods into a form which fits between two book covers, is necessarily a process of selection and exclusion. As Cruickshank notes,

> the novelist – like the illusionist on a stage – is tied to the game of telling a convincing lie, that he must select and re-order and interpret, that he is limited to his own perception of things: that the novel, in a word, can only be the expression in projection of an individual subjectivity.
>
> (Cruickshank 1970: 38)

Moreover, this process of mere mirroring of the world suggests the realist author should be limited to reportage or description. The realist premises are problematic because 'reality … implies objectivity – the world itself rather than the author's view of it' (Cruickshank 1970: 38). Nonetheless, it is neither a fair nor feasible demand to ask a novelist for a societal depiction minus the lenses of perception and interpretation. Apart from stripping an artist of her artistry, a novel, even if it ardently desires to limit itself to mere reportage, will still unavoidably contain a judgemental element built into it. Realist writing may depict social realisms, but it cannot claim objectivity, and thus, cannot claim unbiased and/or comprehensive representation on those grounds.

A second premise of realist writing is that there can be some kind of 'direct transcription from reality to novel' (with the even more problematic implication 'that language is transparent, that "reality" creates language and not the reverse') (Lee 1990: 12). This premise which lays realist writings vulnerable to the charges of inauthenticity contains an insidious assumption that meaning can exist independently of language. Equating the 'real' with the 'true' implicitly assumes that this transcription between the two is technically unproblematic and that language is wholly transparent and neutral (Lee 1990). In IWE, this issue is the more fraught because English had been a contested language, bearing the tag of oppression, elitism and servility from a colonial past, before being reclaimed as postcolonial inheritance and as marked by hybridity.

The third premise of realist writing is that there is a shared, common, even monolithic reality or truth; a single version of truth, moreover, Lee reminds us, which if the reader finds different from her own view, the responsibility of mis-rendering is placed at the door of the author. This is the premise IWE authors face most often, with audiences failing to take into account the multiple realities, of which an author is but representing (or even only partially representing) one. Many criticisms are levelled at IWE writings on the basis that the representations were not compatible with a reader's personal experiences of the subcontinent and its communities. Equally, those novels which

are celebrated for being 'correctly' representative are also the victims of this same unfair premise, because 'criticism that celebrates one author's authenticity often does so at the expense of another' (Karem 2004: 7). As Jeff Karem rightly points out, the celebration of an authentic piece of writing presupposes that there are authentic and inauthentic literatures, and the writings can be divided up into these binary, black-and-white categories. George Levine takes this reasoning one level further, pointing out that literary realism is actually founded on paradox, because '[t]he term 'real*ism*' declares itself as approximation … an attempt to mimic an "other" which it must also match' (Levine 1993: 193).

At this juncture, many may want to ask the same question Cruickshank posed, 'How real is Realism?' In addition, what does realism actually do if it is not a mirror of reality? In literary terms, depicting even a single comprehensive version of reality has its natural and corporeal limits. As Cruickshanks points out,

> One has only to … consider the concentration of time involved in treating a human life in two hundred pages, or to remember the necessary limitations of experience and perception of any single novelist to confirm that reality, in any literal or complete sense, cannot possibly be rendered in the novel.
>
> (Cruickshank 1970: 35)

Ultimately, a novel is a game of make believe, and is subject to its own rules which have to be agreed between author and reader. A novel can be simultaneously a historical document as well as a product of the imagination, and it requires a certain level of narrative sophistication on the part of readers to simultaneously believe and suspend disbelief. Literary critics have all noted the quasi-referential or quasi-encyclopaedic (Said 1994: 84) qualities of novels, and it is precisely that 'quasi' characteristic which has laid novels open to charges of misrepresentation and inauthenticity. However, even while authors testify to perceived realities in their writings, to deny authors their achievements of unique representations is to deny them the very basis of their art (Becker 1980). That said, the lines have long been blurred between acceptable artistic licence and the sheer effrontery of bad faith.

Why then does realism continue to have any validity? Why should an audience receive a novel's literary realism with any regard? According to Lee, one of the manifestations of realism which still has currency is 'the notion that art is a means to truth because the artist has a privileged insight into a common sense of what constitutes "reality"' (Lee 1990: 4). This harks back to a tradition in the very distant past which expected that artists should be of particularly high moral standing in order to be qualified to possess this privileged insight, this exceptional, additional sensitivity, to be a worthy vehicle conveying higher, loftier philosophies. Absurd as this may sound to the twenty-first-century reader, some remnants of it may yet be lingering at a

subconscious level, which may partially at least account for the depth of outrage expressed by readers who take the view that they have been short-changed of truth or reality by authors cast as representatives of their groups, clan or society.

Interestingly enough, it was thought that a writer must have her own firm and clearly established ideology in order to be able to practise her art effectively. As Georg Lukacs argues,

> A writer's ideology is merely a synthesis of the totality of his experience on a certain level of abstraction … without ideology, a writer can neither narrate nor construct a comprehensive, well-organised and multifaceted epic composition. Observation and description are mere substitutes for a conception of order in life.
>
> (Lukacs 1970: 142–43)

By this argument, it is precisely the author's subjectivity which enables her to achieve a piece of work that can capture a coherent reality. Indeed, because a novel is by necessity a piece of writing which is selective and exclusive, the author must edit out the non-significant but nonetheless 'real facts', and include only those which will have some significance in the narrative – 'the artistic copy does help to clarify the muddled mass of data which we receive pell-mell in experience' (Becker 1980: 93). A well-written novel, moreover, is one where this editing process is non-visible, where the chosen selections must appear to be not just seamless, coherent and cohesive, but naturally so – 'A work of art, considered from the point of view of its content, provides only a greater or lesser extract of reality … the extract must seem to be a self-contained whole and to require no external extension' (Lukacs 1970: 47).

Direction of realism in IWE

While in French literature the depiction of social reality in novel form has lost its shock value and its *raison d'être* (Cruickshank 1970), social reality in IWE continues to be one of its most dominant forms. What then may be the *raison d'être* of social reality in IWE? Why is this form so widely used and in such demand? Could it be to construct identities? To depict, represent, portray or preserve certain social realities? Is it a trade in exotica? Or is it some kind of control mechanism whereby authoritative knowledge is given and garnered?

George Levine (1993) questions whether what we want out of realism is a correspondence to truth, or rather a *consensus* of truth. We would hazard a guess that the demand for authenticity in IWE, the insistent demand for a perceived correspondence to truth, is precisely because there is that desired consensus of truth. The heady empowerment of self-representation on the global (read English) literary stage has possibly engendered a real thirst for more of the same; self-representation having finally been gained, should it not then be as flawed, unrepresentative and inauthentic as the Orientalist versions

which had gone before? South Asian identities are so varied, complex and multi-faceted that they are difficult to comprehensively package, impossible to depict and represent if it must be done so exhaustively. However, it is precisely because these identities and realities are nuanced and have therefore long suffered misrepresentation that there continues to be a widespread demand for greater degrees of authenticity in their representations. Having been written *of* for so long, and misrepresented, the audience of IWE may imagine that self-representation should be faithful representation, but faithful to which and whose reality?

Natural as the demand for authenticity in IWE may be, there are many problems stemming from it, the most obvious being the question of what constitutes authenticity. It is already clear that judgements of what is authentic and inauthentic differ considerably from South Asian to non-South Asian (and western) readers and critics as well as within a diverse South Asia; even within a single cultural group, judgements vary widely. 'The naively mimetic use of the discourse of authenticity judges works of literature against models of cultural identity' (Sanchez-Arce 2007: 144), which, as such, are at best a flawed and partial set of judging criteria. This method of judgement brings us to another key problem with the demand for authenticity, namely that it becomes too overwhelmingly significant as criteria, almost to the extent of relegating other literary criteria to secondary importance. Under the pressure of this demand, IWE seems to be increasingly striving for realist depictions which are as objectively verifiable as possible, which will ring true for as many as possible, even at the expense of and with disregard for form, literary merit and stylistics. It is becoming more and more rampant that IWE is celebrated for how true a story it can tell, rather than the quality of the story it is telling. The demands for authenticity are limiting and damaging, both to authors as artists and to the writings they produce. It limits what will be well received, and therefore what will be selected and published, and in turn, what will be made an authorial concern in this circuit of production in the literary world. In this respect, Karem tells us that 'paradigms of authenticity in publishing and criticism are failed ideals in themselves, conceptually unstable and dangerously reductive' (Karem 2004: 15).

In an article about *Brick Lane*, Monica Ali's celebrated first novel which also faced many charges of inauthenticity and misrepresentation, Germaine Greer astutely points out that 'every community ever to be written about suffers the same shock of non-recognition, and feels the same sense of invasion and betrayal' (2006). Part of this non-recognition is because when a life is examined in detail, it 'become[s] oversized by reason of that detail' (Becker 1980: 63), but another part of the reason can be accounted for by the difference (and distance) in perception between the author and the reader, which becomes problematic when concretely articulated in such a public format as a published novel, read by members of the community as well as outsiders to the community, received as *a* even if not *the* representation of that community. Moreover, characters in novels commonly facing charges of being

typecast, two-dimensional, even flat, may well stem from being 'not so much the product of literary conventions, then, as they are representatives of "social types"' (Sainsbury 1996: 180). Failing a multitude of narrative representations as yet, in English at least, IWE begins to take on a significance of representation weightier than it was intended to do, hoisted uncomfortably on to ambassadorial pedestals which it was not intended to occupy. Thus positioned, thus uneasily perched, the task of depicting social realism becomes only increasingly onerous to a South Asian or Indian author, as does her discomfort with the implicit understanding that being cast into this position of (dubious) privilege signals the existence a higher and (more likely than not) external authority which provides or withholds its sanctions at will. The next section will therefore look at the position of authors in terms of the levels of realism of their work.

Authors and authenticity

Even as some high-profile and/or prize-winning IWE is being disparaged for lack of authenticity, its authors maligned on grounds of lacking 'true knowledge' of conditions and lifestyles in India, readers still seem to be adhering touchingly, almost blindly, to the notion that writers are in positions of trust as truth-tellers, hence their outrage (and consequential vociferous criticisms) at the slightest whiff of possible inauthenticities, of being misled or misguided. In other words, we are here in presence of 'the phenomenon of the outraged reader who demands a writer provide the type of book … according to the readers' guide to authenticity. Such readers will speak of authorial betrayal of cultural roots or severance of allegiances to a specific group' (Sanchez-Arce 2007: 143). The reading audience of IWE social realism fiction still seem to hold intrinsically to the notion, even article of faith, that art – and literature – has a function to instruct, inform and educate, even while entertaining. In fact, realists' theories go so far as to insist that the *aim* of art is to instruct (italics mine, Lee 1990). With this understanding in mind, it is easier to comprehend why IWE texts are all too often regarded by audiences in India and abroad as containing truth claims, even judged on these criteria as a marker of merit. Indeed, in IWE not only is the degree of realism in the novel questioned, but also the 'qualifications' of the author, based on positionality, which are supposed to act as an implied guarantee of the truth and reliability of the veracity of the author's realisms and facts.[3] This, however, would seem a rather unsophisticated understanding of literature, art and fiction, if the author is always compelled to be moral guide, truth-teller and even anthropologist. With this limitation, what of the authorial role simply as story-teller?

Looking at the other side of the story, however, do IWE authors set themselves up as cultural tour-guides to the Indian subcontinent? Do they consciously (even if not always voluntarily) play roles as emissaries of ethnicities and cultures, especially diasporic authors who may see themselves or be cast as bridges and translators between East and West? Moreover, with

re-Orientalism rearing its head, is representative representation still possible, or would representation continue to be at best partial and skewed in favour of groups in positions of power and in command of cultural capital?

This discussion of social realism in narratives unpacks some of the reasons for the demand of authenticity in IWE, and the expectations and premises of realism in the same. However, it can be seen that this demand renders IWE ever more vulnerable to re-Orientalism, because a growing demand that authenticisms be authenticated would merely result in the setting up of an alternative canon, transferring from the problems of Orientalism to re-Orientalism, replacing one power for another, rather than challenging the underlying power structure of the meta-narrative.

Barely a decade ago, critics were more inclined to blame problems of IWE on the inherent pitfalls of representing Indian identities in the English language. In his memorably entitled review 'Why Are So Many Indian Books About Pickles?' Akash Kapur identifies the tendency to exoticize, but practically implies that it is natural enough, given the challenge of writing in English. Among the difficulties, Kapur notes, 'The propensity to say too much or too little – the difficulty in reconciling indigenous reality with its English representation … everyday objects are repackaged into totems of cultural significance for western consumption' (Kapur 2001). Dalrymple (2005) in fact takes it for granted that IWE *will* be obliged to compromise itself, the question being only to what extent; he reasons that compromise is a given because IWE simply needs to write for a 'firangi audience', i.e. British and American markets, since the market in India is still too small. Even old and established IWE literary pioneers and lions like Anita Desai, whose oeuvre spans nearly half a century, seem to concur with this; Desai (2008) points out that the literary scene and circumstances today are nothing like they were forty or fifty years ago, and that new pressures have come to bear on both publishers and authors. She concludes that 'the writer soon learns that if he wishes to earn, he must learn to please' (Desai 2008). From this perspective, the unpalatable fact is that the writer who is a career author becomes a supplier and trader more than an artiste, and would find it necessary to re-Orientalize in order to create an identity easily recognizable to its main audience. In fact, Dalrymple goes so far as to make the case that whoever is in the best position to bridge the cultures and translate Indian sensibilities for the West, to 'produce art that is readily comprehensible at both ends of the globe' (Dalrymple 2005), would have the market advantage, and following this line of reasoning, prophesied that Indian diasporic authors will have the edge over Indian authors writing from India:

> If the last few years are anything to go by, I suspect that in the years ahead the main competition Indian writers aspiring to win the Booker will face will not be the Alan Hollinghursts or the A.S. Byatts, so much as their own cousins born and brought up in the west.
>
> (Dalrymple 2005)

Putting it another way, diasporic Indians are allegedly better placed to re-Orientalize than their Indian counterparts, and apparently the higher the success rate at re-Orientalism, the higher the supposedly subsequent commercial literary success rate.

Shashi Deshpande, an Indian writer who has been writing from India since the 1970s, does not accuse authors of compromise, but comes to the same conclusion as Dalrymple, namely that certain groups of authors are better positioned to capitalize on the current market conditions. She notes that the acceptance of IWE has been enlarged by its cosmopolitan (mostly diasporic) Indian authors, who happen to be in the position of being able to speak of the East to the West in a discourse which is in demand and well received:

> The tight rope walking that international acceptance requires (I know for a fact that the Western agent/publisher will look favourably on a book that has just enough of 'India', of the unfamiliar, to make it pleasantly exotic, yet not Indian enough to faze their readers) comes naturally to them [the cosmopolitan Indian writers]; they can do this with ease and skill, because they are situated on the bridge between the two worlds themselves. But this is not possible for everyone.
>
> (Deshpande 2009)

Deshpande seems to regard certain authors as being positioned advantageously almost by chance, while William Dalrymple appears to be working on the premise, or the supposition, that authors position themselves, jostle and negotiate for advantageous positions, which would include being prepared to pander to the tastes and wishes of the West and the western demand for certain (often Orientalist) elements from IWE. This premise is itself troubling, with its assumption that re-Orientalism *has* to be the way forward, the future for and of IWE. And this includes IWE whether produced within India or without – in fact,

> Indian writers too have to face the pressures of providing a certain kind of "Indian" writing. Which is not to discount the fact that there are many excellent Indian writers who have been successful in the West. But only a mere handful can write on their own terms.
>
> (Deshpande 2009)

However, advantageously positioned whether by chance or by design, the privileging of a particular group of IWE authors is problematic obviously because positionality does not guarantee or confer merit. In contemporary IWE, it has sometimes been the case that *who* is speaking (which in part depends on where they happen to be located) matters more than *what* is spoken, and consequently, what is eventually heard and made accessible to large audiences. To add to this, there is also the worry that even within the elite group of the privileged voices, what they choose to say or write may be

based less on artistic excellence than on commercial motivations. As Usha puts it, 'This emphasis on non-aesthetic qualities would lead logically to novels being written so that they can be "interpreted" since it would ensure that such novels are noticed by the literary establishment and the market' (Usha, 29 March 2009). IWE authors working from within India are particularly sensitive to these two problems, suffering as they do from a problem of visibility or recognition and distribution due to their positionality, rather than due to a lack of literary merit. Nambisan for one categorically rejects this manner of classifying authors and novels: 'one should stop labelling books as from here or there and merely judge them by their quality … [I] refuse to be labelled like some exotic tropical fruit that is canned and exported' (Nambisan, 15 February 2009).

When asked about their own motivations for writing, my interviewees, writers of IWE within India, seem remarkably distanced from any temptation to re-Orientalize:

> I first want to be appreciated here and then if it happens, in the West. I would also love to earn more from my writing but would never write with that as my aim or to target a western audience. For me, there is always a single, unknown reader and I write for her/him. It frees me of any self-consciousness because I trust my reader to be a fair critic.
>
> (Nambisan, 15 February 2009)

> At the first instance I write for myself – I don't mean that this is an act of self-indulgence, but I write to explore the kind of situations and characters that interest me, and have a bearing on my world.
>
> (Usha, 23 March 2009)

The reasons for which authors write, their target audiences, and the desire for financial rewards from writing are all part of the complex package which makes up the so-called authenticity of their writings. The authenticity debate in IWE has been raging for at least the past decade, and with good reason. Some degree of re-Orientalism at a systematic level and in certain aspects of the IWE industry seems nearly inevitable given (1) the influence of western publishers (which will be discussed in greater detail further in the chapter), (2) the English-reading audience/market in which western audience/buyers are in a majority, (3) the positionality of authors (whether they are writing from within India or from western countries), and (4) the way audiences cast authors into the emissary position and regard novels as containing truth-claims. As Anita Desai identified, the desire to please in order to earn exerts an 'insidious pressure … not one that encourages freedom or fearlessness' (Desai 2008) and, I may add, not one which frees an author from the problems of re-Orientalizing. And thus, it appears to become all the more imperative to question the good faith of the authors, especially those regarded as representatives of IWE as a result of winning prestigious literary prizes or

having written bestsellers, or who are otherwise acclaimed by the western literary community. Of late, the lit-crit world has become increasingly intolerant of exoticization, Orientalization, and re-Orientalization, which have come to be seen as not just disingenuous, but positively insidious, with problematic ramifications. And authenticity has come to be regarded, in an implicit and slightly over-simplistic fashion, as the antidote to these ills.

In 2000, Vikram Chandra published a long article in *Boston Review* entitled 'The Cult of Authenticity' in which he wittily and vigorously rebutted the accusations of inauthenticity directed at Indian writers in English, and roundly defended his own position. He pointed out that the pursuit of authenticity has been taken to ludicrous lengths, 'to put a cow, any cow, even one cow, into an Indian story is, I suppose, to "signal one's Indianness in the context of the Western market"' (Chandra 2000). Chandra identifies four classic accusations of and reasons for inauthenticity which are indeed those most commonly flung at IWE and continue to be around even nearly a decade after his article appeared:

> To write about India in English is at best a brave failure, and at worst a betrayal of Indian 'realities'.
> Indo-Anglian writers write for a Western audience.
> Indo-Anglian writers make too much money.
> A lot of Indo-Anglian writers live abroad, so they are disconnected from Indian realities, and are prey to nostalgia; and besides, the bastards are too comfortable over there and don't have to face Delhi traffic jams and power cuts and queues for phones and train tickets and busses, and so they don't suffer like us and so they can't possibly be virtuous enough to be good artists.
> (Chandra 2000)

Chandra also points to the dangers of being too afraid of the accusations of inauthenticity, namely to be limited, cowed and defeated:

> To be self-consciously anti-exotic is also to be trapped, to be censored … In your work, don't be afraid of elephants and snakes and mystical India … India *is* full of elephants and snakes and mysticism, and also cell phones and nuclear weapons and satellites.
> (Chandra 2000)

Chandra's solution to these problematic accusations is perhaps a little too simplistic, too disingenuous: he exhorts fellow writers to write without fearing accusations of inauthenticity,

> speak fearlessly to your readers, wherever they are, and be aware that as you speak, you will inevitably be attacked by some critics for being not Indian enough, for being too Indian, too Westernized, too exoticized, too rich, for being a foreigner, an agent of the CIA … As you work, don't

> fear the God of Authenticity, for he is a weak god, a fraud, a fake, and – for all his posturing–completely irrelevant.
>
> (Chandra 2000).

He is almost carried away by his own lyricism, and ultimately his essay does not address the issue of audience reception, publisher's demands and financial remuneration, which most authors have to take into account and somehow reconcile.

In 2008, Amitava Kumar rebuts this article directly, and disagrees that it is within an author's remit to simply ignore, sidestep or otherwise avoid the thorny issue of authenticity – or lack of. 'Unlike Chandra, I don't think there is freedom at hand from the entire question of authenticity, largely because there is no escape from the yearning for the real … Either in our lives, or in our writing' (Kumar 2008). By Kumar's argument, the author has no choice but to take into account the desire, public and private desire, even hunger, for authenticity, whatever implications that may have on her work. As long as there is a public demand for authenticity as a criterion for judging literary merit, as well as a yardstick to measure the desirability of a given novel, and as long as authors are not wholly divorced from and untouched by audience reception, IWE authors may find themselves unable to shake off the bugbears of providing and proving authenticity and rebutting the accusations of the lack of the same. Karem (2004) explains that this hunger, even obsession, with authenticity on the part of readers makes political sense for the readers who are hopeful of gaining some authoritative knowledge from the reading. He adds, 'it also makes economic and political sense for marginal authors to claim that representative power' (Karem 2004: 12). However, as Karem recognizes, authors find they are in the double-edged situation of being severely restricted by the very positionality of representativeness they found advantageous to claim (and even exploit). This also does a disservice to the genre, resulting in the 'multiplication of restrictive narratives of authenticity in publishing, reviewing, and criticism' (Karem 2004: 12). Karem is not far off the mark, as one of the problems with IWE indeed has been its surprisingly narrow subject matter and relatively restricted handful of positions, which have certainly rendered the young literary subculture more visible and easily recognizable, and yet, have in part, confined its growth.

'Real India'

For all Chandra's glossing over the complexities of the IWE debate, he correctly identifies a significant flaw in these accusations of inauthenthicity and discussions of the 'real', namely the presumption that there exists somewhere an authentic account against which everything else can be measured (and found wanting). He points out the fallacies of such

assumptions and the absurdity of placing such qualifications on authenticity:

> This rhetoric lays claim not only to a very high moral ground but also a deep, essential connection to a 'real' Indianness. Despite all their demurrals about not essentializing Indianness, and their ritual genuflections in the direction of Bhabha and Spivak, the practitioners of this rhetoric inevitably claim that they are able to identify a 'Real India', and so are able to identify which art, and which artists, are properly Indian … 'Real India' is never *here*, it is always *there*. 'Real India' is completely unique, incomprehensible to most, approachable only through great and prolonged suffering, and unveils herself only to the very virtuous.
>
> (Chandra 2000)

The issue of the 'Real India' or non-real India which appears in IWE novels is a large part of the phenomenon that often literature acclaimed in the West is less enthusiastically received in India, even derided. As Deshpande observes, 'Over and over again we have seen books come to us from the West, much acclaimed and hyped, and fall flat on their faces in India' (Deshpande, 11 March 2009). Roy's *The God of Small Things* is a well-known instance of this, from receiving the most celebrated literary award of the UK to being dragged through the courts in India. In a recent article in *The Hindu*, Vijay Nair observes that the novels of the three recent Indian Booker Prize winners (Arundhati Roy, Kiran Desai and Aravind Adiga) have been received with 'considerable antagonism' in India, and asks, 'Is it because they hold a mirror to realities we refuse to acknowledge?' (Nair 2009). Nair joins in the debate on authenticity by approaching the question from a different angle, not asking how real the India is as represented in the IWE writing, but asking if these other Indias (perhaps equally real Indias) are not ones acceptable to Indians, or not ones they wish to own to. Amit Chaudhuri points out that the current literary images of India are constructed and spoken of only in terms of success, rendering the other, less successful Indias, invisible (Phalnikar 2006). Shivani goes further and damns the literary constructions of India as being 'a second-hand, mediated India filtered through timeless orientalism lenses, but it is not an India rooted even superficially in contemporary reality' (Shivani 2006: 21).

A recent novel to come under this scrutiny for 'Real India' and 'authenticity' is Adiga's *The White Tiger*, which caused in many Indian critics and reviewers mixed receptions and angst. While reviews of the novel in mainstream western publications, including The Economist, present it as a glimpse into the 'Real India' (Kumar 2008), many readers within India were unconvinced. Such was the case with Kavery Nambisan: 'I read *The White Tiger* sometime last month and was appalled by the factual errors which are tossed around throughout … there are several presumptions and false generalisations' (Nambisan, 22 February 2009). A reviewer from *Phalanx* (and one of the IWE authors from India interviewed for this chapter), Usha finds *The*

White Tiger lacking in nuance, subtlety and originality, and is similarly unconvinced of both the authenticity and the literary merit of the novel: 'Is this all there is to this much celebrated book, one wonders. A broadly fictionalized account of the everyman Indian, told in just one colour – black, with no shades of grey even to relieve it' (Usha 2009). However, many such responses fall into the fallacy which Chandra has already identified, that there is somewhere a version of India which is more real, more authentic. In a remarkably self-reflexive manner, Kumar poses to himself the question, 'Whose India is real; Adiga's, or mine?' (Kumar 2008). Kumar candidly admits,

> I was anxious about my response to The White Tiger … because I was aware that I might be open to the same charge of being inauthentic … At some level, realism had become my religion … Was it the worry of an expatriate Indian, concerned about losing touch with the society he took as his subject? To invest in an aesthetic of observation and reportage was to build banks against the rising tide of that worry. I know now that this worry informs my reading of all novels about India.
>
> (Kumar 2008)

From another angle, Deshpande rebuts Vijay Nair's question of whether Indians are unwilling to acknowledge certain depictions of India, and states instead that 'the question should rather be: why do Western publishers appreciate books by Indian authors which most Indians are unsympathetic to?' Deshpande further contends that although India has its own literary prizes, the books which are acclaimed are the ones which receive western literary prizes, such as the Booker Prize, and thus those sanctioned by a value system external to India: 'The question is: why do we have to wholeheartedly accept their valuation and dismiss the response of readers in this country?' (Deshpande 2009). In interview, Deshpande provides partial answers to the questions she poses. She points out that, 'Over and over again we have this ironic situation of Indians still so much under Western thrall that to be a success in the West is to become automatically an instant success in India' (Deshpande, 11 March 2009). So along with the IWE authors accused of inauthenticity, part of the blame perhaps must lie with the Indian audience who prefer the western selected representations of India over the Indian selected representations, and who are thus also guilty of reinforcing Orientalism and encouraging re-Orientalism. Usha explains that some authors do succumb to the pressure of audience expectation: 'writers find themselves writing in ways that cater to this demand, perhaps without being fully aware of it and without wanting to. And the Western reader/market seems to want "explanatory" fiction from the rest of the world' (Usha, 23 March 2009). In other words, Usha deems that, on occasions, authors are all but pressured into re-Orientalisms, to play the role readers want them to play, and to even occasionally provide inauthentic versions of India.

Publishers positioning authors

Whatever inauthenticities Indian authors may or may not be guilty of, whatever reading audiences may or may not be demanding, the perpetration of re-Orientalism in part has to lie at the door of the publishing houses, particularly the powerful, long-established western ones, which determine which authors will be published, marketed, distributed, hyped, invested in and gambled upon. Indeed, as Sarah Brouillette notes, 'the dominant narrative within the [publishing] industry itself is one in which corporatization has significantly changed the way literature is marketed' (Brouillette 2007: 54). There is no doubt that IWE is in tremendous demand today and that Indian (and South Asian) authors are being sought after and feted as never before. The English-reading public has developed a taste for IWE and the publishers have been quick to supply this demand (which they are in large part responsible for creating in the first place). In fact,

> There isn't a literary festival across the world that doesn't feature Indian writers … India is a strong presence at many international book fairs such as Tokyo, Beijing, South Africa (where, two years ago it formed the largest international presence), Gothenberg, Abu Dhabi, Frankfurt (where it has been the Guest of Honour twice in 20 years) and now, coming up in April 2009, the London Book Fair where it will be the focus country.
>
> (Butalia 2009)

Since writings in English about India began, India has been represented by its colonial masters first of all, and then by the few Indian writers sanctioned by the West, literature being very much part of and central to Orientalizing discourses. As Priya Joshi argues, 'The power of Western mastery was such that the Orient neither participated in nor was permitted to challenge its fabrication in Western words and forms of knowledge' (Joshi 2002: 12). Today, this may have been tempered to some extent by the success of a small number of IWE authors leading to their subsequent increase in negotiating power, plus the growing number of non-western publishers, as well as western publishing houses with branches in India, but the creation of Indian social and cultural identity via IWE is still largely dominated by a handful of powerful, influential western publishing houses.[4] As Usha observes, 'The global market with its own compulsions now dominates and its locus is the West – whether London or New York, I cannot tell, perhaps they are both the same' (Usha, 2 March 2009).

IWE authors in India almost all acknowledge the power of western publishers, and its often detrimental effect on those outside of this golden circuit:

> Not to be published abroad is to become almost invisible – as I realised in the first few years of my writing career.
>
> (Deshpande 2009)

> In India too, the critical acclaim and market success of a writer (I am speaking of IWE here) depend upon their being published and feted in the West.
>
> (Usha, 2 March 2009)

> And success, we need to remember, is closely linked to being published in the West, since readership in India is still limited, and the money, therefore, even for a bestselling book, is infinitely less than what a book published outside would get. This is apart from the reputation one gets by being published outside India.
>
> (Deshpande, 11 March 2009)

However, the backing of western publishers and the acclaim of a western audience is not without its problems. On one hand, it is true that western publishers privilege writings in English over other *bhashas* or regional languages; 'Literary production in English is triply privileged within this field, drawing on the language's American-based global ascendancy, on the subcontinental legacy of British colonialism and, relatedly, on Indian class divisions: this is the preferred language of the urban middle classes' (Orsini 2002: 84). However, as Orsini points out, the demands of the western readers of IWE can be quite specific, quite colonial, so that 'in the florid, sensuous, inclusive, multicultural world of post-Rushdie, postcolonial novel, the West can settle down to contemplate, not India, but its latest reinterpretation of itself' (Orsini 2002: 88). In catering to such a readership, one form of re-Orientalism which may be required of IWE authors is to hold up a mirror to the West, even more so than depicting the Orient.

Western publishers continue to be in the privileged position to commission, select and reward only particular genres, with particular narratives and angles, usually those which they deem are easily recognizable – and therefore easily marketed and sold – to a global English-reading audience. This narrow and restricted representation is naturally designed to serve profit margins and bottom lines, but insidiously also informs reader palates by training expectation and limiting literary consumption. The possible terror of this type of selection process by literature's gatekeepers is that readers may have access only to a sanitized, censored literary image of South Asia. 'Now,' as Shivani cuttingly observes, 'you can safely dip your toes into the exotic mystical waters of the East and not have to worry about being drowned' (Shivani 2006: 9). Studying the commodity aspect of IWE, Brouillette comments on the creation of celebrity authors and the positioning of such authors as representatives of the literature, a creation of the publishers which has 'contributed to the "blockbuster" phenomenon through which particular authors become central to the imagination of readers. Regardless of its purchase on reality, authors have imbibed this narrative as well' (Brouillette 2007: 54). Nambisan accuses the big publishers of sacrificing literary merit for profit, 'out to grab the cash-cows as it were and have become rather indiscriminate in their choice

and in their haste to publish' (Nambisan, 22 February 2009). Publication success has become more concerned with identifying the *bestselling* author, rather than the *best* literature.

Literary critics have been noticing changes on the publishing scene in recent years. Where Indian writers used to go abroad to access western publishing houses, Kathleen McCaul gives examples of Indians moving back to India to write. She cites the examples of Jeet Thayil and Rana Dasgupta, both of whom worked in the US but happily moved back to India to write: 'Things have changed tremendously in India – when I left in the 1990s there was little possibility of a literary life. There were few publishers and prizes. Now there's a thriving literary scene' (Thayil, in McCaul 2007). Along with some Indian writers moving from West to East, Sheela Reddy identifies that literary agents are also moving to India, 'demanding five- and six-figure dollar advances that rival those in the UK or Europe' (Reddy 2008). According to Reddy, the big change has been that of attitude on the part of Indian publishers, who '[t]ired of being treated like poor country cousins … are now throwing dollars in a bid to grab the attention of literary agents and to be taken seriously by the world's publishing community' (Reddy 2008). Reddy gives the example of Adiga's *The White Tiger*, auctioned at the London Book Fair but whose agent refused early pre-emptive offers. Adiga's literary agent instead auctioned the novel in Delhi. From the six publishers who received the manuscript, five offers were made, and these continued to bid against each other. The finalists were Penguin and HarperCollins, with the latter taking the spoils at 14 lakhs (around $35,000). Given this potential, it is unsurprising that Dasgupta observes there are people coming from abroad to Delhi to work in publishing and journalism. It therefore appears that the responsibility for being implicated in systematic re-Orientalism may in the future be shared (even if unequally) between publishers in the East and West alike.

However, even if the publishing scene in India is prospering, there continue to be problems with reception, reviews and literary criticism, and disappointing standards on all these fronts. Dasgupta criticizes the 'cramped, ghetto-like environs that newspaper editors provide for book reviews', pointing out that not only is it difficult to do much more than describe a book in a review of less than 800 words, but that 'good book reviewers are confronted … with a highly reductive conception of how books should be talked about: one that is baldly consumerist and quite inhospitable to the finer aspects of the reviewer's craft' (Dasgupta 2005). This view is echoed by Deshpande, who testifies that

> We don't yet have a body of critics able to make its presence felt in the international arena. In fact the only Indian critics who do seem to matter are those who are living and teaching in universities abroad. One critic said to me: our voices are not heard, we don't have a platform. And another said: we critics have let you writers down.
>
> (Deshpande, 11 March 2009)

It would therefore appear that despite the heftier literary advances some privileged authors have managed to secure, the literary standards of reception in India have a long way yet to go. Dasgupta identifies Indian media as being particularly at fault: 'India media is an intellectual wasteland. It devours ideas and spits out brain-dead noodles of celebrity. Books, reviews, artists – everything is reduced to a trite Indian success story. Trotted out in ten questions' (Dasgupta 2005). Indeed, as Deshpande notes, part of this problem is that Indian criticism has been taken over by journals, magazines and newspapers: 'There are far too many reviews than real criticism, and it is all done by people who don't really have the qualifications to talk about books' (Deshpande in interview with Kumar 2007).

Conclusion

Meanwhile, as Karem posits, 'the concepts of "authentic" identity continue to shape literary production and reception' (Karem 2004: 12), strongly, and very possibly adversely, impacting upon the direction and quality of the development of the genre. Going back one more time to the question of the worth of social realism in narrative, to the thorny question of the worth of social realism in and *raison d'être* of IWE in particular with which this chapter began, we find that George Becker has perhaps the most elegant summation: 'The ultimate subject of a realistic work is a milieu. The question it raises is what are the terms of life in that milieu' (1980: 64). Becker's understanding of the role, significance and position of realism seems both constructive and inclusive for IWE, focusing on a depiction of the 'terms of life' rather than on asserting the *types* of lives or lifestyles. It is particularly useful in allowing for the multiple voices which will go towards defraying the dangers of re-Orientalism, and in adding to the layering of the multiple realities of South Asian literary identity, in specific, and South Asian identity politics, in general, the latter being the broad subject of this collection.

It has been no straightforward task, unpacking the many and intertwining layers of influences which are currently re-Orientalizing IWE, and there has certainly been no shortage of lively debate, complaints, condemnations, accusations and robust rebuttals. Re-Orientalism, the perpetrating of Orientalism by a select, privileged and advantageously positioned group of 'Orientals', seems alive and well on the IWE literary circuits today, reinforced by some authorial intent which caters to both reader demand (largely from the West) and publisher selection criteria, which are in turn mutually informing and interdependent. These are further fuelled and directed by literary critics, reviewers, the media, the academics and Indian reception, based in no small part on western recommendations and (e)valuations. Re-Orientalism in IWE has resulted thus far in a limitation of themes in the genre, rewarding positionality rather than pure literary merit, and in the marketing of a handful of Indias selected and sanctioned by a handful of publishing houses. The damage is not only to the quality of the literature produced and its growth

potential, but also to the skewed representation of India and the literary identity construction of places and communities.

This is not a situation particularly relished by authors, as has been seen in their testimonies above. Usha in fact speaks of authors selecting certain themes and writing in certain ways 'that would fit the postcolonial straitjacket' (2 March 2009), while Chaudhuri admits to being made to feel alienated as an author, and wishes for 'a writing that is more ambiguous about its own position' (Phalnikar 2006). Chaudhuri's words open up an intriguing idea for a new space for IWE to occupy; a space where authors do not have to assert, explain, prove authenticities or wear badges of belonging on their sleeves, but instead would be able to wonder, question, reflect and introduce multiple Indias, multiple Indian identities. In a sense, IWE writing is not unlike a child who has been forced to grow up too quickly, given adult responsibilities too early on. With its burdensome inheritance of colonialism and occupying a defiantly postcolonial space (and sometimes rejecting the postcolonial label altogether), and while trying to gain recognition for literature written in English and learning to use English to express Indian realities, IWE has perhaps been forced to take itself a little too seriously, forced to assume mantles of authority and responsibility of representation. In Chaudhuri's words,

> Right now we do not have a space for the irresponsible misfit, which means we do not have a space which is at an angle to power. Even those who speak against power are in some ways in powerful positions of their own. In India, everybody is some way in some kind of nexus of power. We need to regain that space for the irresponsible. (Chaudhuri 2006)

It is possible that having been relentlessly Orientalized, and being re-Orientalized in much of contemporary IWE, this literary subculture will nevertheless eventually break away from both sets of shackles. It is possible, therefore, that re-Orientalism and the angst about authenticity and misrepresentation may be but one stage through which this literature needs to pass before it can carve out a space for itself, of its own choosing. A space which would be less confining, less exclusive and more accessible and more searching. A space where IWE can validate itself with confidence, rather than looking elsewhere for validation. For the time being, however, re-Orientalism reigns, the power of representation remains in the hands of the few (even if in different hands, but still transferred only to a select few) and the identity construction of India remains highly edited and exclusive. Nonetheless, it is important that IWE does eventually manage to move away from being re-Orientalized, because as Said reminds us, 'we must continue to remember novels participate in, are part of, contribute to a slow, infinitesimal politics that clarifies, reinforces, perhaps even occasionally advances perceptions and attitudes' (1994: 89), and as such, are a key part of constructing not just images but realities, and possibly even futures.

Notes

1 This chapter uses the term 'Indian Writing in English' (IWE) and focuses on writing by Indians, but many of these arguments are also applicable more broadly speaking to South Asian writing in English; there is a difference between these two groupings, but it is worth noting that there are significant and manifold commonalities in the circumstances experienced by both groups of writings.
2 For a discussion on the use of English in South Asian Literature, see Lau, L. (2007) 'The Language of Power and the Power of Language: The Usage of English by South Asian Writers, and the Subsequent Creation of South Asian Image and Identity', *Narrative Inquiry*, Special Issue, 17(1): 27–47.
3 Drawing from 'My Bondage and My Freedom' (in *Fredrick Douglass: The Narrative and Selected Writings*, New York, Random House, 1989), Karem (2004) relates how Fredrick Douglass, an orator for abolitionists, was advised to retain a little 'plantation manner of speech' to make his lectures more credible. At the end of his lectures, Douglass was often asked to show the scars on his back from whipping, suggesting that it was his body, not his narrative, which authenticated his experience.
4 HarperCollins, Random House and Penguin are examples.

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3 On the entrepreneurial ethos in Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger*

Sarah Brouillette

The White Tiger was one of the big books of 2008. It won the Man Booker Prize, and Aravind Adiga was named Borders bookstore Author of the Year as well. It is a rags-to-riches tale and a *bildungsroman*. The narrator, Balram, is a poor man from the Indian state of Bihar, which he detests and deems 'the Darkness', and with ample reason: despite considerable academic promise, at a young age he is removed from school to work in a tea shop; and, in a dilapidated hospital that no doctors deign to visit, he witnesses his father's death from tuberculosis. Longing for escape and attracted to the uniform, he decides to seek work as a driver, becoming a servant for the same powerful family that lords over and impoverishes his fellow low-caste villagers.

By turns cunning and obsequious, Balram is soon selected to move to Gurgaon with his boss, Mr Ashok, and boss's wife, Pinky Madam. This is 'the *modernest* suburb of Delhi', Mr Ashok boasts, 'the most American part of the city' (Adiga 2008a: 101). It is full of shopping malls and posh apartment complexes, spheres of luxurious life and leisure from which Balram is mostly excluded. There, after months of tortured introspection and psychological decline, Balram kills his boss and steals money that was expropriated through landlordism and political corruption to begin with. He then departs for Bangalore, where he starts a taxi company that serves call-centre employees. He hires drivers, promotes his services (their motto: 'We Drive Technology Forward!'; Adiga 2008a: 258) and achieves considerable success, all the while trying to appear blithely unconcerned about the anticipated revenge killing of his family. In telling this story, Balram imagines that he has as a narratee Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao, who is on a trade visit to India. Indeed, he presents his autobiography as a corrective to what he expects the Premier will be told by more official sources.

Adiga appears to have little in common with his protagonist. Before he published this, his first novel, he attended Oxford and Columbia, and then worked as a journalist specializing in finance. He covered US politics for *The Financial Times* until 2000, and since then Indian politics, culture and finance for the Time International group. He has lived in Delhi, and did so while writing *The White Tiger*, but he spent much of the last ten years abroad. Amitava Kumar and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, both well-known commentators

on Indian literature and politics, critique Adiga's work in light of this background. Subrahmanyam is particularly unconvinced by the portrait of Balram – 'This is a posh English-educated voice trying to talk dirty' (Adiga 2008a: 43) – and he suggests that the book's success measures two kinds of middle-class angst: within India, the novel indulges 'the neocolonial imagination' of the bourgeois city-dweller, for whom villages, increasingly 'asphyxiated by Delhi's expansion', produce servants who threaten to morph into disgruntled and terrifying 'criminal castes'; outside India, it feeds liberal objections to the country's 'archaic and primitive' class relations (Adiga 2008a: 42). Kumar is from Bihar, and his take on the novel is not unlike Subrahmanyam's. Responding to a scene in which Balram takes Mr Ashok and Pinky Madam on a driving tour back through the old village, he asks:

> Who is looking here? The village to which the car is returning is not only the employer's village but also [Balram]'s – he is returning to the place where he was born and grew up and has only recently left. Yet does it appear to be the account of a man who is returning home? He recognizes no landmark or person, he has no emotion, he has no relationship to the land or the people.
>
> (Adiga 2008a)

In light of this moment and others, Kumar concludes that the novel's perspective on downtrodden Indians is inauthentic and insensitive.

Aspects of Kumar's and Subrahmanyam's critiques are echoed by some of the book's other official critics (e.g. Tripathi 2008), as well as by a sizeable number of the several hundred readers who have so far contributed reviews to amazon.com, which I will return to cautiously below. It seems that for these interpretive communities *The White Tiger* is engaged in some of what Lisa Lau and Ana Mendes suggest re-Orientalism involves, namely 'continuing to serve up the East as spectacle' and thereby propagating a 'fashionable alterity as a marketing strategy that repackages the "Orient" for global consumption'. However, key aspects of the text have to be overlooked in order to make this case. In this chapter I suggest that, far from straightforwardly orientalizing any location, Adiga writes in a way that is clearly informed by the very idea that he might be engaged in such an act. I read his work as a response to the circulation of critiques of the writer as Orientalist, and as an exploration of the demented psyche of a particular teller of tales about India, rather than as a naive perpetuation of particular marketable images. Turning to his work's marketing and reception, I then suggest we read re-Orientalism less as an identifiable set of actual writing practices, and more as a phenomenon that many readers are by now quite suspicious about, and as a dominant lens through which postcolonial writing has come to be viewed. Indeed, pervasive worries about re-Orientalism may be symptoms of broader concerns produced by the logic of the current cultural marketplace: concerns about the requirements of a competitive cultural economy that circulates images of suffering,

about the inequalities that animate those images, and about the significant barriers that stand in the way if one wishes to claim a role in their revision. In the case of *The White Tiger*, these underlying concerns are strong enough that they prevent some readers from seeing or crediting that the novel is, ironically, compelled by them as well.

The White Tiger and the entrepreneurial ethos

In interviews and articles Adiga has asked his readers to place *The White Tiger* in opposition to business books for aspiring elites, and to the brand of finance journalism offered by the newspapers and magazines that once employed him, which boast overwhelmingly celebratory treatments of the globalization of markets and the arrival of the 'new India' (Man Booker Prize 2008a). He has also suggested that it was while writing journalistically that he gathered material for his fiction, stating that Balram's life is a composite of the many misfortunes he encountered during his travels between meetings with wealthy politicians and businessmen (Adiga 2008b; Jeffries 2008). Balram belongs to what Adiga has in interview called the 'servant–master system, the bed rock of middle-class Indian life' (Man Booker Prize 2008b). This system of course long predates India's reincarnation as an 'Asian tiger', but the novel presents its continuation as integral to the functioning of the 'new economy'. Adiga additionally claims that his treatment of Balram's labour stems from a distinction he felt forced to draw, in his own career, between his 'official reporter's diary' and 'another, secret diary' that contained what he was meant to leave out of his journalism, when his responsibility was to that 'middle-class Indian' rather than to his or her servants. *The White Tiger*, a fictional rendering of the contents of Adiga's 'secret diary', is meant to right this discursive imbalance. Stated precisely, it is meant to correct what the author came to perceive as mainstream journalism's elision of the reality of exploited service labour from images of India's economic boom.

We could of course refuse to credit this self-presentation, but entertaining it as a possibility does clarify the novel's technique, as Adiga appears to have transferred his own resistant relationship to the mainstream take on Indian entrepreneurialism on to his narrator. Early on Balram directly positions his letters to Wen Jiabao as an alternative to state propaganda and to the sorts of 'American' business books, like *Ten Secrets of Business Success!* or *Become an Entrepreneur in Seven Easy Days!* (Adiga 2008a: 4), that one finds all over Bangalore: 'I would like to insert my own "sidebar" into the narrative of the modern entrepreneur's growth and development,' he states (Adiga 2008a: 194). His is a thoroughly critical insertion, a 'sidebar' that refutes the main text. For example, combining pride and shame, Balram imagines telling Wen Jiabao:

> our nation, though it has no drinking water, electricity, sewage system, public transportation, sense of hygiene, discipline, courtesy, or

> punctuality, *does* have entrepreneurs. Thousands and thousands of them. Especially in the field of technology. And these entrepreneurs – *we* entrepreneurs – have set up all these outsourcing companies that virtually run America now.
>
> (Adiga 2008a: 2–3)

It is through tours like the Premier's that contracts are signed and 'enterprise zones' built and expanded; so, fashioning himself as a kind of anti-diplomatic, Balram claims to want to ensure that no dignitaries leave the country with only the officially branded national story. All should also carry away the sorrier, sadder truth that he has to tell. He conceives his story as one that can stand in for these other sad histories, as representative of 'how entrepreneurship is born, nurtured, and developed in this, the glorious twenty-first century of man' (Adiga 2008a: 4).

That said, the ambiguous meaning of 'glorious' in these first pages, positioned uncomfortably between sincerity and sarcasm, provides an early clue that Balram is unable to settle upon a coherent message. To be sure, he might appear to be a positive specimen a visitor could study as a model case of rags-to-riches entrepreneurial acumen. It is after all Bangalore's proliferating 'outsourcing companies' – Balram's shorthand for the call centres, start-ups and dotcoms contained within Electronics City Phase 1 – that secure his own future, and once he is there he becomes one of the privileged few, in cahoots with the local police and invited to mistreat his own employees as he was once mistreated. Still, Balram cannot muster much more than confusion about these ostensible successes.

This is understandable, since often over the course of the narrative it appears to be Balram's tragedies that breed his 'triumphs'. Having suffered is what makes Balram want to pursue a better life, giving him something to seek to overcome. In turn, suffering might seem to supply him with a particularly valuable property, his personal story, whose quantity of misery is what makes it worth sharing with visiting world leaders. But of course that sharing isn't really happening. In reality he is alone in his office late at night, talking to himself, struggling to understand his personality and experiences, trying, most notably, to justify committing a crime that once seemed to him to be just the change he needed.

That change required strikingly brutal violence against a man who may not have deserved to be its target, and it will result in his own family's annihilation. In attempting to rest content with these realities Balram is not just unusual or sociopathic. Not minding about the murder of his family makes him an exaggerated version of the contemporary worker's infamous atomization (Sennett 2006). Balram is pre-eminently 'low drag', not tied down by social commitments, willing to move anywhere for work, willing to do anything to get ahead, and he also lacks anything remotely resembling a secure future: steady employment, a livable wage, and protection from starvation and disease, for example. As he self-critically states, 'only a man who is

prepared to see his family destroyed – hunted, beaten, and burned alive by the masters – can break out of the [chicken] coop. That would take no normal human being, but a freak, a pervert of nature' (Adiga 2008a: 150).

Thus a second major aspect of 'new economy' rhetoric that the novel takes up – in addition, that is, to its elision of the reality of service labour – is the psychological harm required for conceiving of the Self as a flexible, dynamic, self-regulating, entrepreneurial engine, willing to engage in constant reassessment and destruction of past beliefs and allegiances in pursuit of a more fulfilled and productive existence. This understanding of the Self is a core feature of much of the management theory written over the last several decades, and, more than a means of understanding how elite post-Fordist workers perceive themselves, it is the basis for a work ethic that management gurus will position as the ideal to which all people should aspire (Peters 1992; Florida 2002).

This influential management discourse shares much with another purveyor of model contemporary selves: the therapeutic biography industry, which has fictional and confessional branches and much that falls in between. In both the therapeutic biography and the new economy career narrative we find this basic prescription for an ideal Self: she will internalize and biographize her social circumstances, and perceive discontentment, ranging from mild unhappiness to considerable psychological distress, as a temporary setback to be turned into useful fuel for ongoing work towards future successes. In Eva Illouz's treatment, the culture of the therapeutic biography, exemplified and disseminated by Oprah Winfrey's 'tentacular' empire of television, magazine, book club and website, combines 'the moral glory of self-change' with 'gruesome depictions of suffering' to construct a narrative of the Self as 'double hero: on account of what it has suffered from a hostile world and because it can claim ultimate victory over that world and its own self, by overcoming itself' (2003: 128; see also Travis 2007).

Balram's story makes a mockery of this brand of biographical progress narrative, which is at once securely attached to the elite vanguard of new labour, and also generalized and globalized by popular tales of entrepreneurs' paired psychological and professional development. He vacillates uneasily between approaching the image of the entrepreneur with sincerity and sarcasm, between insisting upon his suffering and on his triumph over adversity, between self-celebration and self-hatred, between triumphalism and catastrophism. His radical confusion has an act of murder as its most dramatic outlet, clearly giving a pathological meaning to linkage between atomized psychic unrest, entrepreneurial endeavour and pursuit of one's best Self. In turn, rather than assembling him into a healthily renewed whole, his conflicted account of his own life reveals fundamental fissures within the very idea of a Self for whom suffering is, contradictorily, both a necessary generative motivator and relatively easily overcome, while dwelling in pain, or refusing to psychologically 'deal with' the wrongs one has suffered, is 'a sign of [an] undeveloped or immature identity' (Illouz 2003: 118), or of not yet having found a way to expel or excise unhappiness through self-development.

In Balram's autobiography every system of value, every place he might look for guidance in his personal 'development', from the political sphere to family and religion, gradually turns into farce or fraud. He is left with no anchoring truths by which he might chart a course through his world. At a young age, for instance, he finds that corrupt politicians will accept bribes from rich businessmen who want to avoid paying taxes, but will also hang pictures of Gandhi in their offices and call themselves Leninists. Or, later, after being forced to declare that it was he and not Pinky Madam who drove over a pavement dweller, the statement that Balram signs, by all means under duress and with instruction, baldly states: 'I SWEAR BY ALMIGHTY GOD THAT I MAKE THIS STATEMENT UNDER NO DURESS AND UNDER INSTRUCTION FROM NO ONE' (Adiga 2008a: 143).

This unmooring is clearly exacerbated by Balram's inability to imagine a collective political response to it. His own example suggests that it is dangerous to assume that anyone experiences untroubled submission to their own exploitation. Professions of loyalty are instead often paper-thin disguises of a truer discontentment, disguises that might be pierced at any moment by the revolutionary fervour they feebly conceal. Nevertheless, a pervasive source of frustration for Balram is what he sees as the complacency of the other members of his class. Having already revealed himself as one who cannot help but desire the success he castigates, he laments:

> Never before in human history have so few owed so much to so many … A handful of men in this country have trained the remaining 99.9 percent – as strong, as talented, as intelligent in every way – to exist in perpetual servitude; a servitude so strong that you can put the key of his emancipation in a man's hands and he will throw it back at you with a curse.
>
> (Adiga 2008a: 149)

The result of such thinking is that he never joins with others to combat a common condition. Abed in his basement servant's quarters he is prone to staring at 'anonymous palm prints that had been pressed into the white plaster of the wall' (Adiga 2008a: 228); the construction workers who built the upscale apartment building left traces of their work, deliberately or otherwise, and Balram then glimpses their haunting presence, which might encourage him to identify with their labour. Yet his fixation on emblems is a symptom of a ghostly solidarity that is ultimately fruitless: he feels it but cannot articulate it or act upon it. Instead, though he is confronted with signs of the social production of his unhappiness, he ultimately only takes suffering into himself and uses it to manufacture his future biography, understanding himself as engaged in a fundamentally personal struggle of triumph over adversity.

Indeed, it should be supremely difficult for readers to settle on interpretations of the signs and symbols we encounter in Balram's narrative. Are they really evidence of an incipient revolution, or manifestations of his troubled

psyche, which has him projecting his internal struggle on to the city streets, seeing symbols of class war everywhere? Are the shadowy hands in the plaster on his bedroom walls even really there? What about the Naxalites? Balram hears talk of them from other drivers, and in the car at night he sees signs of followers' imminent revolution:

> I saw men discussing and talking and reading in the night, alone or in clusters around the streetlamps. By the dim lights of Delhi, I saw hundreds that night, under trees, shrines, intersections, on benches, squinting at newspapers, holy books, journals, Communist Party pamphlets. What were they reading about? What were they talking about? But what else? Of the end of the world.
>
> (Adiga 2008a: 188–89)

He applies a similarly apocalyptic language to the snippets of poetry he encounters throughout his journey, which he interprets as signals to the poor that what they lack in wealth they make up for in knowledge of real beauty. Quoting Iqbal, he states early on that people 'remain slaves because they can't see what is beautiful in this world' (Adiga 2008a: 34). Later, he claims:

> The poor win a few battles (the peeing in the potted plants, the kicking of the pet dogs, etc. [Balram has partaken of both]) but of course the rich have won the war for ten thousand years. That's why, one day, some wise men, out of compassion for the poor, left them signs and symbols in poems, which appear to be about roses and pretty girls and things like that, but when understood correctly spill out secrets that allow the poorest man on earth to conclude the ten-thousand-year-old brain-war on terms favorable to himself.
>
> (Adiga 2008a: 217)

Here Balram reads poetry as a welcome kind of self-delusion. Through consciousness of the secrets that 'spill out' from it, the less fortunate can claim creative souls and place themselves above their rulers, establishing 'terms' that favour them.

Balram's dim consciousness of others' anger and others' labour ultimately only contributes to the introspective machinations that end in the murder that both instantiates and secures his radical isolation. That is, his life story, full of anger and resentment, has no real auditors, and its major act is a murder that is ultimately just a further manifestation of his individualization of his own suffering. Murdering Mr Ashok ensures that he has no family left to reconnect with, save for one young cousin he treats as a narcissistic extension of himself, apprenticing him to his own life lessons, and also ignoring, insulting and belittling him in repeated expressions of his own self-hatred. The killing also reflects his faith that he will overcome personal adversity through the murder of one man.

Mr Ashok is more sympathetic than most, in fact, but Balram has him stand in for the various radical inequalities he has faced throughout this life. In one of the book's leitmotifs, obesity is a marker of overdevelopment; it signals the structural dependence of the rich on the poor, who waste away as they are literally consumed by the system. Mr Ashok is an exemplary case, having enough money that he is able to eat and drink more than anyone would need and then exercise excess calories away. Meanwhile Balram has faced depredation after depredation: from massaging this boss's father's feet and picking the potatoes out of his dhosas (these are tossed aside within inches of the starving poor), to being laughed at, humiliated and condescended to, and mocked as smelly and unclean. Mr Ashok remains, nevertheless, less a figure of abusive authority and more a buffoonish emasculated male, and Balram only murders him after having suffered a mental collapse brought on by lifelong confrontation with a radical absence of any stable future or meaningful experience of community.

He attempts to recover from this collapse when he fashions his personal experience into a tale of his attainment of an ennobling freedom that allows him to reach his 'true potential' rather than be someone else's driver. Through the act of narration, in other words, Balram tries to convince himself that his dead boss was the embodiment of every ill he had experienced, which would make murdering him the ultimate and appropriate expression of his triumph over tragedy. He attempts to justify his use of the stolen money in similar terms, as a just reaction to the fact that the money was earned through corruption in any case, and should rightly be in the hands of those suffering classes from whom it was after all expropriated. Yet he never quite manages to persuade himself – or us – of anything. Instead, after facing considerable foes, Balram can do little more than project on to his boss his understandable need for some singular villain against whom he can enact his revenge.

In a particularly memorable scene, he watches a black dog turning in circles, and we know what he sees is himself:

> A pink patch of skin – an open wound – glistened on its left butt; and the dog had twisted on itself in an attempt to gnaw at the wound. The wound was just out of reach of its teeth, but the dog was going crazy from pain – trying to attack the wound with its slavering mouth, it kept moving in mad, precise, pointless circles.
>
> (Adiga 2008a: 213)

In these 'mad, precise, pointless circles' we perceive the precise heart of Balram's complex characterization. The suffering that has brought him to this point makes him a figure for the precarious service class, while his mode of self-presentation and his ruthless pursuit of success make him a figure for the entrepreneurial Self, who views work as the expressive fulfilment of a therapeutic destiny, and turns difficulties into instigations to a ceaseless 'mad' cycle of overcoming one's past Self with newer, better, more productive

versions. The discomfort induced by Balram's characterization is thus an integral part of the author's strategy, whether we deem the technique literary or commercial or some blend of these. On the one hand, as an embodiment of the service class, Balram can be read as a manifestation of Adiga's afflicted conscience about his work as a journalist, and as a target for readers' compassion. On the other hand, as a figure for the entrepreneur whose goal is overcoming suffering en route to productive self-articulation, Balram can be seen as an unveiling of a particular model of the entrepreneurial personality, and a target for readers' denunciation. As a pathologically exaggerated embodiment of the ideal worker, motivated to achieve greatness by inner reserves of self-criticism and unhappiness, he is a critique of the terms of the entrepreneurial biography, in which personal success is the highest priority, and its attainment requires the Self be cut off from all connections and turn inward in pursuit of an illusive source of meaning that will anchor one's actions. The entrepreneurial success story is, for Balram, a mitigating answer or compensation, ultimately hollow and self-defeating, for the radical inequities and lack of stability and secure meaning he has faced in this life. This unavoidable incongruousness, as he unites the low-caste servant and self-celebrating change agent, has encouraged some readers to perceive him as impossible and inauthentic. But such is the precise point of his characterization.

Hence, I suggest, if we are troubled by the fact that Adiga embodies this kind of angst in a decidedly disadvantaged figure – a character who, critics suggest, should not have access to the vocabulary Balram sometimes uses ('now revealing erudition an unlettered man cannot possess … now assuming the pithy timbre of a suave, urban journalist interpreting India for the unfamiliar … now adopting a pedestrian voice with a limited vocabulary'; Tripathi 2008) – we should focus our concern in a particular way. What are so unsettling are the contradictions that *The White Tiger* illuminates, contradictions not just within conceptions of the infinitely entrepreneurial Self, but within 'new economy' contemporary capitalist production more generally: namely, how it depends on a cadre of replaceable service workers, whose efforts allow the utmost introspective freedom to elite 'immaterial' producers, while also generalizing and globalizing the rhetoric of the free-floating agent of enterprise throughout all social strata, disseminating it even to those for whom this particular trajectory might seem a kind of sick joke; and how its institutions and practices 'inflict on the self a wide variety of forms of suffering', while simultaneously accentuating the individual's 'claim and right' to be a Balram-like aspirational master of her own destiny, using self-work to improve her human capital and create a life 'devoid of suffering' (Illouz 2003: 118).

In theorizing re-Orientalism, Lau and Mendes suggest that, unlike the Orientalists Edward Said studied, re-Orientalists are prone to emphasizing their particular 'positionality'. Lau and Mendes note this emphasis in particular in writing that presents itself as 'witness', in which the author wishes 'to prove eligibility as representative and validity of testimony and authority'.

I've shown that while *The White Tiger*'s narrator may present himself this way – who could better tell the story of his own life? – our reliance on him as a source of information is nevertheless exploded. Balram is never presented as our trustworthy guide to the various locations he traverses; he is, rather, a sociopath whose perception of himself and of the world around him is thoroughly suspicious. Indeed, the novel's exploration of its narrator's disturbed psychology seems to be its primary purpose. The total hostility with which Balram sometimes perceives people, the way he presents the village he grew up in as a place of utter destitution and horror, the way he refuses any form of solidarity with others: all these features of his narration are inseparable from his characterization as the embodiment of an anti-social entrepreneurial ethos orientated only towards the survival and success of the lone individual who possesses it. If anything, then, the novel is a study of the murky origins of the kind of Self who might become a re-Orientalist, imagining himself telling sad stories about India to visiting dignitaries.

The White Tiger's market circulation and the question of re-Orientalism

The fact that this dimension of the novel has been overlooked may have to do with readers' suspicions about the book's extensive market circulation, which I turn to now. Adiga's self-critical insistence upon his novel's attention to an economic underbelly has been a key plank in the most pervasive 'marketing story' attached to his text (Squires 2007: 119–46), one that has been authorized to ease its circulation and reception by stressing its act of uncovering part of capitalism's hidden history. A notable portion of Adiga's journalism about India already contains subtle and even not-so-subtle critiques of middle-class complicity in perpetuating poverty and inequality there (e.g. Adiga 2006a, 2006b), often irritating, in the words of a colleague and friend, 'critics of the foreign correspondent corps [who] insist we are always banging on about poverty and filth, when we should be pointing out the five-star hotels' (Overdorf 2008). Still, by his own lights his novel is a product of his afflicted conscience, and this self-construction informs the branding story most firmly attached to the novel, as publishers and marketers, prize committees that have honoured the work, and the author himself, uniformly encourage readers to perceive it as a rejoinder to celebratory treatments of 'Asian tiger' economics.

Krishan Chopra, editor at HarperCollins India, has said of the novel: 'If one were to give just one reason why we decided to publish the book, it would be its startling originality and perspective on the new India' (Sharma 2008). Here, as on its cover and cover-flap blurbs, the novel is positioned as unique and marketable because it offers this 'startling' insight into life experiences construed as otherwise untreated in literature. That is, though a number of well-known novels treat poverty and landlordism – Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable* (1935) and Rohinton Mistry's *A Fine Balance* (1995) soon come

to mind – and though surely other works do address the particular underbelly of India's 'new economy', in the publisher's marketing eye this wasn't yet true of any English-language work designed for large-scale global circulation.

The book's success has since been facilitated by continual emphasis on its interlocking originality and provision of neglected information that people should want to possess. We are told again and again: here is a book that shines much-needed light on the darker realities of globalization; it takes up the lives of the Indian underclass, those whose labour subtends the ascent of the 'new India' but who continue to be excluded from places like elite American-style suburbs and call centres and dotcom start-up enterprise zones. Thus when Michael Portillo, chair of the 2008 Man Booker judges, states that it won the prize for its way of 'dealing with pressing social issues and significant global developments with astonishing humour', he picks up and supports the sanctioned story about the novel. He even quotes the official publicity for the book when claiming that it possesses the 'enormous literary merit' of 'originality', earned through its devoted presentation of 'a different aspect of India' (Man Booker Prize 2008a).

Publicity for the novel would have been hard for Portillo to ignore. Large and numerous print advertisements appeared before its release in India, the UK and the US. There were life-sized promotional cut-outs for bookstore display. The author was profiled widely. Indian news channel CNN-IBN even aired a video book advertisement, which was soon available on YouTube. The advertisement is an instance of a new trend in book promotion. Presenting themselves as short films rather than as advertising – as cultural rather than commercial – these pieces are typically expensive to make and reserved for promotion of select lead titles released by major firms. In the case of *The White Tiger*, an animated piece depicts 'a world-weary man from the village entering Delhi suburb Gurgaon and getting into an orange-coloured taxi' (Sharma 2008); this taxi, also appearing on the book's original cover, was the visual clue meant to tie the short film to the novel, hopefully turning viewers into readers when they encountered the image in stores or online.

Of course the marketing story attached to a work like Adiga's, and supported by an aggressive advertising campaign, need not be embraced to be effective. On the contrary, the ideal scenario seems to be for a book to be put forward as an engine for generation of further conversation about an important but neglected topic. Debates about authenticity have proven particularly useful to this purpose. In Adiga's case, critics of his novel, constructing a counter-narrative that also circulates with the work, as journalists mention it in profiles and readers mention it to each other, acknowledge its desire to provide new information about emerging economic realities – for Kumar, novelists do well to 'explore how the news enters people's lives and indeed becomes a part of daily life' (2008) – but argue its success is compromised by the distance between the author and his real-world subject matter. The very marketability of the novel encourages some of the most vituperative appraisals of it, as readers challenge the legitimacy of Adiga's hold over the voice he

uses in order to capture the 'originality' that makes the work a worthy object for extensive marketing. In other words, the core marketing story attached to the novel, which highlights Adiga's turn against journalism and his 'original' treatment of a neglected reality, fails to impress readers who, at their most extreme, question his ability and 'right', as a member of an elite, to produce a fictional rendering of the subjective life and pathologies of a low-caste servant.

Contributors of customer reviews to the US-based amazon.com site are perhaps the most strident in this respect. Their views cannot be cited without some scepticism. There is no guarantee that contributors to a given forum are who they say they are, or believe what they profess to, or live where they say they do, or didn't write dozens of hostile reviews under various names. That said, forum comments do allow us some insight into how a book might be interpreted, and they help to circulate potential readings. They can be read as performances of, and encouragement for, possible interpretations. In the case of *The White Tiger*, hostile reviews are common but not dominant. Some celebrate the book as a straightforward story of the 'liberation of a man born to be a servant of the rich' (W.H. Jensen), failing to notice its critique of Balram's self-fashioning. Others read it in relation to their own professedly 'romanticized' notions of India: they saw it as a 'land-of-meditative enlightenment' (J.K. Hinton), as the place to which 'more and more' American jobs are now 'sent' (Talha F. Basit), or as a credit card zone that they access through call centres (Beinggerrie). For these readers, the novel offers a welcome corrective.

Those who are less enamoured by it are no more uniform a group. Reviewers who claim to be located in India or part of the Indian diaspora tend to stress that Adiga's work is designed for a non-Indian audience, though the novel was in fact aggressively promoted within India and found a sizeable audience there, winning praise from several media outlets. These reviewers clearly separate themselves from this intended readership and from the kinds of cultural translation and circulation they attribute to the author. Some express clear suspicion that achieving success as an English-language writer requires some willingness to indulge a specifically western readership's misconceptions and fantasies about India. Some imply or simply state that it is, ironically, Adiga himself who is the entrepreneurial character in this situation, enriching himself by applying a cultural calculus to determine what will sell in Europe and North America – namely, prurient glimpses at suffering others in distant locations. Adiga, as much as Balram, becomes for them the true cynical entrepreneur ('Mr Adiga would surely be admired by his protagonist' [Mr Dip]), and his earlier work is read as continuous with his novel, or as simply good training for it, rather than as an attempt to right some of its wrongs. As one reviewer notes, 'Adiga who worked as a business journalist with Time magazine in India knows what sells the best in Europe and America' (Parth H. Mehta). In other instances, while raising concerns about Adiga's success, reviewers also take the opportunity to inform others about

inaccuracies and distortions in the text that might otherwise go unnoticed ('the author should have put in more effort to get all his facts right'; Ashish Kumar).

There is, of course, no guarantee that users of the forum will actually read these comments and be thus chastened. It may be that those who write do not much care if their words are ever read, much as Balram himself remains uninterested in how exactly his story might reach his chosen narratee. The point for Balram seems to be pursuit of an elusive catharsis through his own self-articulation, which is formed, contradictorily, at once in opposition to and in conformity with the story of entrepreneurial success within the 'new economy'. Amazon.com, for its part, facilitates related expressions of dissatisfaction. Particularly discernable within these expressions is significant anger about the association of India with an economic underbelly and about the ossification of these associations in the form of celebrated intellectual properties ('Is there nothing good to say about life in India today?'; AD). Present too is readers' hostility about the global celebrification of figures like Adiga, a process facilitated or even necessitated by global media concentration, as powerful firms elevate writers who are willing to co-produce themselves as translators of Indian experience for various far-flung audiences. This reading of the situation might be limited and essentializing – I've already noted the audience for the novel within India, as an example, and my own reading of the text is more sympathetic – but it responds to significant social inequalities that capitalist cultural markets can perpetuate and mirror, despite, or perhaps sometimes because of, the critiques contained within the texts they circulate.

That is, as we have seen, Adiga's novel is marketed and then celebrated as a welcome supplement to the extant portrait of an economy of uneven development, one that excludes an underclass from the interdependent spheres of wealth accumulation and cultural representation. Critics then object to the terms of his intervention, often situating themselves as readers whose life experiences make them more familiar with the subject than many others would be. The curious can then turn to the novel to assess competing claims for themselves. Amidst all this the novelist himself is wisely neutral, and will appear either open-minded or self-contradictory depending on one's feeling towards him and his project. His task is evidently to facilitate further circulation of and conversation about the novel, and so he declares a typical reluctance to endorse the notion that his work is a vehement critique of the situation it describes. In claiming to be engaged in a simply descriptive act, he vacillates between two positions: first, his innocent wish is to bring true stories to light; second, Balram is not meant to be one real man but an amalgam of many voices, a fictional creature through and through, and an expression of his wish to contradict or supplement other kinds of writing he had done. In this latter mode Adiga presents himself as a filter for others' voices, a passive receptacle listening to and learning from those he met during his travels as a journalist (Jeffries 2008; DiMartino 2008).

Alan Liu has argued that art in the age of information must offer 'a special, dark kind of history … history not of things created … but of things destroyed in the name of creation' (2004: 8). It 'must be about [that is, enact] the "destruction of destruction" or, put another way, the recognition of the destructiveness in creation' (Adiga 2008a: 9). As it reveals the underbelly of the 'Asian tiger' economy, and unsettles the pathologies of the entrepreneurial character, *The White Tiger* seems a perfect instance of Liu's prescription for new art's proper project. Yet as he participates in the promotional circuit, carefully negotiating his position, Adiga is evidently quite aware of the fact that in order for new work to continue to circulate as 'original' and 'innovative', people's struggles have to become writers' stories: the repressed have to return and seemingly authentic traumas have to be located and then translated into literature. In this context or, more accurately, given heightened self-consciousness about this context, what Liu calls a 'dark kind of history' appears to be less what all good art should strive to be and more a material that contemporary writers annex for themselves ironically and haltingly, with increasing difficulty, or decreasing conviction and convincingness, in part because of the existence of extensive markets for texts that present themselves in this light, and in part because of pervasive critiques of the re-Orientalizing modes these markets may invite.

The major lines of Adiga's hostile reception clearly indicate the dissemination and influence of the idea that the lure of mainstream success will tempt Indian writers into new forms of re-Orientalism. This idea shapes how texts are read, or perhaps more accurately how readers profess to have read certain texts, as well as how writers approach their work to begin with, as Adiga's own case shows. Adiga evidently felt compelled to stage challenges to the commercial appeal of certain modes of representation in his writing. When Balram says, 'To break the law of his land – to turn bad news into good news – is the entrepreneur's prerogative' (Adiga 2008a: 32), he refers to his own attempt to turn his personal 'bad news' into an entrepreneurial engine. But Balram's statement is also Adiga's self-reflection: if his journalism involved disguising 'bad news' as 'good news', his literary labour is perhaps not safely or sufficiently different, since his stories of others' suffering produce his success. In such instances, if his novel is attentive to the abject and the untold, it is also worried about their transformation into his own reinvigorating creative energy and, eventually, new copyrights.

This worrying is clearly shared by the novel's critics. It is in light of this common ground that I suggest charges of re-Orientalism are the product of some of the contradictory dynamics at work within mainstream cultural markets: for instance, how a writer's self-critical articulation of opposition to his market positioning can become a source of his work's marketability; or, how the turn to 'sad stories' or 'dark histories' can unfold in tandem with extensive media concentration and a concomitant spotlighting of a select roster of star producers whose links to the stories they tell are, if not entirely suspect, at least always ethically fraught. By shifting our attention to these

dynamics within the cultural field, and to the position-taking that goes on in relation to them, we avoid the identitarian suggestion of a clear division between two locations we can safely label the 'Orient' and the 'not-Orient', and we avoid positing in turn that writers of an elite class become re-Orientalists by straightforwardly turning the 'Orient' into entertaining stories for the 'not-Orient'. The practices that Lau and Mendes associate with re-Orientalism are ones that many writers and readers of postcolonial literature are themselves suspicious about, not least because hyped-up controversy about the authenticity of a writer's access to a particular community is now exceedingly common – a sure-fire way to sell books. In this context, it might make more sense to speak of meta-Orientalism than of re-Orientalism. To speak of meta-Orientalism would be to signal how self-consciousness about circulation of a set of practices associated with Orientalism – exoticisization and dehistoricization, for instance – shapes and feeds increasingly globalized cultural markets, a topic well covered by Graham Huggan's (2001) influential work on the postcolonial exotic. Meta-Orientalism would also be a more apt descriptor in cases like *The White Tiger*, in which the anxious writer both partakes of and critiques Orientalist logic, marketing his work as a corrective to other narratives while, in the text itself, thoroughly undermining any faith in his narrator's access to the truth of a community's experience.

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4 ‘Tomorrow’s brother’

Contesting Orientalisms in Gopal Baratham’s *A Candle or the Sun*

Wai-chew Sim

Introduction

As a concept addressing the representational strategy enacted in literary texts, the term ‘Orientalist’ focuses attention on issues of characterization and voice. The question at hand is whether specific portrayals are essentialist and objectifying, whether they replicate the strategy of Otherness that Edward Said investigated in his influential work *Orientalism*. When adopted as a reading strategy, this mode of inquiry draws support from Nietzschean currents in contemporary thought, in particular from Said’s identification of an affinity between Orientalist practice and ‘Foucault’s notion of a discourse’ (Said 1995: 3). While critics have rigorously questioned the fit between the work of the two men (Brennan 2000; Prendergast 2000), the textual approach associated with Said has become an accepted norm in literary exegesis. As a means of textual explication, it appears to gain urgency in an era which, mindful of the depredations of social exclusion, seeks inclusiveness and participation by all sectors of society. In adopting what amounts to a subject-centred stance, however, such practice may overlook the historical and social situatedness of texts as well as their formal intricacy or inventiveness. This chapter pursues these questions and asks whether texts deemed Orientalist in some manner or form are recoverable when viewed against a wider historical or formal context. It approaches these issues through an analysis of Gopal Baratham’s novel, *A Candle or the Sun*.[1] Published in 1991 in Britain, *Candle* won for its Indian Singaporean writer a slot in the Commonwealth Book Prize shortlist and hence constitutes a milestone of sorts for Singapore letters. As will be explained below, there is an Orientalist disposition to aspects of its configuration. However, the interesting feature about Baratham’s text is that its recourse to the last is couched in opposition to a self-same move by statist discourse. In the name of cultural pluralism, it could be said (but using problematic means), *Candle* excoriates statist rhetoric which makes precisely the kind of cultural homogenizing move that underpins Orientalism as a discourse. Orientalism perpetrated by Orientals has been termed ‘re-Orientalism’ (Lau 2009), and understood in that regard, *Candle* allows us to appreciate the multifarious vicissitudes of the latter as it functions within a polarizing global

capitalist environment. While investigations of Orientalism often implicate the enlivening contexts created by South–North migration and/or cultural exchange, *Candle* allows us to track the re-Orientalism that issues from South–South migration, but one which still bears the subtending influence of the international division of labour and global power realities. More specifically, the novel provides insights into the tensions and challenges besetting the portions of the Indian and Chinese diasporas that have fetched up in Southeast Asia; and thus it potentially widens the scope of a theoretical discussion that at times treats the concerns of the marginalized in the metropolis as an emblem for all postcoloniality. Tracking this topic specifically, a recent issue of the journal *Postcolonial Studies* lamented that Southeast Asia is noticeably absent in the expanding archive of the field; hopefully the ensuing discussion will help to address that shortfall.

In what follows, I will first provide a synopsis of *Candle* before elaborating on its formal and cognitive features. Adopting a contextualist approach, I explain how the book implicates and resists a postcolonial governance mode that relies on hypostasizing cultural and ethnic differences, both internally, in its national setting, and externally, in the imaginative geography that it proffers, one that reifies the entities East and West. More specifically, I look at how Baratham's novel broaches and negotiates the twin dangers of enclavism and assimilationism. I close by suggesting how this analysis sheds light on the rhetorical reach and multiple operational domains of re-Orientalist identity claims. In recent years the grammar of political contestation has shifted away from economic equality to foreground the social recognition and acceptance of marginalized and inferiorized identities. The upshot of my exposition is that the two domains are complementary, that criticism which seeks to further a politics of difference benefits from paying close attention to materialist categories of analysis.

Exotic fiction

Widely acknowledged as Baratham's best novel, *Candle* tells the story of Hernie Perera, an aspiring writer who manages the furniture department of Benson's, the largest department store in Singapore. Hernie finds his comfortable life shattered when his father is diagnosed with terminal cancer and his job is threatened by a planned merger between Benson's and another company owned by Singaporean-Chinese business interests. More ominously, his lover, Su-May, joins a Christian sect, Children of the Book, which seeks to overthrow the government. Having fermented dissent through various activities, Su-May plans to leave the country with Peter Yu, the charismatic leader of the sect. With Benson's poised to release him and Su-May slipping out of his grip, Hernie is offered a solution of sorts by his childhood friend Samson Alagaratnam, now a highly placed official in the ministry of culture. Samson offers Hernie a lucrative job at a government-run arts publication but demands proof of his trustworthiness. Believing that at most they will receive

some 'minor deterrent sentence[s]', Hernie decides to betray the Children to Samson (155). He learns, however, that Samson's political masters intend to use the group to justify repressive policies. As Samson's assistant, Anuita, tells Hernie, they could 'expose [the sect] as a gang of loony kids and leave things at that'; but for political reasons they will characterize it as a 'massive conspiracy' involving several parties, 'including, of course, the Communists' (155). Astonished by this development and emboldened by reflection on his creative work, Hernie decides to help Su-May and Peter flee the country; they accomplish the task just before the security forces close in on them. As the novel closes, Hernie is taken into custody and undergoes interrogation. To help him handle the pain, he imagines Su-May and Peter working in a hospital facility in Tanzania, mingling happily with their charges. Even as the blows rain down on him he is 'reassured of the underlying goodness in the nature of things that is an inexhaustible source of wonder and warmth' (196). He has a vision that Su-May is pregnant and that the child may be his.

As mentioned earlier, *Candle* purveys on one level a form of Orientalism. In a perceptive review of the book, Shirley Chew takes issue with Baratham's depiction of Samson and Hernie's immediate superior, Chuang, who speaks broken English. Both are in some ways caricatures, and responding to this, Chew suggests that Hernie belongs to a tradition of 'ineffectual but liberal-minded protagonists'; he resembles Flory in George Orwell's *Burmese Days* (1934) and Victor Crabbe in Anthony Burgess's *Malayan Trilogy* (1956–59); these characters are '[o]utsiders by temperament' who reject colonial precepts but who nonetheless cannot associate with the locals, 'whom they regard as alien and grotesque in the main' (Chew 1992: 74). In Hernie's case, however, Chew states, 'the inescapable irony is that the people with whom he becomes involved, both the ones in power and those on the fringes, are his own kind'; as a result, 'the general pattern of Baratham's narrative is too close at times to being an unconscious parody of colonial literature' (Chew 1992: 74). The implication here is that, as opposed to European-authored texts which replicate a specifiable discursive regime or episteme, something different should have been expected of Baratham.

We can take the measure of Chew's criticism and extend it by pointing to another character, Rex Zhu, the furniture manager of the company (Teng's) that is teaming up with Benson's. In the episode where Zhu explains his sales strategy to Hernie, we are told that, overjoyed with himself, Zhu 'clapped his hands several times and bowed in several directions, simultaneously the applauder and the applauded' (63). Describing the intrusion represented by Teng's, Hernie states that, although dubious about the 'aesthetic' possibilities of shopping malls, everything about its flagship store 'disgusted' him: 'From its mock pagoda front to its faintly ammoniacal latrines, it epitomized all that was nasty about things Chinese' (45). This negative delineation is presaged by an earlier scene involving Chuang, who has a habit of making Hernie re-do the displays that he puts up. Near the beginning of the book, Chuang's

underhanded ways are emphasized when he tries to take credit for Hernie's work, with the text emphasizing his use of solecistic language:

> 'Chinese say pupil's supremacy is master's reward'. He smiled to himself and bowed slightly to acknowledge my gratitude. 'The times I spend for you in your junior days, not wasted now, ah. So tiresome I became that sometimes I could not stand, but not wasted, see.'
>
> (7)

There is arguably a clear line of descent between the adumbrations above and the double-dealing (but also bowing and scraping) 'Asiatics' that one finds in exotic fiction. Both men are caricatures and are perhaps contemporary variations on the Fu Manchu figure.[2] Part of the reason why Baratham deploys such a characterization strategy is that, taking a leaf from Dickens, he strives to imbue characters with identifiable idiolects and mannerisms. Chan, the specialist who oversees Hernie's father, uses abstruse medical jargon. Samson's idiolect combines urban street-slang with 'the idiom and accent of a disk jockey' (16). Appraising his fictional works, Hernie laments at one point that when he listens to his characters, 'they all spoke with one voice' – his, and this also gives an indication of the importance that Baratham assigns to the impactful use of voice and gesture (42).

Confucianist revivalism

Nevertheless, a proper appreciation of the libidinal charge underwriting these delineations can only be obtained through a consideration of the social climate of the 1980s, when the Singapore government sought to combat its legitimacy gap through essentialist rhetoric and a recourse to primordialism. This took the form of crude ideological manipulation and gives the necessary subtext to the enactments of re-Orientalism in *Candle*. For a period in the 1980s and 1990s, Singapore's incumbent regime promoted Confucianism in tandem with an 'Asian' values campaign in a bid to justify what has been called 'soft authoritarianism' (Means 1996). In the self-interested version relayed by state apparatus, Confucianism meant discipline, communitarianism and respect for authority from those in the lower ranks in return for an obligation to be just and benevolent from those above. This ideologeme[3] has a scalable dimension and operates within families (children must obey parents) as well as states (citizens must obey leaders). When everybody observes such mutuality of obligation and respect or deference, concord and peace will reign on earth.[4] As Gary Rodan notes, however, the propagation of such ideas tracked transparent objectives. An emphasis on 'Asian' values arose from Malaysia as well as Singapore, and Rodan observes that the regional discourse emerged at a time when 'social and economic transformations' in a number of Asian societies produced 'diverse interests and identities' requiring various forms of political accommodation on the part of autocratic leaders;

'[t]he theme reiterated by self-appointed spokespersons on "Asian values" about a cultural pre-disposition to consensus rather than contention' became in that connection an 'especially useful rationale' to justify repressive practices (Rodan 1996: 15).

Furthermore, a high-water mark of such an instrumentalist demarcation of an 'Asian' axiological tradition was the introduction into the Singapore school curriculum of a subject called 'Religious Knowledge' in 1982; under that rubric students could choose to study Confucianism, Buddhism, Islam, Hinduism or Christianity (Chua 1995: 28). With Confucianism leading the way in official media, these subjects were presented as being a balm for the pressures of modernization, as antidotes to the dangers posed by deracination and atomism. It was part of incumbent regime's contention that such educational buttressing – in which 'Asian'-ness is cast reductively as communitarianism – would provide a 'counter-individualistic ideology' to check the penetration of alien traditions, inclusive of the threat posed by 'liberal individualism' (Chua 1998: 40).

While the term 'Asian' indexes the bulk of its citizens, the fact that Singapore's majority population is ethnic Chinese means, however, that an 'Asian' emphasis potentially segues into Sinocentrism with assimilatory or exclusivist effects. And in fact this is precisely the fear articulated through the business rationalization exercise presented in *Candle*. Despite it being a 'joint venture', all of Hernie's subordinates are slated for retrenchment, including his senior salesman, Ahmad, and four 'middle-aged spinsters' (45, 64). Hernie learns that he will himself be released only because he *accidentally* overhears a conversation between Zhu and Chuang. Explaining the changed business model, Chuang tells Hernie that the board of directors of Benson's have decided to 'adopt more Asian image': 'We must flung out false Western values leading to moral decay, unemployment and social welfare … we install traditional Asian values. Soon we sell antique Chinese furniture' (45). When Hernie complains about having to sell faux antique products, Chuang replies that these would be 'modern Chinese antiques' – they would be 'Singaporean-manufactured, by skilled Chinese carpenters' (45). The slippage from Asian and Singaporean to 'Chinese' so dumbfounds Hernie that he can only exclaim 'Oh' in reply; he envisages peddling exotica to 'Australian spinsters seeking Orientalia for drawing-rooms in Perth' (45–46). *Candle* here asserts that the commodification of culture effectively cheapens it. But beyond that it also uses the semantic slippage to stage the monological nature of the conversation operating at national level. In all likelihood, the text suggests, the weight given to a restrictively defined Sinic patrimony will usher other cultures out of the necessarily polyphonic conversation through which previously distinct peoples try to create a rationale for a common life, peoples represented by Hernie, Ahmad and the others whose livelihood are threatened by Teng's.[5]

That is why, as mentioned earlier, Zhu is presented as both 'applauder' and 'applauded', and also why when Chuang 'acknowledge[s]' Hernie's gratitude with a bow there is actually none forthcoming (63, 7). The fact that no

meaningful dialogue can occur under these circumstances is the serious point being made. While both Zhu and Chuang have their offensive aspects, the recourse to re-Orientalism thus needs to be weighed against the threatened marginalization of minority voices. In effect, it might appear, the imperatives of different forms of particularisms are pitted against each other in *Candle*, and this sets up a poser for analysis, because it isn't very clear how we can arrive at a formula for accommodation between them. Furthermore it bears stressing that Confucianism is an 'elite' class-based discourse more likely to be embraced by the 'literati' than by working-class subjects (Dirlik 1995: 261, 270). Even as a 'common discourse' within the Sinic domain, Dirlik argues, it is interpreted differently by 'different social groups and interests', and these readings may well deviate from normative, self-serving 'clichés about harmony and complementarity' (1995: 263–64).

Beyond diaspora

Pertinent to these considerations, David Brown has criticized what he calls the 'corporatist management of ethnicity' in Singapore, an aspect seen most clearly in the provision of social welfare services (1993: 31). Social welfare in Singapore is undertaken by three interest associations, three so-called 'self-help' groups organized along racial lines, with one catering to Chinese-Singaporeans, one to Malay-Singaporeans and one to Indian-Singaporeans. Elected representatives have risen in parliament complaining that this arrangement splits the national polity into ethnic enclaves, that it promotes chauvinism, only to be met with the cabinet's response, couched in the language of pragmatism, that Singaporeans are not ready for an integrated or integrationist approach to tackling the problems of social exclusion (Teo *et al.* 2001: H6). For my purposes, the delineation that *Candle* gives to Samson Alagaratnam also needs to be grasped in the light of such a corporatist management of ethnicity, which is to say against the statist naturalization of parochialism or tribalism. Like Zhu and Chuang, there is admittedly a grotesque or re-Orientalist edge to Samson's configuration. His speech mannerisms are crudely entertaining but also alienating; he is masculinist and objectifying in his treatment of Anuita. Nevertheless, Samson's unattractive attributes are arguably a textual effort to de-naturalize the tribalist assumptions circulating in the public arena. Baratham and Alagaratnam are Tamil-Indian names, and it could be ventured that the unmitigated villainy of the latter asserts on one level that we don't have to prioritize or privilege our ethnic or cultural allegiances. The distance between the historical author (Baratham) and Alagaratnam avers that ethnic or own-group partiality is not of necessity an immutable social given, meaning that Baratham disputes the segregationist dynamic outlined above.

This reading is supported by the episode where Hernie submits one of his short stories to Samson to assert his suitability for the proffered media job. The story features a protagonist named Alagarajah, and typically Samson

thinks that the choice of name is part of Hernie's attempt to ingratiate himself with him, since it is '[a]s close as you can get to Alagaratnam without scraping paint from the boat's bottom' (97). However, *Candle* then stresses that Samson gets his interpretation of the story wrong. He reads it as auxiliary material for a 'crime-prevention' campaign and wants it assimilated into official discourse even though its presentation of unconventional sexuality works against the productionist orientation of the social life-world (101). Samson's misreading of a Tamil-Indian name is thus conceivably part of a larger effort to problematize through his characterization a social set up that (mis-)manages communitarian mindfulness, giving it an enclavist and primordial aspect in order to bolster hegemony and domination, with perhaps consequent damage to social cohesion and tolerance. Put in another way, *Candle*, unlike many postcolonial texts, resists the generic expectation that it provide an 'ethnic' (auto-)biography of some kind.

The alternative to statist fixation with policing communal boundaries would seem to be, not abandonment of ethnic self-identifications but rather their overlaying with social imaginaries that go beyond enclavism and beyond the space of diaspora. However, as sociologist Chua Beng Huat points out, it has suited Singapore's incumbent regime to consistently emphasize the prior term in the phrase 'Racial-Singaporeans'; the latter half of the phrase is in comparison an empty category, with the result being that race/ethnicity is frozen in three 'discursively produced groups' – 'Chinese', 'Malay' and 'Indian' – and is 'essentialized as an unchanging feature of the population so as to ground various specific ways of disciplining the social body' (Chua 1998: 28, 34–35).[6] More recently, Singapore's pre-eminent leader Lee Kuan Yew also claimed that a 'distinctive' or common Singapore culture is 'unlikely to emerge'; unlike the agrarian societies of the past, the modern pace of life precluded that development, he argued, adding that: '[t]he basis of our culture is what we inherited from our original countries, our original cultures' (Peh 2006). A 'hard' version of the thesis of cultural incommensurability is thus invoked to ward off political claims made in the name of a common identity. Incidentally, it should be noted, Lee's stress on Singapore's migrant–diasporic legacy threatens to efface the history and interests of denizens who claim autochthony. As should be clear by now, therefore, *Candle* imbricates a social terrain which reifies culture in order to reproduce repressive forms of postcolonial governmentality. These operations in fact replicate well-known aspects of Orientalist epistemology. The metonymic reductionism that condenses complex cultural domains into convenient traits (consensus-mindedness), the deterministic rendition of culture and the ahistorical gloss given to it should be familiar to any reader of Said's work, with the outcome being the 'substituting [of] a cultural essence that defies time for culture as lived experience that is subject to temporal production and reproduction' (Dirlik 1996: 97).

It is against this context that, as argued above, the alienating portrayals given to Samson, Zhu and Chuang needs to be assessed. His target being

ethnocentrism and the enclavism which sustains it, Baratham gives himself licence to critique its instantiation in the persons of Zhu and Chuang by demonizing a character (Samson) who shares his ethnicity. That way he avoids the same countervailing charge, and in the process his various depictions shade into problematic territory. But additionally, we might add, *Candle*'s aggressive inter-culturality also gains salience when set against the segregationist dynamic that is at issue, because it contests essentialist constructions of oneself and others. In a novel by the British-Asian author Meera Syal, *Life Isn't All Ha Ha Hee Hee*, a character claims that 'choosing whom you love is the most political decision you can make' (Syal 2001: 146), and approached in that regard, *Candle* arguably seeks to problematize state-supported separatism by featuring a host of mixed, cross-cultural relationships. Apart from the relationship/affair between Hernie and Su-May, Hernie's wife, Sylvie, is the progeny of a mixed marriage. Her father is of Indian heritage, her mother Chinese. Sylvie has a habit of talking in 'mismatched clichés' that give her conversation a certain 'jokiness and ambiguity', the implication being that her bi-cultural status confers certain semantic possibilities (12). Her speech mannerisms arguably trope what Mikhail Bakhtin calls organic hybridity, the process of linguistic creolization that is 'profoundly productive historically' because it is 'pregnant with [the] potential for new world views' (Lo 2000: 154). Other mixed relationships include those featured in the stories written by Hernie, including the one misconstrued by Samson; and furthermore Hernie's Lusitanian surname – Perera – suggests a mixed European–Asian or Eurasian heritage. If in certain respects, therefore, *Candle* endorses re-Orientalism, it also proposes an alternative social vision appealing for greater cross-cultural interaction. In contrast to official discourse which favours a relatively underdetermined national identity and sectarian-inflected racialized subjectivities, Baratham looks ahead to a more porous or open-ended syncretic culture that articulates different temporalities, values and priorities.

Formal inventiveness

One of the most intriguing but also vexing aspects of *Candle* is that these concerns are also broached at the level of form. Among other things, Baratham probes the relationship between major and minor narratives by inserting into the novel three of his previously published short stories.[7] The stories are passed off as works written *by* Hernie and are inserted *in full* under their original titles. '[D]ouble exposure', the one that Samson misconstrues, runs from page 87 to 96. The others are: 'kissful of tears' (page 28 to 31) and 'dutch courage' (page 159 to 183).[8] As can be seen the works are progressively longer or more obtrusive in nature, so the option of focusing on just the frame story is hindered. Together they make up about a fifth of the total length of *Candle*, which therein addresses the problematic of how to secure a non-totalizing relationship between the universal and the particular. This

consideration is usefully summed up by Jürgen Habermas, who describes his intellectual project as a quest for 'traces of a reason … that binds without unnaming difference, that points out the common and the shared among strangers, without depriving the other of otherness' (Prendergast 2000: 184). It could be argued that, at the level of form, *Candle* seeks to further just such a non-determinist, pluralist agenda, allowing space for a politics of difference that moves beyond re-Orientalism. At the level of content, however, 'dutch courage', the longest of the inserted works, has a decidedly mixed impact. In the remaining part of this chapter, these different levels of meaning and inflections will be teased out and explained.

To appreciate the expansiveness offered by *Candle*'s use of form, we need to consider the streetpaper published by the Children as part of their avowed goal of overthrowing a 'vindictive, callous, [and] arrogant' government (135). In the first of these missives, the Children encourage readers to write and print their own papers and give detailed instructions on how producers can distribute them safely. Singapore's proscribed media environment is attested by the organization Reporteurs Sans Frontières, whose 2008 ranking of 173 countries for the degree of press freedom in them placed Singapore at 144, that is, 83 per cent down from the top.[9] To get around these restrictions, the Children envisage a conclave of like-minded individuals who would 'communicate safely and freely by streetpapers like this' (57). They state in addition that: 'Your masters kennel you in neat boxes, doctor your females, [and] control litter size according to pedigree' (56). As one critic notes, these last comments are an allusion to past government regulations 'encouraging less well educated women to sterilize themselves after [having] one or two children' (Leong 2000: 288). In response to a state-dominated existence, the streetpaper nonetheless assures its readers that, '[a]ll around you are people who do not want to be dogs any more' (57). What passes for a social contract in Singapore is supposedly a Faustian pact where denizens accept political restrictions in return for material advancement and, mulling over the paper's content, Hernie wonders if the 'average Singaporean' feels 'ashamed' at having given up basic rights for 'paltry creature comforts' (60). Interestingly, Hernie states that 'polemical writing' has never appealed to him, but reading the paper he 'began almost at once to yearn for something [he] had never needed' (58).

Given the above, Baratham's interspersing of stories into the novel is plausibly a figure for exactly what the Children envisage. Streetpaper correspondents are urged to interleave their views into a vast assemblage, becoming all, so to speak, Children of the Book. Commenting on the inset pieces, one reviewer asserts that *Candle* is 'marred by … the appearance of patchwork in the structuring of its material' (Joned 1994: 225); but it could be argued that a 'quilt'-like admixture of heterogeneous elements is *precisely* the scenario presented for deliberation. Even though it is for the moment formed by the works of a single author, *Candle*'s invocation of a space that abuts montage and intertextuality arguably envisages a genuine polyphonic sociality formed

by a freely developing media network. In the terms suggested by Deleuze and Guattari, the assemblage would have a rhizomatic rather than a hierarchical or tree-like, arboreal structure. In a rhizome, every node or point is connectable in principle with any other point; exit and entry points are non-hierarchical; and similarly the Children's project chimes with that theoretical attempt to apprehend multiplicities.[10] For as the Children insist, anyone can write a streetpaper, which can then be deposited in '[a]ny place where people gather' (57). We might say that through the interlacing of frame and inset narratives, Baratham negotiates the double bind of enclavism and assimilationism. On one level, he affirms the imperatives of a syncretic culture, a sense of a common identity needed to overcome the essentialism and re-Orientalism driving what might be described as (postcolonial) divide and rule policies. At the same time, he also suggests that it is possible for minor narratives – which is to say, for different kinds of particularisms – to maintain their independence and self-identity.

This liberationist motif expressed through form allows us to understand the interaction between Hernie and Vandermeer, the planter protagonist of 'dutch courage'. While the story itself begins on page 159, Hernie imagines himself interacting with Vandermeer long before that. 'Over the years', Hernie states, Vandermeer had 'come to me unannounced, remained as long as he chose, had gone when he pleased, leaving me always the sadder for his departure' (121). The manner in which a character from an inset story 'bleeds' into the frame story may be accounted a variation on *Candle*'s liberationist thematic. If the Children's project takes off, dominant narratives will be transformed and replaced, and Vandermeer's 'unannounced' instantiation in the frame story conceivably tropes that development. Baratham suggests in an interview that the act of completing 'dutch courage' (materially putting it on paper) allows Hernie to confront the security apparatus: '[t]he courage of his fictional character makes it possible for him to be brave' (Ban 2000: 37). In this respect, Baratham expresses utopian conviction in the power of art to effect change. If we proceed to the content of 'dutch courage', however, Vandermeer's own voice is problematically recidivist, with the story showcasing the complexity and difficulty of arraigning re-Orientalism in practice. For in effect 'dutch courage' combines a critique of the re-Orientalism incarnated in statist discourse with a disturbing penchant for late colonial culture. It does this while presenting a historical vignette from the Malayan Emergency period (1948–60), from dramatizing the conflict between Vandermeer and anti-colonial forces led by a Chinese guerrilla operative from the Malayan Communist Party (MCP).

For a postcolonial text, there is, on the one hand, a disconcerting colonialist veneer to Vandermeer. As Philip Holden rightly points out, the story's focalization on a class that would soon be swept away by 'a rising tide of history' gives an 'elegiac' tenor to the text, spotlighting its partiality for a late-colonial world glimpsed in the works of Somerset Maugham; Holden argues that this aspect of *Candle* stems from Baratham's background as part of 'a

small, highly educated anglophone elite' which experienced at first hand the transition to postcolonial rule (2006: 61–62). Extending these observations, we may note that 'dutch courage' has the flavour of a *Boy's Own* adventure story, a genre of writing that played a discernible role in nourishing the imagination of Empire and underwriting its practices.[11] The way in which Vandermeer rediscovers his courage and sense of derring-do in the closure sustains such an impression; that development allows him to sally forth to meet his adversary, a Chinese guerrilla fighter named Peng.

This harkening to a late colonial past is arguably a retrograde move, an emblem of *Candle*'s contamination by a re-Orientalist style already glimpsed in the depiction of Zhu, Chuang and Samson. But at the same time, it is arguable that referencing the MCP's activities also defies the static, de-historicized horizon which sustains re-Orientalism in its contemporary Confucianist revivalist guise. It is worthwhile considering this claim in some detail before we proceed to other contextual details pursuant to the text. The most illuminating account of the revival has been provided by Dirlik, who argues that its effluence points to an entire region changing the deep structure of its culture(s). For Dirlik, 'What makes something like the East Asian Confucian revival plausible is not its offer of alternative values to those of EuroAmerican origin but its articulation of native culture *into a capitalist narrative*' (italics mine, 1994: 51–52). Dirlik points out that whereas Max Weber portrayed Confucianism as being a forceful obstacle to capitalist development, Confucian notions of 'harmony, familism, and patrimonialism' are now rewritten as being 'eminently functional' (1996: 109). Given that such a move enacts the homogenizing procedures of Orientalism – it offers Confucianism as a timeless metonym for Chinese sociality – Dirlik suggests that: 'Orientalism, which earlier articulated a distancing of Asian societies from the Euro-American, now appears in the articulation of differences within a global modernity as Asian societies emerge as dynamic participants in a global capitalism' (1996: 108–9). In its re-Orientalist guise, it therefore signals not subjection and vulnerability, but newly acquired status and power.

Writing conspiracy

If Dirlik is right that the contemporary Confucianist revival amounts to extolling the culture-ideology of ceaseless capital accumulation, it is certainly incongruent with the redistribution goals of the MCP. Given the substantial support for the latter among the ethnic Chinese,[12] reference to its activities in 'dutch courage' restores a temporal dimension to cultural articulation; it stokes a sense of culture as a lived experience subject to negotiation and change. Such referencing disturbs the simplistic and reductionist equation of 'Chineseness' with Confucianism. Furthermore, that incongruity is sharpened by the way in which history repeats itself as *bogeyman* in the novel, for *Candle* has a real-life analogue in a group of sixteen individuals who were arrested by Singapore authorities under detention without trial statutes in

1987. The detainees worked for a variety of Catholic social programmes and were accused of instigating a 'Marxist' plot to overthrow the government.[13] Baratham's story of a Christian sect that seeks regime change appears to be based on the incident, and his views on it – that it is being annexed to a scaremongering agenda – are suggested by Anuita's revelation that the Children's activities will be cast as a 'massive conspiracy' involving unspecified 'Communists' (155). Such a treatment would be in keeping with what David Birch calls the 'discourse of crisis' that is a recurring trope in Singapore cultural life, its utility being the maintenance of a 'climate of … uncertainty' used to justify the incumbent regime's 'ideology of control' (1993: 75).

Baratham maintained, however, that *Candle* was begun in 1983 and completed before the incident. He jokingly quipped to *Time* magazine that the alleged conspirators had 'cheated [me of] my plot' (Mitchell 1992: 58), and also stated separately that the affair had elevated a '[c]owardice' prevalent among Singapore publishers, hence hampering his efforts to get the book out (Ban 2000: 36). Any resemblance between *Candle* and the alleged 'Marxist' plot was thus fortuitous, or, as one reviewer suggests, 'an eerie stroke of writer's clairvoyance' (Koh 1991). Without being an after-the-fact rendition of events, it seems reasonable to suggest nonetheless that *Candle* merely tracks a dialectic germane to the social material under consideration. In 1989, a Singapore government commissioned report found that one of the unforeseen consequences of the consecration of 'Religious Knowledge' as an examinable subject was that it intensified 'religious fervour and religious differences among students'; it raised the long-term prospect of 'inter-religious conflicts', a threat that led to the subject being dropped in 1990 (Chua 1995: 30). This is to say that there is a sense in which *Candle* appears as a symptomatic reaction to primordial narratives circulating in the public realm. The title of *Candle* actually references a song sung by Su-May at one point during a fellowship gathering. Written by the singer–songwriter Sydney Carter, the song features the line: 'For the same light can shine in / A candle or the sun' (23). Read in tandem with its closure, the title heightens the redemptive inflections of the novel, giving it the contours of a morality tale. *Candle* suggests that Hernie's courageous intervention in the ending articulates a self-transcendence (or divinity) innate in all of us. On one level, the Christian universalism proffered by *Candle* is thus liberationist in intent when it questions the social stratification that bolsters local despotism; it reacts to a cynical divide and rule arrangement by offering an egalitarian cosmology. But it is also arguably an epiphenomenon of precisely the same social forces, an unforeseen corollary of crude state efforts at religio-ideological manipulation. Not surprisingly, perhaps, the championing of primordialist or re-Orientalist narratives stokes a competing response. As a form of political claims-making, the endorsement of one form of primordialism lends weight and impetus to other versions and varieties.

Given that its formal arrangement puts great emphasis on montage and intertextuality – in certain respects, *Candle* appears to see itself as a

provisional *placeholder* for other voices and texts joining a widening debate – another of Baratham's stories touching on the Malayan Emergency is potentially relevant here. First published in 1981, the story in question, 'Tomorrow's Brother', concerns a Malay guerrilla leader named Salim who returns to his village to kill his elder brother, Daud. After a period in the city, Daud became money-mad and corrupt. He cheated his neighbours of their money and sold village girls into prostitution. In time, he grew increasingly powerful, and as the local strongman had terrorized the villagers until they sought help from the guerrillas. Unable to undertake the task himself, Salim leaves it to a Chinese guerrilla named Peng Yew, whose name makes him a precursor to Peng in 'dutch courage'. Tellingly, Peng Yew is also a transliteration of the Chinese-Hokkien (and Mandarin) term for 'friend'. After the execution, Peng Yew goes to Salim and explains how he worked a ruse on Daud to spare him anguish before his death. Salim thanks him formally. He is bound to Daud by memories that 'belonged to the past', he says, but Peng Yew is now his 'tomorrow's brother'; he is bound to him by 'the future', by a 'destiny' as 'real' as the rope they used while crossing a swamp en route to the village (Baratham 2001: 195).

Conclusion

In providing a delineation of agrarian-class, cross-cultural affiliation, Baratham invokes pre-independence dreams of progressive social transformation and egalitarianism. The concerns presented in 'Tomorrow's Brother' suggest why the statist recourse to re-Orientalism provokes an uncompromising response in *Candle*, averring perhaps that, stemming from a hypostasizing of differences, a practicable social compact is being destroyed or betrayed. This is not to excuse *Candle*'s problematic configuration but to suggest that its re-Orientalist patina is a function of the total social situation in which it occurs. Considered as both a critical evaluation of re-Orientalism *and* a symptomatic reaction to it, Baratham's novel arguably allows purchase on how the discourse operates in a number of registers, addressing potentially a number of audiences. As the foregoing analysis shows, re-Orientalism, can, through an evacuation of history, suppress a recognition of the diversity operating within a particular cultural domain, in this case, of the contending radical features of Sinic culture. Operating as a discourse of the universal, and as seen in the way in which minority perspectives are shown being sidelined in the text, re-Orientalism practices can also suppress heterogeneous voices *within* a national formation. As a result, and because it offers an incipiently sectarianist agenda, re-Orientalism theory can stoke a counter re-Orientalist and essentializing response, as seen in the portrayals of Zhu and Chuang. In addition, it also has a transnational dimension manifesting not powerlessness but newly acquired power. As a discourse of the universal at home, the rhetorical and illocutionary force of re-Orientalism is boosted by its deployment as a locus of particularity set against a ubiquitous Western Other. But

as the above suggests, there is actually deep-set complicity between Orientalism and re-Orientalism. Although articulated as a cultural dichotomy (individualism on one side, collectivity on the other), and although it trades in 'us' versus 'them' sentiments, this collusive, joined-at-the-hip binary is capacious enough to channel inter-capitalist competition even as it accommodates and extols the new globalized, post-Fordist accumulation regime. The situation in which dominant elites use culturalist arguments to justify authoritarian practices is hardly unique to Singapore. What is new or perhaps glimpsed in *Candle* is that, grasped as a bellwether for global capitalism, Orientalism/re-Orientalism now serves as the site for a power/knowledge alliance *between* nations, one that serves the interests of the 'transnational capitalist class' (Sklair 1995: 70). In a situation where each uses the other to essentialize the Self and to suppress heterogeneous voices within, it seems necessary that we try to de-fetishize and deconstruct the categories East and West,[14] that we question our fixation on separating the pure from the impure.

Christopher Prendergast has argued that in our approach to the question posed most compellingly by Said – 'How does one *represent* other cultures?' – it is probably more helpful to seek answers from imaginative literature than from theory (Prendergast 2000: 93). Applied to *Candle*, that itinerary reminds us that in order to further a politics of difference we must equally be cautious about its hypostatization and insidious manipulation. As my exposition tries to show, this difficult task is facilitated by analysis sensitive to the nuances of setting, history and context, which is also to say that we should strive to deepen our understanding of 'the politics and the economics of culture' (Wallerstein 2004: 516), all of which underscores the notion that there is a worldly dimension to criticism, something that Said himself took pains to emphasize.

Notes

1 Hereafter abbreviated *Candle* and cited parenthetically in the text.
2 See Kim (1982) for a discussion of how the Fu Manchu character operates in popular culture.
3 Fredric Jameson develops this concept in his book, *The Political Unconscious*. The term points to a sense in which class discourse has an analysable structure and can be manifested in proto-narratives which ultimately serve an economic function.
4 For a comprehensive account of the Confucianist revival movement, see Dirlik (1995).
5 For a counter-position, see Holden. Holden registers 'Baratham's discomfort … with the implicit Sinocentrism of Asian values discourse' but argues that *Candle* ultimately leaves unchallenged 'governmental constructions of race and culture' (2006: 63, 58).
6 Nirmala PuruShotam argues in this regard that the CMIO typology used in Singapore has a colonial provenance. Singaporeans are classified as either ethnic Chinese, Malay, Indian or Other in official documents, which for PuruShotam amounts to a 'significant' colonial inheritance or 'neo-orientalism' maintained by postcolonial elites. She argues that the practice 'derive[s] … from the orientalist concern to understand, catalogue and … explain the "Other"' and was fuelled by Empire's need to drive the subject population into 'segregated socio-economic niches' (1998: 54).

7 The stories are taken from a collection that Baratham published three years before *Candle* titled, *People Make You Cry and Other Stories* (1988). At one point Hernie is described, seated at his desk, writing 'Roses in December' (15), a story that also appears in the earlier collection but which doesn't appear in *Candle*.
8 The story titles are given in lower-case without capitalization.
9 See Frontières (2008). For more information on the media set up in Singapore, see Seow (1998).
10 See Chapter 1 of Deleuze and Guattari (1988).
11 For a comprehensive account of the sub-genre, see Bristow (1991).
12 For a fictionalized account of the emergency, see Han Suyin's 1956 novel, *And the Rain My Drink*.
13 For a comprehensive account of the affair, see Seow (1994).
14 See Chapter 1 of Lazarus (1999) for an exemplary deconstructive account of 'the West'.

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5 Pulp frictions

Jigna Desai

During the Golden Globe Awards ceremony in 2009, Indian Muslim mega-star Shah Rukh Khan was introduced to the North American audience as the 'King of Bollywood'. Invited to present the nomination of the film *Slumdog Millionaire*, Khan warmly greeted the slightly bewildered audience with an offer to do a 'pelvic Indian dance'. In this setting, Shah Rukh Khan's brown (Muslim) male body could be recognized as an Orientalized Bollywood, rather than as a terrorist with the prompts and validation of Danny Boyle's presence and within the larger terrain of global cinema. Directly addressing the expectation of his staging and performing re-Orientalism, this offer was followed by a tongue-in-cheek comment that could be read to reflect Khan's awareness of Hollywood's ethnocentrism and ignorance about him and the broader Bollywood culture industry rather than any form of self-deprecation: '[but if I were to do such a thing,] they would shoo me off the stage'. Addressing the audience, he added cordially: 'Thank you for your graciousness to the Indian film fraternity and thank you Danny [Boyle] for shooting your film in Mumbai. Way to go.' Expressing gratitude for what might be considered cinematic tourism may be an ironic statement, and at the very least a statement that highlights the Orientalism of the film, Hollywood and his invitation to enact a re-Orientalism on this stage. While aware of Bollywood's presence, few of the American celebrities seemed actually familiar with or able to recognize Khan himself. Hence, while Bollywood might be one of the largest global culture industries and Khan an unparalleled celebrity within it, to an ethnocentric Hollywood both were only vaguely identifiable through Orientalist lenses. Nevertheless, it is tempting to see Khan's frictional and teasing offer to gyrate as a recognition of and a rejection of a performative Bollywood re-Orientalism in which he plays the role of the submissive and appreciative little brother who wants to join the celebrity fraternity.

'Lack' of recognition showed a different face a few months later when Khan's name surfaced on an alert list and he was detained and interrogated at Newark's Liberty International Airport. On his way to celebrate India's Independence Day and to promote a new film, he was held by US Customs and Border Protection authorities for questioning for a short period of time until he was permitted to contact the Indian Embassy for assistance. Khan

was ironically on his way to promote *My Name is Khan*, a story of a Muslim American with Asperger Syndrome who is racially profiled as a terrorist in a post-9/11 United States. Outrage and protest flooded the print media and electronic forums across the subcontinent and parts of the diaspora as the 'King of Bollywood' was 'mistaken' for a potential terrorist. In the heavily surveillanced space of the airport, this mis-recognition overwhelmed and breached the buffer of Orientalism and Bollywood re-Orientalism staged at the Golden Globes, rendering Khan Muslim and dangerous, a potential terrorist. Danny Boyle's film *Slumdog Millionaire*, which Khan introduced at the Golden Globe Awards, was much more likely to be familiar to the American audience than Shah Rukh Khan, *My Name is Khan* or Bollywood. *Slumdog Millionaire*'s achievement of numerous nominations and awards in the United States has much to do with the fact that it is not an Indian film, but a film about an India. More interested in depictions of slums and poverty (think of the recent popularity of *Born into Brothels* by Ross Kauffman and Zana Briski), elements of *Slumdog Millionaire*, nevertheless, resonated with audiences eager to consume certain Orientalist visions of India. This chapter examines the politics of and around *Slumdog Millionaire*, demonstrating different enactments and levels of (Orientalism and) re-Orientalism, within the film as well as in terms of its reception, in India and in the West. With its transnational production, it may in fact to be said not only to perpetrate Orientalism and re-Orientalism, but also to simultaneously create and feed a desire for or consumption of the same.

The crossing trajectories of Shah Rukh Khan and *Slumdog Millionaire* indicate the multiple and simultaneous globalizations occurring through varied and stratified flows, some of which reify and reinvigorate Orientalisms. One might argue that the cinematic world in which Shah Rukh Khan is adored by millions of fans, if not recognized by over a billion people, encounters the world of Hollywood and Homeland Security in moments of high *friction*. In contrast to scholars who see globalization as a set of processes that are characterized by smooth flows of people, commodities and capital, anthropologist Anna Tsing poses globalization as characterized by moments of friction that are the 'awkward, unequal, unstable, and creative qualities of interconnection across difference' (Tsing 2004: 4). While awkward and unequal may be understatements in this case, nevertheless these encounters reveal the complex social, economic, cultural and political processes that are indicative not of a single global culture or the transcendence of the national into the universal, but rather of frictional networks of power, and, importantly in this case, ones in which Orientalisms significantly shape the terrain. Thinking through and beyond frameworks of globalization here, the competing frictions include multiple forms of Orientalisms, ones that frame Shah Rukh Khan as exotic spectacle and state threat. In the spaces of the Golden Globe stage and Liberty International Airport, different flows of power coincided creating and making visible frictions of exotic spectacle, state power, Muslim racial formations and pulp globalizations embedded in

Orientalism and re-Orientalism. To understand *Slumdog Millionaire*, then, requires an engagement with the text, but also an understanding of what epistemes make it so recognizable and appealing to western audiences at the same time that its references, stars and performances remain frictionally unfamiliar, unsettling or misread. Orientalisms, here, are reconstituted as exotic spectacle (Bollywood) and as racialized empire (Muslim as terror) within the context of neoliberalism and globalization. As these Orientalisms compete and collide, they produce congruence or discordance, as well as frictions. I argue that re-Orientalism is critical to making distinct a 'benign' Orientalism of exoticism from one associated with the threat of terror. The performance of re-Orientalism satisfies the desire to recognize the Orient in the image of the West as 'little neoliberal brother' (or globalized game show winner as I discuss later).

Bollywood – frictional cultural industry

'Bollywood' – once a tongue-in-cheek term used by the English-language media in India – has become the dominant globally recognized term to refer to Bombay's (Mumbai's) prolific and contemporary Hindi-language culture industry and cinema. Additionally, film is only one component of this expansive culture industry that includes advertising, fashion, music, performances and food. Bollywood films have met with box-office success and enthusiastic audiences both nationally within India and globally. For many, the culture industry of Bollywood has become and is the cultural face of India globally. It is only in the last two decades that the term has proliferated nationally and internationally. Over time, the term 'Bollywood' has come to be used interchangeably with and replaced others such as 'Bombay/Mumbai cinema' or 'popular Hindi cinema' that marked films as regionally and linguistically specific. Moreover, Bollywood has become an anachronistic term subsuming non-contemporary cinema into its purview. Notably, the term itself is by no means ubiquitous or universal in its usage. Despite (or perhaps because of) this international and cultural cache, the term 'Bollywood' remains contentious. Critics of the term dislike its derivative nature, implicitly suggesting that it is a form of re-Orientalism. Recent arguments by stars, directors and scholars reveal the schisms in perspectives around the term. Its critics charge that it overshadows and erases the diversity of other regional cinemas within India, privileging one particular region (Mumbai) and language (Hindi) over others; that it is a poor second cousin to Hollywood, marking the commercial Indian film industry as a derivative and mimic of its western counterpart; and that it refers to the increasing globalization and diasporization of the film industry and its attendant industries which are proving to be more profitable than the films themselves. Critiques cite the colonial history and the derivative nature of the term to highlight its deference and dependence on Hollywood as a point of origin and reference. As Nitin Govil remarks,

> Bollywood's primary claim towards the multiple histories and directions of cultural flow, however, is contained within 'Bollywood' itself, a heteroglossic term that connotes a complex set of material and discursive links between Bombay and Hollywood. At the same time, in its equivocation to a global yet distinctively Indian – if not alternative – modernity, Bollywood is a *frictional* term.
>
> (Govil 2006: 86)

Rajadhyaksha (2003) posits that Bollywood refers to a recently developed mode of production, a way of producing culture within a national and global context that is inextricably linked to the Indian nation-state and the post-colonial economy of liberalization. Bollywood often functions metonymically for India nationally and internationally. In many contexts, Bollywood equals Indian cinema and Indian cinema equals India. In this manner, one can see Bollywood as being concerned with the assertion of a national identity within the international or global context. As such it enacts what Partha Chatterjee (1993) describes as anticolonial nationalism's reformulations of Orientalism's and Eurocentrism's distinctions between the West and the (post)colony. Chatterjee suggests that in addressing Eurocentrism's insistence that the colony is both distinct from and inferior to the West, anticolonial nationalism maintained the distinction between the native and the West while asserting the equality or superiority of the native through the assertion of a material/spiritual division. Anticolonial nationalism deploys the division of the material/spiritual to suggest that the nation guarantees the sovereignty of the latter by maintaining and protecting tradition and autonomy of national culture from the West.

Hence, the global appeal of Bollywood is often explained by suggesting that it is oppositional to Hollywood, a logic that continues to engage an us/them distinction by reversing the terms of subordination. In other words, it may be that Bollywood's appeal lies in its assertion of anticolonial nationalism and the supposed challenge it makes to the global dominance of Hollywood, a possible form of re-Orientalism. As Chatterjee argues, anticolonial nationalism is present not only in South Asia, but also in Africa, other parts of Asia and Latin America where Eurocentrism's episteme distinction between the West and colony also operated. Bollywood's ability to cross national boundaries, therefore, may best attest to its ability to render the frictions of globalization from the view of anticolonial nationalism. Bollywood's implicit and explicit insistence on comparison to, difference from and equality with Hollywood engenders criticism while simultaneously accounting for its appeal. While many (including myself) forcefully assert the global significance and presence of Bollywood, it is important to examine what purpose this serves. Bollywood being offered in comparison to Hollywood as a global phenomenon is a case of Eurocentric metrics at play, Orientalism at work; however, Bollywood offering itself in comparison to Hollywood, in deliberate juxtaposition and contrast, is a case of deliberate re-Orientalism.

Pulp Orientalism

Boyle's *Slumdog Millionaire* has garnered critical and popular acclaim internationally. Winner of Golden Globe, BAFTA and Oscar awards, the film has played the role of arthouse underdog-cum-top-dog in the West. Focusing on a Muslim *chaiwallah* named Jamal Malik, his gangster brother Salim and their childhood friend Latika in Mumbai, *Slumdog Millionaire* uses street-children actors, repeating flashbacks and mixed Hindi and English dialogue to weave together a suspenseful romantic narrative framed through the popular Indian version of the game show *Kaun Banega Crorepati?* (based on the global franchise of *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?)*. With its 'street-children' actors, romantic hero, damsel in distress and mafia violence, *Slumdog Millionaire* has been seen alternatively as a Bollywood fairy tale, docudrama and/or a pulp or mafia film. Echoing elements of previous Indian films, *Slumdog Millionaire* relies on familiarity with cinematic references such as the trope of two estranged brothers, depictions of the underworld and the fairy-tale ending which are common in popular Hindi cinema. In the film, two brothers, orphaned by the Hindu attacks on Muslims in Mumbai after the destruction of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya, befriend a young orphan girl. The three children survive on the streets until they are kidnapped and recruited by an underworld gang; when the three attempt to run away, the two brothers succeed in escaping, but Latika is recaptured. The film intercuts the present moment of the game show with flashbacks from Jamal's childhood, adolescence and early adulthood as he searches for his childhood friend. In depicting this seedy and crime-laden underbelly of India's urban development, the film portrays the abject poverty that proliferates simultaneously with the rapid rise of global capital and wealth among the elite and bourgeoisie in modern urban India. It also depicts how other networks of power such as state power and communal violence proliferate the suffering of the vulnerable children.

If one of the central tenets of Orientalism and Eurocentrism is that the West is different from and more modern than the (post)colony, then the presences of the colony, its cinema and media and its stars are read as signifiers of difference and their imitative indebtedness to the West. The West and its knowledges continue to mark the possibility of freedom and liberation for the 'Oriental' subject (one that anticolonial nationalism cannot provide). In the case of re-Orientalism, this performance of capability achieves recognition in the face of social and class hierarchies marked by extreme poverty, crime and disenfranchisement as bourgeois and cosmopolitan elite claim their own achievement and modernity, in contrast to impoverished Orientals and to the West. As discussed in the introduction, the postcolonial elite may target their re-Orientalism towards marking their clear distinction from the 'backward' underclass. They may also work to prove the modernity, cosmopolitanism and neoliberalism of the subject.

The portrayals of poverty in *Slumdog Millionaire* have sparked intense debate among viewers. Some critics have generally pointed out how it traffics

in Orientalism via its depictions of poverty and slums. In other words, many reviewers emphasize that the film's implicit subtext poses an essentialist distinction between the West and India and is therefore Orientalist.[1] Other more nationalist reviewers implicitly argue that only Indians have the right to depict Indian poverty and that the film is anti-Hindu in its portrayal of Muslims as sympathetic victims of communal violence. While critics implicitly clarify that *Slumdog Millionaire* is not *Passage to India* or *Lawrence of Arabia*, Orientalism works to naturalize relations of power and maintain Western epistemic and economic dominance within the film. They charge that the film replicates Orientalist ways of knowing India – as a backward, ignorant, poverty-stricken, immoral land where subhuman conditions produce 'slumdogs' in economic and cultural terms. These machinations to claim representation and status in hierarchy produce certain re-Orientalisms as this stake in positionality is geared towards the West and the disenfranchised poor.

The most vehement critiques forward that the film is imbued with a romanticization of poverty and what might be called development Orientalism, one focused on the spectacle of contemporary Indian poverty as a way to mark its lack of modernity. Activist groups have objected to the term 'slumdog', arguing it is a racial slur for those who live in poverty in the global South, while several cultural critics focus on the aesthetics and cinematic techniques as evidence of the film's Orientalism – pointing to its frenetic pace, its use of English-speaking actors, and western realism in the production of difference. These criticisms have come from a wide range of critics including activists, journalists and Bollywood actors such as Amitabh Bachchan. Others focus more generally on the depictions of poverty and argue that they provide a seedy view of cosmopolitan modern India or that Indians are better suited to represent such narratives.[2] In fact, within the national context, those elites who have access to the means of representation and actively participate in re-Orientalizing processes may be those who protest most vociferously against the film. Often the elite (nationalist and diasporic) point to themselves as modern counterpoints to these slumdogs, suggesting themselves as representative of the shining nation and the proper (Hindu) subjects of its cinema. These are criticisms often made by those who want to forward, instead, the ubiquity of 'shining' India's modernity or to present nationalists as better suited to depict the nation, its 'normal citizen', and its disenfranchised poor. To these latter critics, any depictions of poverty by the West seem to signify backwardness and Indian difference. Ironically, of course, many of the popular Hindi films that depict the underworld and impoverished aspects of urban Indian life, such as *Deewaar* starring Bachchan, are also referenced in *Slumdog Millionaire*. In fact, Loveleen Tandan was hired to assist with the film; in addition to casting, her transformations of the film included penning Hindi dialogue for the children. Her participation increased the 'authenticity' of the film and its realism. In light of these critiques, is it possible to see the film's depictions of poverty as more than a re-Orientalist guided tour of a

fabricated slum by a British director and his Indian cohorts, one that may refer to but claim a more 'realistic' view than that of Bollywood? How might we reconsider not just the concern with poverty within the film, but perhaps more importantly in this case, also see the antidote it presents? Where does it locate the subaltern poor within a globalized India and world? In other words, how might attending to neoliberalism, wealth and globalization within the film give us more insight about Orientalism and re-Orientalism within frictional flows? For instance, within the film, Prem Kumar, the television show host played by Anil Kapoor, emphasizes his class dominance through a bullying and aggressive re-Orientalism. Asserting his own superiority over Jamal, he clearly positions himself at the top of a class and social hierarchy in which the urban modern celebrity-elite represents and rules the nation-state. His hostility towards Jamal reinforces a capitalist re-Orientalism in which the haves have successfully reached modernity, accrued capital and achieved self-hood through their own initiative, while the have-nots are responsible for their own misfortune, backwardness and disenfranchisement.

It is clear that in depicting the world of western tourists, call centres and *Kaun Banega Crorepati?* globalization, Orientalisms and modernity are critically interlinked within the film. Hence, the 'problem' of poverty and the possibility of becoming a millionaire also follow a more contemporary logic – one that is neoliberal: to overcome the Hindu nationalist, neoliberal capital may rescue the good globalized Muslim. The emphasis on media, the state and global capitalism illuminates a reformatted and reimagined postcolonial and globalized citizenship that is made possible through neoliberalism. The title of the film, *Slumdog Millionaire*, captures both the Orientalisms and the neoliberalism that underlie the film. While both are associated with India (slums as markers of India's development, Muslims as violent, and millionaires as the sign of its economic modernity), the title crucially links them together. These slums are rife with neoliberalism and globalization as well. And the film suggests that while slums may breed violent Muslims who manoeuvre through the underworld, they may also produce good modern Muslims who seek capital and Western knowledges.

Inappropriate knowledge

Formally foregrounding its commitment to neoliberalism, the film employs the game show as a framing device in the opening sequences of the film.

> Jamal Malik is one question away
> from winning twenty million rupees.
> How did he do it?
> A. He cheated
> B. He's lucky
> C. He's a genius
> D. It is written.

At the centre of the plot is the question of what the game show contestant Jamal knows, how he has come to this knowledge, and how this knowledge is (in)appropriate to his social, religious and class location. While Prem Kumar derisively and dismissively mocks that Jamal is a lucky contestant, Irrfan Khan as the police inspector rules out the possibility of Jamal as lucky or a genius. Commenting that doctors, professors and lawyers are the ones who should advance in the show, he asks 'What the hell can a slumdog possibly know?' The participants of a game show are expected to be educated, cosmopolitan and bourgeois citizens of the nation-state who demonstrate their class and educational privilege in the form of 'intelligence'. Education is interchangeable with intelligence in the logic of the bourgeoisie, who assume that those who are capable achieve education; those who are not, appropriately, remain in ignorance and in poverty. Therefore, Jamal's success on the show must be the result of fraudulent activity or destiny. The film opens with a scene of police torture and interrogation during which Jamal explains *how* he knows and methodically eliminates the possibility of deception and fraud. As Jamal recounts what he knows, he also emphasizes that one does not have to be a genius to know. He turns the tables on the police inspector, asking him if he knows the price of *pani puri* at a particular shop, or if he knows who stole an inspector's bicycle the previous week. With these questions, Jamal demonstrates the situated nature of knowledge, pointing out that it is less about inherent genius, than about power, location, social community and labour.

As Jamal narrates the specific mechanisms that engender his knowledge, the police interrogators as well as the audience members accept the veracity of his claims. Consequently, the film offers destiny as an explanation for his knowledge. Hence, the purpose of the film is to unravel how Jamal gathers information on his path of destiny through the various slums, tourist sites, kitchens and corporate centres of Mumbai and Agra. The concept of a written destiny is implicitly linked to Hindu-normativity, the naturalization of power and domination, and Orientalist conceptions of India. We might want to read in direct opposition to the inevitability of what the term 'destiny' might imply: the actual cultivation, acquisition, retention and production of knowledge by the subaltern Muslim child in poverty. Moreover, we may want to ask what answers are contained or foreclosed by the limitation of the framing of the question. In offering the multiple choice options, the film erases other answers – such as power and labour. The significance and meaning of this labour and knowledge is at the height of the controversy about *Slumdog Millionaire*: how is Jamal located within the nation-state and what knowledge does he possess? Within the film, labour produces knowledge, but knowledge itself is removed from questions of power though it is explicitly linked to violence. While Jamal gains knowledge and information from all sectors of and experiences in his life, the film's depictions of the children's labour is bifurcated. The abuse, coercion and exploitation of the children by the criminal underworld are clearly demonized within the film

while they are simultaneously shown to produce knowledge and become the means for Jamal to know. In contrast, the other forms of labour, delivering *chai*, guiding tours and conning tourists, are much more whimsically portrayed; they appear to create learning opportunities that far outpace the classroom depicted earlier in the film. In this rendition of neoliberalism and capitalism, capital creates the opportunity for Jamal's labour that leads to the knowledge that enables him to access capital. Capital in Mumbai, New Delhi and Agra pre-exists the labour here. Hence, we might see that the film unravels and interrogates the meaning and location of knowledge itself. By tracing Jamal's success on the show, the film makes visible the relations of power that define knowledge, imbue it with value, produce meaning, and distribute and curtail privilege. Delinking knowledge (and success) from destiny (and luck), the exposition offers capital and media as methods of acquiring access. However, while demonstrating that capital enables access for Jamal, the film also demonstrates the violence produced by proliferation and expansion of global capital within India. Each vignette emphasizes the global connectivity and flows in which Jamal is located, but more importantly it links them specifically to the violence of his subalternity. Thus, the film demonstrates the violence and capability of global capital.

Media and neoliberalism

The television show is a critical device for not only authenticating Jamal's knowledge, but also for producing and confirming Jamal as a credible, genuine and valid citizen-subject. More specifically, the game show becomes the sanctioned space in which Jamal can be transformed from slum dweller to neoliberal citizen by demonstrating his participation in the knowledge and information economies of the postcolonial Indian nation-state. Additionally, the various questions that Jamal must answer ultimately prove his appropriateness and worthiness for access to citizenship, capital and heterosexual romance. Each question within the show provides evidence that he has mastered the various epistemological domains necessary for citizenship and a location in bourgeois civil society. In this section, I discuss the significance of the medium of television, the reality quiz show and the specific questions within the show as mechanisms for establishing Jamal as a neoliberal global citizen who can be recognized via re-Orientalism by the West.

Indian television during the 1990s marked a time of change. Moving from a development- and state-based system to a globalized corporate one, changes in the television industry went hand in hand with the shifts in the political economy of the larger nation-state and the rise of neoliberalism. More specifically, until 1991, there was a single state-run television channel in India. However, the emergence of satellite channels created major shifts in programming and viewing practices. Television with its proliferating channels became a critical medium geared towards middle-class viewers. In this moment, television as a medium itself underwent radical changes and was

significant to a wide range of processes that transformed the nation-state during the globalization of the Indian economy. The expansion of the industry reflected shifts in local and global political economy and can be seen as indicative of neoliberal deregulation, transnational financialization and globalized programming of the Indian television industry. Changes in the television industry have produced and reformulated social practices, transformed public spheres and citizenship, and altered state policies. For example, television in this period became watched increasingly, though not exclusively, in the home. However, an analysis of television must eschew a proscribed divide between the public and the private and attend to the nation-state, capital, and the production of consumer-citizenship. In fact, transformations in the television industry and other culture industries (e.g. those of fashion, food and film, and especially Bollywood) were critical to the processes of globalization and neoliberalism that are seen as constitutive of the 'shining' Indian nation today.

It is dubious to claim that this expansion and proliferation was a democratizing process. Some would argue that the liberalization of the economy and the transformation of the media produced more elite media cultures and industry. For example, the privatization of media can be noted at the level of production and consumption as an increasing emphasis on domestic viewing became part and parcel of the cosmopolitan bourgeoisie. Certainly, the proliferation of channels and programming part of the exponential expansion of media industries reified, one could argue, the consumer-citizenship and those groups associated with imagined community of 'shining' India. Satellite television, while inundated with international shows such as *The Bold and the Beautiful* and *Baywatch*, also featured a whole host of indigenized programming seeking to produce and garner new audiences. Indian programming expanded with an abundance of dramatic family serials, religious epics, talk shows, news shows and reality television, all of which functioned to mediate between family, economy and nation-state. This rapid expansion, globalization and Indian-ization of television developed multiple and complex understandings of Indian audiences, viewers and citizens. In other words, the transition from state-dominant television to media diversification and proliferation did not bring liberation but provided a new reinforcement of dominance and power through the governmentality of the medium of television.

While many shows such as *Baywatch* were exported wholesale, it is also clear that reality and game shows with certain formulae such as the *Idol* series and *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?* were perhaps even better positioned to become quickly nationalized, thus becoming international phenomena with the globalization of television. One can read the dissemination of the quiz show as another mechanism of Eurocentrism. If the quiz show is a popular test of knowledge (albeit trivia), then it nevertheless provides a form that is seen to be adaptable and portable within an international context. Hence, the modularity of knowledge is globalized within a particular form and genre that is modified for national (and linguistic) specificity. However, the nature of

knowledge and knowing itself remains Eurocentric as the quiz show is merely adapted for locations elsewhere that are assumed to be separate and distinct, but with the means of parity. Hence, each nation will have knowledges similar to those of the West, specifically about literature, history, art, cinema, religion and the nation itself. These categories of knowing, however, will remain unquestioned as the categorization of knowledge is naturalized and deemed universal. Hence, when India acquires *Who Wants to be a Millionaire?*, it is claiming its access to capital, knowledge, modernity, literature and national culture within Eurocentric and belated terms. It remains unable to question the means of categorization and knowledge production participating within these revised modes of Orientalism and Eurocentrism. Hence, the globalization of shows such as *Who Wants to be a Millionaire?* demonstrates how contemporary television programming implicitly forwards Eurocentrism. Moreover, I want to argue that the format of the quiz show and the forum of reality television are also recognizable to western audiences and work to establish Jamal as a global neoliberal subject rather an abject subaltern in poverty. In establishing the universality of western media forms and categories of knowing, the show makes Indian neoliberalism and modernity not only familiar but also derivative, but also deploys the show to bestow a recognizable subjectivity upon Jamal.

Who Wants to be a Millionaire?, a British quiz show, debuted in 1998 on the ITV channel with an ultimate prize of one million pounds. Quickly becoming popular with its unique single-player format, the show garnered a national audience and then quickly became internationalized. Spreading throughout Europe, North America, Latin America, Asia, Africa and the Pacific Rim in the subsequent decade, *Millionaire* has now appeared in over 100 countries. BBC News (2005) cites *Millionaire* as the most popular international television franchise of all time. Recently, the *Millionaire* franchise was acquired by the media conglomerate Sony. The rise of international franchise reality game shows such as the popular *Idol* series or *Millionaire* in India was a critical part of the globalization of Indian television. In particular, *Millionaire* appears ideal for localization and nationalization as it can easily be transformed to include national knowledges, cultures and tastes. However, it is important to consider that a quiz show such as *Millionaire* does not merely represent or reflect national cultures and identities, but actively produces them. I am suggesting that the globalization of Indian television, in general, and shows such as *Millionaire* critically participated in the production of a globalized neoliberal consumer citizen (one marked by Indian-specific difference). Reality and quiz shows along with family melodramas dominated programming during these decades while pedagogically establishing the parameters of citizenship through their emphasis on respectable families, normative culture, expected knowledges and sanctioned practices. In this manner, the globalized Indian television industry, while it moved away from state-based television programming, simultaneously promoted governmentality and citizenship that worked to fortify state power and its relation to globalized capital.

The rise of quiz and talent shows in relation to 'reality television' has created a new form of entertainment in India. While Murray and Ouellette (2004) comment on the American context, their observations about the function and facility of reality television are apropos for Indian television as well. They suggest that reality television is

> an unabashedly commercial genre united less by aesthetic rules or certainties than by the fusion of popular entertainment with a self-conscious claim to the discourse of the real. This coupling, we contend, is what has made reality TV an important generic forum for a range of institutional and cultural developments that include the merger of marketing and 'real life' entertainment, the convergence of new technologies with programs and their promotion, and an acknowledgement of the manufactured artifice that coexists with truth claims.
>
> (Murray and Ouellette 2004: 3)

The popularity of this forum is clearly linked to its acceptability to and popularity with the bourgeoisie within India; while spectacle and fantasy have often been relegated to the 'masses', realism has been seen as the domain of the bourgeoisie. The ability to represent a particular real – the globalized real – has further bestowed respectability on reality television in particular, and television in general.

The Indian version of the show – *Kaun Banege Crorepati?* (*KBC*) (literally 'Who Will Be a Ten Million Owner?') – was broadcast in 2000 on the Star Plus channel and played a particularly significant role in the history and economy of Indian television culture. It is the show that revitalized the career of Amitabh Bachchan. Megastar of Indian cinema of the 1970s and 1980s, Bachchan's career stalled after an unsuccessful attempt to form the media conglomerate Amitabh Bachchan Corporation Limited (ABCL) and to return to cinema in the 1990s. Premiering on television as the host of the show, Bachchan and *KBC* immediately garnered popularity and became synonymous. Appearing from 2000 to 2002 and from 2005 to 2006 as the host, Bachchan quickly established his own set of stock of catch phrases, including the ubiquitous '*lock kiya jaye?*' (loosely translatable as 'lock the answer?'). The popularity of the show and its host rescued Bachchan from a variety of financial and artistic woes, significantly revitalizing his career. After Bachchan fell ill in 2006, Shah Rukh Khan replaced him as the host of the show. The popularity of the show eventually also led to the increase in the prize money from one *crore* rupees to the two *crore* rupees that is depicted in the film.

Within the context of *Slumdog Millionaire*, the translation of the show's title from *Who Wants to be a Millionaire?* to *Who Will Be a Ten Million Owner?* reflects an interesting issue of cultural signification and meaning. In the former title, desire structures the possibility of achieving the status of millionaire. Hence, the idea of an individual free of material and social limitations underpins assumptions about the participant-citizen. In contrast, in

the Indian version, it is not simply a matter of desire. Who will become a millionaire appears less dependent on will than on ontology and/or destiny. In light of the film, the title translated thus reifies and naturalizes the notion that certain citizens can and will win, while others (such as Jamal's brother) are ineligible or destined to fail. Jamal, as we know from the beginning of the film, is destined to be a *crorepati*. Within the film, while it is the police who torture and interrogate Jamal, it is the television show that ultimately proves his capacity and worth. Hence, after completing their questioning, the police escort him to the more significant space – that of media and neoliberalism – the television studio. It might be helpful to note how the state power and capital collude to produce, shape and demarcate citizenship for the unnamed bourgeoisie. In this regard, the state functions primarily as a lubricant for the real mechanisms of power – capital. As Murray and Ouellette write,

> a closer look at reality TV forces us to rethink the changing meanings of public service, democracy, and citizenship in the age of neoliberalism, deregulation, conglomeration, and technological convergence. Reality TV's growing preoccupation with formats that assess and test people's capacities (and capacities for self-improvement) has emerged at a historical juncture marked by the dismantling of public welfare programs and an emphasis on private and personal initiative as an alternative to the state's role in managing social needs and risks.[3]
>
> (Murray and Ouellette 2004: 3)

With the use of analepsis, *Slumdog Millionaire* proves to us that Jamal's epistemology and ontology do entitle him to access to neoliberal citizenship and global capital. Jamal passes the citizenship 'tests' of the state and media public, who act as agents to protect the bourgeoisie from the underclass. Within the film's version of the show, just over half the questions address the national knowledge required for cultural citizenship: knowledge about cinema, the state, Hinduism, literature and sports (namely cricket). The first question, interestingly and poignantly, establishes the significance of popular Hindi films of the 1970s to national culture. Answering the question 'Who was the star of the 1973 hit film *Zanjeer*?' with ease, Jamal proves himself to be a fan of Bachchan, a Mumbaite and an Indian. In posing this as the first question, *Slumdog Millionaire* suggests that cinema constitutes cultural citizenship and national knowledge within the context of India; furthermore, it connects Amitabh Bachchan's 1970s persona of the underclass and disenfranchised hero with Jamal.

The second question, focusing on the official script of the nation-state, 'A picture of three lions is seen in the national emblem of India. What is written underneath?' is one that Jamal cannot answer, the implication of the film being that the postcolonial nation-state has been less relevant to Jamal than other institutions of power and capital.[4] The lack of knowledge associated with this question and a later question emphasizes Jamal as having situated

knowledges and the irrelevance and failure of the postcolonial nation-state in serving its disenfranchised citizens. The third question[5] provides an opportunity for the film to demonstrate how Hindutva dominates the nation-state, as Jamal's flashback demonstrates that he gained his knowledge while witnessing the murder of his mother by Hindutva nationalists during the violence against Muslim communities in Mumbai after the destruction of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya. However, this critique of Hindutva needs to be placed against the other Hindu-normative aspects of the film – such as the emphasis on destiny – that undermine some of the critique implicit in this scene.

The next question in the show ('The song "Darshan Do Ghanshyam" was written by which famous Indian poet?[6]) is meant to emphasize the existence and presence of Indian arts and literature. Literature is a common category of questioning on quiz shows. In its modularity, this category is assumed to be translatable to all nations which must all have national literatures. However, as critics have carefully argued, the category of national literature within the postcolonial context is always a belated category that leaves intact the Eurocentrism and its categories of knowledge. As Rey Chow (2004) and Aamir Mufti (2005) observe, non-western literature is always known through Orientalism. In this case, the film again offers Indian literature in the form of a song that has value only in the form of commodification. Jamal is familiar with the *bhajan* and its author because the street children are forced to learn and perform it to enhance their begging. However, this *bhajan* offers no hope or sustenance for Jamal.

The final questions of the show demonstrate the power of western capital and Eurocentric categories of knowledge. When the host Prem Kumar asks Jamal, 'On the American $100 bill, there is a portrait of which American statesman?' Jamal is able to answer this question but is unable to say who adorns the 1,000 rupee note when the police inspector asks him. Responding to how he cannot know, Jamal replies, '*They* didn't ask me that question.' His response emphasizes that he does not determine the questions, the value of knowledge or the value of currency; he is inserted violently into systems of global capital and Indian national capital. This comparison re-emphasizes the insignificance and marginality of the postcolonial nation-state to the political economy and everyday life of the urban poor. Here, Prem Kumar's national re-Orientalism (knowledge of the 1,000 rupee note) is put into place by Jamal's neoliberalism from below. Jamal's response makes clear the hierarchies produced by Orientalism and re-Orientalism; his location within these hierarchies is one not of his own construction, but one he can name nevertheless. Continuing in this vein, the next questions focus on the American invention and production of weapons,[7] British geography[8] and international sports[9] – all subjects with which Jamal has had encounters.

In the final round, the quiz returns to the western canon, more precisely to French literature and the novel ('In Alexander Dumas' book *The Three Musketeers*, two of the musketeers are called Athos and Porthos. What was the name of the third musketeer?'), raising questions again about what

knowledges are valued and validated, what counts as literature and who is culturally literate. However, while Jamal does not 'know' the factual answer, he has demonstrated mastery of the more important lesson of liberal humanism –in this case, the meaning of friendship and fidelity. Nevertheless, he guesses correctly and wins the two *crore* rupees. In doing so, Jamal successfully proves his validity and location within an informational society. Moreover, he has merged this knowledge and has been able to capitalize on it within an information economy. In this moment, he becomes recognizable, unlike Shah Rukh Khan, as a globalized neoliberal human subject located within revitalized modes of Orientalism and Eurocentrism.[10]

In 2006, when Boyle was approached by Celador and Film4 Productions to consider the script for the film, Celador (2waytraffic) was the producer of *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire*. Eventually, additional funding was also secured from Warner International Productions. This cross-promotion of the show through transmedia is hardly new. However, the way that Orientalisms produce the Orient for spectacles might be worth examining. As I have discussed above, the modularity and dissemination of the game show itself solidifies Eurocentrism, establishes Eurocentrism as universal, emphasizes the spectacle of its internationalization, and highlights its repeated performances through re-Orientalism. In this version of the world on exhibit, the game show supplements the more straightforward Orientalism of exoticism and abjection. It is the everyday ordinariness of the spectacle in this case that creates friction. In this world-as-exhibition (see Mitchell 1998 and Introduction), the displays occur in the medium of television represented again within cinema. This is not a claiming of an imperial truth but the franchising of Orientalisms so that each location may produce and perform its own localized re-Orientalism.

But what happens when the re-Orientalism creates friction? In the case of Shah Rukh Khan's two appearances mentioned above, other discourses exceed the performative re-Orientalism expected of South Asians in the West (or at least Britain and the United States). Though entirely immersed within the performative re-Orientalism of Bollywood, Khan's teasing and homoerotic offer and denial of pelvic gyrations made visible the audience's expectations and desire for this spectacle, as well as Khan's refusal to embody and perform the spectacle. Focusing on the global reach of media, representation and cinema, the award shows celebrate the uneven terrain of signification, knowledge production and distribution put forward by *Slumdog Millionaire*. The film as well as the award ceremonies seeks to recognize the postcolonial racialized South Asian subject as the global neoliberal citizen. In his other appearance, the buffer of recognition offered by re-Orientalism was momentarily overwritten by the semiotics of terrorism and Muslimness, the Orientalism of racialized empire. The politics of recognition by which Shah Rukh Khan was 'recognized' by technologies of surveillance in the airport require similar conduits of global telecommunications and management of information, as does the award show. Outside of the grid of intelligibility made

possible by the spectacle of cultural difference within the film and the awards ceremonies, Khan's detainment demonstrates the 'illegibility' of his Muslim body. In other words, the Muslim subaltern can be recognized both within the film and on stage through a disavowal of Orientalism, racialization and terror. The fierce anger at this case of 'mistaken identity' by South Asians suggests an investment in the ability to be legible to and to be recognized by the West.[11] Rather than arguing against mis-recognition, one might want to name these frictional moments as the soft pulpy reconstitutions of Orientalisms.

Notes

1 See, for example, Anuja Prashar (2009) and K. Hariharan (2009).
2 Rarely is the film framed as an example of re-Orientalism by South Asians, considering that the screenplay was adapted from the award-winning novel *Q and A* written by Indian author Vikas Swarup; the co-director Loveleen Tandan wrote the Hindi dialogue and cast the film; the music is by A.R. Rahman and M.I.A.; the film contains homages to numerous Hindi films including *Satya*, *Company*, *Black Friday* and *Deewaar*; and the actors include street children, a British television performer (Dev Patel), several Hindi/Bollywood actors (Anil Kapoor and Irrfan Khan) and an Indian model (Freida Pinto).
3 See Nandini Chandra (2009) for a similar and more succinct argument.
4 The answer is 'Truth alone triumphs'.
5 'In depictions of Lord Rama, what is he famously holding in his right hand?'
6 The answer provided in the film has been contested as the *bhajan* was supposedly introduced in the film *Narsi Bhagat*.
7 'Who invented the revolver?'
8 'Cambridge Circus is in which UK city?'
9 'Which cricketer recorded the most first-class centuries in history?'
10 It is only after establishing him as a global neoliberal citizen to the West that the film allows Indian publics to recognize him as an Indian citizen as well. On the second night of his performance on the show, crowds gather in viewing publics on the street to watch Jamal on the show. These viewers, we presume, claim Jamal the *chaiwallah* as one of their own. Hence his triumph is posed as their victory as well, as traffic stops, call centres stall, people shout his name, call their blessings and shower him with affection.
11 See Jasbir Puar's *Terrorist Assemblages* (2007) for a more sustained discussion of 'mistaken identity'.

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6 Re-Orientalism is on TV

From Salman Rushdie's *The Aliens Show* to *The Kumars at No. 42*

Ana Cristina Mendes

> Soon it begins to feel like a long time ago that he was Indian, with family ties, with roots … Race itself seems less of a fixed point than before. He finds that to these new eyes he looks indeterminate. He has already passed for Jewish, and now … he is taken for an Italian, a Spaniard, a Romany, a Frenchman, a Latin American, a 'Red' Indian, a Greek. He is none of these, but he denies nothing; during these brief, casual encounters he adopts the protective colouring of how others see him.
>
> (Rushdie 2000: 290–91)

> From the point of view of those in charge of order, strangers are the solid leftovers of the productive process called 'social spacing'; they posit perennial problems of recycling and waste-disposal.
>
> (Bauman 1993: 181)

Referring to postcolonial cultural production, Graham Huggan concludes that 'the language of resistance is entangled, like it or not, in the language of commerce' (2001: 264). This chapter contends that Salman Rushdie's work, being inextricably enmeshed in capitalist modes of cultural production, distribution and exchange stands at the nexuses of representation and reconstruction, as well as of complicity and autonomy. This chapter draws connections between *The Aliens Show*, a situation comedy in Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* about a group of creatures from outer space, and *The Kumars at No. 42*, a BBC minority-based sitcom. Both Saladin, the co-star of the grotesque TV programme in Rushdie's novel who plays the role of Maxim Alien, and Sanjeev Kumar, the protagonist of *The Kumars at No. 42*, are relentless in their shared ambition of becoming media personalities in Britain. In their pursuit of fame, Saladin, an Indian immigrant to London, constantly changes his hairstyle and clothes, while Sanjeev, a Br-Asian[1] living in Wembley, has his family bulldoze the back garden to erect a state-of-the-art TV studio so that he can host his very own chat show. The key issue in these characters' attempted assimilation to mainstream discourse is that they are equally aware of the provisionality of their cultural self-construction. Both texts highlight continuities and disruptions: from *The Aliens Show*'s focus on

the misrepresentation of Otherness on the part of the media, mirroring the blatant ethnic stereotyping of the period from the 1960s to the 1980s, to the interstitiality of *The Kumars at No. 42* which came to characterize Br-Asian TV comedy from the late 1990s and early 2000s. What is interesting to note here are the dilemmas that result from the negotiation of Orientalist representations. Such representational dilemmas are framed in the context of a globalized world where transnational cultural industries simultaneously foster an expanded space for minority-based authorship and self-fashioning, and betray the unfeasibility of unmediated and unframed literary, cinematic or other type of cultural self-representation.

In 1989, Timothy Brennan noted how difficult it was 'to tell in Rushdie's parodies where complicity begins and ends' (Brennan 1989: 92). In a more recent inquiry, Deepika Bahri recognizes that Rushdie's cosmopolitan writings, along with Arundhati Roy's and Rohinton Mistry's, form part of a body of work that 'is often mediated by the very process of flattening that ushers it into the mainstream of acceptable radicalism'; in addition, she argues, 'its expansively geocultural inflections are apt to be muted, and its aesthetic dimension lost to its parochially functional purpose' (Bahri 2003: 3). Still, in Bahri's perspective, criticism of those postcolonial texts should be attentive to a 'native intelligence' that is not 'minority and Third World informancy' (Bahri 2003: 7), but rather emphasizes 'the existence of the subject of postcoloniality in relational terms with its First World sponsor' (Bahri 2003: 18). 'This hermeneutic stance,' Bahri suggests, 'permits a conception of literature as simultaneously embedded in a real, reified world of commodities *and* in potential tension with it by virtue of its native regime of aesthetic and formal organization' (Bahri 2003: 7). Such a nuanced position runs counter to the perception of Rushdie as representing the quintessential native informant, a class of individuals that Gayatri Spivak defined, in her influential essay 'Can the Subaltern Speak?', as belonging to the Indian cultural elite and acting as 'native informants for first-world intellectuals interested in the voice of the Other' (Spivak 1988: 284). Indeed, Rushdie seems for many to be the perfect representative of the category of Indian writers suggested by Meenakshi Mukherjee 'who are globally visible, who are taught in postcolonial classrooms the world over, and who are hailed in the review pages of Western journals as interpreters and authentic voices of the non-Western world' (Mukherjee 2000: 574). In effect, Mukherjee charges these writers with fundamentally catering to the expectations of a western readership and of purveying selected, restrictive and often western-based representations of India.

According to Homi Bhabha, culture is a transnational and translational strategy of survival (Bhabha 1994: 172).[2] Not unrelatedly, Huggan sees postcolonial cultural producers as 'both aware of and resistant to their interpellation as marginal spokespersons, institutionalized cultural commentators and representative (iconic) figures'; furthermore, 'they make their *readers* aware of the constructedness of such cultural categories; their texts are

metacommentaries on the politics of translation, on the power relations that inform cross-cultural perception and representation' (Huggan 2001: 26). Rushdie's role as cultural broker – more than that of a 'cultural mulatto' who is able to 'navigate easily in the white world' (Ellis 1989: 189) – lies thus within those fault-lines which, paradoxically, provide the context and condition of possibility for the writer's actions in what Arjun Appadurai terms a 'diasporic public sphere' (Appadurai 1996: 22). As Rushdie puts it in a 2008 interview, alluding to his at times controversial actions in that public sphere inhabited by the artist, '[n]othing of great interest for [him] is done sitting safely in the middle of the room. You want to push the boundaries as much as possible' (Preston 2008). This can well be read as an all-encompassing commentary on the circumstances of his own life and creative project thus far. Huggan questions whether the representativeness of postcolonial writers is 'a function of their inscription in the margins, of the mainstream demand for an "authentic", but readily translatable, marginal voice', but admits that this question 'yield[s] no immediate or obvious answers' (Huggan 2001: 26). The process this critic describes hints at the charges of self-exoticization or gimmickification of South Asianness faced by artists who are seen as pandering to western reception. In this respect, he draws attention to the double coding involved in postcolonial self-fashioning 'wherein space claimed for cultural expression becomes a constricted and restrained space within a wider system' (Huggan 2001: 31).

Re-Orientalist cultural practices can be regarded as potentially strategic and affirmative, and/or otherwise complicit with the rules of the western market and aiming mainly at metropolitan audiences. As my inquiry into current re-Orientalisms was initially motivated by Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, with its self-conscious juggling with re-Orientalist elements and its self-reflexive implication of the postcolonial writer's status as exotic commodity in the global literary market, it might be relevant to consider how this novel, through its self-deployment as cultural commodity, stages Rushdie's challenge to its anticipated commercial appeal and accommodation within a metropolitan publishing industry. *Midnight's Children* subverts re-Orientalist representations of India as the exotic Other by repoliticizing Orientalist imagery. In effect, Rushdie's novels and miscellaneous writings exhibit a self-ironic acceptance and questioning of an instantaneous cut-and-paste contemporary culture, in particular regarding the changes that have taken place in the cultural industries since the 1980s, and, on the other hand, the fact that these characteristics of self-irony and self-reflexivity are conversely clear sources of the marketability of his works, finding as they do particular purchase with a metropolitan readership. Admittedly, Rushdie's works have not renounced consumption in the global literary field. The author does not actively downplay nor disclaim his involvement in the inevitable commodification of postcolonial cultural production; in effect, his primary cultural products – his novels – are consumer items themselves and their simple financial viability relies on their mainstream success.

Unquestionably, the publication of *Midnight's Children* in 1981 made Rushdie's literary name. In that novel, thematically, via the main character and narrator Saleem Sinai, Rushdie critically mobilizes discourses of the exotic and self-ironically engages with Orientalist essentializations; the writer does so by exposing the metropolitan consumer-reader's complicitous desire for exoticism. Saleem is a skilful merchant of narratives – he knows how to put his stories on the market, hawking their exotic trimmings such as snake-charmers and fakirs to satisfy the exoticist appetites of his imagined audience. *Midnight's Children* deploys meta-exoticism – that is, a strategic redeployment of the exotic: it plays on re-Orientalist representations of India as the exotic Other and hence repoliticizes identifiable Orientalist imagery. In this sense, the novel introduces alternative modes of resistance to the western appropriation of India – its exotic appeal is undercut by the text's self-reflection on the process of cultural consumption it fosters. Rushdie then embarks on a critique of exotica by appropriating exoticist codes of cultural representation; the exotic here is reinvented as an empowering decolonizing category because a reconfiguration of discursive power has been generated. In Shivani's words, Rushdie is 'accomplished at simultaneously catering to the thirst for exoticisation and deconstructing it in subversive ways' (Shivani 2006: 11). Nonetheless, fiction that involves re-Orientalist representation risks replaying to the reader Orientalist stereotypes by re-inscribing them. In effect, authorial intent is only one of the meanings included in the field of meanings already attached to diasporic cultural products in the global cultural economy. Through a re-Orientalist frame, are Orientalist stereotypes exclusively questioned or also unwittingly re-inscribed in *Midnight's Children*? It is difficult to offer a clear-cut answer to this thorny question.

Rushdie's self-consciousness about his books' position in a globalized literary marketplace, in particular in the context of their authorized circulation, frames *Midnight's Children*. While such self-consciousness is one of the trademark features of his works, self-consciousness being a 'constitutive feature of the postcolonial field' (Brouillette 2007: 1), the figure of the cosmopolitan consumer-reader is central to the success of the 'double-edged tactics' involved in the novel's reliance on representations of a marketable exotic India and on the subversion of exoticist and Orientalist codifications (Wachinger 2003: 88). Huggan writes that Rushdie has 'recognised [his] own complicity with exoticist aesthetics while choosing to manipulate the conventions of the exotic to [his] own political ends' (Huggan 2001: 32). Wachinger adds in this respect that in *Midnight's Children* the pickles that the narrator produces 'cunningly mirror the way postcolonial India circulates on the global market', while the novel's central trope of chutnification 'comments on the function of India in world-wide commodity culture' (Wachinger 2003: 73). In addition to the aspects mentioned by these critics in relation to Rushdie's staging of his novel's own imbrications with the marketing of cultural difference, *Midnight's Children* poses the controversial question as to whether postcolonial literature knowingly or intentionally posits an ideal reader, a

reader who is cosmopolitan and an active consumer of re-Orientalized cultural products in the sense that she is expected to negotiate the instabilities of re-Orientalism. In other words, does the difference which the novel self-ironically builds on actually hold up to scrutiny in the eye of a cosmopolitan beholder?[3]

The Satanic Verses is, in Rushdie's oft-quoted words, 'a love-song to our mongrel selves' (Rushdie 1991a: 394). Saladin Chamcha,[4] upon entering the host country and in an attempt to be accepted there, semi-anglicizes his name, making it more recognizable than Salahuddin Chamchawalla, in his first act of mimicry of the ethnic Other. In fact, he makes a career out of mimicry as the gifted voice-over behind a wide range of TV commercials and radio shows, impersonating everything from a packet of garlic-flavoured crisps to the President of the US (Rushdie 1989: 60). At all times performing as an invisible actor, he deceives his audience into believing he is white British on account of the Oxbridge-type accent that he picked up because of his schooling in England. Through his versatile vocal capacity, Saladin is dubbed 'the Man of a Thousand Voices and a Voice' (Rushdie 1989: 60). He 'rule[s] the air-waves of Britain' (Rushdie 1989: 61); however, since his 'face is the wrong colour for [national] colour TVs' (Rushdie 1989: 61), he is never permitted to make his presence seen in the roles he plays. Although he is a trained actor, to thrive professionally out of his gift for mimicry he has to make his body unseen in the British visual media. Later when he is a protagonist in the hit TV serial *The Aliens Show*, his screen appearances are always in prosthetic make-up to conceal his brown skin. Indeed, both Saladin and Mimi Mamoulian, his Jewish-Armenian co-star whose name again underscores the idea of mimicry, must perform according to dominant ways of seeing: that is, they have to become invisible, deprived of what denounces them as Other. Saladin and his co-performer must continually reinvent themselves as aliens, restyling their look according to the terms of the host society and readjusting their roles for the amusement of a mainstream white audience. In their unrelenting yearning to be TV personalities, Saladin and Mimi alter their voices, clothes, body parts, hairstyle and hair colour – 'which could go from purple to vermilion between shots' (Rushdie 1989: 62) – in a deliberate effort of reinvention and of assimilation into set cultural codes (although, to be fair, Saladin is coerced into this situation because there is no market in the host country for brown faces).

Media stardom does not last long for Saladin, who is again confronted as inevitably an ethnically marked performer. In effect, *The Aliens Show* eventually comes under attack, attracting leftist protest 'as politically reactionary, reinforcing', in British society, 'the idea of aliens-as-freaks' (Rushdie 1989: 63). To make the situation worse, it seems that in the 1980s, according to the show's producer Hal Valance, even 'ethnics don't watch ethnic shows. They don't watch 'em … They want fucking Dynasty, like everyone else' (Rushdie 1989: 265). To this the producer adds that the protagonist's

'profile' – which is apparently 'too ethnic' – is deemed unsuitable for the programme; as such, there is no place for him and, for that matter, for all the 'ethnics' in the sitcom. Considering that '*The Aliens Show* is too big an idea to be held back by the racial dimension' (Rushdie 1989: 265), the producer is planning to remodel the show into a de-ethnicized and depoliticized version featuring toned-down and nice-looking 'latex-and-Quantel Schwarzenegger[s]' (Rushdie 1989: 268) for export to the US. Having made the programme 'too damn racial' (Rushdie 1989: 265) and hence having seemed to have upset the normative views of the audience costs Saladin his job and his career in the media. Following Zygmunt Bauman's arguments concerning social responses to the stranger (Bauman 1993: 180–81), the character is the ambivalent alien who disturbs pre-existing categories of social spacing; he is thus outside the producer's and the audience's understanding and control. Saladin needs to be discarded – this constituting a proteophobic response following Bauman's reasoning – even if he offered a novelty and proved essential to *The Aliens Show*'s initial success, which was ultimately the result of a proteophilic attitude. Rushdie's Saladin, like Bauman's stranger, raised the spectre of hybridity, carnivalization and creolization, or, in Robert Young's phrasing, the 'threat of degeneration and chaos incipient upon a "raceless chaos"' (Young 1996: 25). Accordingly, reactions to Saladin exemplify conflicting but complementary anthropophagic and anthropoemic strategies of dealing with the alien. In this respect, Rushdie recounts a personal experience from his earlier days in advertising that relates to Saladin's predicament:

> I once earned my living by writing commercials, and I found the prejudice of senior executives in British industry quite appalling. I could tell you the name of the chairman of a leading building society who rejected a jingle on the grounds that the off-screen singer sounded as if he had a black voice. The irony was that the singer was actually white, but the previous year's jingle had been sung by a black man who obviously *had* the good fortune not to sound like one.
>
> (Rushdie 1991c: 136–37)

After a plane crash and the resulting fall to the English coast, events which take place at the beginning of *The Satanic Verses*, Saladin experiences an additional mutation, from human to monstrous being, from counterfeit white British citizen and aspiring migrant to dangerous illegal alien in London. It is because Saladin cannot pass as white British that he must become a grotesque alien, first on *The Aliens Show* and later when he acquires a demonic tail and horns. Stereotypical projections of the Other find literal manifestation in his body – transmuted into the devilish figure of the goat, he materializes into the racial villain. As a manticore, one of the mutant immigrants the now unemployed actor encounters in a hospital, remarks: 'They describe us … They have the power of description, and we succumb to

the pictures they construct' (Rushdie 1989: 168). In an interview, Rushdie clarifies these statements:

> The point is that if you come from the black communities in this country, the power of other people to describe you is much greater than your power to describe back. And so, one can't see it as a fair struggle at the moment, because we are described, and we are described into corners, and then we have to describe our way out of corners, if we can. And it seems to me that that's one of the things I was trying to do: I was trying to contest descriptions.
>
> (Webb 2000: 99)

As illustrated by Saladin's acting career, the alternatives for the migrant seem to rest between assimilation and demonizing. Again, the novel stresses that, even in the latter option, manipulation by the media for financial profit is inescapable: Saladin's looks set the trend for a 'Satanist revival' and commercialized forms of the exotic are strategically redeployed under the guise of self-parodic posters, button-badges and sweatshirts with a goat-devil logo (Borner 1996: 114). Saladin, whose identity is the result of mimicry, fusion and transmutation, is 'a creature of *selected* discontinuities, a *willing* re-invention' (Rushdie 1989: 427). The character is conscious that the cultural recodings he undergoes in his obsessive desire to be assimilated are provisional. In the end, his postcolonial refashionings – from a mimic man intent on passing as an Englishman to a professional mimic making a living out of entertaining his hosts in his new home – lose their subversive potential as acts of mimicry, in the sense of an enacted difference that is almost the same, but not quite (Bhabha 1994: 87), and are trafficked within the terms of the entertainment industry. Even if he tries for a long time to mimic an Englishman, re-Orientalization also plays an important part in his identitarian remaking: he was '[a] man with a holy land to conquer, his England' (Rushdie 1989: 175), yet he too could perform as 'everybody's goddam cartoon of the mysteries of the East', spraying himself with patchouli and dressing in a white kurta, 'no shame, he was ready to be anything they wanted to buy, that read-your-palm bedspread-jacket Hare-Krishna dharma-bun' (Rushdie 1989: 174).[5]

The shape-shifting postcolonial subject which is Saladin relates in these respects to the liminal figure of Sanjeev Kumar from *The Kumars at No. 42*. Aided by the national and international groundbreaking triumph of the BBC satirical series *Goodness Gracious Me*, and against the backdrop of the booming mainstream success of the Bollywood film industry, this show is included in a body of Br-Asian cinematic and televisual productions corresponding to an increasingly important global market niche. A highly successful comedy series, this chat show/sitcom hybrid premiered in 2001. Following the show's success, several remakes ensued, including, among others, an Australian (with a Greek family), German (with a Turkish family),

Israeli (with a Moroccan-Jewish family), Dutch (with a Surinamese family), North American (with a Mexican-American family), Portuguese (with an Angolan family), Pakistan (with a Gujarati family) and Indian (with a Parsee family living in Mumbai) versions. Since the late 1990s, thanks to a broader media exposure, Br-Asian performers and their specific cross-cultural humour have indeed bridged boundaries in national comedy; nonetheless, minority-based sitcoms have inescapably been subject to the commodification suffered by Asian food, fashion and home-furnishings. If one reaction to the highly mediated portrayal of minorities on the British small screen has been the assertion of their power to represent themselves, it seems that unmediated self-representation is a utopia. Still, we have come a long way from the media invisibility or, alternatively, the blatant ethnic stereotyping in the 1960s and 1970s, as depicted in a passage from the novel *Anita and Me* by Meera Syal:

> According to the newspapers and television, we simply did not exist. If a brown or black face ever did appear on TV, it stopped us all in our tracks. 'Daljit! Quick!' papa would call, and we would crowd round and coo over the walk-on in some detective series, some long-suffering actor in a gaudy costume with a goodness-gracious-me accent … and welcome him into our home like a long lost relative.
>
> (Syal 1996: 165)

The purpose of selecting this extract is twofold: on the one level, Syal is one of the actresses involved in both the comedy series *Goodness Gracious Me* and *The Kumars at No. 42*, so her words can assist in the understanding of the creative project behind those comedy series;[6] on another level, it allows attention to be drawn to the shift from, as Mary Gillespie has so powerfully put it, depictions of comic Asians (or, to be accurate, whites browned-up to play Asians), to humorous performances by Asian comics themselves (Gillespie 2003: 95).

Using strategies of intertextuality and deconstruction, *Goodness Gracious Me* recuperates and engages critically, even if in a light-hearted fashion, with comic narratives belonging to an era when white performers mimicked ethnic minority characters. From the outset, the title of the sitcom hybridizes a pervasive popular image of South Asians current in 1960s Britain. Indeed, not only the title of the programme, but also its theme tune were adapted and reclaimed from the hit comedy song 'Goodness Gracious Me' sung by Peter Sellers and Sophia Loren to promote *The Millionairess* (1960). In this film, directed by Anthony Asquith, a blackened-up Sellers acted the part of Ahmed el Kabir, a stereotypical Indian doctor, while Loren played Epifania Parerga, his patient. As a sort of counterpart to his brownface make-up, Sellers took on an absurd and caricatural Indian intonation in the song, while at the same time uttering the 'typically British' phrase 'goodness gracious me' (Gillespie 2003: 98).[7] British imitations of Indian speech – the 'goodness-gracious-me accent' Syal refers to in the passage from *Anita and Me* – are re-appropriated

in the Br-Asian comedy series: the theme song is a hybridized bhangra interpretation of the playful and jingly tune. Tellingly, the programme's provisional working title was 'Peter Sellers is Dead'. Despite being finally considered excessive, that initial title was probably chosen recalling that Sellers blackened his face again in Blake Edwards's screen comedy *The Party* (1968). There, he plays the character Hrundi V. Bakshi, an ill-fated Indian film extra, cast in a *Gunga Din*-like film,[8] who causes chaos when he blows up the set before the cameras start shooting.[9]

Designed by the team behind *Goodness Gracious Me*, the spoof chat show *The Kumars at No. 42* features the Kumars, an upwardly mobile family. Instead of the customary outward signs of affluence, they have adapted the back of their house to build a TV studio so that their son, the fame-obsessed Sanjeev, can break into the British media industry. Sanjeev's characterization relies on comic exaggeration to draw on the 'Asian Kool'[10] stereotype the outcome of the growing media visibility of Br-Asians. Episode after episode, Sanjeev hosts his own chat show while dodging the interruptions and embarrassing comments of his slightly dysfunctional family, who keep meddling and ridiculing him in Punjabi while he is interviewing his guests. In *The Kumars at No. 42*, the mainstream talk show format is parodied and deconstructed by having a Br-Asian family interview, on a weekly basis, prominent celebrities, stand-ins for the British establishment, and by locating it within the family's private house. From the outset, it is possible to set up obvious links between *The Aliens Show* and *The Kumars at No. 42* in their shared assimilation to mainstream discourses of cross-cultural representation and in their mostly mainstream audience. They are conscious of holding on to normative conceptions of what is deemed safely oriental and thus tolerable to chiefly white audiences. When challenged about the self-stereotyping Saladin gladly underwent as Maxim Alien, Rushdie's character argues that 'the damn show isn't an allegory. It's an entertainment. It aims to please' (Rushdie 1989: 63). The team behind *The Kumars at No. 42* did not wish to alienate mainstream viewers and deliberately capitalized on the show's crossover audience appeal by refusing to be politically correct and by self-consciously and deliberately engaging with re-Orientalism. In this instance, the interstitiality of Br-Asian cultural production prevents assimilation and full co-optation of dominant ideologies. Bearing in mind the present-day amplified tension between expectations for larger media exposure on the part of minority artists and suspicions of complicity with contemporary western corporatization, the cultural politics of *The Kumars at No. 42* both self-consciously celebrates and exposes the show's liminal positioning in the entertainment industry in a post-imperial Britain.

As denounced in Rushdie's account of Chamcha, the subversive effect of self-caricaturing falls necessarily short as effective counter-stereotyping when faced with the increasingly global mode of mass-market consumption. In one of the episodes of *The Kumars at No. 42*, when Stephen Fry accepts a cup of tea, Sanjeev says: 'The perfect blend of Indian flavour and British refinement,

similar to what this show is like, isn't it?' At this point, the host brings to the fore a thorny question: is this show not a part of British mainstream reinvigorated by a touch of 'Indian flavour', like tea itself? Notwithstanding the show's satirical edge, is it fair to expect mainstream comedy to escape the commodification of cultural translation? Perhaps to provide clues for the answer to this tricky question (and ironically reminiscent of the appropriation of the migrant Saladin for commercial ends) is the publication by Sanjeev Bhaskar, the actor who plays Sanjeev Kumar, of the TV tie-in book *Help Yourself with The Kumars* (2006) which, judging from the synopsis, is 'the Kumars' very own self-help guide to improving your life so you can be just as successful, rich and popular as the Kumars themselves'. What emerges at this juncture is that both Rushdie's narrative and *The Kumars at No. 42* manage to mirror the global spectacularization of cultural difference (Huggan 2001: 15) back at itself by exposing and exploring the spectacle's flaws and contradictions, turning it on its head by working from *within* it. Is this then a possible answer to or strategy for addressing re-Orientalism? Is the undermining from within, the exposure of 'how the trick is done', the revealing of the implicit, residual Eurocentrisms a way of subverting re-Orientalist tendencies?

Ultimately, Rushdie's popularity nonetheless depends on the marketing of the exotic and is very self-consciously situated in it. Indeed, notions of the exotic (whatever that may be supposed to entail and include) are ineradicably part of the 'marketing story' (Squires 2007: 119–46) attached to his narratives, a story which the writer strategically engages with rather than retreats from. Embedded within the fluidity of global culture, the term 'Rushdie' acts as a brand name for a marketed cultural good with all the attendant complexities, including interpretations blinkered by preconceived expectations. Regimes of representation have a tendency to fix meanings in order to better manage and promote a cultural product – in the present case, the twin processes of cultural deterritorialization (Rushdie as cosmopolitan diasporic writer) and reterritorialization (Rushdie as an Indian writer) aid such categorization. Self-irony, in particular the juggling with expectations of re-Orientalization, has definitely helped rupture such straitjackets. More than translating and mediating an authentic, exotic culture for his readers, the author suggests the possibility of an ironic, self-reflexive, if not metafictional, reading of postcolonial diasporic works: 'I must say first of all that description is itself a political act,' writes Rushdie in his essay 'Imaginary Homelands' (Rushdie 1991b: 13). In general terms, re-Orientalist postcolonial narratives have destabilized the spectacle of Otherness, morphing the display of the Other to accommodate the representational shifts effected by those involved not only in cultural production, but also in cultural circulation and valuation. This inevitably leads to questions of power – by encouraging a metatextual awareness in their readers, re-Orientalism works to reinstate agency and foster empowerment in the face of an engulfing global literary marketplace.

Rushdie both parodies and slyly reroutes Orientalism, opening the way for a re-examination of the expectations of his metropolitan readership. Such

recourse to re-Orientalism is not without its problems. The re-Orientalist representational strategy adopted by the writer is one of appropriation and resistance, although, like the use of stereotypes in general, it is a 'complex, ambivalent, contradictory mode of representation, as anxious as it is assertive' (Bhabha 1994: 70). Re-Orientalism feeds on (and into) Orientalism, while attempting to pre-empt its strength, insofar as it sustains the commodification of difference in an increasingly globalized market, while maintaining the potential to disrupt the systems within which that market operates. Probably one of the most disquieting characteristics of many postmodern analyses of power relations is their failure to effectively locate any kind of resistance in the strictly regulated world of social space or acknowledge the existence of even a partial dismantling of the shifting power relations underlying cultural production, notwithstanding the repeated emphasis on opposition to that power. This sentiment, of an entire social space irredeemably shaped by 'an implacable machine of power' (Hardt and Negri 2000: 323) recurs when one ponders the issue of whether or not Rushdie's writing reconstitutes the Orientalist stereotypes that it attempts to destabilize. In effect, re-Orientalist subversion is complicated by the powerful market forces undergirding Orientalism, calling into question at times the success of re-Orientalist experiments.

Postcolonial authors necessarily inhabit a provisional position – though subject to metropolitan mediation, it is also prone to revision due to the dynamic interdependence between margins and centres. Besides, as Jane M. Jacobs reminds us, it is 'a revisionary form of imperialist nostalgia that defines the colonized as always engaged in conscious work against the core' (Jacobs 1996: 15). Drawing on a concept of ethnicity not as a static, unchanging or monolithic construct, but as a mobile, unstable and polymorphous performative category, this chapter has attempted to contribute to the neutralizing of the pernicious opposition between ethnically defined individuals (e.g. Rushdie) and ethnically unmarked individuals (the mainstream). In the process, it has focused on negotiations of heavily mediated power relations in a field of representation dominated by the logic of multinational capitalism. Following this line of thought, one that hopefully has been able to accommodate the complexities of the permeability of borders and of the fluidity of identification, Rushdie's own standing in the field of postcolonial cultural production cannot be adequately charted using the worn-out two-dimensional map which would rely on the endlessly repeated and renewed dichotomies of centre/periphery and left-wing/right-wing. The writer's fictional manifesto has shifted in response to the challenges of liquid modernity (Bauman 2000) and has renewed itself as old constructs have failed to be productive. He eludes any easy classification of cultural politics; besides, transnational cultural flows (including mass media's worldwide reach and globe-spanning migration) foster conditions for an increasingly complex identitary cross-affiliation and for the rearticulation of overlapping cultural platforms.

Notes

1 Raminder Kaur and Virinder S. Kalra argue that the label 'Asian' 'has no consistent historical or global use' (Kaur and Kalra 1996: 218). Moreover, the term 'British Asian', commonly used to refer to British citizens who descended from South Asia, 'essentializes both terms' while 'hierarchizing the former against the latter'; as such, the alternative 'Br-Asian' is 'forwarded as an analytical tool from which it is possible to consider identity formations in the particular locality of Britain' (Kaur and Kalra 1996: 221). In its eliding of the letters '-itish' in 'British' and its use as a prefix separated from 'Asian' by a hyphen, the term 'Br-Asian' starkly highlights the multiple identitarian identifications and decentred sense of belonging that result from inhabiting *both* British and South Asian cultures.

2 Bhabha reasons:

> the borderline work of culture demands an encounter with 'newness' that is not part of the continuum of past and present. It creates a sense of the new as an insurgent act of cultural translation. Such an act does not merely recall the past as social cause or aesthetic precedent; it renews the past, refiguring it as a contingent 'in-between' space, that innovates and interrupts the performance of the present. The 'past-present' becomes part of the necessity, not the nostalgia, of living.
>
> (Bhabha 1994: 6)

3 This idea rests on Huggan's contention that 'difference is appreciated, but only in the terms of the beholder; diversity is translated and given a reassuringly familiar aesthetic cast' (Huggan 2001: 27).

4 'Chamcha' can mean both 'spoon' and 'yes-man' in Hindi.

5 A similar re-orientalization, followed by the immediate debunking of that strategy, opens Syal's novel *Anita and Me*:

> I do not have many memories of my very early childhood, apart from the obvious ones, of course. You know, my windswept, bewildered parents in their dusty Indian village garb standing in the open doorway of a 747, blinking back tears of gratitude and heartbreak as the fog cleared to reveal a sign they had been waiting for, dreaming of, the sign planted in the tarmac and emblazoned in triumphant hues of red, blue and white, the sign that simply said, WELCOME TO BRITAIN … Of course, this is the alternative history I trot out in job interview situations or, once or twice, to impress middle-class white boys sniffing round, excited by the thought of wearing a colonial maiden as a trinket on their arm. My earliest memory, in fact, is of the first time I understood the punchline to a joke.
>
> (Syal 1996: 9–10)

6 Syal has become a 'recommended author' in the English literature curriculum for secondary students in England, alongside authors such as Anita Desai, Benjamin Zephaniah and John Agard and in place of writers such as W. B. Yeats, Anthony Trollope and Lord Byron.

7 Interestingly, this British imitation of Indian speech is mentioned in *The Satanic Verses* with reference to Saladin's failure to maintain his carefully crafted English speech in Bombay:

> Years passed; and then Saladin Chamcha, actor, self-made man, returned to Bombay with the Prospero Players, to interpret the role of the Indian doctor in *The Millionairess* by George Bernard Shaw. On stage, he tailored his voice to the requirements of the part, but those long-suppressed locutions, those discarded vowels and consonants, began to leak out of his mouth out of the theatre as well. His voice was betraying him; and he discovered his component parts to be capable of other treasons, too.
>
> (Rushdie 1989: 49)

8 *Gunga Din* is a 1939 film directed by George Stevens. It is set in nineteenth-century British India and is famous for its stereotypical representation of the Indian character Gunga Din, who had always wanted to join the British Army but was not allowed to.

9 This subversion, or inversion, is vital to the critical stance of the programme; nevertheless, the engagement of *Goodness Gracious Me* with the history of representation of ethnic difference in TV comedy is regarded by some critics as controversial given the show's efforts to aim at (white) mainstream audiences. As Gillespie argues in her discussion of the programme, the producers 'did not want the kind of show that would inspire guilt in the white audience with constant reminders of racism and the legacy of imperialism' (Gillespie 2003: 97). In its appeal to both a minority Br-Asian audience and, most importantly, a mainstream one, the critic notes in the sketch show a trans-ethnicity approach (or 'stereovision') that exemplifies the growing representation of cultural difference in depoliticized and commodified forms. This approach glosses over the legacy of empire and colonialism as well as the reality of tense ethnic relations in contemporary Britain for the sake of the broadest possible audience acceptance. In the critical debate concerning the show's progressiveness, Chris Weedon had already alerted to a contentious issue: 'When looked at from the perspective of challenging white British ethnocentrism, a key question that *Goodness Gracious Me* raises is the extent to which apparently progressive comedy is overdetermined by the long-standing reliance of mainstream comedy on racist stereotyping' (Weedon 2000: 264). From a similar standpoint, Sarita Malik added a further interrogation: 'Because … stereotypes are negotiated by Asians and deliberately subverted through visual puns, spectacle and parody, can we safely say that racist readings are not gleaned from the text?' (Malik 2002: 103). In this respect, Malik brings to the fore the extent to which ambivalence works in and through comedy shows in which stereotypical representations are simultaneously called upon and, as the programme-makers have it, confronted and interrogated (Malik 2002: 106).

10 The 'New Asian Kool' is a marketing label devised in the mid 1990s which heralded the hypervisibility of South Asian diasporic cultural production within mainstream British culture.

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7 Foreign fantasies and genres in *Bride & Prejudice*

Jane Austen re-Orientalizes British Bollywood

Tamara S. Wagner

Gurinder Chadha's *Bride & Prejudice* (2004) is a Bollywood-influenced Jane Austen adaptation that plays with Orientalist and Occidentalist clichés by simultaneously tapping into two intensely marketable genres. Combining elements of Hindi film and the genre of the literature adaptation, it trades on a current craze for Bollywood elements in the international market and draws on a renewed revival of period drama for the big screen. Its spatial and temporal transposition of Austen's 1813 novel *Pride and Prejudice* into twenty-first-century Amritsar in north-west India at first sight simply appears to 'update' a timeless classic. But as close reading shows, the film defamiliarizes present-day concepts of love, marriage and financial exchange across the globe by filtering them through Austen's satire. Targeted at a global audience, this British-made film employs different layers of irony in an attempt to transcend the confines of old and new forms of stereotyping. While questioning Hollywood's hegemony from the point-of-view of the British film industry, it capitalizes on the defamiliarizing effects of exotic or foreign genre elements to suggest new ways of turning cultural exchanges into intertextual interchanges and culture clashes into constructive genre breaks. This twofold market appeal of both Bollywood film and Austen adaptations, however, threatens to upstage the self-reflexive potential of such genre experiments, altogether undermining a sustainable critical thrust.

What singles out the film as a particularly intriguing case study is that it satirizes the marketing of the exotic on which its international success nevertheless largely depends. Stylistic mixing is matched by juxtaposing India, Britain and the US. Fantasies of 'other' spaces thereby pinpoint both America's and India's exoticization of Old England as much as that of a typified Orient. Yet sheer excess of genre crossings neither automatically ensures a transcendence of cultural baggage (including additional baggage accumulated through appropriation itself), nor creates by default a critical rather than an imitative pastiche. But how can we accurately gauge both the critical potential of such a stylistic amalgamation and the additional stereotyping it might inadvertently reinforce? In order to address the complexities of sustaining both Austen's irony – notoriously difficult to be captured on screen – while making the most of a partly parodic homage to classic Bollywood despite the

difficulties of dealing with the exotic in contemporary cinema, I situate *Bride & Prejudice* within critical discourses on the self- or re-Orientalization that threatens to reintroduce elements of exoticization into seemingly self-reflexive reworkings. A close analysis of the slippages that fissure the film's central ironies reveals both the problems and the opportunities of any transposition of genres, texts, or paradigms.

The term 'transposition' helps us to understand how the most complex and experimental reworkings become enabled to transcend the limits of literature adaptation as a specific genre. Transposition is a useful term that moves beyond the idea of a necessary update that is to work 'as bait to attract more general readers and to help justify including the novels in school lists' (Macdonald and Macdonald 2003: 1). The thematic structure of *Bride & Prejudice* overtly – even in a tongue-in-cheek-fashion, as I shall show – hinges on genre crossings between Bollywood film, literature adaptation, post-colonial reworkings and also partly parodic revisionism. The resulting transposition of a 'classic' literary text consequently works through a twofold repackaging of iconic traditions famed for their general popularity: Austen and Bollywood. As a result, the film's deliberate targeting of a specific audience compels close critical attention to the pitfalls of self-exoticization. As part of a renewed craze for transpositions, or updates, of canonical fiction, Austen is once again introduced to new viewers (and ultimately perhaps readers, too), and so is Bollywood. Part and parcel of an increasingly visible marketing of elements borrowed from Hindi cinema, the musical interludes, choreography, as well as multinational and multi-ethnic casting (including the former Miss World and leading Bollywood actress Aishwarya Rai as Lalita Bakshi, Austen's Elizabeth Bennet) force an intriguing clash of genre paradigms that could perhaps not be any more dissimilar. While it has repeatedly been questioned whether the resulting blockbuster, with its necessarily distorting appropriation of Hindi film and classic British literature, really does more than merely cash in on both, the film is saved from lapsing into a mere rehearsal of clichés by attempting to re-create Austen's ironies. How this transposition manages to go beyond the mere appropriation of a 'classic' text, but then becomes complicated by strong market forces that propel its re-Orientalization, prompts us to reconsider the limits of such experiments. These limits are imposed upon popular film not just by the demands of the market, but ironically also by the theoretical confines of film (and more general cultural) criticism.

In the repackaging and exportation of an 'Orient' for international consumption, re-Orientalization operates as an internal process that mimics the recently much deplored exoticism in popular culture. This mimicking may at times be inadvertent, yet the self-othering it implies is as often deliberately market-driven. As Lisa Lau and Ana Mendes stress in the introduction to this volume, 're-Orientalists … faithfully keep to the tradition of Orientalism' in rendering up the East 'as a spectacle for consumption' with different flavourings. The resulting products join what Graham Huggan has so pointedly

termed the production of a 'postcolonial exotic': in a marketing of multiculturalism on a global scale, an alterity industry is built on 'mechanics of exoticist representation/consumption' (2001: x). This consumerist exoticization permeated fashionable discourses on diaspora, hybridity and multiculturalism in the West throughout the 1990s. By 1997, Stanley Fish could symptomatically arraign a boutique multiculturalism that invited the production of all too predictable, clichéd exponents of the exotic that were being sold as consumer goods. Although Fish posited a peculiarly vague conceptualization of what he called 'strong' or 'very strong' multiculturalism as a possible counterpoise, what is most important to note here is that he focused on food, festivals and food festivals as the most easily consumable output of neatly stratified cultural diversity. Toying with the commonly extended metaphor of consumption, Fish specifically targets 'the multiculturalism of ethnic restaurants, weekend festivals, and high profile flirtations with the other' (1997: 378). The edible is lumped together with the flirtatious in a parody of sexualized food metaphors that are indisputably peppered through cultural fictions of 'exotic' or 'ethnic' consumption. Over the last decades, such fashionable promotion of alterity has increasingly come under critical investigation. Perhaps most influentially, in expressing her disillusionment with 'the chorus of celebrating the idea of diaspora', Ien Ang condemns the fabrication of an at best limited set of identities. They are 'strait-jackets' manufactured by the then fashionable rhetoric of identity politics in the 1990s: 'many people obviously need identity (or think they do), but identity can just as well be a strait-jacket' (Ang 2001: 12, vii).

As a textual analysis of Chadha's *Bride & Prejudice* shows, self-irony can rupture such straitjackets, yet the resultant juggling with re-Orientalist attractions renders the intended escape notably difficult. Re-Orientalization thereby emerges as the internalized version of a new Orientalism – frequently termed 'neo-Orientalism' – that has been dangerously distorted as a positive development in often virulently exacted identity politics. Whereas neo-Orientalizing tendencies refer to exoticizations of 'the Orient' in contemporary literature and film that often feature it as an 'other' space, located elsewhere and hence easily typecast, re-Orientalization happens within seemingly self-reflexive reworkings. On the most literal level, this means works by Asian writers and filmmakers, or produced in Asia. But as the internal strategies of a British-made film by a British Asian director showcase, such re-Orientalization can be both ambiguous and complex. Re-Orientalization, therefore, may overlap or form part of a more general neo-Orientalism in contemporary popular culture, but as it occurs in works that pertain to be a reaction to common forms of exoticization, it is arguably also more invidious.

Throughout the latter half of the twentieth century, both postcolonial and diasporic productions have repeatedly displayed a tendency to define themselves as self-conscious reworkings or reactions to earlier Orientalism or current neo-Orientalism – in the process curiously endorsing necessarily reductive categories. Playing into a streamlining of what might otherwise have

been experimental redirections, they have ironically been immensely instrumental in constructing some of the most limiting paradigms. Strategies of re-Orientalization consequently rear their hydra-like heads as the outgrowths of both market pressures and audience expectations are engendered in the criticism itself. Over the last decades, discourses on the multicultural and the hybrid have generated a self-perpetuating, largely imitative production of similar works that meet a demand for more narratives featuring the same (or very similar) types of Others. To an extent, in short, re-Orientalized texts spell out what consumers of the new postcolonial or, more loosely defined, multicultural exotic apparently wish to purchase: more cross-cultural affairs, more updated travelogues into far-away places, more juxtapositions of palm trees and skyscrapers, more reviewing of 'multi-ethnic' food – the latter in a particularly slippery invitation of a potentially comical literalization of exotic consumption.

Occidentalist inversions additionally reinforce prevailing clichés. Just standing them on their heads only makes them all the more widely recognizable. In this, Occidentalist representation has perpetuated perhaps most insistently the impact of such stereotypes on the popular imagination. Representations of the so-called West as the object of Occidentalist desire in *Bride & Prejudice* brings out this reinforcement of common clichés through their seeming inversion especially well. The film, in fact, attempts to play with (if not necessarily transcend) precisely such clichés. What has recently shown potential at least to criticize the stereotyping intrinsic to Orientalism and Occidentalism tendencies in popular narratives of otherness indeed is a self-ironic engagement with both sets of expectations. Whether sheer parody can instigate a more encompassing redirection in the representation of changing global culture must of course remain doubtful. That targeted consumers tend to misunderstand complex attempts to break through their expectations can be seen from the earliest reviews, such as the *Sunday Mirror*'s reductive description of *Bride & Prejudice* as merely an 'attempt to make the Bollywood experience accessible to Western audiences' (Adams 2004: 46). As I shall show in more detail, this has resulted in what Ana Mendes has recently already diagnosed, among 'most responses to the film', as 'a puzzling consensus on its "Indianness"' (2007: 100). Such responses, in fact, have unhappily obscured that 'one of [Chadha's] aims was to probe contemporary cultural stereotypes' (Wilson 2006: 324). Even if we keep the dangers of falling into the trap of an authorial fallacy here in mind, Cheryl Wilson is certainly right when she points out in a recent article that 'Chadha keeps viewers aware of the form' as 'she both adheres to and pokes fun at Bollywood conventions' (2006: 330). What I seek to address here as a central issue is that *Bride & Prejudice* also offers an illustrative example of the way misreadings that are based on viewers' expectations of an 'exotic' product short-circuit the endeavour to get away from or parody common clichés.

A misreading of the film's use of irony has ironically reduced it to an exotic spectacle. But this is not to say that the film itself does not plead guilty of

employing re-Orientalizing strategies. In part this is indisputably the result of its cultural as well as financial investment in the promotion of Bollywood tradition in the international market. Its importation and integration into mainstream cinema necessarily hinges on the most recognizable and hence more superficial elements. The very vagueness of the rehashed paradigms, however, has at times been facilely understood as the realities of contemporary India instead of the distinct paradigms of a subgenre intensely aware of its own play with recurring clichés. A detailed interrogation of the film's shifting negotiation of the exotic (both Orientalist and Occidentalist) consequently has to answer two related questions: the extent to which postcolonial, or diasporic, exoticization has been projected on to the film in interpretations blinkered by preconceived expectations and, conversely, the extent to which re-Orientalizing strategies form part and parcel – and possibly a necessary evil – of the film's deliberate crossing between different genre paradigms and film traditions. Above all, a careful critical assessment of its experimental potential needs to be firmly set in the foreground in order that some of the most clichéd interpretations are partly pre-empted, or satirized, even as the film continues to struggle with the temptation just to toy with clichés.

'Too light, and bright, and sparkling': dancing to Austen's ironies

Most visibly perhaps, Chadha's attempt to transpose Austen's ironies on screen is undercut by a self-consciously exotic subtext that threatens to take over the narrative structure as a whole: the theme of cultural clashes, or of East and West becoming entwined. Much of the comic effect is grounded in this subtext, as is a considerable part of the film's marketability. It may even be due to the colourful Bollywood dance scenes and their successful translation of Austen's use of metaphors drawn from dancing (Wilson 2006: 325–28) that the final result is closer to what Austen herself termed the 'too light, and bright, and sparkling' atmosphere of the original text (Austen 1997: 203) than many a more purist dramatization. And yet, Austen's subtle ironies are at times simply displaced by mere slapstick – Mr Darcy nearly losing his trousers springs to mind. It is not only that the reduction of intricate issues of status and class to a 'foreign affair' threatens to obscure the subtleties of the original text.[1] More detrimentally, this shift (from class to race, as it were) also introduces a disconcerting re-Orientalist slant. This twofold simplification of what could theoretically be a complex reworking becomes particularly pressing in the final scenes. As the leading couples ride off into the sunset on their elephants, they leave behind a bundle of unsolved plot twists. While critics have diagnosed this slapdash escape as a sign, or symptom, of Bollywood feel-good conventions (Ramachandran 2004: 44), it makes it difficult to see how this can work either as a successful literature adaptation or as the cultural criticism with which the film is generally credited.

Bride & Prejudice, it is important to note, was 'simultaneously released in a Hindi dubbed version as *Balle Balle Amritsar to LA*, a title that makes no

reference to the Jane Austen text *Pride and Prejudice* on which the movie is based, but foregrounds the diasporic itinerary of the film' (Malik 2007: 83). Cross-cultural issues had an essential impact on marketing processes. The film's tagline – 'Bollywood meets Hollywood … and it's a perfect match' – undeniably traded on the success of United States and Canadian productions such as Mira Nair's *Monsoon Wedding* (2001) and Deepa Mehta's *Bollywood/ Hollywood* (2002), which had already brought 'the aesthetics of Bollywood and Hollywood together for crossover audiences' (Dudrah 2006: 17). This was despite the fact that the British-made film also attacked Hollywood hegemony, and I shall come back to its parody of 'American' perceptions. The simplistic dichotomy flaunted by the tagline, however, completely erased not just Austen, but the entire complexity of *Bride & Prejudice* as British Bollywood. Ignorance of the film's production history hence already situated it among a proliferation of immensely sellable manifestations of current re-Orientalization on a global scale. Film critics tended to sidestep the intricate itinerary of migrating, or shifting, exotic spaces despite the fact that Chadha was to emphasize it repeatedly: 'Let us remember, *Bride & Prejudice* … was financed by Pathé in Europe, and American rights were pre-sold to Miramax. It doesn't have Indian money in it' (Arnold 2005). Ana Mendes has recently analysed the 'puzzling consensus on [the film's] "Indianness" – underscoring notions of translation, masala, and fusion – even if the filmmaker defines it (and herself) as British' (2007: 100). It might, in fact, be far more accurately viewed as part of Britain's 'Asian Kool'. This subgenre is located at the intersection of British and Indian diasporic media,[2] and yet the work of filmmakers of Indian descent has regularly been lumped together with any Asian diasporic texts. This category is clearly at once too broad (in conflating different diasporas) and too narrow (in ignoring overlaps with other developments). As a result, such films have been laid open to accusations of 'hypervisibility' (Desai 2004) despite their marked differences.

In *Beyond Bollywood*, Jigna Desai undoubtedly makes an important point when she suggests that South Asian diasporic productions are integrated into the canons of national cinemas through a logic of cultural hybridity, and that this assimilation is based 'primarily on profit' (2004: 65). Such appropriations cash in on and further the films' hypervisibility in the market (2004: 65; cf. Mendes 2007: 96). Karen D'Souza and Tasleem Shakur have gone further in questioning the entire project of British Indian film and television production as mainstream entertainment: 'How far can these comic cultural portrayals … constructed to the sensibility of mainstream British audiences offer a social critique, or are they merely a pragmatic strategy?' (2003: 90). This fails to make sense of the popularity of self-irony in British Asian popular media and underestimates British Indians as a considerable market force. In a recent interview, Chadha even suggests that a film exclusively watched by Britain's South Asian communities would work commercially, although with *Bride & Prejudice*, she admits, she aimed to create 'a multi-national, multi-cultural crowd-pleaser' (Macnab 2004: 37). Accounts of her work in overview-oriented

studies nevertheless fail to differentiate between the exoticization of Bollywood elements in Hollywood film and the current reworking of British (film) culture, which has seen Indian producers develop self-consciously English texts (such as the 1980s Merchant Ivory productions). More recently, it has also witnessed the international success of Danny Boyle's *Slumdog Millionaire* (2008), a British film located purely in India.

Situating *Bride & Prejudice* squarely among global diasporic discourses without taking these specificities into account hence completely ignores both its aesthetic composition and its cultural significance. Clearly, it is 'an ambivalent text, central to British Asian filmmaking whilst being re-appropriated into the multicultural heritage industry' (Mendes 2007: 98). That a subsequent critical focus on cultural or genre hybridity has given rise to some of the most virulently critical comments from within the interpretative frameworks of diaspora or globalization studies already prompts a careful reconsideration. When Gayatri Gopinath typecasts Chadha as part of 'a new crop of Indian diasporic feminist filmmakers' who 'are in no small part responsible for this translation of Bollywood into Hollywood, in that they act as modern-day tour guides' (2005: 162), the implied accusation is essentially twofold. It suggests both a savvy cashing in on a fad that increasingly empties a specific genre (Bollywood) of its meaning and a paying into mere self-exoticization, and re-Orientalization, for the international market. Admittedly, it is one of the inadvertent ironies in *Bride & Prejudice* that its struggle with the dangers of self-exoticization is not always successful. The added theme of cross-cultural affairs (both financial and romantic) certainly exacerbates the issue, and as such its introduction is aesthetically as well as ideologically flawed. What I wish to suggest, however, is that the film's self-conscious triangulation of various foreign genre elements breaks through at least the most limiting dichotomies.

Repeated recourse to a triangulation of shifting exotic places operates as a means to circumvent the dichotomous East-versus-West-story. To circumvent or, with a pointed self-reflexivity, to satirize the customary dualities of culture-clash narratives is crucial to the film's redeployment of both re-oriented Orientalist and Occidentalist motifs. The recasting of Mr Darcy as an American and the consequent inclusion of the heavily overused motif of the American abroad may well make one cringe, but the film then proceeds to derail this intrinsically cliché-ridden plotline by introducing an additional juxtaposition of variously Othered characters. Predictably, the central foreign affair is a typical side effect of an ultimately failed business venture, i.e. the extension of a hotel chain into India. Yet the introduction of a backpacker in search of the 'Real India' as the 'updated' version of Austen's libertine officer is one of the film's redeeming masterstrokes. Johnny Wickham is a directionless, deliberately rootless and homeless Englishman. In a comical literalization of the way he is clearly adrift, he first emerges from the sea in India and then apparently stays in a houseboat in England. Nor is this the end of the film's partly tongue-in-cheek deployment of the convenient literary technique

of doubled characters. Will Darcy, the American hotel magnate, is aligned not just with backpacking Wickham, but also with Mr Kohli, a Non Resident Indian (NRI) accountant who is the film's version of Mr Collins, Austen's unctuous clergyman. As they all appear – significantly, as mutually interchangeable – in the heroine's dream of being 'an overseas bride', I shall take this dream-sequence as a representative scene. To prepare for this detailed reading, I shall first assess the film's use of different literary and filmic conventions as it self-consciously juggles different re-Orientalizing tendencies.

Beyond the filmic theme park

'I don't want you turning India into a theme park' (*Bride & Prejudice*, 2004) – Lalita Bakshi, Chadha's version of Austen's Elizabeth Bennet, sharply turns on her misunderstood Darcy, an Oxbridge-educated heir to an American multi-million-dollar hotel chain. How much more ironic could it be, therefore, that Chadha's films have received the somewhat dubious praise of working best as 'modern-day tour guides that in effect "modernise" Bollywood form and content for non-South Asian audiences' (Gopinath 2005: 162)? Surely one would think that the film's two-pronged use of transposition (of Austen as well as of Bollywood) ought to counteract such a simplified – and simplifying, even essentializing – approach. And yet, its achievement has all too easily been reduced, over and over again, to an 'attempt to make the Bollywood experience accessible to Western audiences' (Adams 2004: 46). Exoticization as a problematic issue may partly be pre-empted in the film itself, but its ironic dimension is often missed or deliberately elided. Its absorption into readymade critical paradigms (of the diasporic, the hybrid, the transnational, the globalized British Indian, and so on) has not only all too easily typecast the filmmaker, her work and her (target) audience.[3] It has actively prevented critical attention to what the text itself actually does. A new look at the engagement with Occidentalist as well as Orientalist desire in the film enables us to move beyond quick praise for its 'multilayered, hybrid form' (Sutherland 2005: 357), as well as beyond allegations of its ideological complicity with British or United States' imperialism (Malik 2007: 80). *Bride & Prejudice* clearly merits close analysis on its own account – as a coherent whole comprised of seemingly incongruous genre elements that form more than just a good mix and match.

This is of course not to deny that this mixture operates as the film's main characteristic, even its driving force. However, instead of being neatly sorted out and separately dissected, these defamiliarized genre elements need to be understood within a consciously self-reflexive working out of popular paradigms. In lifting the entire plot and much of the characterization from *Pride and Prejudice*, Chadha's transposition of a classic literary text may join a proliferating number of such 'updates', but as it translates Austen's interest in money matters into the present-day global business world, different versions of globetrotting become an important connecting thread. Riches themselves

are no more criticized than Mr Darcy's exemplary estate is in Austen's novel. But there is no way of achieving or negotiating travel, migration, cosmopolitanism or diaspora that escapes the satirical thrust. This certainly assists in recreating at least partially the irony of Austen's works – an admittedly difficult feat on screen. But what does this do to the cross-cultural affair as a currently intensely marketable plot device? What is particularly noteworthy is a striking dichotomy in the critical reception. While Austen scholars have largely endorsed *Bride & Prejudice* as a loose remake of a timelessly powerful plotline (Wilson 2006: 323–24; Sutherland 2005: 357), accounts that have concentrated on contextualizing the film in identity politics, racialization or global marketing processes have been very doubtful (at best) about its play with the clichés it indisputably markets. Their approach singularly denies that different levels of re-Orientalization are already satirized in the film itself.

Surely sentiments expressed by the would-be 'Amrikan' Mr Kohli, who has 'made a packet as an accountant in LA' (*Bride & Prejudice*, 2004) or British Asian Kiran Balraj, the equally snobbish Caroline Bingley of the film, are hardly to be taken as exemplary or even necessarily representative. This has not stopped critics from judging the film's representation of India from these characters' 'broad generalisations about arranged marriages and spicy food' which Chadha apparently just 'skims over … much like she did with perceptions of British Asians in the popular but shallow *Bend It Like Beckham* (2002)' (Ramachandran 2004: 44). The most snobbish commentary on food in rural India is voiced by Kiran, who is promptly admonished to 'stop being such a coconut. This is our dear, dear motherland' (*Bride & Prejudice*, 2004). Her brother's admonishment is of course in itself tongue-in-cheek. Still, Kiran's cultural hybridity also corresponds effectively to the Bingleys' ambiguous class-status. In Austen's novel, they are *nouveaux riches* eager to conceal that their money has been made by trade. On this level of plotting, the projection from nineteenth-century class to current issues of global migration and culture conflict works almost seamlessly.

But if Kiran's cutting remarks pointedly contrast with Darcy's inaptitude as he endeavours to make the most of the offered tourist experience until his trousers slip down, this very contrast explodes any further workable parallelism along the same lines. Darcy's struggle with unfamiliar clothing is the real reason he declines to dance with Lalita. This sadly distorts Austen's probing representation of a more complex mixture of shyness, pride and class-consciousness. Instead, this Darcy becomes both pathetic and a figure of fun. More disturbingly still, Kohli's empty-headed boasts of his eligibility, of his 'Green Card, new house, big cash', have been read as a problematic engagement with model minorities in the United States (Malik 2007: 79). Although he may occupy a 'scene-stealing role' (Ramachandran 2004: 44), he clearly remains a caricature. Neither his boasts nor his actual successes or failures are any more representative of Chadha's opinions or the realities of diasporic communities than Mr Collins's behaviour is of Austen's attitudes towards religion or the clergy. Instead, satire spells out some of the most overtly

caricatured prejudices. Although much of the stereotyping is done by characters of Indian origin, the seemingly neat transposition becomes obscured. It is upstaged by the cross-cultural theme.

Nevertheless, the corresponding alignments between characters help measure the extent not just of the source text's reworking, but also the introduction of re-Orientalizing elements. In that it plays right into the most blinkered audience expectations; the cross-cultural affair, for one, is embarrassingly clichéd in its overall structure, redeemed only by minor characters so obviously overdrawn that they operate as successful caricatures. Whether these satirical slants are always grasped by a mainstream audience remains uncertain. Briefly, the Bennets, living beyond their means in a small estate entailed away from their five daughters, find their corresponding counterparts in the Bakshis in their decaying former imperial residence in rural Amritsar.[4] Bingley, the promising newcomer, is turned into Balraj, a second-generation British Asian lawyer. He arrives in town to attend a wedding, accompanied by his friend, Will Darcy, heir to an international hotel business with its headquarters in Los Angeles, which stands in for the novel's desirable estate Pemberley. His inherited riches, however, are boosted by his English education, signalling that there is clearly more than just one transatlantic trajectory at work in what has been termed the film's 'diasporic itinerary' (Malik 2007: 79).

What is more, the notable ease of this transposition of characters across time and space creates in itself a comical titillation for an audience familiar with either *Pride and Prejudice* or any of its earlier adaptations. Apart from the deletion of some sisters (one of Bingley's and one of the five Bennet sisters) and the transformation of Darcy's self-important aunt, Lady Catherine de Bourgh, into his similarly overbearing mother, Catherine Darcy, the cast of characters lets itself be moved into a different cultural context with a startlingly comical evocation of apparently perennial issues. On the surface, therefore, the result is simply a reworking of a classic text. In its geographical as well as temporal transposition of familiar plotlines, after all, *Bride & Prejudice* does not really break any new ground. Instead, it stands in a tradition of adaptations that can be traced back to the Renaissance project of updating classics precisely to posit a universality of human behaviour by foregrounding the ease with which it could be recreated at different times and places (Harris 2003: 51). Although such productions have flourished on stage for centuries, film and television dramatizations have boosted this intertextual relationship and engendered probing inversions. Self-consciously revisionist versions trade on a refracting of precursor texts. Dominating the market in the second half of the twentieth century, rewritings within the same medium (prose fiction) significantly paved the way for transpositions that sought to remould underpinning ideals or agendas as well. These refracting versions famously ranged from Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966), the most influential among several reworkings of Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847), to the retelling of Charles Dickens's *Great Expectations* (1861) in Peter Carey's *Jack Maggs* (1997). Ironically, Rhys's postcolonial spin on the original's oblique references

to the offstage West Indies has been turned into some of the steamiest filmic representations of the Victorian Empire's marginalized Others.[5] In a telling reversal of these once so fashionable inversions, *Great Expectations* has more recently been reworked once again in Lloyd Jones's *Mister Pip* (2007). Likewise 'writing back from the margins' of Britain's former colonies, Jones is instead more interested in re-evaluating 'Dickens's novel for its "humanistic ideas"' (Gribble 2009: 186). At the beginning of the twenty-first century, this growing reaction against the aesthetic limitations of ideologically driven postcolonial appropriation of classic works thus indicates an important development in both film and fiction.

The skewed forcing of postcolonial as well as feminist criticism into the 1999 *Mansfield Park*, Patricia Rozema's 'postmodern pastiche of Austen's novel' (Fergus 2003: 70), is an extreme example of such an appropriation. This is all the more so because the better-realized parallelism of the triumphant Navy and the bankrupt baronet at the opening of the 1995 version of *Persuasion* forms a good point of comparison to Rozema's interpolation of different cultural discourses of the time (such as anti-slavery debates). The earlier production foregrounds a juxtaposition that is already an important thematic structure in the novel; the postmodern pastiche sets fashionable cultural discussions of the 1990s to film, completely upstaging an already distorted plot. In a similar vein, Amy Heckerling's 'truly transmogrified' teenage chick-flick (Stern 2000: 221) *Clueless* (1995) is very loosely based on Austen's *Emma* (1816), transposing some of the novel's plotlines and adaptable characters into 1990s California. Such reworkings can clearly be either emulative or an inversion of the original's intentions or effects. Like any other form of adaptation, transpositions undoubtedly open up a text to new audiences and readerships.

Not surprisingly, the loosest versions of Austen's works have been endorsed as successfully 'caus[ing] the viewer to conclude, after having returned to the text and evaluated the reading that the film has delivered, that the filmmakers have a point, an interpretation which deserves a hearing' (Mosier 2003: 228). Hence, these films operate as an 'effective ambassador in the twenty-first century' despite the fact that hybridity always implies miscegenation and may, in some lights appear 'disrespectful of her [Austen's] novels' classic status' (Sutherland 2005: 358).[6] In seeing a character, often a now iconographic figure, a set of such figures or a recognizable motif moved – transposed – from one genre, time or setting into another, on one level a transposition can thus be seen as simply providing a more extreme version of what all adaptations do. Not all updated versions of classic narratives necessarily involve such transpositions across time or space, and conversely, transpositions do not always imply an updating of pressing themes or underpinning ideals and ideologies. The effect at times is merely a deliberate defamiliarization. Be this as it may, neither popularity nor effectiveness should be a more definitive category of evaluation than fidelity to the source text. On the contrary, analyses of transpositions altogether need to get away

from the tour-guide syndrome. In the case of a 'Bollywood Austen', this syndrome necessarily poses a threat on more than one level.

A critical probing of the levels of intertextuality and the aesthetic effects of the transposition process in *Bride & Prejudice* may therefore fruitfully counteract any blinkered lumping together of complex texts (and intertexts) under ready-made categories. This is especially important since such categories are often sorted according to a filmmaker's ethnicity or a specific formal element (such as Bollywood dance interludes). As we have seen, much of the dilemma about its re-Orientalizing tendencies has largely been created by the way *Bride & Prejudice* was marketed and received. The injunction not to turn India (or a Bollywoodized Austen, for that matter) into a theme park tailor-remade for a multi-million-dollar blockbuster, however, already features as an important subtext in the film. A much needed critical reviewing consequently needs to highlight how the film already anticipates (and ironically re-presents) cultural appropriation. Genre mixing at once introduces and helps to work out problems of re-Orientalization that seem almost impossible to avoid. Chadha's Austen is transformed across time and space in an ironic tribute to a cinematic India and its fashionable re-imagining elsewhere. Close analysis of a central dream-sequence shows how it plays on the parodic resources of such a Kohliwood vision of life abroad. Neatly encapsulating the film's experiments with popular culture's growing investment in re-Orientalizing impulses, it at once contains its most self-ironic references and its most overt realization of its underpinning problems with re-Orientalization.

Dreaming of an overseas bride

Kohliwood is Mr Kohli's dreamscape of successful financial as well as geographical mobility. It significantly appears as such only in its manifestation within Lalita's nightmare. This dream-sequence occupies a pivotal position in the film in that it juggles highly marketable issues in a sharply satirical fashion. This underscores the film's overall tone while specifically stressing that these themes are going to be explored primarily through satire. Austen's subtle irony might at times be smothered by a more overt, more blatant, altogether less understated emphasis on comic effects, yet coarseness certainly suits the presentation of vulgar Mr Kohli. At the same time, this scene-stealing role combines most effectively the transposition of Austen's plot and the introduction of the additional theme of cross-cultural relationships. This dual project finds a well-suited – precisely because caricatured – embodiment in Mr Kohli. Like Austen's Mr Collins, he arrives with the purpose of finding a wife among his cousins, and inspires hope in the mother and amusement in the father, who openly relishes his guest's inane conversation and bad manners. Collins/Kohli proposes to Elizabeth/Lalita by listing his 'reasons for marrying' (Austen 1994: 299) – 'No Life Without Wife', as the refrain goes in *Bride & Prejudice* – and is accepted by her financially more prudent friend Charlotte/Chandra immediately after this proposal's rejection. In one of the

film's more hilarious shifts, Kohli's self-advertisement of having made it big in America corresponds to Collins's boast of having been 'so fortunate as to be distinguished by the patronage of the Right Honourable Lady Catherine de Bourgh [in all her] bounty and beneficence' (Austen 1994: 272). This structure, however, then becomes further supplemented by Kohli's assertion that he is in search of a 'traditional wife' in sharp contrast to '[o]ur girls that are born there', who have 'totally lost their roots'. This is his 'one problem with America': 'You know, in US, they're all too outspoken and career-orientated. And some have even turned into … the lesbian' (*Bride & Prejudice*, 2004). This is followed by the younger Bakshi sisters' suppressed giggles. Issues of gender as well as class clearly inflect the representation of global migration, establishing a closer link to Austen's transposed social milieu. In addition, this newly introduced theme itself becomes focused in the figure of the overseas bride. The comically startling lapse from Lalita's own Occidentalist dreamscape into a cliché-ridden and-riddled nightmare, I wish to illustrate, intriguingly disentangles its ambiguous evocation.

The imported traditional overseas bride Kohli covets forms an extreme epitome of stereotyped cultural differences from within (or rather, from within the diaspora). At the same time, it conveys the striking parallelism of Orientalism and Occidentalism throughout the film. Occidentalist desire is presented as a longing not just to go West, but to exoticize life in the West. That the latter constitutes a markedly imaginary space engendered by fantasies of the foreign becomes overtly realized in the lumping together of the UK and the US as commercial rivals projected on to the romantic rivals Wickham and Darcy. Corresponding to, rather than counterpoising, old or new forms of Orientalization, Occidentalism forms a recurring refrain that may frame the introduction of several genre shifts, but which is also crucial to a dual criticism of exoticization. The wedding with which the film opens already addresses a move abroad through marriage as a topical issue. It is posited as a move to a centre, which is chiefly the centre of attention at home: the overseas bride's stardom as 'the golden girl'. As one of the first songs in the film goes, 'A marriage has come to town. There are stars in your way. From Amritsar to UK. There are stars in your way. From Amritsar to UK. You are the golden girl. The centre of the world' (*Bride & Prejudice*, 2004). It is, revealingly, with the introduction of Kohli that this becomes a projected journey from Amritsar to Los Angeles (echoing the film's title, *Balle Balle Amritsar to LA*, we remember, in the dubbed Hindi version).

This shift is comically prefigured by a joke about a man who has made it good in America and can now boast three swimming pools (one of which is kept empty for times when he does not feel like swimming at all). In a stress on changing gender paradigms, the same issue is then more seriously addressed through Darcy's set-down by Lalita when he describes the groom's successful search for 'a bride who was traditional' (*Bride & Prejudice*, 2004) – the first mention of the word 'tradition' or 'traditional' in the film – through match-making as typically Indian and 'a little backward' (*Bride & Prejudice*,

2004): 'Is that what you think, too, that India is the place to go for a simple woman?' It is of course central to the film's underpinning project of transposing *Pride and Prejudice* into a contemporary and emphatically global environment that these prejudices about overseas brides inform the lead couple's sparring matches. In a differentiation between opposing points of view determined not merely by ethnicity, culture or class, but also gender, Lalita seeks to explode readymade explanations (or excuses) bandied about by Darcy's male British Indian friends. So far he has swallowed them wholeheartedly as the one and only available authentic version. Such authenticity altogether needs to be questioned – with regard to the seemingly representative exponents of both the East and the West.

Bride & Prejudice proceeds to explore the equally stereotyping exoticizing of an Occident of the imagination in order to counterpoise the problem of re-Orientalization. It is made clear that just as protagonists in and of the West nurture common prejudices in their encounters with contemporary India, their counterparts in India display certain expectations of Kohliwood and of life 'near the Queen's castle' (*Bride & Prejudice*, 2004). In a deliberate dismantling of East–West dualities, we are reminded that the American Darcy becomes 'Balraj's fast friend at Oxford'; that it raises an overseas groom's profile in rural India that 'his family live in Windsor, near the Queen's castle'; and that modern-day matchmaking services are now web-based, browsed by updated Mrs Bennets and supplying 'a *global* dating service [italics added]' (*Bride & Prejudice*, 2004). Wickham is moreover the son of Darcy's British nanny (in the United States), and his aimless globetrotting follows the opposite trajectory of economic betterment through migration as embodied by Kohli. At the same time, it parallels the extension of international business operations into the hitherto untapped resources of rural India for the tourist industry.

In yet another ironic twist in Chadha's engagement with different forms of dealing with and in the exotic, Wickham's Orientalism is as reductive, patronizing and ultimately self-serving as Darcy's project of extending his family's business. Turned from Austen's dashing officer into a similarly self-indulgent backpacker, Wickham sets himself up with a peculiarly comical obnoxiousness as the opposite of the foreign businessman, eager to slum it in what he perceives as the 'Real India' (*Bride & Prejudice*, 2004) of the Bakshis' abode. He simultaneously flourishes his lower-class origins as much as Austen's original villain boasts of being the presumably ill-treated son of old Mr Darcy's steward. In a succinct synopsis of the film, Rajinder Kumar Dudrah has pointedly described 'the cunning Wickham' as 'an English backpacker looking for his next exotic fling' (2006: 162). This particularly hypocritical Orientalist foray not only casts a different light on what may otherwise come across as a re-Orientalizing tendency only. Scenes showcasing Indian traditions as Bollywood spectacle starring a smugly confident Johnny Wickham (in sharp contrast to socially awkward Will Darcy) need to be re-viewed in light of his ultimately exposed hypocrisy. By the same token, this

adds another layer to his villainy, as does his flirtation with Lalita's youngest sister Lakhi, the Lydia of Austen's novel, and also his more successful seduction of Darcy's sister in the film's prehistory.

The exotic backpacker who 'simpers, and smirks, and makes love to us all' (Austen 1994: 434), as Mr Bennet puts it with reference to the novel's Wickham, seemingly fulfils Lalita's Occidentalist desire. Set up in deliberate contrast to financially motivated marital plans, this desire hinges on a glorification of thoughtless irresponsibility and general restlessness. Much like the universal charm of Austen's freely roaming Wickham, this attraction expectedly backfires. Lest we miss his identification with, or embodiment of, the particular Occidentalist desire that drives Lalita as a would-be overseas bride with a difference, Chadha's villain revealingly gives the runaway Lakhi (and the overseas audience, whether in the US or elsewhere) a tour of London. This tour includes not just the Millennium Wheel, or London Eye, with its view of the Thames and various typified sights of a tourist's London, but also 'that great British bastion, the National Film Theatre', in the middle of screening Manoj Kumar's *Purab Aur Pachhim* (1970), literally 'East and West' (Ramachandran 2004: 44). It is in front of the cinema screen that Darcy and Lalita catch up with Wickham and Lakhi, and their encounter mirrors a fight onscreen. Much has been made of the way in which 'the film scores' in 'affectionate tributes to Bollywood' (Ramachandran 2004: 44), and how Bollywood thereby becomes a setting, just as '[s]etting the American sections of the film in Hollywood (or Kohliwood as it appears when Lalita imagines life as Kohli's wife), reminds viewers that the film both is and is not Hollywood' (Wilson 2006: 330).[7] The simultaneity of overlapping cinematic conventions underscores the significance of genre mixing for the film's intersecting levels of intertextuality, while continuously pointing to the sheer visibility (if not hypervisibility) of self-reflexivity itself. The tableau of the highly cinematic resolution scene involving Wickham's exposure without doubt brings this out most clearly. This showdown even sports a readymade audience as it literally upstages the Bollywood classic, bringing a repeated gesturing towards genre breaks to an almost carnivalesque culmination.

The same slippages between juxtaposed sets and settings explode Lalita's dreams of traditional rural England as the ideal backdrop of her white dream wedding. None of the film's song-and-dance sequences is merely a simple interlude taken from an easily recognizable genre. Instead, all contain different styles of dance and music, as well, at times, as languages. An extreme as well as markedly comical realization that verges on self-parody, the Kohliwood dream-sequence intersperses a Bollywood dance interlude with traditional English country dances. In this, it takes up a common feature of period drama, but it does so in order to showcase Occidentalist desire. English traditional dance and costumes break into the Bollywood choreography much as the dreamer herself breaks into a picturesque landscape consisting of rolling green hills, a country church, a picture-book traditional English village. Blonde little flower girls are grouped around Lalita, who is dressed in a white

wedding dress and veil. Wedding bells are ringing, mingling with the music. Yet this vision is tellingly embedded within a dance sequence (and nightmare) inspired by Mr Kohli's proposal.

This framing highlights the dream's textual or filmic elements, while simultaneously declaring it an exotic fantasy. This fantasy is about to go comically wrong. The sudden lapse from a rejection of Kohliwood into the dream of becoming instead an 'overseas bride dressed in white, to have a little home in the country and live in the land of Her Majesty' (*Bride & Prejudice*, 2004) is as startling as the subsequent lapse from this dream into nightmare. Echoing Kohli's refrain of 'No Life Without Wife', her sisters tease Lalita by conjuring up images of Kohli's dream wife: imported to 'make aloo gobi, [while] he'll make the money' (*Bride & Prejudice*, 2004). Lalita counters this nightmare with her own version of moving abroad. Somewhat disconcertingly, her dream version of leaving home and going overseas is likewise through marriage. The resultant vision that features her dream (and consequent nightmare) stars the newly arrived, exotic Wickham. Both the scenery and the sheer opulence of the picture-book wedding are ill-assorted with his status or means. This alone already spells out the distorted effects of imaginary spaces of exotic desire (Occidentalist and Orientalist alike). Their collapse is then aptly literalized by thunder-claps. In a Gothic twist more reminiscent of Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (both 1847) or mid-Victorian sensation novels such as Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White* (1860), Wickham turns into his doppelganger or double, Darcy, and Lalita wakes up with a start. The familiarity of the Gothic imagery in itself creates a comic effect. It underlines the dream's conventionality.

Throughout the film, in fact, exotic space shifts or migrates. In this, it scores in a dismantling of various foreign fantasies even as it seems to feed on (and into) them. Its twofold questioning of exoticization is most suitably realized in imaginary spaces of desire that oscillate between East and West, or rather between the emphatically imaginary realms of a fictional or cinematic Orient and Occident. These traditional sites of exotic desire overseas generally consist of rolling green hills with which Austen film adaptations, if not necessarily her fiction itself, have come to be associated. Alternatively, the most common depictions of such sites pander to a conventional tourist gaze. The London Eye and an abode 'in Windsor, near the Queen's castle' are repackaged for an American audience as well. On the surface level of the plot, they may be outdone by new forms of gold-digging in California. However, we also need to remember that Catherine Darcy's hotel business is not really, or at least not exclusively, the transposed version of the desirable estate Pemberley of the novel. The Darcy business (also) stands in for Rosings Park, Lady Catherine de Bourgh's embarrassingly over-decorated, pretentious, even gaudy house, which Mr Collins praises by dwelling on its cash value. Elizabeth expectedly fails to be 'in such raptures as Mr Collins expected the scene to inspire, and was but slightly affected by his enumeration of the windows in front of the house, and his relation of what the glazing

altogether had originally cost' (Austen 1994: 333). Rosings, it has often been remarked, functions first and foremost as Pemberley's 'gaudy opposite' (Duckworth 1994: 225), so that Mr Darcy's estate can shine even better as an improved version, 'where natural beauty had been so little counteracted by an awkward taste' (Austen 1994: 382). Here Elizabeth can see 'with admiration of his taste, that it was neither gaudy nor uselessly fine; with less splendour, and more real elegance than [Rosings]' (Austen 1994: 383).

Given that the film's Darcy ultimately heeds Lalita's advice not to embark on neo-imperialist forays into India that seek to recast it as a theme park, he may be seen to improve on his mother's business in a similar fashion. Yet the conflation of Rosings and Pemberley in one international enterprise does not allow such an easy distinction between good and bad ways of doing business. In *Pride and Prejudice* Lady Catherine's and Darcy's completely unconnected estates are located in very different parts of England, whereas in *Bride & Prejudice* California has already been identified with Kohliwood. As a desirable place, it has thereby been so completely exploded that its evocation simply cannot go round full circle without unhinging the film's thematic coherence. Perhaps this accounts for much of the lopsidedness in its rather abrupt or, it has been suggested (Wilson 2006: 330), open ending. As Wilson has suggested, the 'practical aspects remain troubling – this Elizabeth cannot be welcomed to Pemberley, which in the film is an upscale Los Angeles hotel owned by Darcy's mother, nor does she particularly want to be' (2006: 330). But it is not only the vanishing points of the ideal Pemberley that are problematic. Mr Kohli's imported overseas bride is reasonably happy (arguably more so than Elizabeth's similarly resigned friend in the novel); Lakhi has had a lucky escape that has notably been questioned; for all we know, Lalita may even get her white wedding, albeit transposed from the rolling green hills of the Austenian landscape on to the ultimate elephant ride with which the film ends. It is certainly strongly implied that she is deserting her father's business – thereby turning Darcy's original rescue of the Bennets into an abandonment of responsibilities at home. In an even more disconcerting twist, one hardly wishes to imagine her boosting the tourist industry, improved or otherwise, and certainly not for the benefit of such seemingly alternative Orientalists as Wickham.

The same lopsidedness permeates the film's incipient criticism of exoticization and any form of tourism, including the exported cultural tourism in which it participates. Although *Bride & Prejudice* critically re-views the most tiresome and essentializing paradigms of cross-cultural affairs as a popular trope, it nevertheless trades on its easy marketability. Hence it is perhaps not altogether surprising that it has come under attack as complicit with a deliberate exploitation of and capitalization on exotic formulae. As Chadha 'exploits the film genres of Mumbai, London, and Los Angeles to mediate Austen's novel' (Sutherland 2005: 357), it is indisputably 'problematic that *Bride & Prejudice* is now set to capitalise on this growing influence [of Asian cinema] in general, and on the crossover appeal of the exotic that is associated

with Bollywood in particular' (Mendes 2007: 97).[8] Even a triangulation of imaginary exotic spaces as a partly parodic spin on familiar trajectories has its limitations. The resulting play with various diasporic itineraries works well with the overarching theme of prejudice, and yet the film perhaps necessarily stops short of dismantling clichés that are useful for driving the plot.

To an extent, the deliberately exoticized refracting of the source text may successfully counteract boutique multiculturalism's usual streamlining. Whether this transcendence is fully realized or even realizable nevertheless remains ambiguous. Ultimately, the re-Orientalization takes place on three interconnected levels: first, on the level of genre mixing; second, on the level of representation, that is the level of plot, theme and exotic literary spaces; and third, on the level of reception and criticism. Thus, as the transposition of the Austen text into British Bollywood defamiliarizes both traditions, this is no simple matter of appropriation or transformation of a classic. British Bollywood is itself transformed. The integration of Austen into its exploration of central issues of 'British Kool' brings out the film's 'Britishness' all the more, yet the indisputable incongruities – responsible for much of the comical effect on which the film's popular success depends – also draw attention to variously defined foreign or other genre elements. Indeed, this is how the defamiliarizing of Austen re-Orientalizes the usage of Bollywood traditions in British cinema.

What remains most disturbing, however, is that the cross-cultural affair detrimentally delimits genre mixing's creative potential. This links the film's self-exoticization to the representation of the expected exotic in the text itself. It is not only that the triangulation of differently exoticized spaces pivots on an unfortunate juggling with clichés. The play with Occidentalist desire as a direct inversion of both inherited colonial nostalgia (as epitomized by the Bakshis' decaying residence) and parallel forms of current Orientalist imperialism (including both Wickham's ingratiating way of slumming it among the locals and Darcy's initial project of opening up rural India to the tourist industry) fails to transcend this dead end. The parodied migration plot embodied by Mr Kohli may have created some of the film's most popular scenes, yet it remains more than doubtful whether the underpinning ironies do not become obscured by the overtly 'sparkling' ending. In other words, it cannot be denied that *Bride & Prejudice* capitalizes on some of the direst re-Orientalizing strategies – with the introduction of the cross-cultural affair prominent among them. The film's self-irony does much to shatter expectations and thus forms a vital redirection. This redirection, however, is notably short-circuited by the film's overall reception and prevailing criticism. Marketing strategies in part precipitate the limiting interpretation of Chadha's self-styled 'multi-national, multi-cultural crowd-pleaser' (Macnab 2004: 37) as only a hybrid admixture of an exoticized past and a doubly exoticized India. Still, the most disturbing confinement of its experimental potential has been propelled by the wider popularization of critical discourse, by the still persistent 'identity politics' Ien Ang has pointedly condemned as 'a

strait-jacket' (2001, vii). What might perhaps help us to break out of such confines is a shift of attention to the aesthetic potential of genre experiments with different traditions – beyond the ideological and market-oriented straitjackets that still continue to reinforce re-Orientalization.

Notes

1 Cheryl Wilson has argued that the shift from class issues to racialization confuses the power dynamics between the romantic leads, which detracts from Darcy's 'rescue' of the family (2006: 329).
2 This subgenre includes productions as different as the British television serial *Goodness Gracious Me* or Chadha's *Bhaji on the Beach* (1993) and *Bend It Like Beckham* (2002).
3 Dudrah unquestioningly includes Chadha's work among 'South Asian diasporic centred films' and among 'attempts to present a feminist reckoning of South Asian diasporic cultural productions and politics' (2006: 156). Compare Gopinath (2005: 162).
4 In a succinct overview of recent developments in the exportation of Bollywood elements into mainstream film, Dudrah has even suggested that the underlying 'idea of families arranging mutually beneficial status marriages translates smoothly to its new setting' (2006: 162).
5 The 1993 film directed by John Duigan was followed by a 1997 contemporary opera adaptation with music by Brian Howard, directed by Douglas Horton and produced by Chamber Made, and more recently, by a 2006 television version directed by Brendan Maher.
6 Not surprisingly, discussions of Austen adaptations revolve largely on 'transmogrification', to borrow Lesley Stern's term (2000: 221). This is despite the fact that the most recent versions (*Pride and Prejudice* in 2005, *Persuasion* and *Mansfield Park* in 2007) all eschew such experiments in favour of fast-paced tours of Regency England and English landscapes repackaged for the international market. Jocelyn Harris has even suggested that since 'the relationship of the Jane Austen versions to Jane Austen's texts can never be purely mimetic' so that 'their difference means that they displace their originals in a kind of metaphoric or even metonymic manoeuvre', it might therefore be '[f]ar better to make the alteration deliberate and wholesale, that is, to create an imitation' (2003: 51). Nevertheless, it surely is a stretch to view Heckerling's *Clueless* as 'the most thoroughgoing revision of Jane Austen and therefore the most fully creative imitation' (Harris 2003: 62). Such an 'intuitive and creative approach to translating literature to film', after all, may well raise the question, 'Where is Jane Austen in this fresh milieu?' (Macdonald and Macdonald, 2003: 7).
7 Ramachandran lists a number of such tributes:

> Lalita and Darcy replay the iconic scene from *Barsaat* (1949) where Nargis swoons into Raj Kapoor's arms … and the opening in the fields of the Punjab recalls Aditya Chopra's *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* (1995), one of the first Bollywood films to break into the UK box-office top ten. Chadha's renaming the Bennets the Bakshis could even be a riposte to Peter Sellers' caricatured portrayal of an Indian, Hrundi V. Bakshi, in *The Party* (1968). The performances are mostly over the top, in keeping with Bollywood conventions.
>
> (2004: 44)

8 Similar criticism has informed the reception of *Bend It Like Beckham* (2002). It has been termed Chadha's version of the 'mainstream "feel-good" movie,' which was notably marketed in the United States 'as a quirky "chick flick"', and so 'it would be unfair to expect it to tackle heavy political realities adequately' (Ashby 2005: 131).

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8 More than meets the eye

Two kinds of re-Orientalism in Naseeruddin Shah's *What If?*

Mita Banerjee

The Orient for the Orientalist seems to be, above all, a feast of colour: a dazzling spectacle for the western eye. The Orient,[1] first and foremost, is a space of pleasure, untouched by the calculating eye/I of rationality. As Edward Said has famously written,

> The Orient is watched, since its almost (but never quite) offensive behaviour issues out of a reservoir of infinite peculiarity; the European, whose sensibility tours the Orient, is a watcher, never involved, always detached, always ready for new examples of … 'bizarre jouissance'. The Orient becomes a living tableau of queerness.
>
> (Said 2003: 103)

The Orient, according to Said, is the Orientalist's own creation – it is located in the 'nexus of knowledge and power creating "the Oriental" and in a sense obliterating him as a human being' (2003: 27). The recipient of the 'jouissance' provided by the Orient is the western observer, critic or scholar.

Bollywood film, by the same token, may be fodder for the Orientalist precisely because, to western observers, it seems to be defined by a dazzling spectacle of colour. The aim of this essay, however, is to argue that Bollywood may be more than meets the (western) eye. Rather, 'colour' and the *fabric* of colourful clothing are more than just surface phenomena within the iconography of Indian cinema. This chapter argues that a focus on Bollywood as an Orientalist spectacle, the production of an Oriental vision for a western observer, may fail to take into account the culturally specific intra-Indian coding of both colour and fabric. Bollywood, in other words, may not *be* about a western observer in the first place, even if this observer finds in Bollywood film a recent instance of what Edward Said calls 'bizarre jouissance'. It will be suggested in this essay that in Bollywood film – and in Naseeruddin Shah's film *What If?* (*Yun Hota To Kya Hota*) in particular – there are two kinds of Orientalism at work: the confirmation, for a western observer, that 'India' is indeed a feast of colour; and the triumph of Hindu India, in all its colourful exuberance, over a Muslim minority which it views as both colourless and immoral. To put it differently, Hindu India may celebrate its own

colour kaleidoscope, which is at once indicative of both cultural pride and cultural nationalism; this colourful exuberance, in turn, will be solace for the western desire for the colours of the Orient. Thus, the film contains an intra-Indian dialogue about the role of religious minorities in contemporary India. To speak of the 'Orientalism' of Indian film, the production of an 'Oriental' version of India by Indian movie producers, may run the risk of obfuscating this internal dimension of contemporary Hindi cinema. As the editors state in their introduction to this volume, what is at stake is thus 'the heterogeneity embedded in categories such as the West and the East'. It is this heterogeneity with which this chapter is concerned. A critical reading of Bollywood film, by the same token, may want to look at what Bollywood 'does' for the West (e.g. feed into the desire for 'bizarre jouissance'), but may also want to inquire how the message or appeal of a given Bollywood film is different for various Indian audiences as well.

To focus only on the prior reading – the effect of Bollywood film on a western audience[2] – may thus perpetuate a western bias: the emphasis of what a given cinema or cinematic technique provides to the West. Rather, my aim is to ask whether to interrogate a given text through the discourse of Orientalism – as a spectacle which unfolds solely for the enjoyment of the western observer – cannot also obfuscate other avenues of reading. In these avenues, it would in fact be largely irrelevant whether or not this text satisfies a western desire for colours. Much more to the point, this alternative reading would explore the ways in which a given representation of the 'Orient' speaks to a non-western and culturally specific audience. To return to Said's definition of Orientalism, the western viewer may *see* in Bollywood film the latest manifestation of 'bizarre jouissance', but what is the intra-cultural meaning embedded in this 'jouissance'? What is the meaning of an intra-Indian colour coding (and the coding of fabric), which a view of Bollywood's colours as simply Orientalist would gloss over?

At the same time, it may be useful to distinguish between Orientalism and what Lisa Lau terms 're-Orientalism' here. Lau has recently suggested that Orientalism both as a concept and a state of mind may be far from obsolete. Her concept of 're-Orientalism' extends the Saidian model by asking questions which may in fact be a blind spot of the Orientalist paradigm originally proposed by Said. What, she asks, if the Orientalism of the Orient is *not*, as Said proposes, only in the eye of the western observer? What if Orientalism is manufactured by the Orient itself? And, even more disturbingly, might Orientalism be produced not just for the West – in a critical and highly strategic move of beating the West with its own weapons – but, rather, for indigenous use as well? What if the Orient, in other words, believes in its own Orientalism? As Lau has emphasized, what may be at stake here is 'the perpetration of Orientalism in the arena of contemporary South Asian [cultural production]: no longer an Orientalism propagated by Occidentals, but ironically enough, by Orientals' (2009: 571). It is this contentious issue addressed by Lau with regard to South Asian literature in English, which this essay will

try to relate to the cultural, moral as well as aesthetic debate on a contemporary Bollywood film, Naseeruddin Shah's *What If?* (*Yun Hota To Kya Hota*). Lau contends that the perniciousness of 're-Orientalism' in comparison to older Orientalist depictions of subaltern space lies in the fact that Orientalism is now 'authenticated' by South Asian authors themselves. According to Lau,

> Orientalism has long been evident in the literature written about South Asia from the days of colonialism, which began with non-South Asians writing and representing the Indian Sub-Continent and its people. However, even in contemporary South Asian literature in English by South Asians, the process of Orientalism can be seen to be still occurring. The curious development over these few recent decades is that Orientalism is no longer only the relationship of the dominance and representation of the Oriental by the non-Oriental or Occidental, but that this role appears to have been taken over (in part at least) by other Orientals … This process of Orientalism by Orientals is what I will be terming as 're-Orientalism'.
>
> (2009: 572)

As Lau is well aware, however, the idea of a 'native informant' catering to colonial assumptions about his/her own culture has been part of colonial discourse analysis all along, and is thus hardly a novel one. Where her intervention is key, however, is that it calls into question the progressiveness of contemporary Indian writers in English: instead of following the idea of a radical discontinuity between colonialism and postcolonialism, she makes us wonder whether contemporary Indian diasporic writers are not in fact 'postcolonial' native informants, catering to a particular western desire of what constitutes 'Indianness'. Like Graham Huggan's idea of 'the postcolonial exotic', Lau's intervention thus draws attention to the fact that, in the postcolonial context as much as in any other, a 'narrative' is never just a narrative. Rather, the market and its Orientalist and neo-Orientalist desires for a representation of the East as 'truly different' make sure that some narratives may sell while others may not. The issue is hence that of a given 'postcolonial' text catering to the desires of a western audience. Bollywood film may be particularly key to this dilemma. For, arguably, Bollywood manages to cater to western desires while at the same time telling the very story it wants to tell, and wants to tell to itself and its Indian audience. Bollywood may hence have its cake and eat it too: to use Lau's terminology, it re-Orientalizes India for the western audience, and it re-Orientalizes Hindu India for the benefit of Hindu mainstream audiences in India, marginalizing Muslims in the process precisely because they are said to lack colour. This intra-Indian dialogue or representation of Indian internal heterogeneity is prompted, what is more, by the topic of the film: the witnessing, by Indian emigrants to the US, of the 9/11 attacks.

Fashioning desire

Focusing on the 2006 Bollywood film *What If?*, this chapter will ask whether the concept of re-Orientalism may be applied to Bollywood's filmic imagination,[3] as well as what avenues of interpretation such an application may in fact foreclose. Crucially, it may be argued that to speak only of *one* kind of re-Orientalism in an analysis of, for instance, Bollywood film is in fact to reinforce a concern with, even fixation on, a western audience. What if the main audience envisioned by a given representation is not, however, (solely) the West, but rather an 'indigenous' audience in the country where this text was produced? Bollywood film, it could be argued, is a key genre in this context. While Bollywood producers have been shrewd in inviting western audiences and thus increasing their profits on a world market, their main intended audience continues to be an Indian one. The revenue generated in the West continues to be miniscule compared with the profits reaped by Bollywood film on an Indian market. On the level of both narrative and marketing, western audiences may not be central to Bollywood film. The Indian audience, what is more, needs to be further differentiated. Bollywood caters to an Indian middle-class audience that is largely Hindu.[4] My concern in this essay is to ask whether Bollywood cinema can be said to create a form of Hindu secularism and perpetuate, in the cultural sphere, Hindu narratives for a mainstream audience. Moreover, this perpetuation may depend on an aesthetically and narratively specific coding of religious minorities, especially Muslims. One issue which may be especially relevant here is the depiction, by Bollywood film, of interreligious marriages. As Indian cultural critic Amitava Kumar has noted, Hindu–Muslim intermarriage continues to be a controversial issue in contemporary India. In his autobiographical narrative, *Husband of a Fanatic* (2005), Kumar records the resistance he faced in his marriage to fellow poet Mona Ali:

> In the summer of 1999, when India and Pakistan were engaged in a conflict … I had gotten married. In the days leading up to my wedding, I often told myself that my marriage was unusually symbolic: I was doing my bit to help bring peace to more than a billion people living in the subcontinent because I am an Indian Hindu and the woman I was about to marry, Mona, is a Pakistani Muslim … I wondered whether I … could walk around with a placard hung from my neck, saying MARRIAGE FOR PEACE.
>
> (Kumar 2005: 10–11)

How, then, is such intermarriage portrayed in Naseeruddin Shah's *What If?* Bollywood film and the context of its production are especially interesting in this context. At the heart of Bollywood film, there is a tension between the filmic narratives – narratives which, I would argue, perpetuate a Hindu version of Indian history and contemporaneity – and the film's contexts of

production. Bollywood film may tell a Hindu narrative for a largely Hindu audience, but the stars cast in these films are often Muslim, as are many of the choreographers and directors. Many of the stories told by Bollywood cinema are those of Hindu mythology; it is hence particularly appropriate to speak of this cinema as a form of secular Hinduism. While many film critics, such as Vijay Mishra, have written about what these Hindu narratives meant to Hindu Indians in the diaspora, the fact that the mythologies underlying the films are Hindu (and not, for instance, Muslim or Christian, to name only two of India's many religious minorities) seems to go unnoticed. It is this idea of the taken-for-grantedness of Hindu affiliation as it informs Bollywood cinema that this chapter seeks to unpack. According to Mishra, 'Perhaps we saw our own lives in Fiji in terms of Rama's banishment and retrospectively glorified ram rajya, the Kingdom of Rama … Hence many Rama films … were enormously popular with Fiji Indians' (2002: xi). The idea of Bollywood cinema addressing, and catering to, an Indian Hindu audience, on the other hand, may be unpacked by looking in more detail at the industry's depiction of, for instance, Muslim minorities. As Mishra goes on to say, 'the form has developed ways of bypassing its own inherently imperialistic discourses. Here the voices of women and the underprivileged generally require urgent attention' (2002: xix). While more recent studies than Mishra's have addressed the issue of women's roles and sexuality in Bollywood films,[5] the depiction of Muslim minorities has rarely been addressed. This depiction, in turn, may well serve a re-Orientalist end, as this essay will suggest.

The chapter will show how *What If?* can be read as being re-Orientalist in two ways: as re-Orientalizing India for the West, and as re-Orientalizing Hindu India for an Indian mainstream audience. Lau's discussion of re-Orientalist practices within the South Asian community is hence crucial in one more respect: It draws attention to the fact that there may in fact be an internal discussion of what the 'East' (or in this case South Asia) is. Previous discussions of Orientalism or neo-Orientalism, on the other hand, seem to have focused more on the relationship of a given representation of the 'East' for a western audience or readership. A given representation does not have to be *about* the West, even as it may be fodder for western desires. What story, then, does *What If?* tell an Indian middle-class audience about itself and how does a western audience view this same story?

Moreover, Bollywood may in fact be a puzzle for the Orientalist observer. For if Orientalism is also a form of ethnography, the desire to see the Orient unfold in its 'authentic' cultural practice,[6] Orientalism also hinges on the idea that the Oriental is unaware of the fact that he/she is being observed. As Christopher Balme has recently suggested with regard to Orientalist assumptions inherent in contemporary tourism of the Pacific, authenticity, for the Orientalist, should never be staged:

> The cultural paradox can be best encapsulated in the oxymoron 'staged authenticity', coined by Dean MacCannell to define one of the central

> paradoxes of the tourist gaze. [We need to] examine the way in which authenticity is established and negotiated in tourist performances. The central tension here is that between the notion of a fixed and immutable authenticity and that of performance which, by definition, creates alteration through repetition.
>
> (Balme 1998: 53–54)

Bollywood, on the other hand, would be diametrically opposed to this form of authenticity as an absence of staging. Precisely because Bollywood producers shrewdly manipulate the responses of a western audience, they are keenly aware of being observed by the West. Bollywood may be fodder for Orientalist or re-Orientalist fantasies, however, but it cares little for its western audience except in terms of profit. What is most interesting to note is the split which Bollywood cinema performs between sales figures and narrative concern. The West may figure in Bollywood's profit calculation, but it is marginal at best to its cinematic narratives. There is a key difference between this manipulation of western audiences on the one hand (a desire driven mostly by Bollywood's desire for profit on a world market) and the assumption that Bollywood film must somehow be *about* the West. Western audiences, it is proposed in this chapter, are unwitting witnesses to a story that is in fact concerned with intra-Indian heterogeneity. They are indulged, but their presence (as observers or re-Orientalist tourists in a cinematic landscape) does not loom large in the minds of the producers.

In this puzzle or split between two audiences,[7] *What If?* as a film is even more multi-faceted. From the very beginning, the aesthetics of the film will be disappointing to the Orientalist observer. For the aesthetics of *What If?* do not fit within Bollywood's signature aesthetics at all. Rather, they are more in line with art or parallel cinema. As Meenakshi Shedde has argued, on the other hand, Bollywood's signature aesthetics are all about colour. This feast of colours, by the same token, is solace for an Orientalist mind depressed by the alienation of (post)modernity. Postmodern alienation can hence also be seen as a longing for colour. The depressed individual, it must be remembered, is literally unable (and is physiologically unable) to see colours; he/she sees everything as tainted with a grey brush. Bollywood, on the other hand, is pure 'visual Viagra', as Shedde has suggested (Shedde 2002: 4). *What If?* as a film may be interesting to consider because it frustrates the western desire for colour. My aim in this chapter is to ask in what instances in particular the film may be frustrating to the Orientalist desire of the Orient as a 'tableau vivant', and, it could be added, a colourful tableau vivant. Potentially, there may be a sense in which an Orientalist gaze on the Orient and a Hindu gaze on India's Muslim communities may converge. For in *What If?*, the absence of colour occurs precisely in what is portrayed as the drabness of Indian Muslim culture. It is this juncture – Muslim colourlessness as disappointing to the Orientalist and as reassuring for a mainstream Hindu audience – that this essay wants to explore.

As a film, *What If?* does not seem to be representative of or typical for Bollywood cinema at all. My contention is that it is because of this alternative aesthetic that the film may be an interesting topic of discussion, because it may lay bare the assumptions – and style – of 'traditional' Bollywood film, and of a western audience with which this traditional Bollywood film has been so successful.

Crucially, moreover, *What If?* is also a film directed by an award-winning actor who is not Hindu, but Muslim: Naseeruddin Shah. What is intriguing to consider is that precisely because Bollywood film (a genre in which *What If?* at the same time participates and from which it distances itself aesthetically) is a mass market, it must cater to a mainstream Indian audience, which, predominantly, is a Hindu one. This chapter hence inquires into the ways in which *What If?*, a film made by a Muslim director, participates in creating a narrative which is part of the discourse of Hindu secularism. Finally, the catastrophe of 9/11 further complicates the dilemma between Orientalist desires and an Indian market for which these desires may have no meaning. What Shah's film illustrates is that occurrences like 9/11 are being debated *outside* the West independent *of* the West.

In *What If?*, Hindu secularism is played out not only on the level of narrative, but also in the domain of fashion. Fashion is at the core not only of Bollywood's aesthetic, but also of its moral code. In Bollywood, particularly for female characters, what you are is what you wear. Rather, the question is not only about fashion design, but also about material. In Bollywood's imaginary universe, Indian fabrics (silk and cotton) are pitted against the synthetic materials of the West. This distrust of syntheticism, in turn, has deep-set historical roots, going back all the way to Mahatma Gandhi's struggle against British mercantilism and the call for wearing homespun in the fight for Indian independence. The *khadi* jacket which Nehru made popular in India and the West alike must be understood as Indians' resistance to British fashion dictates in terms of both style and fabric. As Dorothee Wenner and Riyad Vince Wadia have argued, Bollywood's heroine can be spotted at a glance: she wears only 'cotton, silks, chiffon and all natural fibre fabrics' (2002: 12). The westernized vamp, on the other hand, is everything the heroine is not, donning outfits made from 'nylon, lycra, satin, velvet and all industrial age materials' (Wenner and Wadia 2002: 12). However, the symptom of western-style syntheticism – not synthesis – is actually a misleading one here. If Bollywood's moral logic pits Indian natural fabrics against western synthetic mini-skirts, the implication is that the former is authentically, genuinely Indian whereas the latter is not. This binary opposition, in turn, would serve to veil the fact that Bollywood's Indo chic is itself an *invention* of authenticity. Bollywood's version of Indo chic hence *poses* as cultural authenticity; in or through this very pose, it conceals the fact that it is invented, and that it is steeped in the present, not in the past. Similarly, colours also loom large in Bollywood's moral universe, particularly in its depiction of women. As Wenner and Wadia go on to note, the heroine is

characterized by a 'harmonious blend of pastel colours' (Wenner and Wadia 2002: 12), whereas the vamp dons zebra patterns.

As these considerations indicate, Bollywood has deep-set anxiety towards cultural hybridity. This fear, of course, is counter-intuitive because Bollywood in itself is a deeply hybrid phenomenon. From the sound of its music to the cut of its fashion, it is a filmic form (and cultural imaginary) which may well be called 'adulterated': it is 'tainted' by the very West which it castigates in its narratives. *What If?* essentially tells a Hindu story, yet this is a story in which a number of Indian religious minorities are included. This inclusion, in turn, is part of an ideology which contends that all of India's minorities can be 'united' under the roof of Hinduism. As Shedde observed,

> It's true, there is neither pollution nor corruption in [the West]. But what is missing is BJP – Bahut Jyaada Pyaar. This acronym symbolizes 'much love' for the Indian community in all its variety, but also evokes the conservative Bharatiya Janata Party, the party of the people and the most dominant force in the Indian coalition government. But this is who we are.
>
> (2002: 19; my translation)

Bollywood's hybridity thus emerges not only out of a fusion between western and Indian elements but, precisely because Bollywood employs Hindu culture as shorthand for Hindu India in general, it also involves a potential blending of Hindu and Muslim elements. Hybridity in this sense may be both intra-Indian and transnational. What is at stake here is both a cultural and religious heterogeneity within India itself (woven into its very fabric) and a hybridity arising from India's contact with the West. Both these elements are deliberately written out of Bollywood's visual narrative.

Given this ambivalent relationship to a double-coded hybridity (western and intra-Indian), it can be argued there are, in both Bollywood's fashion and its narrative fabric, in fact two kinds of Indo chic.[8] Bollywood's Indo chic (the saris and shalwars worn by its female protagonists) is itself hybrid in the sense that these garments would be considered too immodest for non-filmic Indian street-wear. In this sense, it is the sari and, to an even greater extent, the shalwar kameez which have been subjected to a profound process of westernization, to a nip-tuck of Indian fashion through the adding of a western touch. At the same time, however, Bollywood's storylines contradict this process through the practice of adulteration, for even the hybridized shalwar, seen through Bollywood's moral logic and the aesthetic this logic entails, is so much more enticing than the denim jacket. According to Shedde, 'many Bollywood films of the 1990s show the heroines [trying on] Western tights and plunging necklines … but [ultimately] slipping [back] into demure Indian saris [at the film's end]' (2002: 5). Western clothing – like western life-styles – hence serves as Bollywood's fantasy, and a fantasy of transgression especially of female roles; this transgression is put an end to, however, by the marriage at

the end of the film. The romantic resolution, in turn, is accompanied by the appropriate apparel. While these are general remarks on Bollywood films, the remaining part of the essay will explore how they may be played out in the visual politics of a specific Bollywood film, *What If?*

There is in *What If?* a teleology of both colour and fabric. Even as all religious communities seem to come together under the roof of the filmic narrative, with each community given – and this too, needs to be mentioned – equal scope, some communities are rescued from the 9/11 attacks in the end while others are not. Shah's film *What If?* can be seen as one of Bollywood's reactions to the events of 9/11. Since this chapter is concerned with the question whether what may be read as Bollywood's re-Orientalism may in fact be a Hindu narrative which has nothing to do with either Orientalism or re-Orientalism, it is crucial to look at a film which addresses, even if under erasure, India's Muslim community. The film chronicles the lives of Indian emigrants to the US who are killed in – or saved from – the 9/11 attacks. The principle of accident seems to clash, in the filmic narrative's highly complex logic, with that of Hindu superiority. While Salim, the Muslim stockbroker, is killed by the attacks as he is in the World Trade Center when the plane crashes into the towers, the wife of a Hindu businessman who has flown to meet her US-based husband is saved from the attacks because she has missed the plane. She has missed the plane, moreover, because she wanted to meet her husband in a sari, not in a jean jacket. The act of changing back into the garments befitting a demure Hindu wife literally saves her life.

In the end, the Hindu couple – Hemant and Tilottima – are safely in the eye of the storm; and they are dressed in both the right colours and the right fabrics. The Hindu wife wears a cotton sari when she steps off the plane because she has misplaced her boarding pass; the same plane is subsequently destroyed in the 9/11 attacks. What has saved Tilottima, the narratives makes clear, is the cotton sari as much as the (narrative) accident of the misplaced boarding pass. In fact, the narrative 'rewards' her with the accident of the misplaced boarding pass only because she has already proved her morality through the wearing of her cotton sari even on the plane to the US. Similarly, Hemant, the Hindu husband, proves his mastery over western influences even as he has relocated to the US. Reconciliation, if we read the filmic narrative with the grain, may be an economic necessity: not so cultural assimilation. What is crucial is that to read these narrative strands as re-Orientalist – as the Hindu couple going back to its roots as a confirmation of an Orientalist desire for authenticity – would be to miss the point. In *What If?*, a secular Hindu narrative emerges precisely from the idea that the Hindu couple can masterfully negotiate the requirements of western-style globalization *and* Hindu tradition. Interestingly, this is something the Muslim stockbroker Salim, who can be read as the Hindu groom's opposite, cannot accomplish. It is Salim, the Muslim stockbroker, who falls victim to the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center in the film.

Hindu exuberance and Muslim chromophobia[9]

The reinvention of Hindu tradition and Hindu fashion by Shah's film is not directed at the West, but rather and much more centrally, to an Indian Hindu audience. To this audience, Shah's film speaks about an Indian Muslim (minority) community whose claim to Indianness it denies, thus confirming the desire of the Hindu audience for a Hindu homeland. Yet what is crucial about this intra-national narrative is that Bollywood's Hindu nationalist narrative does not alienate a western audience: rather, it confirms its re-Orientalist fantasies. It could well be argued that, to Bollywood's advantage, a Hindu and a western audience meet in their craving for colour. As *What If?* proves, the confirmation of the western observer's Orientalist fantasies may in fact converge with the saturation of (Hindu Indian) needs in one and the same narrative. Re-Orientalist fantasies and Hindu desires, with the latter existing completely regardless of the former, may hence converge.

If Orientalism hinges on the *colour* of the Orient, and if Bollywood might be itself guilty of re-Orientalizing India and marginalizing its Muslim communities, it may well be crucial to look at the colours in which the film depicts the cultural practices of this Muslim minority. Moreover, to speak of such re-Orientalizing practices only as a form of complicity with the West's Orientalizing of Indian culture would fall short of capturing the full complexity of re-Orientalism. (Hindu) India in Bollywood dazzles not only the West but also *itself* with its colours. These colours, in turn, are both generically Indian, for the western gaze, and specifically Hindu, for the Indian gaze. What in Bollywood's visual imaginary is marked as drab is both Muslim culture and an adulterated Hindu culture which is often mapped on to the female body. Orientalism, as Said has forcefully argued, centres on colour. What, then, about Bollywood's re-Orientalizing gaze on Indian Muslim culture? Colour is reserved, in Bollywood's visual imaginary, for Hindu culture, and for Hindu femininity specifically.

Hindu exuberance is hence said by Bollywood's filmic imagination to clash with Muslim drabness; Muslim culture is blamed both for its prohibition of religious images and for its chromophobia. Re-Orientalism in Bollywood is thus the triumph of the Hindu kaleidoscope over the drab triteness of Muslim culture. In the film, Muslim women are seen as instances of female colourlessness. There is, for instance, Salim's mother, the Muslim matriarch, clad in white from head to toe, sporting a scarf serving as a headdress. If Bollywood's re-Orientalism (the vivid spectacle of Indian colour for the West and the spectacle of Hindu colour for the Indian viewer) celebrates and converges in the exuberance of Hindu culture, the Muslim matriarch is clearly a misfit in this colouring of the nation. It is a difference which, precisely because of the absence of colour, lacks 'jouissance'. What is striking is that both the western and the Hindu eye seem to crave colour.[10] Films such as *What If?* are hence re-Orientalist in two senses and for two different audiences: they provide the

West with the Oriental colours it yearns for, and they give an Indian mainstream audience the colourful confirmation that, in its visual exuberance, India is a Hindu homeland in which the brown-clad Muslims are both culturally and visually out of place. *What If?* conforms to both purposes of re-Orientalist practice: the invention of an Indian space untainted by the West and the simulation of a Hindu India untouched by Muslim influence.

These evils or taints, in turn, are embodied by Salim and his Hindu girlfriend, Namrata, respectively. Salim is the cocaine-addicted Muslim stockbroker, and Namrata embodies the deeply westernized Hindu dancer he is having an affair with. Their garments, moreover, mark them as misfits in *What If*'s colourful Hindu narrative. In *What If?*, India celebrates the Hindu majority in all its colours; these colours, for the Western eye, become the re-Orientalized colours of the Orient.

What is disturbing here is that the depiction – or rather, the assertion – of Muslim chromophobia permeates not only Bollywood film, but Indian Writing in English (IWE) as well. In Bapsi Sidhwa's *Cracking India* (1991), for instance, we find images of Hindu chromophilia and Muslim chromophobia. What is striking here is that Sidhwa is in fact Parsee; she could hence be seen as a neutral observer of what might simply be Muslim cultural and religious difference. Yet it may be interesting to consider whether Islam's chromophobia may not actually have become a topos in the depiction of Islam for authors and directors regardless of their religious affiliation or provenance. In Sidhwa's novel, the Islamization of Lahore is seen above all as a war against both images (English and Hindu) and colour. Sidhwa's young narrator, Lenny, observes that in the city of Lahore, now Pakistan, the statue of Queen Victoria has been removed from her pedestal:

> The garden scene has depressingly altered. Muslim families who added colour when scattered among the Hindus and Sikhs, now monopolize the garden, depriving it of colour. Even the children, covered in brocades and satins, cannot alleviate the austerity of the black burkas and white *chuddars* that shroud the women. It is astonishing. The absence of the brown skin that showed through the fine veils of Hindu and Sikh women, and beneath the dhotis and shorts of the men, has changed the complexion of the queenless garden. There are fewer women. More men.
>
> (Sidhwa 1991: 189)

Islam is hence depicted as lacking in both colour and vividness; and, as the reference to gender indicates, it is also regarded as lacking tolerance.

In Salim's mother, the Muslim matriarch, the absence of colour and the absence of morality converge. Not only is Salim's mother portrayed as clad in drab colours, she is equally unappealing in terms of character. Domineering and authoritative, she is depicted as the head of a family engaging in

semi-legal affairs. Seated on a pedestal, Salim's mother receives her visitors, in an ironic persiflage of *The Godfather*, Bollywood-style:

Matriarch: [sitting on a high chair, as if on a pedestal: in the background, there is a row of veiled women in black, who mutely look on]: Come over, Zubeida. [Zubeida kneels at her feet, kissing her hand.] Your son has disgraced me.

Female relative: [leading Salim and Javed outside on the balcony]: Amma says you must wait.

Zubeida: [pleading, holding on the matriarch's hand]: He's a child, he made a mistake. Even I am ashamed of what he did. But Amma he is a very nice child, please, save my son. The policeman is a very vindictive man, my son is being framed … For god's sake, save his life!

Matriarch: But your son stole?

Zubeida: Yes, but …

Matriarch: [raises her hand to silence Zubeida]: Then speak no more, I won't help. Look, when you're hungry, you may steal two loaves. Justified. But here's one who has evil on his mind. God help me, no. [She draws herself up, looking down on Zubeida.]

Zubeida: But Amma …

Matriarch: Shut up.

Salim: [on the balcony with his brother, overhearing the conversation]: Amma seems to be in a foul mood today.

Matriarch: [to her audience in the back row]: Don't you people realize, sometimes even I can be in a tough situation? But here you are, always asking. Gafoor. Call Salim.

Gafoor: Brother, Amma is calling you.

Matriarch: [withdraws her hand from Zubeida, looking dismissive; then patting Zubeida on the cheek]: Go my child, I never help frauds.

(*What If?* 2006)

It is at this juncture that the split between *What If*'s narrative fabric and its contexts of production may be most apparent. This scene depicts the Muslim matriarch as a female godfather ruling over what is essentially a family mafia; her sons, even as they are powerful stockbrokers in their own right, cower before her. In a dimly lit room furnished only in sombre colours, she sits on a pedestal. The depiction of the Muslim family – which is likened explicitly to a Muslim clan – the film's portrayal of Salim's family, could not be more problematic. The father, significantly, is absent, the family incomplete. It is equally significant that in *What If?*, the Muslim matriarch is played by Saroj Khan, one of the most successful of Bollywood's choreographers. In the scene

cited above, the film may portray the Muslim community in a negative light, thus catering to a Hindu majority. Yet, by casting Saroj Khan, it implicitly acknowledges the fact that the choreography of these Hindu narratives is often conceived by Muslim choreographers, in this case Khan. The politics of casting in Shah's film may thus be at odds with the Hindu narrative which he may be compelled by market requirements to tell. The negotiation between religious communities in India not only takes place within the filmic narratives, but also in the films' contexts of production. Colour, moreover, is by no means incidental to such negotiation. This colour can be read on multiple levels: as having an intra-cultural specificity and negotiating interreligious relations on the one hand, and as fodder for the Orientalist on the other. From one perspective, *What If?* and Bollywood film in general can be read as re-Orientalist in its portrayal of the Hindu majority as colourful. Yet, on an alternative level and in a narrative strand unconcerned with western perception, such colour coding would carry an intra-culturally specific meaning and moral judgement on the colours of the most appropriate romance.

The colours of interreligious romance

Salim, notably, wears a western suit. The colours of this western suit, moreover, are drab; the outfit is western both in cut and in colour, or rather, this is what the filmic narrative implies. His habit of snorting cocaine only confirms his addiction to things western.[11] Cocaine, the film implies, goes with the western suit. This is how Salim is described by the film's voice-over: 'Salim Rajabali. Share broker by calling with a romantic bent of mind. The family is migrating to America, severing all ties with his country. But some ties are such that he would like to remain tied to' (*What If?* 2006).

Crucially, there is in the film's moral and aesthetic logic no 'indigenization' of the western suit as far as Salim is concerned. Rather, as a Muslim, Salim lacks the ability to transform the suit from within. The film thus pits two Indian businessmen against each other: on one hand, there is Hemant, whose newly wedded wife survives the 9/11 attacks because she insists on wearing a sari. Significantly, despite the fact that Hemant is living in Boston and works in a corporate setting, he is never actually depicted by the film as wearing a suit. On the other hand, there is Salim, who wears nothing but suits, supporting the claim that he is a 'share broker by calling' (*What If?* 2006).

The western suit, then, unmakes Salim in the fabric of the narrative. It is no coincidence that his widowed mother, the Muslim matriarch, only dons white.[12] Salim's suit, seen from this perspective, is almost Muslim, or so the filmic colours would suggest. Its drabness superimposes a western taint on a Muslim imaginary which is said by the film to lack colour to begin with. What is more, the suit seems to have destroyed Salim as much as the cocaine has. Despite the fact that Salim is depicted by the narrative as a successful businessman, he is nevertheless characterized by a certain passivity. The point is hence not so much that Salim possesses the power to transform the suit

from within, but rather that he falls victim to the suit's lure because it signifies not only western culture (and the ubiquity of western culture) but a lack of colour which is portrayed by the film as being specific to the Muslim community.

Unlike Hemant, the proactive Hindu businessman, Salim seems to drift; he has fallen victim both to his cocaine addiction and his obsession with his Hindu girlfriend. When Salim is accidentally involved in a shoot-out and has to leave India for the US in order to evade the police, he begs Namrata to come with him:

> Salim: Come with me to America.
> Namrata: Oh Jesus, what next?
> Salim: Come with me to America. Please!
> Namrata: What do you mean … ? Is this some Hindi flick – insert a shot of a plane and here we are in America?
> Salim: I cannot live without you.
>
> (*What If?* 2006)

Namrata's invocation of Jesus is telling: Namrata's is a deeply adulterated cultural repertoire; she is a fallen woman in terms of both morality and religion. At the same time, the reference to the 'Hindi flick' is equally significant here. If Bollywood, the world's biggest 'dream factory', insists on the 'suspension of disbelief' (to use Christopher Balme's term in another context), then Namrata's statement disrupts this disbelief. Her realism, clearly enough, is not that of Bollywood film, and it is for this, ironically, that the film will go on to punish her. The film pits two love stories against one another: one that it sanctions (Hemant's marriage to Tilottima, the obedient Hindu wife) and one it condemns (Salim's inter-religious affair with Namrata). No wonder then, in this sense, the film has Salim perish in the attacks on the World Trade Center – attacks which, in a tragic irony which the film implies to be fitting, were perpetrated by Muslim terrorists.

And what of Namrata's dance? When she performs, surrounded by a half-naked male harem – Bollywood's Hindu revenge on Muslim patriarchal concepts – a modern western-style dance, she is de-sexed, from a Hindu nationalist perspective, not only by the dance moves but by her attire as well. In a bizarre suspension of narrative logic, she is made to wear a black graduation gown, without any reason to account for this strange outfit, except to mark her both as a cultural and a sexual misfit. There is, it hardly needs to be emphasized, nothing seductive about an oversize, unisex graduation gown. In colour as much as in dress, Namrata is moved in the direction of her potential mother-in-law, the Muslim matriarch. Both in colour and in dress, these two women are unappetizing. Even as she goes on to take off her dress to reveal a western-style T-shirt and tight-fitting pants, the T-shirt, in Bollywood's aesthetic repertoire, is as unappealing as the gown: neither is sanctioned by Hindu morality. If the graduation gown is curiously sexless, moreover,

Namrata too is only one step away from being made to wear a western suit. The gown, incidentally, is a uniform of sorts. Moreover, the gown also seems to imply a form of academic achievement, and an achievement certified by the West. All these associations converge, however, in rendering Namrata unsuitable (and undesirable) for the Hindu morality otherwise celebrated by the film, embodied by Tilottima, the model Hindu wife. Namrata's gown, incidentally, is black; and in its inappropriateness as a Hindu woman's apparel (or so the film suggests), it is also postmodern. It is a gown used out of context. As Vijay Mishra has illustrated with regard to an earlier Bollywood film, *Soldier* (1998), neither blackness nor postmodernity bode well for Bollywood's moral code. In the film, the 'postmodern black-sari-clad demotic/demonic Mother figure' is hardly a desirable heroine (Mishra 2002: 7). Not only does Namrata wear black, then, she does not even wear a sari, but an American graduation gown.

In *What If?*, the (re-Orientalizing) assumption of Indianness as both colourful and sexually alluring takes shape against a female Other who, in Namrata's case, is neither genuinely Hindu nor genuinely feminine. In this case, the spectacle of Hindu India as a feast of colours (soothing to the Orientalist) is confirmed through the disruptive presences of a sexless Hindu woman (Namrata) and a languishing Muslim man, Salim. The new self-confidence of an economically successful India, in *What If?* is that of a specifically Hindu India; and it is here that the revelling in colours (which may be seen from one perspective as a re-Orientalizing gesture) and the marginalization of (drab) Muslim communities converge.

Yet what is interesting to consider in this context is that Namrata's dance disrupts an Orientalist suspension of disbelief in that it refuses to re-inscribe the colourful fantasy of Orientalism. This disruption begins with the music. In a film industry famed for its song and dance sequences – sequences that are inseparable from their colourful choreography – Namrata's ultra-modern western dance is clearly out of place, because of its western-style music and because of the absence of sung lyrics. This, clearly, is not Bollywood; it is Bollywood's persiflage of western decadence. If Bollywood is a dream in which Hindu India wants to believe – making Bollywood a mainstream film industry – a dream in which Muslim communities are featured only as drab Others to a colourful Hindu India, in aesthetics, music and behaviour, Salim and Namrata disrupt this world of make-believe. Namrata self-consciously refers to Bollywood film – of whose narrative she is part – as a 'Hindi flick', and the dance sequence she is featured in has nothing to do with Bollywood aesthetics at all. Namrata's dance is anti-Bollywoodesque; in either case, there is no Orientalism here. The idea that Shah's film is more in line with parallel or art cinema can be further nuanced here. The sequences where it undercuts the assumptions – and aesthetic style – of traditional Bollywood film are those scenes in which Salim, the fallen Muslim stockbroker, and his equally immoral, lapsed Hindu girlfriend are portrayed. Namrata's drabness, incidentally, is also characterized by a refusal of make-believe:

Namrata: Look, I'm always there for you. So what if we can't live together? …
Salim: [kisses her on the mouth]: Come home once, meet my mother. It will be a very good opportunity to meet her? No?
Namrata: [dismissing his whims]: Yeah.

(*What If?* 2006)

It is no coincidence, moreover, that Namrata should be cast as unromantic in this scene. This means that in Bollywood's cultural imaginary there can be no place for her. The first glimpse we get of Hemant and Tilottima in the film is in a loving embrace, she still in her wedding finery. Hemant's and Tilottima's love, then, is sanctioned by marriage; and it is portrayed by the film as both romantic and visually pleasing. If *What If?* can thus be said to participate in the creation of a secular Hinduism for a mainstream Indian audience, it is no coincidence that through the film's aesthetics and its portrayal of two different couples – Hemant/Tilottima and Salim/Namrata – the film should sanction Hindu marriage even as it castigates Hindu–Muslim romance.

Crucially, *What If?* writes Muslim minorities out of the narrative of Hindu secularism by using the 9/11 attacks as a plot device. Shah's film may hence transgress against the traditions of Bollywood film by giving a Muslim character space in his narrative, rather than turning him into a mere extra. Salim's being written out of the narrative through the 9/11 attacks, however, is in keeping with the marginalization of Muslim characters characterized by Mishra:

> The limited space occupied by Muslim culture and history in the popular film (even though … many of the current crop of important stars as well as production teams are Muslims) leads to a number of uneasy consequences. First, their marginalization may imply that they are not legitimate objects in the domain of the popular … Second, their stereotypification means that their emotional range is limited … With rare exceptions, in Bombay cinema the Muslim as a character is simply *written out* of considerable chunks of cinematic history.
>
> (Mishra 2002: 216; italics mine)

Read with the grain, the narrative of *What If?* implies that there can be no place in the film's version of Hindu India for Muslim stockbrokers and lapsed Hindu women. Through the fateful and unappetizing union of Salim and Namrata, Shah's film drives home the idea that such Hindu–Muslim unions are doomed to fail. The aim of this essay has been to inquire into the limits of both an Orientalist and a re-Orientalist paradigm, and to try to reveal what such a reading, precisely in its focus on a western observer, may serve to obfuscate. Seen from this perspective, *What If?* would be seen to depict not the Orient as a western fantasy, but, rather, a colourful Hindu India where Hindu exuberance triumphs over Muslim chromophobia and drabness, and

where Hindu–Muslim intermarriage is criticized through both filmic narrative and cinematic aesthetics.

The most crucial aspect of reading *What If?* as a re-Orientalizing narrative may be the status such a perspective accords to the West. Orientalism, it seems, is inconceivable without the binary opposition of the West and the Orient. What if, this chapter has tried to ask, we were to read *What If?* as a filmic narrative which depicts a romanticized Hindu India not for the benefit of the West, but for the sake of a mainstream Hindu audience? As a filmic narrative, then, *What If?* has multiple audiences. Catering to the Hindu majority, it participates in creating a Hindu secularism in contemporary culture. At the same time, however, it challenges discourses of Hindu superiority through its context of production: *What If?* is also a film made by a Muslim director and famed Bollywood actor, Naseeruddin Shah. Finally, Shah's is a film which challenges or broadens the aesthetics of Bollywood film through its use of an alternative aesthetics. That it does so particularly in its depiction of Muslim characters and Hindu–Muslim romance may be a token of the requirements of a mass market and a predominantly Hindu audience, as cited above. The blind spot of 'traditional' Orientalist paradigms, on the other hand, may be the western belief that, in Bollywood film, the Orient re-Orientalizes itself only for the benefit of the western observer. As Said originally wrote,

> In a sense the limitations of Orientalism are, as I said earlier, the limitations that follow upon disregarding, essentializing, denuding the humanity of another culture, people, or geographical region. But Orientalism has taken a further step than that: it views the Orient as something whose existence is not only displayed but has remained fixed in time and place for the West … The West is the spectator, the judge and jury, of every facet of Oriental behaviour.
>
> (Said 1988: 308)

What may be at stake, rather, is a narrative which, even as it may confirm the desires of the western Orientalist, is not concerned with the West but with intra-Indian heterogeneity. In these multiple forms of address, *What If?* also bespeaks of a high degree of cultural self-confidence. Like Hemant, the Hindu businessman choosing to relocate to the US without giving up his Hindu heritage, Bollywood film may not really be interested in what it does for the West. The first lesson to be learned by the critic in search for instances of re-Orientalism, then, may be that this, too, may be a form of conceit. If I have argued at the outset of this essay that Orientalism is also an ethnographic endeavour – the practice of listening to the natives who are unaware that they are being observed – to inquire whether re-Orientalist practices may have multiple audiences (and non-western audiences as well) may also be similar to the turn towards a new, postmodernist form of ethnography: a paradigm in which, as James Clifford (1988) has argued, the western ethnographer may for

once fall silent and listen to the natives. In this very sense, *What If?* may be a prime example for the polyphony of contemporary Indian film, and its negotiation of both multiple audiences and multiple religious communities in India. Only if we carefully reconsider our theoretical paradigms and unpack their underlying assumptions, however, will we be able to listen to, and appreciate, such cultural polyphony. What the recent paradigm of re-Orientalism introduced by Lau makes possible, then, is to make visible an intra-Asian (in this case intra-Indian) dialogue about who represents the 'East' to western and non-western audiences, and who has the power to resist such representations, and on what levels. Bollywood cinema's mass circulation, it would seem, exports to the West not only a portrait of Hindu India in general, but of Hindu India specifically. And it re-Orientalizes not only India but its Muslim communities, through a particular use of both colours and fabrics. It is in this visual specificity that Bollywood creates a contemporary version of what Said once called the 'tableau vivant' of the profoundly disturbed but profoundly desirable 'East'.

Notes

1 This essay proceeds from the assumption that both the Orient and the Oriental are constructs; quotation marks are largely absent for the sake of readability, even as each particular construct (both, I will argue in this essay, western and 'Asian' constructs) tries to erase them for its own purposes and its own ends.
2 David Whitton (2005) has spoken of the 'Bollywood effect' in this context. Whitton's essay is crucial also in that he conceives of the western love of Bollywood as a neo-Orientalist phenomenon.
3 My aim here is not to set up a monolithic understanding of Bollywood film. Rather, I am concerned with the 'political unconscious' of Bollywood film as both a mainstream film industry and a film industry which caters to an Indian majority audience of Hindus. At the same time, even as Bollywood films differ significantly as to, for instance, the cultural practices they sanction or condemn, there is nevertheless a shared aesthetics, as Rachel Dwyer has illustrated in her many accounts of Bollywood film. The term which Dwyer uses, however, is 'Hindi cinema', not 'Bollywood film'. This chapter employs the term 'Bollywood film', on the other hand, to speak of a particular western desire for mainstream Hindi film, a desire termed the 'Bollywood effect' by Whitton (2005).
4 I am highly indebted to the comments of an anonymous reviewer which helped me substantially in revising this essay.
5 See, for instance, Gayatri Gopinath's *Impossible Desires* (2005).
6 I am drawing here on Christopher Balme's recent discussion of the concept of 'Orientalism' in the context of tourist practices in the Pacific (1998).
7 I am simplifying here for the sake of argument, distinguishing between an Indian and a western audience. What this view omits, however, is that Bollywood has been embraced on non-western, non-Indian markets as well. Thus Bollywood has been highly successful on the African market. Nigerian cinema (Nollywood), for instance, has incorporated Bollywood filmic practices into its own filmic repertoire.
8 Graham Huggan has addressed the concept of 'Indo chic' in his study on what he calls the 'postcolonial exotic': the deliberate self-exoticization of, for instance, Indian writers for a global market in which 'Indianness' has become a consumer good, often of luxury value. Huggan writes,

> 'Indo-chic' … [is] not simply to be seen as naïve Western constructs; [it is a product] of the globalization of Western-capitalist consumer culture, in which 'India' functions not just as a valent cultural sign but as a highly mobile capital good.
> (2001: 67)

9 For the use of colours and the concepts and discourses of chromophobia, cf. Monika Schausten (2008).
10 The 'Muslim eye', the filmic imagination would imply here, craves only the absence of colour; Islam is portrayed in the film – and in literary narratives which will be discussed below – as being averse to all forms of sensual perception and experience. This is a highly biased view. Clearly, the assumption of the desires of these communities must be a strategic simplification. What I am concerned with, however, is that both western and Hindu audiences have certain expectations about what 'Otherness' comprises.
11 Cocaine, incidentally, is not only a drug, but a synthetic drug. The narrative of Hindu morality would hence be doubly opposed to Salim's habit: first, because Hinduism views drugs (e.g. alcohol) with scorn; and second, because cocaine is implied to be a western drug.
12 There is an apparent contradiction in my argument here. As a widow, Salim's mother would have to wear white. Yet my contention is that this widowhood and the colour it entails converges with what I am reading as a (Hindu) depiction of Muslim culture as 'chromophobic' (Schausten 2008), contrasting with the colourful exuberance of Hindu culture.

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9 Re-Orientalisms

Meditations on exoticism and transcendence, Otherness and the Self

Tabish Khair

'Don't you know you're not supposed to be here?' the British 'Hon. Sec'y' of the Gezira Club in Cairo had barked at Edward Said when, as a boy, Said took a shortcut across the club premises, knowing that his father was a full member of the club (Said 2000: 44). When young Edward began to explain, he was brusquely silenced with the order, 'Don't answer back, boy. Just get out, and do it quickly. Arabs aren't allowed here, and you're an Arab!'

This is an almost typical experience of the colonized *qua* the colonized, and it can be textually encountered in various forms, ranging from the anecdotal – as in the Indian writer R.K. Narayan's retelling of a colonial school education shorn of Indian cultural and geographical references (Narayan 1973) – to the physically abusive, such as M.K. Gandhi being thrown out of a railway compartment in South Africa. The space of the Gezira Club as an Arab-free colonial zone obviously existed more in the minds of people like the 'Hon. Sec'y' and on the paper that such minds spawned. As a place, it was so contiguous with its vicinity that an Arab boy could walk in and out of it, or could do so if not policed by the gaze of the 'Hon. Sec'y'. Talking of Orientalist texts, Said was later to write that 'such texts can create not only knowledge but also the very reality they appear to describe' (Said 1995: 94). In some ways, the space of the Gezira Club, as experienced by young Edward, was as much the creation of texts and the language of certain mindsets as the various barbed-wire spaces of Palestine–Israel are today. They were, like the discourses Said critiqued as Orientalism later on, not simply or even necessarily 'wrong'; they were closer to limitations, simplifications and, at times, distortions of the complex possibilities of places. One can argue that much of the oeuvre of Edward Said returns us again and again to this conflict between space and place, and that one of Said's main concerns was the recovery of places while not denying – as some postcolonial theory does – the uses of spatial demarcation (e.g. the Palestinian 'nation-state').

A major flaw in some critiques of Said's 1978 *Orientalism* can be said to be caused by a version of the intentional fallacy; this also applies to an erudite study like J.M. Mackenzie's (1995). This flaw is partly called upon by some uses of Said's critique by his followers and by some phrases in Said's book too, but it is also a misreading of his study of Orientalism as a discourse.

Regardless of how good the intentions and how interested the observer, Orientalism in Said's sense always led to a simplification of the complexities of the place described, a simplification that, coming from a position of immense discursive and political power, led to greater distortion of perception and even self-perception than ordinary cultural prejudices. Hence, the point of Said's critique of Orientalism was *not* that Europe or the 'West' had cultural prejudices. All cultures have their prejudices, but the hegemony of Europe in the past few centuries turned many European perspectives, prejudiced or not, into the main and at times the only – definitive – truth about complex non-European places, ideas, histories, customs or peoples. A failure to realize this leads to an inevitable repackaging of Orientalisms, especially in times of perceived threat, such as our post-9/11 era, as Sunaina Marr Maira (2009) and Arun Kundnani (2007) show in two very different studies. A definitive simplification and the centring of perception and experience around a post-imperial West (sometimes Europe, sometimes US, sometimes both) remain distinctive aspects of these re-Orientalisms, as do some reworked Orientalist perceptions.

Such re-Orientalisms have various sources. There is a burgeoning rightist, conservative neo-imperialist discourse, consolidated by political developments like the 'war on terror', that has re-employed old Orientalist tropes, such as the pre-historicity of the 'Orient', the duplicity of the 'Arab', etc. One can take most of these neo-discourses and understand them almost verbatim with reference to Said's selective but pertinent reading of the old Orientalisms. There is also a degree of 'marketing of the margins', as Graham Huggan (2001) puts it, which serves to privilege re-Orientalist tropes from another (liberal, left-leaning) political trajectory. The history of 'prizing otherness' in the Booker (Huggan 2001: 104) is just one instance of that. But I would prefer to eschew such temporal manifestations and look at the problem (and development) from a larger theoretical perspective: that of negotiating Otherness in the colonial and post-colonial contexts, before returning to what I consider the definitive aspect of re-Orientalisms in the field of contemporary English-language literature.

As I explored in detail in *The Gothic, Postcolonialism and Otherness* (2009), the Other can be visualized in various terms of difference – those of gender, sexuality, race, colour, ethnicity, culture, class, nationality, and so forth, or a combination of two or more of these. What the Other signifies is the *ineradicability of difference*. But this is not the same as absolute difference, across space or time: sheer incomprehension. For this difference to come into being, there already has to be a relationship between the Self and the Other. The very perception of difference insists on an exchange that can be experienced as different and a look, given and returned, which can distinguish sameness from difference along certain avenues of perception. The term 'Other' insists on this relationship, which is vital for both the Self and the Other and cannot be reduced to sameness. For the Other to be other, there has to be difference – *and* space for its acceptance, interplay and recognition. This is very different

from the common colonialist tendency to turn Otherness into sheer negativity, blankness or a waiting-to-be-the-sameness. Much of the recent slippage into Orientalist tropes comes from an inability to conceptualize this problem. This leads to a failure in narrating the alterity of the Other, or a tendency to narrate it simply in colonialist terms of absence and void.

These, however, are not exclusive or only options. I would like to illustrate this with Herman Melville's 1851 *Moby-Dick*. There are two central encounters with Otherness in *Moby-Dick*: Ishmael's encounter with the cannibal, Queequeg, and Captain Ahab's encounter with the white whale, Moby-Dick. Both are of very different character, though essentially about the same problem. Ishmael's encounter with Queequeg launches the narrative of the novel. It is worth examining its negotiation of sameness and difference. Ishmael, the narrator-protagonist, has just introduced himself as a man smitten by the sea: after many trips as a sailor in merchant ships, he has now decided to undertake a whaling voyage. This undertaking is itself presented by Ishmael in mock-heroic terms as a major event, sandwiched between imagined headlines reporting the election of the President of the US and 'Bloody Battle in Afghanistan' (Melville 2004: 37). Ishmael's narrative is already full of references to non-European spaces and people, and when he arrives in New Bedford, on his way to shipping abroad a Nantucket whaler, we enter a world that existed in both the Old World and the New, but one that has seldom been described. It is a world of black churches and coloured sailors. The note of cannibalism has already been sounded when Ishmael enters the Spouter-Inn for lodging and sees an array of spears, whaling lances and harpoons on its walls: 'You shuddered as you gazed, and wondered what monstrous cannibal and savage could ever have gone a death-harvesting with such a hacking, horrifying implement' (Melville 2004: 44). Inevitably, Ishmael uses the binarism of cannibalism constructed as a standard antithesis of (western) civilization, but he also turns it upside down. For very soon, in this very inn, he is to meet, and sleep with, a 'cannibal'.

Ishmael has his prejudices. Let alone cannibals, he is not too comfortable with racial strangers either. When he is told that he will have to share his room and bed with a 'dark complexioned chap', he tries to avoid such a fate and attempts to sleep on two hard and uneven benches: 'I could not help it, but I began to feel suspicious of the "dark complexioned" harpooner' (Melville 2004: 47). As he has not yet met the harpooner, Ishmael's suspicions are not grounded in any actual experience: they are the result of language and the assumptions he already carries in his mind. The 'dark complexioned' harpooner is portrayed in clearly 'Other' terms: Not only does he look different, he also earns money on the side by 'such a cannibal business as selling heads of dead idolators' (Melville 2004: 54) as souvenirs. When Ishmael finally decides to sleep in the room – the cannibal has still not returned – he rummages around in the harpooner's possessions and is confirmed in his perception of threat and difference. But even then, when the man finally arrives, Ishmael is in for a shock: 'What a sight! Such a face! It was of a dark,

purplish, yellow colour, here and there stuck over with large, blackish looking squares. Yes, it's just as I thought, he's a terrible bedfellow' (Melville 2004: 56). Narrating the story of this first meeting, which results in more frights, Ishmael makes a statement that appears retrospective and is significant to the entire matter: 'Ignorance is the parent of fear, and being completely nonplussed and confounded about the stranger, I confess I was now as much afraid of him as if it was the devil himself' (Melville 2004: 58).

Here, we have returned to the common Gothic linkage of the Devil with the 'dark complexioned' Other, the racial/colonial Other. But Ishmael's story is different: he gets to know this stranger, Queequeg, and they become the best of friends. However, this does not happen at the cost of Queequeg's Otherness: Queequeg remains a 'cannibal', different in his behaviour and beliefs but still able to relate to Ishmael. Perhaps it is this ability to live with the Other, which both Queequeg and Ishmael demonstrate, that finally complicates notions of cannibalism-vs-civilization to such an extent that we have remarks like this one by Ishmael later in the novel:

> Go to the meat-market of a Saturday night and see the crowds of live bipeds staring up at the long rows of dead quadrupeds. Does not that sight take a tooth out of the cannibal's jaw? Cannibals? Who is not a cannibal? I tell you it will be more tolerable for the feejee that salted down a lean missionary in his cellar against a coming famine; it will be more tolerable for that provident Feejee, I say, in the day of judgement, than for thee, civilized and enlightened gourmand, who nailest geese to the ground and feastest on their bloated livers in thy pâté-de-foie-gras.
> (Melville 2004: 415)

Ahab has a completely different relationship to Otherness. Moby-Dick, the whale, is incomprehensible to him (and to the sailors). This is not a total lack of comprehension; for instance, Ahab knows enough about Moby-Dick and sperm whales to be able to chart their courses and track them. But there is a point beyond which the whale, Moby-Dick, is *different*. It is the 'Other'. This point, which is a necessary condition to any encounter that the Self can have with another Self/Being, or a society can have with another society, can be accepted, as Stubbs the chief mate suggests, as a difference: it need not be attributed a negative or positive connotation. But this difference, as we have seen, is usually attributed a negative connotation. Ahab (and his sailors), as Ishmael did with Queequeg, tends to see Moby-Dick in the colours of the Devil, and even Ishmael succumbs to this perception at times. Ahab is not unaware of the sources of his hate for Moby-Dick. It is not just that the whale took off his leg; it is also because there is a point beyond which Moby-Dick, like all *Other* reality, is 'inscrutable'. This is how Ahab puts it,

> Hark ye yet again, the little lower layer. All visible objects, man, are but as pasteboard masks. *But in each event – in the living act, the undoubted*

> *deed – there, some unknown but still reasoning thing puts forth the mouldings of its features from behind the unreasoning mask.* If man will strike, strike through the mask! *How can the prisoner reach outside except by thrusting through the wall? To me, the white whale is that wall, shoved near to me.* Sometimes I think there's naught beyond. But 'tis enough. He tasks me; he heaps me; I see in him outrageous strength, with an inscrutable malice sinewing it. *That inscrutable thing is chiefly what I hate*; and be the white whale agent, or be the white whale principal, I will wreak that hate upon him.
>
> (Melville 2004: 237; italics mine)

This is a rich passage, but it is also – consciously or not – a powerful record of a common kind of reaction to the Other. The Other is always a Self with another will: 'some unknown but still reasoning thing'. Part of the threat (and value) of the Other arises from this 'wilful' and 'ineradicable' difference, this difference that can never be erased without erasing the Other which, like the white whale, is always 'shoved near' the Self. To live with this difference, this limit of scrutability, is to live differently – or, as Emmanuel Levinas suggests, it is to live with 'the moral imperative that *pierces* the self with moral obligation, with service to the other' (Cohen, in Levinas 2006: xxvii). Alternatively one can adopt the more common option, the option so often espoused within European imperialism (though by no means confined to it): one can, like Ahab, 'hate' that 'inscrutable thing', ascribe ulterior motives to it ('agent' of the Devil, or 'principally' Devilish) and seek to destroy it.

In his introduction to Levinas's *Humanism and the Other*, Richard A. Cohen addresses 'a question as old as philosophy': 'How does one preserve ineradicable difference while at the same time make genuine contact?' (Cohen, in Levinas 2006: xi) One can note the limitations (but not total redundancy) of language by highlighting how and why emotions play a major role in the colonial Gothic narration of Otherness.[1] Perhaps, as Levinas suggests too, it is a question that can be answered outside mainstream philosophy: it is a question that cannot be answered within the logocentricity of language, but can be answered in praxis. The very dichotomy between subject and object, Self and Other, etc., that basically Descartes formulated, and which continues to haunt European thinking, is based, after all, in a privileging of theory (and, hence, language) over experience: it is by 'thinking' in 'language' that Descartes concludes that

> it is not reliable judgement but merely some blind impulse that has made me believe up till now that there exist things distinct from myself which transmit to me ideas or images of themselves through the sense organs or in some other ways [or experience: my note].
>
> (Descartes, in Pojman 1998: 472)

For the experience of, say, cycling is not divided up between 'theory' and 'practice': one does not have a theory of cycling in mind when one cycles, or a

theory of the way the cycle operates. This theory of the 'cycle' comes into being, or is required, only when the cycle breaks down.[2]

And that is what Melville's *Moby-Dick* suggests: for it is in praxis that Ishmael and Queequeg learn to 'preserve ineradicable difference' and 'make genuine contact' and it is both in language and in praxis that Ahab fails. This may be one reason why creative literature, which largely *depicts* experiences and events, is better at coping with Otherness than discursive and academic literature, which often tends to follow logical contradictions to the point of intellectual genocide. Hence, perhaps, the postcolonial attempt – brave, necessary and radical in its own ways and context – to narrate the Other or to narrate Otherness is flawed from the start, for it brings into language that which cannot be really spoken about, or not fully. On the other hand, the colonialist binarisms that postcolonialism often – and rightly – disdains can be turned to great (though often limited) effect by the best literary practitioners, because the binarisms, when not totally simplified, also imply a point of contradiction, which might allow space for alterity to survive in the narrative even if it is not narrated.

In the colonial response, Otherness, as discussed in this chapter, and narrated, often at its most complex, in Gothic or Gothicized fiction from the period, is commonly perceived as a threat. But if the inescapable proximity and final irreducibility of the Other can be experienced simply as a threat to the existence of the Self (as above), colonial discourses can also posit the Other as utterly knowable in his/her/its (fetishized/negativized) Otherness. In the colonial Gothic, these two approaches are present, but along with it is the recognition of the centrality of the Other, which translates not only as repulsion (threat/terror/death) but also as attraction (possibility/transcendence/love). For instance, the relationship between Victoria and the Moor in Charlotte Dacre's Gothic novel *Zofloya* (1997) is structured by this complexity.

One can keep adding examples from primary and secondary literature, but it is better to return to the other side of the argument – that relating to postcolonialism. I have indicated above that colonial Gothic/ized fiction, with its binarisms (even with its simplified antagonisms, its desperate attempts to negate or eradicate the threat of the Other), recognized, if only grudgingly or implicitly, the alterity of the Other. However, as I have suggested earlier, this could not be the case with postcolonial Gothicized fiction (and postcolonial literature in general) when it set out to narrate or narrate from the position of the Other. While the attempt itself was necessary and laudable, it created another set of problems even as it remedied some of the imbalances and problems of colonial discourse and fiction. If the colonial Gothic/ized text was haunted by ghosts from the empire, the unconscious conceptual litany of that haunting ran thus: can the Other be anything but the obverse of the Self or its juvenile/deviant version? And if so, is the Other anything but a threat and a source of terror – to be reduced, if juvenile/delinquent, or to be fled from and/or eliminated, if the obverse of the Self?

Heading the other way, postcolonial texts are faced with another set of questions. They usually take for granted the need to narrate, defend, justify the colonized and the subaltern – the Other, in conceptual terms. But in the execution of this need they are faced with the problem of language and its close imbrications with power: a scream of terror negates and reduces the Other but starkly registers its alterity; an explanation of events and character, however, runs the risk of reducing the Other to more of the self-same.[3] The Other is not simply 'limit and menace', a cause of terror, to the Self. Levinas does not dispute this 'repressive function' of the Other, adducing 'the wars and violence' of history as evidence of it. But he points out that 'the other man – the absolutely other – the Other – does not exhaust his presence by that repressive function. His presence can be meeting and friendship, and in this the human is in contrast with all other reality' (Levinas 1999: 56).

As much as we may criticize the dominant colonial discourses of non-European Otherness and the very exploitative and demeaning nature of colonization, the very notion of colonial conceptions of non-European Otherness allowed some spaces of implicit narration and alterity that are sometimes closed or blurred in the postcolonial bid to narrate non-European Otherness. On the other hand, the postcolonial bid to narrate the 'other half of the story' is a necessary corrective to the colonial tendency to view the Other as either a Self-waiting-to-be or the negative image of the Self. In both cases, however, the space allowed to the alterity of the Other shrinks when that difference is sought in order to be captured in language. As Gayatri Spivak has shown, the attempt of intellectuals to 'dissolve and know the discourse of society's Other' often leads to an appropriation or making transparent of the Other (Spivak 1988: 271), and hence basically reduces the Other to the Self. However, this need not lead us to simply ask the question: can the subaltern speak? For that question is again circumscribed by the Cartesian privileging of language and theory as the only or primary source of agency, opposition and legitimacy. For the subaltern may not be able to speak, but the subaltern can throw stones, burn books, shout, even – though this is something that the pacifist in me cannot condone – maim or kill. It is in this realization that we can still leave space open for the alterity of the Other to be registered – but not explained away or, as literature, narrated 'fully', narrated as a smooth 'prizing otherness'. It is by consciously creating narrative space for the alterity of the Other – if necessary by breaking the narrative, plunging it into silence or noise – that we can avoid the smoothness of current re-Orientalisms.

An excessively 'smooth', 'linear', 'gripping', 'transparent', 'enjoyable' – there are a number of such adjectives privileged by literary agents, publishers and journalistic critics today – narrative is likely to lead to the disappearance of alterity in the bid of narrating it. If the colonialist trend was towards the simplified segregation of spaces narrated by Said in his 'club' anecdote and studied by him in *Orientalism*, the multicultural/postcolonial desire to narrate difference itself runs the risk of a definitive simplification that inevitably

borrows its colours from Orientalism and leads to re-Orientalisms. Limitations, simplifications and, at times, distortions of the complexity of places are not a feature only of Orientalism, or even simply imperialism – they are a feature of any dominant discourse. The dominance of a discourse can be measured less by its 'truth-quotient', if there is any such thing, and more by its ability to structure (explain, describe and record) reality in its own terms, as Michel Foucault has indicated in various contexts. This is not to claim that discourses are fairy tales, and hence any one is as good or as bad as any other, but it is to underline the base of power on which a dominant discourse depends and, at the same time, dialectically if you will, creates.

Today, when multicultural and/or (soft) postcolonial literatures have come to be accepted, at least in the publishing world and Anglophone academia, a certain relation of postcolonial reality has started assuming the contours of a discourse. Some of it unconsciously shares the enabling discursive elements of Orientalism, as understood by Said: the depiction of the non-European Other in terms of lack or negativity. But even the kinds of literature that do not subscribe, consciously or unconsciously, to such a notion of Otherness have to address the relationship between exoticism and the need/drive to transcend one's own space. After all, to narrate/read the postcolonial is always to engage with that which is not just colonial; to narrate/read the non-European is always to engage with that which is not just European. The process requires an effort to transcend one's own space, particularly so on the part of the western or global readership of postcolonial literatures: this can also be the discursive spaces of a preferred language of writing, as in the case of Anglophone literatures. However, this bid to transcend can very easily lapse into exoticism on the part of the writer, the reader, the critic or all three.

I argue that 'exoticism' and 'transcendence' are different and will illustrate that difference with reference to some recent postcolonial fiction. Put simply, exoticism (negative or positive in its connotations) constructs the 'Other' space in a way that does not disrupt, inconvenience or question the space of the Self. It is this that Huggan, for instance, critiques in his reference to the awards culture of the Booker as 'prizing otherness'. However, the actual Other – irreducible to the Self in its alterity, while demanding a response from the Self, as Levinas puts it – is reduced to a negativized/simplified Otherness in such attempts. In this sense 'exoticism' is an easy way out of the problems of 'transcendence', which always calls the Self into question. An easy route out of this questioning of the Self is the 'enjoyable' or 'transparent' narrative. To understand this let us look at the privileging of story-telling, which is so much a part of postcolonialist orthodoxy now and has been accepted by general critics too (who, however, sometimes echo a strand of Orientalism in seeing postcolonial authors as story-tellers rather than novelists[4]). A glance at the blurbs of recent fiction indicates that there is too much story-telling and too little of anything else in the global book market: Monica Ali, Yann Martell, post-Satanic Salman Rushdie, Khaled Hosseini, etc. It appears that

today the highest compliment critics can pay a novelist is to describe her as a great story-teller. Where would that have left Proust, Joyce or Camus?

Historically speaking, it is doubtful that novelists with intricate stories between their covers were primarily story-tellers. Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov* (1880) and George Eliot's *Middlemarch* (1871–72) are not easy-to-read stories, or even meant to be read simply as stories. In *Dead Souls* (1842), Gogol does not turn the very marketable idea of selling the dead into a thriller or a thigh-slapper. Zola's *The Ladies' Paradise* (1883) is not simply an entertaining *Dallas*. However, look at any of the novels being currently placed on the front shelves of the large bookstores, promoted by book clubs, overloaded with advances and awarded prizes like the Booker, and you come across (sometimes excellent) story-telling, and (sometimes) little else. Where are the novels experimenting with narration, style, ideas, conventions, newness? They are being written, but they are not visible – and perhaps not winning the Booker either. There was a time when story-telling needed to be championed. After all, story-telling is the proletariat of novel writing, just as basic, as essential, as likely to be dismissed by the cerebral classes. And yet an excessive celebration of story-telling is problematic. There are at least two major objections to this predominance of story-telling in the art of novel-writing today: the first one relates to the genre, and the second to the world around it.

To take the generic objection first: at least those of us who write in English have no excuse to ignore the name of the genre 'novel'. It is true that every once in a while a critic or a novelist tries to define the genre, usually by highlighting one of the many elements that go into it: plot, story, language, characterization, individualism, print, whatever. But the genre defines itself also in terms of novel-ness: by definition, a novel (at least in English, where it is not a 'roman') is something new. Hence, one can argue that the premium should be not on story-telling – which is an age-old art – or any other component of the novel, but on experimentation and contestation in the novel as a whole. I am not arguing in favour of newness for the sake of newness. I am aware that the novel grew to strength with the rise of industrial capitalism and that newness remains one of the gods of capitalism. Like all gods, it is capable of much mischief. And yet, to take newness out of the novel – at least as self-aware contestation, re-questioning, experimentation – is to take the novel out of this world.

The other – worldly – objection relates to the ways in which story-telling (unlike the narrative of a novel) operates. Story-telling is a collective art. It depends on large areas of agreement. This is what explains, partly, all those novels by 'coloured' writers that finally tell us about the confusion of Third World immigrants in the West, or about Indian or Muslim women contending against (eastern) patriarchy in London or New York, thus echoing Orientalist tropes. It is not that such stories do not exist, but they are told more often because that is how western readers see eastern women and men. What about other stories – for example, those of Indian women with professional degrees

and work experience who marry into the US or Europe and are turned into housewives for years or for ever, because their visas do not permit them to work? I know more eastern women turned into housewives by the West than eastern women who are being civilized into modernity by contact with the West, but I am still to read about the former in prize-winning novels.

Even promising bestsellers, like Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* (2003), Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* (2003) and Marina Lewycka's *A Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian* (2005) display this consumerist bias in favour of stories that are already visible, shared stories. This explains the stories of *Brick Lane*, published at a time when visa, custom and anti-terror restrictions had begun to impact even on privileged commuters from the East, culminating in this scene: 'Two Bangladeshi women, middle-aged immigrants, decide to go skating. But you cannot skate in a sari, says one. Oh yes, you can. You can do anything in England, replies the other' (2003: 412–13; my paraphrase). There is no suggestion of irony in this narrative. And while I will gladly concede that some women can do things in London that they cannot do in, say, Kabul, the fact remains that some women can also do things in Jakarta, Delhi or Karachi that they are not allowed or able to do in London or Copenhagen. In 1987, Ravinder Randhawa, a pioneer of modern South Asian writing in England, published a hilarious, gendered novel, *A Wicked Old Woman*, playing with exactly these possibilities and prohibitions: its protagonist was an immigrant woman who pretended to be old in order to wrangle more personal space within England. Of course, the novel never became a bestseller.

If literature, as is often claimed, is meant to challenge and question, then it appears that many eulogized recent novels depend on questioning the Other, not the reading Self in the West. *A Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian*, an admirable work of humour in many ways, nevertheless depends on stereotyped perceptions of Communism and the conflict between 'new' and 'old' East Europe. It also offers fair dollops of complacency to us in the West, constantly highlighting the rational, democratic, tolerant aspects of England. Similarly, Hosseini's *The Kite Runner*, another promising first novel, does something remarkable – and unnoticed by critics. Praised as a 'masterful story' of Afghanistan, it keeps us in Afghanistan until the first years of Soviet control and invasion, then it skips the Mujahideen phase and returns us to Afghanistan only once the Taliban are in place. Would it be possible for a writer to narrate the Mujahideen – those equivalents of the founding fathers of America, according to one US president – and still write a bestseller? Or have we become incapable – at least in the supermarkets of literature – of reading novels that make us question our own roles and assumptions, our own complicity in the horrors of the world?

We are increasingly told stories that can be pulled off the shelves of our age's discursive supermarkets and do not have to be retrieved from some remote corner shop; they are stories that encourage us not to think too much. Perhaps that is why even excellent first novels, like Zadie Smith's *White Teeth*

(2000), and Booker-winners like Yann Martel's *Life of Pi* (2002), tend to be so lenient about nomenclature, mixing up Hindu and Muslim names with no narrative justification, not even that of the 'unreliable narrator' claimed by Salman Rushdie when critics accused his *Midnight's Children* (1981) of historical errors. After all, what's in a name, as long as the brand – in these two cases 'India' – is apt? What is 'an interesting story': something 'all of us' find 'interesting' or 'share'? By these supermarket standards, Proust's stories were not worth telling, and Joyce was not capable of telling his stories well. Even Shakespeare, though not a novelist, hardly ever told an original story or told it 'well': consider Hamlet, that moronic ditherer!

Interestingly, such is the hold of story-telling on much of global and postcolonial writing that even highly intelligent writers fail to see its implications. For instance, Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* (1997), a Booker winner and an excellent first novel, was obviously written (and read) as championing small stories, submerged secrets, repressed memories and subaltern experiences. This was stressed not only by the title of the novel, its structure and narratives, but also, very clearly, by an apt opening quotation from John Berger: 'Never again will a single story be told as though it's the only one' (Roy 1997: i). But then, in its unconscious kowtowing to the myth of story-telling, the novel went on to contain lines like these:

> It didn't matter that the story had begun, because kathakali discovered long ago that the secret of the Great Stories is that they have no secrets. The Great Stories are the ones you have heard and want to hear again. The ones you can enter anywhere and inhabit comfortably. They don't deceive you with thrills and trick endings. They don't surprise you with the unforeseen. They are familiar as the house you live in … In the Great Stories you know who lives, who dies, who finds love, who doesn't. And yet you want to know again.
>
> (Roy 1997: 229)

There is something disturbingly contradictory in a novelistic discourse that begins with that Berger quotation – with its deep suspicion of meta-narratives – and then goes on to celebrate story-telling, because it is seen as oral and subaltern, quite unconscious of the fact that it is also highly hegemonic. After all, the *kathakali* act replays one of the two main epics of Hinduism in this case, and a story that works because its endings are known is above all hegemonic. In fact, as I have argued, for a narrative to be celebrated as story-telling, it has to draw upon hegemonic and dominant narrative strands and tropes. If it draws upon lesser or subaltern ones, it will not be heard or read as a 'great story'.

This is, however, repetition with a difference. Re-Orientalism is genetically modified Orientalism, as I shall indicate towards the end of this chapter. In the postcolonial context, this means (in the first instance) that certain aspects of colonial narratives are repeated again and again, consciously or not, with or without irony. Some of these aspects I have already listed. But there are others:

for instance, the centrality of the colonial bridge. Again and again, in different ways from Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* to Roy's *The God of Small Things*, the postcolonial novel returns to the cultural bridge of colonization (Anglophone colonization in the case of India) at the expense of so many other bridges. Similarly, when it celebrates hybridity, it usually sees this hybridity in Anglophone terms: hence, an Indian who speaks English is a hybrid, but a Tamil who speaks Marathi is largely left un-narrated in her specificity, or even implicitly reduced to a kind of mono-cultural denseness. Likewise, there is often an undue stress on English as a language, almost (as even in Jeet Thayil's excellent and *major* poetry collection, *English* (2003)) the only 'nation' available to the writer. The celebration of creoles complicates but does not change this equation – as the creoles being celebrated are always English-based (in the Anglophone context) – and hence return us to the fecundity myth of colonization. This leaves out the condition of other kinds of postcolonial writers, whose relationship to English is different. In all these cases the *space* of discourses (also those contained in a particular language) tends to push into a specific *place* of enunciation in such a way as to make the *place* visible in terms that reduce its alterity – either by making it transparent or by making it exotic (that is, different but only in terms permitted by the dominant discourses, in the sense in which Ziauddin Sardar (1996) talks about the 'double victimization' of Pocahontas in the successful Disney animation film).

The problem, as is obvious, has to do with negotiating similarity and difference. Writing across cultures, which have already been narrated by Orientalism and associated colonial discourses, postcolonial authors can either copy or reverse the narratives of the past. This is more so if what is required or expected of them is 'great story-telling' because the registers of greatness in story-telling are already over-determined by the past. Both options, however, lead to a privileging of the colonial bridge, a re-usage of Orientalist narratives – an aspect of re-Orientalism, which as we shall see, is capable of further genetic modification. Both are obviously ways in which exoticism – a construction of the Other by the Self – returns in the garb of a postcolonial narrative. Such a return might question the Other, but it does not question the Self: for instance, one can argue that Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* (1988) is a *great* (and greatly disturbing) novel for readers from a Muslim background, but it is a largely soft and comfortable one for most non-Muslim western multicultural readers. As stated earlier, exoticism constructs the Other space in a way that does not really disrupt, inconvenience or question the place of the Self, or does not do so to the same extent. On the other hand, perhaps, the attempt to transcend the Self, even when it echoes some exotic narratives, can be used to bounce back from the space of Otherness to question the Self. Maybe that is why a text like Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1988), despite its colonial connotations and notwithstanding the prevalence of universal readings that it elicits, is not a soft text. For it does not just tell a 'great story': it gets all tangled up in its attempt to tell and not to tell the stories that could not be told in the nineteenth century, the stories that became just a

civilized lie of imperialism. It does not manage to present the half-visible, but it does – unlike soft fiction[5] – record the deeply disturbing existence of that which was 'not supposed to be here'.

In literary re-Orientalism then, the texts that are privileged are those that return to the centrality of the West in different ways, even in negative ones. This is what I mean by a slight genetic modification of Orientalism: the discourse is no longer the colonialist one of 'civilizing' the world, but the West (and values seen as rooted in and deriving from this West) is still seen as performing a *definitive* – constructive or disruptive – role. Hence, the popularity of multicultural London novels of the kind that, even when they are groundbreaking in many other ways, end up simplifying multicultural India or Bangladesh. Hence the sari in the skating rink and the missing Mujahideen. These novels are different from colonial ones; they are often aware of Orientalist tropes, but even these novels depend on a crucial aspect of re-Orientalism: the trend towards a definitive simplification and the centring of perception and experience around a post/imperial West. In doing so, they narrate the space of the Other in ways that do not, finally, disrupt, inconvenience or question the space of the Self.

Notes

1 Developed further in Khair's *The Gothic, Postcolonialism and Otherness* (2009).

2 I owe my example of the cycle to a conversation with Dr Kevin Cahill, University of Bergen, Norway.

3 As is obvious by now, my use of Otherness in this paper draws from texts by Levinas, Martin Buber, Tzvetan Todorov and Michel de Certeau. It differs from various other European formulations, at least in the sense in which Buber puts the stress not on the 'cogito' but on the relation to the Other as the basis of philosophy and knowledge (Buber 1958), a point also echoed by Levinas. It also departs from the European mainstream philosophical tradition in Levinas' formulation:

> The very large and quasi-formal structures of the neo-Platonic schemata, the contours of which can still be clearly discerned in the set of modern Hegelian or Husserlian themes … mark the return of transcendent thought to itself, the identity of the identical and the non-identical in self-consciousness, which recognizes itself as infinite thought 'without other' in Hegel. And, on another plane, they command Husserl's 'phenomenological reduction', in which the identity of pure consciousness carries within itself, in the guise of the 'I think', understood as intentionality – *ego cogito cogitatum* – all 'transcendence', all alterity. 'All externality' reduces to or returns to the immanence of a subjectivity that itself and in itself exteriorizes itself.
>
> (Levinas 1999: 11–12)

> For Levinas, not only is 'knowledge' in itself 'a relation to something other than consciousness and, as it were, the aim or willing of that other, which is its object' (Levinas 1999: 16–17) and the Other is an 'end', not simply a 'means' (Levinas 1999: 148), but also the Other is 'inassimilable', 'irreducible', 'unique' (Levinas 1999: 138). Or, as Pierre Hayat puts it in his introduction to Levinas's *Alterity and Transcendence*,
>
> In order for a true transcendence to be possible, the other must concern the I, while at the same time remaining external to it. It is especially necessary that the other, by his very exteriority, his alterity, should cause the I to exit the self.
>
> (Levinas 1999: p. xiii)

4 Just as 'natives' and 'blacks' were supposed to play music but not to compose, to be athletic but not to be much good at sports, and so on, well into the twentieth century.
5 I have borrowed the term 'soft fiction' (as implicitly opposed to 'hard fiction') from the conversation of the French writer and critic Dr Sébastien Doubinsky.

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