

Autophagia and Queer Transnationality: Compulsory Heteroimperial Masculinity in Deepa Mehta's *Fire*

I am suggesting that heterosexuality, like motherhood, needs to be recognized and studied as a *political institution*.

—Adrienne Rich (1993, 232)

Behold the mighty Englishman
He rules the Indian small
Because being a meat-eater
He is five cubits tall.

—Narmad, Gujarati poet (quoted in Gandhi 1957, 21)

The fundamental sanity of Indian civilization has been due to an absence of Satan.

—Romila Thapar (1990, 15)

In “**Queer Nationality**” (1993), Lauren Berlant and Elizabeth Freeman describe “*Americana nervosa*,” a condition that involves “compulsive self-gorging” (194). *Americana nervosa* constitutes citizenship as “national iconicity” (195), that is, simultaneous self-constitution and self-consumption. For Berlant and Freeman the body politic is figured by a politics of the body that is, in fact, a geographical politics: heterosexuality is unrecognizable without “bounded spaces” (205) and maintenance of those spaces (see Bacchetta et al. 2002). A queered analytic of nationalism brings spatiality into question, because heterosexuality demands the protection of boundaries in order to constitute the normative heterosexual subject.

Berlant and Freeman neglect, however, the transnational and global ramifications of the heteronormative economy. American consumer culture, in the global traffic of commodities, desires, fears, and nostalgias, is the hegemonic cultural form of self-expression and memory. The insignias of American consumption are the insignias of proper space and proper time, and American space and time are the world's future: freedom qua

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consumptive modernity. Relegated to “the waiting room of history,” to use Dipesh Chakrabarty’s (2000, 8) phrase, so-called developing nations glance through glossy magazines and watch commercials that evoke desire for a future that is also America’s present. For Americans, accordingly, “the past is usually another country” (Appadurai 1990, 327), and people in the rest of the world are Americans in the making.

Through this imperial and totalitarian gesture, the American subject becomes subjectivity, becomes knowledge, becomes system, becomes Western, becomes truth, becomes (new) world. Within this framework, therefore, America is a heteroimperial, masculine, and consumptive nation. American autophagia requires “commodity spectacle,” fetish objects such as flags, uniforms, and (virtual reality) maps as well as anthems, sports, military displays, commodity logos, and mass rallies (McClintock 1995, 373–75). This body politic and politics of the body, what I term *compulsory heteroimperial masculinity*, is characterized by what Judith Butler calls “First-Worldism”: “a certain sense of the world as a national entitlement” (2004, 39). Nationalism, which does not “acknowledge that there is a world beyond America” (Roy 2005, 43), is the alibi for a compulsory heteroimperial masculinity that is pathological; capitalist fundamentalism relegates the non-West to perpetual belatedness and demands the (pre-emptive) protection of boundaries in order to elicit the requisite shock and awe.¹

In this article I reconfigure Berlant and Freeman’s notion of queer nationality as queer transnationality. While Berlant and Freeman challenge the conflation of a queer body politic and politics of the body with market segments and products, I take their argument further by transnationalizing queers: how complicit is queer consumptive modernity in imperialism and the international division of labor? The critical question becomes not only how queers consume but how queers are consumed in the global rather than Americentric traffic of nostalgias, identities, and desires. The central fact in my argument is that the notions of world and home are a priori

¹ I use the term *nationalism* here as opposed to the term *patriotism* in order to maintain the distinction between the nation and the state. The nation is the people insofar as they involve heterogeneous memories and traditions. The state is the official body of governance, whether democratically elected or not. The state involves the formation of a nationalist identity and history in the context of anticolonial or anti-imperial movements or in the formation of collective histories and self-identity. Thus, nationalist movements are normative and homogenizing because they either represent the party line or are formed in opposition to party lines (imperial or indigenous dictatorial regimes, for example) and thus require a sense of unity. I am referring, therefore, to the hegemonic constitution of a diverse and complex people as “American” qua heteroimperial masculinity.

performed and articulated through heteroimperial masculine boundary maintenance. Thus democracy in its current American form necessitates compulsory heteroimperial masculinity.

This form of compulsory heterosexuality renders any other nationalist imaginary, or any other imagining of heterosexuality, to be regressive and pathological, terrorist or fundamentalist. In other words, the way to be heterosexual is to be an American heterosexual; heteroimperial masculinity becomes synonymous with heterosexuality. Thus, the difference between America and the developing world is no longer one of assertive public subjectivity based on rights for individuals in the former and lack thereof in the latter. Instead, appropriate heteroimperial masculinity becomes the proper form of civilization, history, and modernity.

In order to demonstrate the politics of queer transnationality as a possible subversion of heteroimperial masculinity, I do not focus further on the American landscape. Instead, I take my analysis to the empire of “make-believe Americans” (Appadurai 1990, 329) whose “evolutionary belatedness” (McClintock 1995, 44) is signified by improper heterosexuality and thus improper nationhood. I do so in order to demonstrate how the post in postcolonial enables an understanding of the colonial in postcolonial, thereby exposing a temporality and spatiality that is neither “post” nor developing. Through an analysis of Deepa Mehta’s film *Fire* (1996), I describe how compulsory heteroimperial masculinity travels and becomes constitutive, even when, as in the case of *Fire*, no American character is represented on-screen. I argue that compulsory heteroimperial masculinity operates even when Americans themselves are absent. This demonstrates its force and its mobility.

Indeed, what viewers see in *Fire* are the insignias of proper consumptive modernity (billboards, fast food, video rental stores, brand names, popular hybrid dance music, motorcycles, English dialogue) accompanied by a lack of proper heteroimperial masculinity. All male characters in the film are pathological; that is, they are improperly masculine even though all the logos of modernity (double-entendre be noted) surround them. Pathological Indian masculinity becomes the stage on which the relationship between the female lead characters, Radha and Sita, emerges. Radha and Sita are consumed, via the film itself as a commodity, as quintessentially Indian because they are victims of an innately pathological Indian masculinity, which does not seem to change even in a modern and metropolitan India. Yet, they are also consumed as universally queer heroines because theirs is a timeless story of female love and desire at odds with nation, culture, and history. The film as cultural commodity allows the audience to consume both a regressive Indian masculinity that fails to

keep up with the times and a female love and desire that are Indian and yet also a force of modernity. As mentioned earlier, a politics of mobility characterizes and constitutes compulsory heteroimperial masculinity so that heterosexuality no longer remains in motion. By seeing how compulsory heteroimperial masculinity travels because it is hegemonic and seeks hegemony, I emphasize, along with Rajeswari Sunder Rajan and You-me Park, that knowledge that “addresses issues concerning the most ‘backward’ parts of the world may claim the most advanced understanding of contemporary global reality” (Sunder Rajan and Park 2000, 66).

Fire enables an analysis of compulsory heteroimperial masculinity in two specific ways: First, while scholars such as Gayatri Gopinath and Geeta Patel focus on the homoerotic and homosocial relationship between Radha and Sita, the two female protagonists, I analyze the migrant, and orientalized, body of Julie. Julie is doubly dramatized as the licentious Western(ized) woman in contrast to the chaste and pure Hindu middle-class woman and as the “Oriental” woman (she escaped the tyrannies of the revolution in China) who betrays indigenous men because she desires an American (real) man qua heteroimperial masculinity. Julie becomes the repository not only of Indian anxieties about boundary maintenance against Chinese aggression (India fought and lost a war against China in 1962) and economic competition but also of inferiority: Indian men are not men enough to be desired by Western(ized) women.

This analysis of Julie demonstrates that the protagonists of *Fire* are not those who are on-screen but rather those who are offscreen. The post-colonial face-off is one between the heteroimperial American masculinity desired by Julie at the expense of her lover Jatin, on the one hand, and hagiographic, feminized, anti-imperial masculinity figured by the father of the nation, Mahatma Gandhi, and imbibed by Ashok at the expense of his wife Radha, on the other. Radha and Sita’s relationship, therefore, must be contextualized within various “sexual economies” (John and Nair 1998, 7) that constitute what Mary E. John terms the “force-field” (1998, 370) of its legibility.² As mentioned earlier, both queer nationality and queer transnationality must account for regimes of heteroimperial bound-

² John and Nair define sexual economies as “the materiality of sites where discussions of ‘sex’ are laid out and contested, rather than with abstract positions” (1998, 7). Similarly, John refers to “the sexual domain as a *force-field*, an intersubjective realm in and by which sexual desire is variously aroused, blocked, or violated and where much more than the freedom or lack of sexual expression is involved. In order to discover what greater sexual agency might promise for women, we urgently require a more effective descriptive apparatus that would provide the ability to name socio-psycho-sexual processes that are historical and mortal” (John 1998, 370).

ary maintenance that configure compulsory heterosexuality. In other words, from the perspective of heteronormativity, Indian men are pathological because they do not embody heteroimperial masculinity; conversely, I argue that because Indian men do not embody heteroimperial masculinity, it is heteroimperial masculinity that is itself pathological.

Second, *Fire* enables us to discern how compulsory heteroimperial masculinity deploys compulsory heterosexuality for boundary maintenance. Jatin fails to become a proper heteroimperial masculine subject because he is unable to keep his wife Sita under his control (she stands up to him and loves Radha) and is also unable to keep his lover Julie under his control (she refuses to marry him and globalizes herself as an object of desire by learning how to speak with an American accent). Even though Jatin is modern (he wears Western clothes, while Ashok wears a traditional *dhoti* made from *khadi*), he cannot elicit the requisite shock and awe for boundary maintenance: Julie wants to flee India for Hong Kong, and Sita leaves him and their home. Similarly, Ashok fails to become a proper heteroimperial masculine subject. Ashok loses control over his wife Radha, and she leaves their home with Sita even though feminized anti-imperial masculinity deploys compulsory heterosexuality to keep women in their places and counters perceived Western lasciviousness through renunciation of sexual desires. Neither Ashok nor Jatin, however, overreach the logic of compulsory heteroimperial masculinity that determines their heterosexuality. The compulsory heterosexuality that emerges from the logic of compulsory heteroimperial masculinity can only see (“seeing without looking” being one of the most important tropes of the movie) pathological (because nonheteronormative), compulsory (because failed heteronormative) homosexuality. What cannot be seen, and can only be looked at voyeuristically (through Ashok’s horrified eyes and through Jatin’s titillation at his wife’s new-found sassiness), are Radha and Sita at face value: two women who love each other. Indeed, the ostensible dichotomy between feminized anti-imperial masculinity and improper but on its way to becoming proper patriarchy (thus not only able to control women but also desirable for Western women who will naturally fall into place for a real man) through consumptive modernity comes full circle as both brothers have the same response to Radha and Sita: arousal. Radha and Sita, on the contrary, create a relationship that is appropriate and healthy within coercive heterosexist familial, institutional, and national body politics and politics of the body. In other words, within compulsory heteroimperial masculinity, the unhealthy is healthy because it exemplifies protest against coercion; within compulsory heteroimperial masculinity, the abnormal is normal because it resists homogenization.

The Subcontinental feminine

Fire recreates colonial scripts of inadequacy and effeminacy such that a pathological model of compulsory heterosexuality reinforces itself within a postcolonial Hindu middle-class home and its inhabitants.³ The British construed Indian patriarchy as unnatural, a construal due to the foregrounding of an extreme and not widely practiced form of violence against women (sati), unlike the purportedly natural division of sexes constituting British patriarchy. In the colonial context, moreover, Hindu men were likened to British women and therefore considered unfit for governance and, by extension, the (white man's) burdens of rationality and empire.⁴

While numerous scholars have pointed out that all the male characters in the film are patriarchal and violent, I take this claim further by emphasizing the form of masculinity that is (compulsorily) operative within the film. None of the male characters attains proper heteroimperial masculinity qua nationhood, and none of the female characters emerges as a suitable partner for the heteroimperial masculine subject. Even though Biji, the mother-in-law, presumably fulfilled her patriarchal obligations by having two sons, she is old, widowed, and dependent upon her sons. Indeed, her muteness symbolizes the silence imposed on mothers working for patriarchy, even improper patriarchy, just as her disloyalty does: she will not testify on behalf of Radha and Sita. Thus, the love and desire experienced by Radha and Sita can only emerge within "failed heteronormative arrangements" (Gopinath 1997, 482) or in the "absence of 'real' men" (484) because Mehta's film testifies that there are no real men in India, only pathological ones. Gopinath locates "nonheteronormative arrangements within rigidly heterosexual structures" (1997, 473). I disagree with her premises even though I believe that she is absolutely right to question a purportedly natural teleological "narrative of 'lesbian' sexuality," which considers the move "from a private, domestic sphere into

³ According to Partha Chatterjee, colonizers "assume sympathy with the unfree and oppressed womanhood of India" and "transform this figure . . . into a sign of the inherently oppressive and unfree nature of the entire cultural tradition of a country" (1993, 118). Similarly, Mrinalini Sinha recounts the Ilbert Bill controversy of 1883–84. Law member of the government of India C. P. Ilbert introduced the bill to amend the Code of Criminal Procedure of the Indian Penal Code so that it would be possible for native officials to have limited jurisdiction over British subjects in country towns. What Sinha terms the "politics of colonial masculinity" (1995, 44) juxtaposed the stereotype of the "manly Englishman" (41) and the "effeminate Bengali *babu*" (40) to deprive native officials of the right to oversee trials of British subjects.

⁴ See Nandy 1980, 1983; McClintock 1995; Sinha 1995; Chopra, Osella, and Osella 2004.

a public, visible, 'lesbian' subjectivity" (482) to be progress and modernity as such.

Gopinath's "geography of desire and pleasure" (1997, 473) calls for "transnational spectatorship" (Gopinath 2000, 283) or a "queer diasporic viewing practice" that will "reimagine and reterritorialize the 'homeland'" as the "locus of queer desire and pleasure" (284). These transnational "alternative circuits" (Gopinath 2002, 155) and "multiple movements" demonstrate that the nation is "marked by diasporic movement just as the diaspora becomes a part of the nation" (154). By focusing on the space within, however, Gopinath paradoxically ignores the space without, a temporality and spatiality that, as I mentioned earlier, in fact enables and determines the (dualistic) naming of hetero- and homosexuality and their interpellative e/affects. Seeing nonheteronormativity within heteronormativity destabilizes the presumed naturalness of heteronormativity, but it does not necessarily call into question what amounts to, in Gopinath's account, a naturalized queerness or queer diasporic viewing practice. What is it that we (queer diasporic viewers) are looking for? Will we know it when we see it?

Similarly, Patel mistakenly construes criticism of Mehta's representation of Indian men as the diasporic reformulation "brown women must protect brown men (and themselves) from white men and women" (2002, 223). For Patel such criticism of the film (by the president of the Indian student's association at a small women's college in America) serves to restrict discussion because "the voice of the designated 'other' has spoken her will, through a speaking of her injury" (223). Injury trumps analysis when the raced body is assumed to be authentic and thus irrefutable. This prevents an examination of the investment in figuring raced beings in the United States as failed or excessive. Also, such criticism, according to Patel, forestalls recognition that "virile heteromascularity is fully implicated in a right-wing production of proper masculine citizenship in South Asia" (223). Although Patel is absolutely right in this regard, I disagree with her hasty dismissal of "anxieties about masculinities" (223) if only because such representations of masculinity are also cultural capital: culture as capital, that is, culture as property bought and sold in the marketplace for cultural currency and capital.

Thus, even as Patel recognizes that notions of proper cultural capital, "capital that ought to travel, and traverse national borders" (2002, 229), censor critical analysis, she delivers a surprisingly apologist and dualistic reading of *Fire* by stating, "In South Asia, neither men nor women seem to have obsessed about masculinity. Instead, the three nodes of incitement, each produced through the other, were Indianness, women and sexuality,

and freedom of expression in the public sphere” (230). I am unclear, however, how India and a movie ostensibly about India can represent all of South Asia and its people. Also, how can any discourse that focuses on women, the public sphere, sexuality, religion, and free speech ignore masculinity? Anxieties about masculinity underlie criticisms of and reactions to the film, for both Western and non-Western audiences.⁵ Furthermore, as numerous scholars have demonstrated, masculine anxiety is one of the most fundamental and well-documented tropes of imperial and postcolonial modernity.⁶

While it is clear, therefore, that *Fire* is situated within a larger framework of (un)belonging, I locate my analysis in the politics of the body and the constitution of the body politic: If the modern nation-state requires heteroimperial masculinity, then queer female bodies are the (absent) (national) body politic on which the formulation of modernity (the *post* in *postcolonial*) occurs. Queer female bodies are bodies out of place even as heterosexual women are symbolically overdetermined and hypervisible as boundary markers, despite being invisible as subjects of history and nationalisms (Mohanram 1990). Queer female bodies therefore become what Thomas Waugh terms “subaltern corpses” (2002, 202).⁷ *Fire* reinforces precisely this notion of subaltern corpses: Radha dies symbolically in the accidental fire that is meant to kill her and also to purify her; Sita leaves her husband and she and Radha meet at the Nizamuddin *dargah* (Sufi tomb).⁸ By being “non-familied” (Chopra, Osella, and Osella 2004, 196) and by seeking refuge and a new beginning, despite being Hindu

⁵ Mehta herself emphasizes, “I am not a feminist who downgrades men” (Wijegunasingha 2000). As Sudip Mazumdar reports, the “inadequacy” of Indian men can be rectified through India’s “gradual opening to the outside world.” For him, “the most encouraging reaction to [Mehta’s] film came from a male colleague, who has started fetching his own drinks, instead of asking his wife” (Mazumdar 1998, 29). Pamela Cuthbert, however, congratulates Mehta for not creating a “man-bashing saga” (1996, 31), even though, ostensibly, it is her contact with the West that exposed her to feminism. Apparently, feminism is an alien concept in India.

⁶ See Memmi (1965) 1991; Fanon 1967; Mannoni 1990; McClintock 1995.

⁷ Waugh (2002, 202) refers to the death of the “queer” character Anand in the film *Holi* as emblematic of a “national cinema already littered with subaltern corpses.” The sight of his corpse dangling from a ceiling fan further reinforces the brutality, humiliation, and self-loathing that Anand is subject to at his college. The overly determined violence of the last scenes of this movie is matched only by Anand’s profound silence and silencing.

⁸ Ashok leaves Radha to die in the accidental fire that starts when she is boiling some milk for her mother-in-law over the kitchen stove. Ashok rescues his mother but does nothing to douse the flames that begin to swell around Radha.

middle-class women, in a Muslim (Sufi) shrine, Radha and Sita symbolically die because they fail to materialize in the modern nation-state.⁹

Rather than unhinging heteronormativity from within, as Gopinath does, or simply espousing solidarity with lesbian activists against censorship and repression by right-wing Hindu communalism, as Patel does, I argue that compulsory heteroimperial masculinity can be challenged by disrupting the boundaries that enable heteroimperial masculinity to be. By dismantling the bounded spaces that figure the body politic and politics of the body, queer transnationality shifts the terms of discourse from inclusion or intrusion to one that changes the very landscape that gives a body politic and politics of the body particular meanings and resonances at the expense of other bodies that matter but that do not count as life.

⁹ Mehta seems to be alluding to quite a few things in this one scene. First, fire in Hindu ritual serves as both witness and as agent of purification. Radha manages to escape from the fire relatively unscathed and meets Sita at the Muslim shrine where Sita has been waiting for her in order to begin their new life together. The fire suggests that Radha has been purified (with the fire serving as a witness to that purification) and has emerged in a new form or avatar. Second, the fire starts while Radha is boiling milk. Mehta is alluding to the countless ostensibly accidental “kitchen fires” that have claimed the lives of Hindu women. These kitchen fires, however, are not accidental, because the women have been burned to death by their family for bringing insufficient dowry. Third, Mehta relentlessly shows the same scene, that is, the goddess Sita’s “trial by fire” (*agnipariksha*) from the Hindu epic the *Ramayana* throughout the film. This epic was made into a television serial, and the scenes that Mehta shows are from that version of the epic. In this “trial by fire,” Sita has been rescued by her husband, the god Rama, from Ravana, the demon king, but must go through a trial by fire in order to demonstrate her purity. If she emerges unscathed, then she has not been sullied despite being captured by another man, a stranger who is not her husband. Fourth, Mehta refers to the ostensibly religious practice of sati, that is, the burning of a woman on the funeral pyre of her husband. According to this practice, which formed one of the key justifications for British colonialism, the woman never becomes a widow even though her husband has died because she follows him after his death. Also, since sati can occur only if *sat* or divine light is present in the woman, her burning simply removes her mortal human form and allows her divine or goddess form to emerge or to be revealed. The woman, therefore, never really dies. There are many ways in which one could analyze the last few scenes in Mehta’s film. Radha emerges from the fire unscathed and not only is pure but is also now revealed in her “true” form as the lover of Sita. Or, Radha’s love for Sita is a form of death for her husband Ashok, and Radha as a good Hindu wife must perish along with her husband and follow him even in his death. In addition to these ways of interpreting these last few scenes of the film, I argue that Radha and Sita have presence and visibility in the modern nation-state only insofar as they adhere to the roles of wife and (potential) mother. Outside of the compulsory heterosexuality of both heteroimperial masculinity and feminized anti-imperial masculinity, they disappear. Hence, they symbolically die and are last seen in a Muslim shrine.

Compulsory homosexuality

For Gopinath, “how a film like *Fire* travels across multiple national sites and accrues multiple audiences and meanings in the process of such travel” (Gopinath 2005, 134) enables “defamiliarization of conventional markers of homosexuality” (12) and provides “alternative strategies through which to signify nonheteronormative desire” (12). Yet, even as she seeks a “mode of reading and ‘seeing’ same-sex eroticism that challenges modern epistemologies of visibility, revelation, and sexual subjectivity” (12), Gopinath reads transnational signs of nonheteronormative desire when Sita dresses herself as a Hindi film hero and dances with a shy Radha and when she pretends to smoke one of Jatin’s cigarettes and wears his clothes.

At these moments Gopinath naturalizes culture and retains the “centrality of a failed or impotent masculinity as a metaphor for the (post)colonial condition” (2005, 72), a trope that she criticizes. In Gopinath’s “ocular field” (151), one locates “the sight or the site of same-sex desire” as it is “routed and rooted within the space of the middle-class home” (152). Even though transnational signs of nonheteronormativity may denaturalize heteronormativity from within the cracks and fissures of rigidly heteronormative arrangements, “queer female desire” (153) seems unable to account for the conflation of heterosexual and heteronormative. In other words, because the former no longer remains in motion, Indian patriarchy is not patriarchal enough.

Transnational signs of nonheteronormativity, furthermore, run the risk of naturalizing nonheteronormativity and thereby undermining its radical potential. For example, C. M. Naim (1999) refers to the same sequence that Gopinath cites as a transnational sign of nonheteronormativity and points out that it has a completely different effect on an audience viewing the dubbed version of the film. Naim’s account also challenges Patel’s dismissal of masculine anxiety as an important aspect of both the film and its reception. For audiences listening to Sita speak in Hindi, the cross-dressing scene “forcibly” tells them that “Sita speaks English, can wear jeans and dance to rock music, and knows about sex though still a virgin” (Naim 1999, 3).¹⁰ When she returns to her marital home after her hon-

¹⁰ The Indian Censor Board initially passed the film without any cuts, but after a smattering of small but violent protests from Hindu communalist factions the film went back to the censor board, where only one thing was changed: “Sita” became “Nita,” and only in the Hindi version (Kazmi 1998). This change would avoid offending those incensed by the fact that a Westernized woman and a lesbian (the two being conflated in this case) is named after the Hindu goddess Sita, wife of the Hindu god Rama, from the Hindu epic the *Ramayana*. The name “Radha” was kept, however, even though this is also the name of a Hindu goddess, Radha, the consort of the male god Krishna.

eymoon and sings and dances wearing Jatin's clothes, she looks in the mirror and seductively pulls her shirt to reveal her bare shoulder. This signifies a woman aware of and comfortable with her sexuality and powers of attraction.

When Hindi is thrown in with predominantly English dialogue, audiences are made aware of "the Indianness" of the characters, "and not in terms of their class origins, education, or cultural orientation and values" (Naim 1999, 4). When English words are used in the context of predominantly Hindi dialogue, these "indicate status, 'modernity' and 'Westernness'—another well-known convention in Hindi films" (4). It is no surprise, therefore, that Sita comes across to audiences viewing the Hindi dubbed version as a Westernized girl, especially when she kisses Radha full on the lips when Radha tries to console her about Jatin.

Sita, Naim emphasizes, seems to recognize her attraction to Radha and "understands her own homoerotic feelings and is not surprised by them. In other words, she knows about lesbian love" (1999, 4). For audiences watching the English version this would underscore that Sita "married against her wishes, in fact against her sexual orientation, while to the audience of the Hindi version she would only appear more negatively 'modern'—she knows about 'these things' too" (4). Indeed, this interpretation carries through to another cross-dressing scene that Gopinath also reads as a transnational sign of nonheteronormativity, that is, when Sita dresses as a Hindi film hero and dances with Radha.

For audiences viewing the Hindi dubbed version, this not only establishes her "'manly' role in the relationship" (Naim 1999, 4), in contrast with what Western audiences may see as "butch" in the original English version, but also sets Sita up, "in terms of the established markers in Hindi cinema," as "no innocent soul" (4). Indeed, a movie about Indian Hindu middle-class women whose native language is Hindi becomes, in a curious twist, "original" in its English-language version and "dubbed" in its Hindi-language version. Gopinath locates "fissures of rigidly heterosexual structures that can be transformed into queer imaginings" (2005, 103) to argue for the "disassociation" of "(hyper)femininity and heterosexuality" because "female homoeroticism" in *Fire* is "signaled through hyperbolic femininity" and not through "the cross-dressing or butch-coded character" (104). Naim, however, takes the cross-dressing or butch-coded character at face value in terms of the conventions of Bollywood cinema.¹¹

¹¹ According to these Bollywood conventions, "Sita is at best a misguided person and at worst an evil vamp" (Naim 1999, 4), because even though she marries into "a 'decent' family" she "destroys its precariously held balance once her own sexuality is denied by her

For Naim, *Fire* creates two conclusions about lesbianism in its dubbed version for audiences: “Female homoeroticism is ‘caused’ by a denial of women’s natural heterosexual desires—i.e., a sexually denied heterosexual female becomes a lesbian” (1999, 4), and “lesbian love is a ‘Western’ thing—girls who speak English, wear jeans and dance to rock music are more likely to be so inclined than a girl who is ‘truly Indian’” (4). Given these impressions and the causal chains and sexual economies they set in motion, it comes as no surprise to Naim that the male members of the audience with whom he watched the movie “denounced the husbands as ‘weaklings,’ and loudly proclaimed their own sexual prowess and physical endowment” (5). Mehta, accordingly, fails to realize the conventions of Hindi cinema and cinematic literacy that would reinforce this perception of emasculation, which is also incidentally “one of the favourite themes in pornographic writings in Hindi, where often a ‘well-endowed’ heterosexual hero ‘cures’ coeds and neighborhood girls of this ‘unnatural’ habit” (Naim 1999, 5).

Jigna Desai reads “the context and events of the film” (2002, 66) in terms of the “dominant neocolonialist reception of the film in the West [United States and Canada],” Hindu communalism, and “Mehta’s own fluctuating responses” (67). While she agrees with Gopinath’s criticism of discourses that place “non-Western sexualities in a developmental relation to metropolitan sexualities” (Gopinath 2005, 159), she remains “wary” of how “diasporic cultural production dominates transnational flows” because of “power and resources” (Desai 2002, 83). Yet Desai casts Mehta’s attempts to “occupy the position of author-ity” as “forced” (78). Such an approach apologizes for Mehta’s “contradictory and shifting” statements even as Mehta remains, in terms of financing and transnational visibility, outside looking in/on.¹²

husband” (4). This raises the question, however, of the naturalness of the heterosexual family if it is so “precariously held in balance” as Naim notes. When Sita dresses in drag, Naim reads this scene as Sita being “an evil vamp” (Sita is Westernized and not Indian). Gopinath, however, reads this scene as indicative of how the West and India cannot be separated so clearly and decisively, especially because of the significant presence of Indians abroad in the diaspora who not only watch Bollywood films but are also making Bollywood films part of the Western cultural landscape (2005, 118). The Indian diaspora is not “foreign, inauthentic, and indeed ‘queer’” (113) as opposed to the authentic and “implicitly heterosexual” (113) Indian nation, but the two, nation and diaspora, constitute each other.

¹² Mehta reports she felt “very Indian” making *Fire* because she “thought about things like karma and fate” (Cuthbert 1996, 30) even though she is a Canadian and Indian director. But Bruce Kirkland emphasizes that Mehta “never felt more Canadian” because of the “fanaticism of a sect of Hindu extremists” and “zealots” (2002). For Mehta, “it became

Desai's apology neglects an analysis of masculine anxiety that renders Mehta inauthentic and perverse and further neglects "engagement" with the "political flows between the (post)colonial nation and diaspora under the processes of globalization" (2002, 83). Desai's account reinforces Mehta's self-characterization as a solitary woman warrior battling hegemonic communalism and violence, even though she received overwhelming support from the Indian Censor Board, audiences, lawyers, activists, judges, and the Bollywood film industry as well as from Western activist, scholarly, and film communities.¹³ It also elides Mehta's heterosexism as she vociferously argued against what she sees as, and what I term, the *compulsory homosexuality* imposed on her film.¹⁴ The politics of mobility of this film, a Canadian film that is not-so-Canadian and an Indian film that is not-so-Indian, therefore, allows us to glean the politics of immobility that govern the looking relations that in turn enable the past to be another country, one anterior to proper modernity, or pre(proper)history.

Seeing without looking

These looking relations are stopped short, subversively, in *Fire* precisely

about freedom of expression. It became about democracy. It became about fanaticism. . . . Am I Indian or am I now looked upon as someone who has been corrupted by the West?" (Kirkland 2002). Canada becomes a poster nation for hybridity, fluidity, and self-fashioning, while India remains a homogenous and fatal culture.

¹³ Ramola Badam (1998) emphasizes that "the movie had run to packed houses for three weeks in Indian cities causing little more than raised eyebrows and a smattering of protests." Similarly, Nikhat Kazmi (1998) reports, "A Censor Board which has lately been taking strong exception at the slightest exposure, the minimal swear words and the faintest hint of obscenity, miraculously passed the film without a single cut. All that it demanded was a change in name" because "it made a strong statement and needed to be seen by women." The Central Board of Film Certification refused to ban the film "even as hard-line sections . . . appear to be gaining the upper hand in overall decision-making, including in economic policy" (*Times of India* 1998). Esteemed actors, directors, judges, and activists, including Muslims, filed a petition in the apex court "to seek an explanation from the Maharashtra government" about its "failure to provide protection to the screening of the film" (*Times of India* 1998). Gopinath and Desai describe the transnational alliances of groups such as New York-based South Asian Lesbian and Gay Association and New Delhi-based Campaign for Lesbian Rights (Desai 2002, 83; Gopinath 2005, 158–60).

¹⁴ Referring to the "fire of passion and desire," Mehta states, "*Fire* is not about lesbianism. It is about the plight of women in India . . . the women's relationship represents modern India itself" (*Rediff: India Abroad* 1998). Mehta has also said, "When you want to focus on something that is sensational, you make that the main part of the film. I've said it over and over again, and I should know since I made the film—*Fire* is not about lesbianism" (Mehta 1998).

at what would constitute a beginning, in Gopinath's sense, of another imagining, of "new architectures of being" (Gopinath 2005, 186). Radha and Sita are last seen at the Nizamuddin *dargah*. A literal and decaying architecture signifies the material (in)visibility of queer female desiring subjects and of Muslims. In the postcolonial context, Hindu heteroimperial masculinity construes Muslim patriarchy as unnatural, a construal due to the foregrounding of extreme and not widely practiced forms of violence against women, unlike the purportedly natural division of sexes constituting Hindu patriarchy.

Hindu communalist factions, according to Sunder Rajan, support a Uniform Civil Code (UCC), as opposed to "personal laws," "primarily as a means of removing the 'privileges' of minority men. The UCC that is envisaged will be a version of Hindu law and will thereby secure Hindu hegemony" (Sunder Rajan 2000, 57). Yet, "Hindu ideologues seeking a UCC would still be bound to resist reform of personal laws in certain directions that might empower women" (57), because Hindu communalism deploys Hindu upper-caste, middle-class, and urban women as symbols of domestic service, virtue, and chastity (Sarkar 1995, 182–86). The "strength, virility and aggression" (Basu 1995, 165) of Muslim men, purportedly evident in the meat they consume, the children they father, and their physical prowess, succeeds in making the "raped Hindu woman symbolic of the victimisation of the entire Hindu community" (165). Hindu men cannot rape Muslim women because "Hindus are victims" and "can be neither communal nor aggressive" (179). Islam, moreover, in this paradigm, forever binds Muslims to Pakistan, the constant threat to India's sovereign borders; Islamic fundamentalism and communalism, unlike ostensible Hindu secularism, evident in the push for a UCC, for example, render Muslims incapable of objective nationhood.¹⁵ Zakia Pathak and Sunder Rajan describe the process of what I term *Hindu compulsory heteroimperial masculinity* as "Hindu men are saving Muslim women from Muslim men" (1992, 263). To be (properly) Hindu, therefore, Radha and Sita must efface their queer desire; to be (properly) queer and female desiring subjects, Radha and Sita must efface nation and religion. They are trapped in the nowhere of perpetual simile—their condition is like that of Muslims—while their own experience symbolizes another exclusion, that of Muslims in the Hindu nationalist imaginary.¹⁶

¹⁵ Jalal 1996; Menon and Bhasin 1998; Bhargava 2000; Pandey 2001.

¹⁶ Sunder Rajan defines "personal laws" as a "legacy of colonial administration": "Four religious communities, the majority Hindu, and the minority Muslim, Christian, and Parsi

Rey Chow's (1993) notion of spectatorial agency, which is also a form of bearing witness, argued for in the context of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's articulation of the silence of the subaltern, provides a looking relation that inverts the terms of compulsory heteroimperial masculinity. Radha, Sita, and Muslims are not symptoms of (im)proper compulsory heteroimperial masculinity, an unfinished postcolonial body politic and politics of the body with errant parts. Instead, they allow us to see compulsory heteroimperial masculinity as pathological: (negative) presence (who is there?) and (negative) ontology (who is not?) made mighty and real by the force of the exclusions that surround it.

Queer transnationality, therefore, by discerning "bounded spaces" (Berlant and Freeman 1993, 205), renders visible the politics of immobility that determines the politics of mobility. The direction of the critique changes from "rendering vocal the individual" to "rendering visible the mechanism" (Spivak 1988, 286) that enables Mehta to represent a compulsory heteroimperial masculine stance. Mehta creates another postcolonial fantasy: diasporic brown women saving native brown women from native brown men. She is Indian enough (read: native informant) to represent India but Western enough (read: objective) to be able to criticize it: Canada is culturally and socially diverse; India burns its women without historical pause. Yet Mehta's postcolonial critique of postcolonial reason undermines her art and reinforces compulsory heteroimperial masculinity: this body politic and politics of the body enable her seeming mobility as well as the seeming immobility of communalism and nationalism.

Hindu communalism qua compulsory heteroimperial masculinity is not a postcolonial derivative of its Western original. Such an argument naturalizes compulsory heteroimperial masculinity as Western even as it effaces (an)other body politics and politics of the body denied a (proper) name. Sights and sites of similarity are not necessarily sights and sites of identity or essence. In addition, Mehta does not simply fail to represent a purportedly authentic India. Compulsory heteroimperial masculinity is "negatively 'modern,'" to use Naim's (1999, 4) phrase: pathological heterosexuality can only see pathological homosexuality (hence the importance of seeing without looking), and heterosexuality is not authentic,

communities, have their own personal laws. . . . No one is exempt from or may opt out of a religious identity. . . . Personal laws operate in matters relating to inheritance, marriage, divorce, maintenance, and adoption, which are regarded as 'personal' issues, understood to be matters that relate to the family or 'personal' sphere." She emphasizes, "Despite differences among them, the personal laws of all communities are discriminatory towards women" (2000, 55).

original, or somehow able to resolve its crises from within. Queer transnationality emphasizes that compulsory heteroimperial masculinity is not the only possible modernity: absence of evidence is not evidence of absence.

Julie

As do Gopinath and Patel, Naim exclusively focuses on Radha and Sita and ignores another significant trope of Bollywood cinema that did not cause protests and received minimal attention from scholars and activists, both in India and its diaspora: the Anglo-Indian female.¹⁷ Mehta seems to name Julie, Jatin's Indo-Chinese girlfriend, after the Anglo-Indian heroine of a very popular 1970s Bollywood film, *Julie*. Julie, the character in *Fire*, not only looks white because of her fair skin but also sounds white because she speaks with an American accent. Julie, therefore, according to the conventions of Bollywood cinema, seems to fulfill the role traditionally given to the Anglo-Indian female: “‘loose,’ ‘immoral’ female characters with Christian names” who work as “barmaids or cabaret dancers” (Mujtaba 2004). Her fair skin mitigates her ostensibly typical Chinese facial features, as does her American accent; her Chinese origin, therefore, is figured as Westernization. Given that both Indian and Chinese women are often subjected to similar stereotypes of docility, servility, and demureness, Mehta foregrounds Julie's difference from Radha and Sita by emphasizing her Westernization and through the notable absence of Julie's mother (whom Mehta could not have portrayed as Westernized, because she would have been born, raised, and married in China, even if this absent mother hated India), in contrast to which Radha and Sita emerge as conventionally Indian.¹⁸

Increasingly, the “Hindu girl” has usurped the vamp role, even that of the “other lady,” by “merging it with the central female character” (Mujtaba 2004). Indeed, “the recent wave of Anglo-looking actors and actresses” in Bollywood cinema attests that “look[ing] white” is a “commodity” in Bollywood (Singh 2005). Even though heroines should look

¹⁷ See, e.g., Vasudevan 2000; Mishra 2002; Viridi 2003; Desai 2004. All these sources refer to women in nation and diaspora, but none examines the role of the Anglo-Indian female, except in a cursory manner. Rosie Thomas's article “Fearless Nadia” (2005) examines how the Wadia brothers presented Mary Evans, a blue-eyed blonde, in the 1935 film *Hunterwali*. Fearless Nadia became a cult figure during the nationalist independence struggle. Fearless Nadia merchandise included whips, matchboxes, and playing cards.

¹⁸ Indeed, Julie's Westernization is stereotypically portrayed as the result of the absence of her mother since patriarchy renders women primary transmitters of compulsory heterosexuality as culture.

white, they cannot sound white. Diasporic Indian actresses who return to India in order to star in films are dubbed over if they are unable to speak Hindi without a discernable foreign accent (Singh 2005). If sounding Indian is synonymous with not sounding American, even if the heroine looks white, then in this racialized and sexualized economy, Radha and Sita not only do not look white, but they also do not sound white. They are darker in complexion and are always shown wearing conventional Indian clothes (sari or *salwaar kamiz*), even when sleeping, or in Sita's case, even while having sex with her husband. Julie, however, looks white, sounds white, and unlike Radha and Sita wears revealing clothes.¹⁹

I situate my analysis of compulsory heteroimperial masculinity in Julie's framing as the alibi for Radha and Sita's Indianness and in her defiance of the traditional vamp role. First, even though Radha and Sita defy compulsory heterosexuality through their love for each other, they are still "Indian," because unlike Julie they are dark skinned, care for the elderly, and value family over personal ambition. Second, even though Julie is compulsorily heterosexual, in fact is stereotypically so as a seductress, she is not "Indian," because unlike Radha and Sita she works outside the home, has sex before marriage, and wants to use her sex appeal to become a film star. Indeed, Julie is not "Indian" even though she is a Chinese immigrant to India and has lived there for most of her life. On the one hand, Mehta ostensibly attempts to challenge what she sees as uniform Indian patriarchy and tradition (with Hindu middle-class women standing in for the whole nation-state of India) through Radha and Sita's desire for each other. On the other hand, she deploys the most patriarchal and, frankly, clichéd stereotypes to establish her heroines as "Indian" and *Fire* as a tale of "Indian women." In addition, she deploys the most patriarchal and, frankly, clichéd stereotypes of Western women to establish her anti-heroine as "Western." To establish Julie as Western, moreover, requires eradicating her migrant history as well as a belief in an essential Westernness that somehow remains unmoved and untouched even though, as mentioned earlier, Julie has spent most of her life in India and received her education in India. Julie, however, refuses to marry Jatin and redeem her gross Westernization (in terms of Bollywood convention) by producing Indo-Chinese, half-caste (male) children.

In Bollywood movies that depict Indian communities in the diaspora,

¹⁹ It would be interesting to hear how Julie sounds in the dubbed version of the movie, since Julie will presumably be speaking in Hindi with an American accent rather than speaking in English with an American accent. As mentioned earlier, Naim does not refer to Julie at all.

and for Indian immigrant communities themselves, the wedding as an event depicted in film or as an event in the life of the diasporic Indian community, as Gopinath notes, “becomes the paradigmatic performance of communal belonging and ‘tradition’ along patriarchal lines” and is “the marker of irreducible immigrant difference in a hegemonic white, Christian landscape” (Gopinath 2005, 126). The often stereotypically lavish and loud Hindu Indian wedding is perceived to set the Indian community apart as foreign and also simultaneously establishes an essential “Indianness” that is maintained even though the community is on foreign soil. *Fire*, however, inverts this politics of (in)visibility by staging a wedding that does not happen. First, a film made by a diasporic Indian that represents a diasporic Chinese woman in India establishes Julie’s Western identity through her refusal to marry an Indian man. Radha and Sita, however, have arranged marriages. Julie’s refusal to marry prevents her from materializing as a subject-citizen because she is not the wife of an Indian man nor a (potential) mother of half-Indian (preferably male) children, which would have mitigated the fact that she is Chinese. Although Julie’s refusal could be interpreted as her independence, she is portrayed as not only stereotypically Western but also as contemptuous of Indian men and India altogether. This characterization undermines the subversive potential of her choice as well as the subversive potential of the fact that not all diasporas exist in the West and not all diasporic movements are Western bound. Second, Mehta does not stage the wedding of Radha and Sita and thereby maintains the subversive potential of their relationship. Indeed, queer female desire does not necessarily denaturalize compulsory heteroimperial masculinity, even if it replaces the groom in “Groom-Bride” with the bride in “Bride-Bride” (Gopinath 2005, 171), perhaps in another monsoon wedding.

This dialectic of reversal by displacement, despite Gopinath’s rejection of teleology, ignores the compulsory heteroimperial masculinity that gives the scene meaning and legibility. This “third space” (see Bhabha 1994, 36–39, 101), I argue, is compulsory heteroimperial masculinity, and forms the third term that is elided within a dualistic framework: Groom-Bride or Bride-Bride. Bhabha casts the third space as necessarily “ambivalent” (120). Yet, as argued earlier, the third space that is compulsory heteroimperial masculinity demands the (preemptive) protection of boundaries precisely through camouflaging compulsory heteroimperial masculinity as the naturalized sexual order of things, the topos upon which sexuality itself materializes and comes to have any significance or meaning. In fact, casting the third space as ambivalent camouflages violence (soldiers themselves often wear camouflage to blend in with the terrain they are occupying),

because there is no equal distribution of power within the processes of negotiation of a given and naturalized compulsory heteroimperial masculinity. As argued earlier, compulsory heteroimperial masculinity prevents some inhabitants from materializing as contemporaneous rather than belated interlocutors and fellow-citizens of the body-politic and have no say in the politics of the body on which it is based (military bases themselves being one form of occupation and control even on ostensibly foreign and sovereign soil).

While Gopinath looks for “the possibility of triangulated desire that does not solidify into ‘lesbian’ or ‘heterosexual’” (2005, 104), she ignores the numerous slippages and (im)mobilities that signify Julie as simultaneously Chinese, Indian, and American. Even though Julie is the most mobile of all the characters, since she comes from China and is headed to Hong Kong, she is static and overdetermined. While Radha and Sita’s love is revealed in song and dance sequences (114), the most indigenous of genres, Julie is seen on only two occasions, eating and fucking.

In fact, she describes sex as hunting, and her animal appetite is reinforced by Jatin’s raw back. Jatin feels like a manly man, and Julie will never get caught as what she terms a “baby-making machine,” underpinning the degradation and stereotyping of animal and human. Instead, she desires to be a heroine in kung fu movies. Jatin has a poster of Bruce Lee in his room, perhaps from his adolescent days, and adolescent schoolboys ask him for kung fu movies but get blue films—Western pornography—instead. On the one hand, Jatin desires his Westernized girlfriend, but, on the other, he perpetuates contempt for Western women in boys learning how to be (Hindu/Indian/heterosexual) men already in uniform.

Jatin licks Julie’s toes and paint her toenails, an effeminizing reversal of her job as a hairdresser. He degrades himself before Julie’s father, who hates Indians and India, where his parents emigrated after the Cultural Revolution. Others of his generation grew up in America, England, or Australia, but Julie’s father must “squat” when shitting and cannot comfortably read the *Kowloon News*. His son is called “chinky” at school. Julie grooms herself for Hong Kong, and her American accent mediates her “chinky”-ness. Inverting patrilineal descent, Julie’s father commends his daughter for picking up an American accent in six months. Rather than pursue higher education in India, which was made available to women there before it was in any university in England, Julie prepares herself to be looked at because she looks white and sounds white, a (real) object of desire for real men. She does not use her middle-class consumer prowess to secure training of any kind but develops her skills in bed.

The racist representation of Julie undermines the historical import of

kung fu's symbolic economy, that is, a time when everybody was kung fu fighting: "Bruce Lee's movies hit the screen just as the United States ceased its aerial bombardment of Vietnam (between 1964 and 1972, fifteen million tons of explosives fell on Vietnam, more than twice what was expended during World War II in all sectors)" (Prashad 2003, 71).²⁰ Yet Lee fought "without guns, with bare feet and fists, dressed in black outfits associated with the North Vietnamese army" at a time when, "apart from napalm, the United States used its arsenal of finance capital to undermine the sovereignty of the nations of the Third World" (Prashad 2003, 71).

Stereotyping Julie effaces Hong Kong's radical history. In Hong Kong, Julie places herself in what is perhaps the right place at the right time. Having escaped China, she will escape India by her own fast and forward devices. While India and China compete on the global stage for globalization's ostensible benefits, Julie refuses to wait in the past of another country. Hong Kong, an "Oriental" yet global city, is a happening place because the only places that happen are those where American men happen to be.

The only baby that Julie will have is with a real man: an American man can save this Chinese immigrant in India, who will be an Indian immigrant in Hong Kong, from her double misfortune, her birth in China and her emigration to India. Julie, therefore, provides a convenient repository for Indo-Chinese anxieties. Her crossover appeal effaces her Chinese and Indian identity; Indian women cross over but retain their Indian/Hindu identity. Radha and Sita disappear in the Hindu heteroimperial nationalist imaginary; Julie is expelled.

Obscenities

Gopinath emphasizes that "there is no pure space of desire that transcends the terms of dominant culture" (2005, 75). In terms of "architectures of being" (186), Mundu, the male servant, perennially moves upstairs (the home) and downstairs (the eatery/video rental), contributing his labor yet belonging to neither site. He knows how to use a camera and takes a picture of the family when Sita arrives from her honeymoon, yet remains outside the shot. In this scene, Mehta's camera, Mundu's own focus and framing of the shot, and the spectator's view all coincide at the sight of the heterosexual, Hindu, middle-class, extended family.

The technologies of visibility and their "*scopic* politics" (McClintock

²⁰ Ironically, Vijay Prashad notes that Biddu, an "exemplary Indian who lived in England . . . wrote the song, hence its appearance on Indian radio" (Prashad 2003, 75).

1995, 365), however, elide Mundu's presence and labor. The family photograph stills idyllic and idealized time; the joint nuclear family, however, is literally impossible without Mundu, who remains literally invisible. Mundu has no proper name and is known only by a generic that infantilizes him.²¹ If a "fortified racialized masculine subject comes into being only at the expense of the racialized female subject" (Gopinath 2005, 77), then *Fire* inverts this process through the staging of another impossible desire, to use Gopinath's phrase, Mundu's for Radha, and another wedding that does not happen, Mundu's with Radha.

Mundu is a full-time servant and masturbates to blue films in front of Biji to release his sexual frustration. This patriarchal privilege, a furtive, vengeful release of his private parts, belies his lack of privacy. Mundu also follows Bollywood and Hindu epic convention as the servant who enables the plot: he informs Ashok about Radha and Sita, without being a significant or signifying member (double entendre be noted). In terms of Mundu's masculinity, his script is pretty limited: He either enjoys blue films like Jatin or he must be rehabilitated by Ashok's guru in order to become more like Ashok himself. He either ciphers heterosexual/heteronormative domesticity or imbibes heterosexual/heteronormative misogyny. Neither choice escapes compulsory heteroimperial masculinity.

The looking relations that are his lot are furtive, without site, and unoriginal, without sight. He either spies on Radha and Sita or degrades white women's bodies. Mundu masturbates to *Joy Suck Club*, a reference to Amy Tan's widely acclaimed and successful 1989 novel, *The Joy Luck Club*, about Chinese immigrant women in America and their relationship with their daughters. Mehta further underscores Julie's overdetermined Westernization through this title, which is Mundu's only access to the Chinese girl his master Jatin is fucking. Rental stores in the United States sell an India mired in (globally financed) tradition as they falsely proclaim that *Fire* is banned (Naim 1999), while rental stores in India sell an America mired in (globally financed) perversity, as they falsely proclaim white women's hypersexuality. Just as Julie's fiery and feisty nature is figured as Western in *Fire*, since it cannot possibly be authentically Chinese or Indian, the pornographic movie *Joy Suck Club* in the movie *Fire* turns Tan's novel about Chinese and Chinese-American women into a representation of the ostensibly innate licentiousness of white American women. *Joy Suck Club* also displaces Indian racism and misogyny toward China, half-cast as the West, and racism and misogyny toward the West, half-cast as China.

²¹ "Mundu" is a variant of the Hindi and Punjabi word *munda*, which means "boy."

Mundu's lack of sight is also reinforced during a dream sequence, further interiorizing the trope of seeing without looking. In this dream sequence, Radha and Mundu bask as king and queen while Jatin and Sita wait on them. Later, Mundu mistakenly thinks Sita is his queen. He does not see Radha, his real queen, just as Radha and Sita do not see their love and are in turn not seen by their respective husbands or by Biji, just as the household does not see Mundu.

During this dream sequence Jatin wears dark sunglasses as he fans Radha and Mundu. Jatin looks cool, even in his servile role, and can see in the bright sunlight. He also wears a Western-style dress shirt, presumably one of the Armani shirts he is looking for at another juncture in the film. The logos of consumptive modernity find their place even when the viewer voyeuristically participates in another's dream. The sunglasses do not obscure the spectator's vision of Jatin but instead allow us to see Jatin the way Mundu sees him: suave, Westernized, and desirable.

Mundu carries the family portrait with him and circles Radha's face with a heart. Mundu has a schoolboy crush, and this adolescent, infantilized, and premasculine sight/site is further seen in larger-than-life billboards of Crush, a Pepsi product, adorning the streets and highways. Crush is no longer available in America but is prominently advertised all over Delhi. In fact, the eatery shutter is painted with the orange logo of Crush and bears witness to Ashok's further descent into pathological heterosexuality. Mundu's obsequious exposure of Radha's sexual relationship with Sita has an emasculating effect on Ashok. Ashok finds himself simultaneously repulsed and aroused by his wife's relationship; he replays images of her with Sita in his mind, which the viewer also sees. He sits on the eatery's steps, neither inside nor outside, neither upstairs nor downstairs, but a threshold signified by the crushing sight of Radha and Sita, the site of his humiliation. His mother's bell rings insistently in the background.

Ashok's legs spread and he violently joins them while both praying and beseeching for help. This phallic gesture suggests that Ashok's pathological heterosexuality either displaces itself onto his guru or is aroused by two women in bed together, the most compulsory perhaps of heteroimperial masculine fantasies. Radha does not want to hurt Ashok, a man she seems to love and respect, and asks him to understand, if in fact he loves her, what she needs. He descends, however, further into compulsory heteroimperial masculinity as he forces himself onto her. He can either crush her into submission or leave her to die.

Perhaps Radha and Sita are, like Julie, ball breakers, who crush the men who surround them. Radha crushes Mundu's balls by slapping him;

Sita crushes Jatin's balls because she is indifferent; Julie crushes Jatin's by refusing to marry him and have his baby; Radha crushes Ashok's through her relationship with Sita and crushes his guru's by tempting Ashok; Ashok crushes his teacher's balls by no longer controlling himself.

Ashok's guru, however, has swollen testicles, a condition that Mehta deploys to present the effects of sexual abstinence, even though, scientifically speaking, swollen testicles are not the result of sexual deprivation. Perhaps the guru's big balls are meant in an ironic sense: by giving up desire and sexual relations (presumably with women) he is no longer a real man, and actually has no balls, or he is too much of a man. In a further irony, the profits earned through Radha and Sita's labor pay for the operation to bring his balls down to size or have them removed completely (Mehta does not elaborate). Radha and Sita become responsible for the guru's castration in a misogynistic logic that blames women for the temptation they pose to men. The guru's swollen testicles represent, symbolically and literally, compulsory heteroimperial masculinity, that is, either excessive masculine prowess, in keeping with the temptation that women pose, or excessive self-control, also in keeping with the temptation that women pose. The swollen testicles crush women who are never more than the temptation they pose to men.

Is the relationship between Radha and Sita just a crush? Are Radha and Sita the forces of modernity that can crush static India? Given that Crush is no longer available in the United States, would a Coca-Cola logo, more powerful and successful than Pepsi, signify proper nationhood and proper time through consumptive modernity as heteroimperial masculinity?

Unlike Gopinath, I am more interested in the vortex of pathological heterosexuality that surrounds Radha and Sita in the figures of Jatin, Ashok, Mundu, Biji, and Julie. It is these relationships that signify the pathology that is compulsory heteroimperial masculinity and forms the crucible in which Radha and Sita's relationship emerges. I argue that in compulsory heteroimperial masculinity any postnational and postimperial fantasy recognizes, as Edward Said states, that the "world today does not exist as a spectacle" but requires "the energy to comprehend and engage with other societies, traditions, and histories" (1994, xx). Queer transnationality questions, therefore, which body matters because, in compulsory heteroimperial masculinity, this is a matter of life or death, a subject that matters.

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