Post-9/11 Shifts in Racial Formation: Tracing Complicity and Mapping Possibility for U.S. South Asian Community

Shireen Roshanravan

In their essay, "Monster, Terrorist, Fag," Amit Rai and Jasbir Puar argue that the "war on terror" has given rise to an aggressive heteronormative patriotism that turns on the construction of the terrorist as "a racial and sexual monster," the product of "a failed heterosexuality" (118). Their argument builds on Michel Foucault's analysis of the "monster" as code for the pathological gender and sexual deviant in Western discourses of (ab)normality. Because these hegemonic discourses label gender and sexual deviance a mental and/or physical disease, the figure of monstrosity simultaneously categorizes the "abnormal" and enforces dominant criteria for what counts as "normal." Puar and Rai expand Foucault's analysis to include the racial and cultural dimensions of the monster's pathological "abnormality" in the history of sexuality. In doing so, they provide the historical and political lens from which to read the monstrous portrayals of Osama Bin Laden as eliciting and justifying post-9/11 white supremacist heteronormative U.S. patriotism.

Puar and Rai's analysis of the "war on terror" enables complex investigations into post-9/11 responses to racist patriotic violence. Specifically, Puar and Rai expose the complicity of U.S. South Asian responses to cases of "mistaken identity" with the very racist patriotism that constructs them as justified targets of violence. These responses include the resurgence of cultural nationalisms that elide issues of gender and sexual violence within South Asian immigrant communities as well as the circulation of educational messages that emphasize "we are not them." The survival impulse to "correct the mistake" and emphasize that "we are not them," Puar and Rai state, "has focused on getting the attention of white America, intent on re-narrating themselves [South Asians] as respectable, exemplary, model minority citizens" (138).

Those who sought to re-establish themselves as "model minority citizens" emphasized a racialized "we" distinct from the "real" brown enemy with whom they were "mistaken." To the extent that the "real" brown enemy is marked by "failed heterosexuality," this racial distinction has to include displays of "civilizing" heterosexuality, which, as I explain later, requires an emphasis on endogamy

and patriarchal family formation. In this paper, I follow the interwoven racial, sexual and colonial logic of this post-9/11 survival impulse to expose its seduction, the contradictions on which it relies and the feminist avenues it obstructs at the imaginative and praxical level. Specifically, I consider how the post-9/11 reassertion of model-minority identity constructs married endogamous heterosexuality as a fundamental "tradition" in efforts to affirm U.S. South Asian culture. In doing so, I suggest that anti-racist feminist conceptions of South Asian American identities require the very cross-racial solidarities blocked by this "civilizing" heterosexuality.

While Puar and Rai invoke the historical saturation of "heteronormativity" with racial meaning, further elaboration of the violent nationalist and global imperial uses of heterosexuality within colonial modernity is necessary to unpack what I mean by "civilizing" heterosexuality. The work of de-colonial feminist philosopher María Lugones is central to this elaboration. Her theorizing of the "modern/colonial gender system" provides a framework and vocabulary to articulate the organization of gender and sexual relations in service of global capitalist colonial projects.

Lugones suggests that European colonization imposed a racialized gender system on the colonized. This gender system has a "light" and "dark" side. Only the bourgeois colonizers had access to the "light" side characteristics of this gender system: sexual dimorphism, patriarchal man/woman binary classification, and endogamous heterosexuality in service of Eurocentered global capitalism. In other words, this "civilizing" heterosexuality functioned to maintain white "racial purity," protect the inheritance of wealth along racial lines, and reproduce leaders of the imperial nation. The colonized, however, were subjected to the "dark" side of this gender system. As such, they were imagined to be hermaphroditic freaks, indiscriminate animal-like sexual beasts, and resistant to patriarchal binary gender (and thus human) classification. While the "civilizing" heterosexuality of the colonizer functioned on the "light" side to reproduce the imperial race/nation and protect its wealth, the colonized experienced its violence on the "dark side" through "forced breeding" of slaves and rape as symbol of European conquest. Accordingly, Lugones reveals that it was not only non-whiteness but also an imposed gender system that marked the colonized as primitive savages fit for deep labor exploitation and other horrific violence.

The "modern/colonial gender system" facilitates an understanding of the "monster-terrorist" as the pre-modern brown sexual deviant who must be "civilized" or destroyed by the white U.S. heterosexual patriot. The patriot's enactment of "civilizing" heterosexuality reaffirms investment in patriarchal and white nationalist ideology. For example, in a speech given shortly after 9/11, first lady Laura Bush implied that an increase in married heterosexuality was a positive sign of the U.S. nation coming together in response to terrorism (Peterson). This supposed marital response to terrorism amongst the "civilized" was, of course, accompanied by the U.S. government's brutal military action against the "barbaric" brown enemy. The violent, degrading and perverse enactments of "civilizing" heterosexu-

ality are further evidenced by the photograph briefly released by the Associated Press featuring a navy officer signing a bomb with the phrase, "HIJACK THIS FAGS!" (Puar and Rai 127). That is, heterosexuality as a nationalist imperative simultaneously (re)produces the white civilized nation (marital bliss) while producing and destroying the sexually deviant brown other (military brutality).

As displays of U.S. patriotism take the form of married heterosexuality amongst one's own, the concept of the "civilizing" nation merges with that of the white patriarchal family. Maintaining the health and security of an imperial nation bound by filial connection requires careful policing of both its conjugal and geopolitical borders. Noting the 19th century emergence of the family metaphor for the imperial nation and its aspirations towards empire, Anne McClintock writes,

> Controlling women's sexuality, exalting maternity and breeding a virile race of empire-builders were widely perceived as the paramount means of controlling the health and wealth of the male imperial's body politic, so that, by the turn of the century, sexual purity emerged as a controlling metaphor for racial economic and political power. (47)

McClintock highlights the inextricable connection between heterosexuality, women's sexual/gender subordination and "racial purity" in 19th century British imperialism. As "bearers" of the "race," women are significant to maintaining "racial purity" and justifying claims to national superiority. Heterosexual imperatives of the imperial nation thus restrict white bourgeois women to patriarchal gender and sexual identities as wives and mothers to their male leaders. This heterosexuality relies on an exaltation of the woman as "mother" of the "race/nation." Puar and Rai trace this connection between motherhood and racial inferiority to the contemporary field of terrorism studies which cites "inconsistent mothering" as a primary cause of the "monster-terrorist" (122). A "fag" raised by a "dysfunctional family," the "monster-terrorist" is both an embodiment and product of "failed heterosexuality."

To the extent that the "real" brown enemy is marked by "failed heterosexuality," U.S. South Asian responses to post-9/11 cases of "mistaken identity" must entail displays of "civilizing" heterosexuality if they aim to prove "respectable patriot" citizen status. However, the very attempt at "correcting the mistake" misses the racist logic inherent in the "patriotic" act of "mistaking" one racial-ethnic minority for another. In Jasbir Puar's words, "The 'mistaken for' itself is not a mistake, insofar as it is the very point . . . indicating either that . . . one other is as good as another other or . . . the Other is undifferentiated and needs to remain so" (*Terrorist* 187). The "war on terror's" exposure of the undifferentiated Other as terrorist-suspect departs from the institutionalized model-minority discourse that emphasizes hierarchical differences between non-white others. That is, the "model minority" discourse, unlike post-9/11 racist patriotism, relies on divide-and-conquer claims that some minorities are "culturally superior" to others (Kim 117).

Accordingly, the violent incidents of "mistaken identity" signal a post-9/11 shift in U.S. racial formation,[1] one that forcefully exposes the fiction of "race" as socially constructed, not biological. Such exposure—when recognized—bears resistant potential for reformulating U.S. South Asian identities in deep coalitional relation with other U.S. communities of color. As Puar and Rai's analysis suggests, attempts to "correct" the "mistake" indicate a failure to recognize this resistant potential, and instead, feed the racist and (hetero)sexist logic that justifies post-9/11 "patriot" violence. Hence the question: How does heterosexuality function within colonial modernity to block cross-racial feminist identity formation in this global age of war and imperialism?

I explore this question through an "ideological reassembly"[2] of multiple sites—discussions of same-sex marriage in U.S. South Asian immigrant community and queer South Asian diaspora juxtaposed with incidents of post-9/11 racial profiling of South Asians and Latinos. A site rife with political contradictions, "marriage" as a tradition of cultural (re)production becomes contentious terrain for feminist negotiation with post-9/11 shifts in racial formation. I exemplify these contradictions within U.S. South Asian immigrant and queer community, highlighting interactions that reveal the use of endogamy to reconcile desires for a positive U.S. South Asian self in community[3] with desires to evade the violence of post-9/11 racist patriotism. Finally, I turn to U.S. South Asian and Latino cases of post-9/11 "mistaken identity" to illustrate the post-9/11 blurring of racial boundaries between "brown" peoples and the responses that elude its resistant potential. As I re-member these disparate cases of "mistaken identity," I also re-member alternative feminist responses that reconceptualize U.S. South Asian identity as positively interdependent with non-South Asian people of color[4] and as *un*sustainable through heteronormative traditions of marital reproduction "amongst our own."

I am particularly interested in how model-minority identity formation relies on an allegiance to "civilizing heterosexuality" and its female-subordinating "traditions" that define "culture" and "community" in racially exclusive terms. The use of "tradition"—especially traditions deemed "patriarchal"—to negotiate one's status in the civilizing discourse of the "War on Terror" is rife with ambivalence and danger. The hegemonic labeling of non-Western "culture" as "traditional" (read: backward) and the Christianized West as "modern" (read: civilized) is part and parcel of justifying neocolonial and neoimperial violence across the globe (Moallem 11; Alexander 193). British colonial characterization of Indians as "barbaric" often focused intently on their "excessively" patriarchal marital traditions—dowry, sati, child marriage—many of which were invented, sanctioned and made hegemonic by the British themselves.[5] Given this history, I argue that model-minority discourse is itself an ideological cog in the "marriage-industrial-complex": the neoimperial and neoliberal scripting of marriage as a modernizing "tradition" that justifies the decrease of state social welfare services and the growth of state-funded military- and prison-industrial complexes.

The Model Minority and the Marriage-Industrial-Complex

Because "home" communities for U.S. people of color often provide fundamental sites of resistance against racism in the United States, rejecting traditions like "marriage amongst one's own" fails to "liberate" women and queer people of color if it leads to a loss of community and kinship connections. Giving voice to this dilemma, U.S. feminists of color have insisted on the need for struggle against multiple forms of oppression that manifest at the international, national, and local community levels. This includes fighting violence perpetrated simultaneously by state institutions and by our loved ones at home. Moreover, since being a woman of color in the political sense has more to do with one's relation to others and less to do with claiming a racial/gender identity, those of us invested in a politics of women of color must commit ourselves to the transformation of relations within our familial and historical racial/ethnic communities. Such transformation requires pushing the limits of our imagination when we arrive at the violent edge of ossified traditions central to hegemonic understandings of "our culture." For many U.S. South Asians, this means confronting the marriage-industrial-complex.

I use the term "marriage-industrial-complex" to invoke the trajectory of analysis put forth by queer transnational feminist scholars, Suparna Bhaskaran and M. Jacqui Alexander. Both Bhaskaran and Alexander insist on exposing the connections among racial formation, empire and the politics of heterosexuality. Bhaskaran, for example, uses the term "wedding-industrial-complex" to describe a "traditional institution" integral to the postcolonial Indian political and economic project of integration in the twenty-first century global market (3-6). She exposes a connection between India's neoliberal economic reforms beginning in the 1980s to the rise of India's global presence via international corporate beauty contests, Bollywood, and girl-child-focused service industries that hail a new, more "modern" Indian woman.[6] This "millennial woman," Bhaskaran explains, is publicized as someone who *chooses* a subordinating femininity and heterosexuality. It is this "choice" that marks her as quintessentially Indian yet similar enough to her Euro-American counterpart to achieve "modern" status. Indian culture, according to Bhaskaran's analysis, remains wedded to neo-imperial ideology where Indian "traditions" morph on the global stage from "backward" to "modern" while still maintaining the same heterosexual imperatives previously condemned by Western feminists.

The shift from "backward" to "modern" is based on the ideological and material usefulness of such heterosexuality, particularly as it facilitates the transnational flow of corporate wealth between the global south and the Euro-American empire. For example, Bhaskaran explains that participation in Indian beauty pageants is a conduit to the global pageant corporate circuit. The most prestigious pageants are owned by lucrative U.S.-based companies. In other words, westernized modes of subordinating heterosexual femininity, when economically profitable for the nation, become a way for the middle- and upper-middle class Indian woman to serve her nation. It is in

this larger political and economic transnational context that Bhaskaran describes the aggressive familial pressure to marry, endured by South Asian women in their mid-to-late twenties, in terms of the "wedding-*industrial-complex*." Because its manifestation at the community level cannot be detached from neoliberal and neo-imperial political projects that profit from patriarchal heterosexuality, such familial pressure to "marry" must be understood as more than a cultural rite of passage.

I substitute the term "marriage" for "wedding" to emphasize an institutionalized history of racism and heterosexism that includes antimiscegenation and antigay-marriage laws in the United States. This history includes the implementation of neoliberal economic policies like those examined by Bhaskaran. Such policies diminish already insufficient social service, educational, health and housing infrastructure while bolstering the massive growth of prison and military industries in the United States. Priya Kandaswamy makes this especially evident as she exposes neoliberal economic policies that promote marriage as an answer to poverty (708). She argues that such policies normalize a racially stratified welfare state and a racist heteronormative inscription of national belonging. These policies implicitly blame the "promiscuous single black mother" for the cause of poverty and proclaim state-sanctioned married monogamy as criteria for citizen access to social welfare benefits. Kandaswamy's research thus reinforces Puar and Rai's claim that the U.S. state frames "the failed (Western) romance of the heteronormative nuclear family" as primary threat to the nation's health and well-being—be it terrorist invasions or domestic poverty (Puar *Terrorist* 53). In each case, marriage sanctions racist, colonialist and neoliberal capitalist projects. I thus use the term "marriage-industrial-complex" purposefully to invoke the link between what Alexander calls "heterosexualizing projects" and the industrialized killing, exploitation and disappearing of people of color and people of the global south via the prison- and military-industrial-complexes.

Model-minority derived understandings of South Asianness are intricately connected to the marriage-industrial-complex insofar as they prescribe a dissociation from those racialized as part of the "underclass" as well as "the normalization of the stable procreative endogamous family in the community's definition of achievement" (Kim 121; Das Gupta 70). The relation between the two components—horizontal racial/ethnic disassociation and successful heterosexuality—become evident when model-minority discourse proclaims that a large part of what separates the "model minority" from the "bad minorities" (who—the logic goes—deserve to end up in the military- and prison-industrial-complexes) is our better family values (read: married, low-divorce rate, procreative). This line of reasoning echoes that of neoliberal right wing "family values" rhetoric and the mainstream lesbian and gay rhetoric in support of same-sex marriage (Kandaswamy 707). Marriage becomes part of the racist heteronormative criteria for national inclusion and access to the benefits of citizenship in all three discourses, making it a site rife with contradictory and complex meanings for U.S. South Asians negotiating their desire for a positive sense of self in community.

Complicity and Contradiction in U.S. South Asian Community

While Jasbir Puar theorizes the machines of war that manipulate circuits of complicity across communities vulnerable to the violence they enact, I focus on navigating the contradictory sentiments amongst U.S. South Asians of immigrant and queer diasporic community. Specifically, I am interested in how U.S. South Asians navigate their desire for a positive sense of self in community and their desire to evade state violence through the equation of heterosexuality with endogamy (an investment in one's "own people" as a *more* civilized race) and queerness with exogamy (an inevitable descent into that which is "foreign," queer, and thus suspect).[7] Such conflations follow colonial modernity's invention of race as biologized identity that then promotes traditions like "marriage amongst our own" as central to positive formulations of cultural identity.

In a racial climate that classifies all brown others as "foreign threat," U.S. South Asian investment in endogamy serves to recreate the racial distinctions otherwise dissipated by post-9/11 cases of "mistaken" identity. The "model us" reasserts its racial/cultural status over and against other peoples of color. Recuperation of "model" status, as stated earlier, derives from the desire for a positive sense of self in community combined with a survival impulse intent on getting the attention of white America. Given that the response is directed both inward (community) and outward (white America), this process of redefinition often results in contradictory articulations of cultural identity. This became especially evident during my participation in two gatherings—one which took place in my own U.S. South Asian immigrant community, the other which took place during a queer South Asian diasporic conference. I describe them below beginning with the former.

In early July 2008, I attended a dinner gathering in my middle-class U.S. South Asian immigrant community. Those present were Hindu and Parsi middle-class Indian immigrant professional men and women in their 30s to early 60s. The upcoming presidential election was a hot topic of discussion, and this usually Republican-voting group was discussing their support for Democratic candidate Barack Obama. "We need to end this 'war on terror' and get out of Iraq!" said one of the men. He then began describing multiple accounts of South Asian male colleagues and friends who had been harassed and racially profiled as suspect terrorists. The other men nodded their heads and added their own encounters—some personal, others distant—with post-9/11 racial abuse. Then, without any transition, one of them firmly stated "But I'm not for this same-sex marriage!" The antiwar stance was immediately tempered by an anti-queer stance, which, in turn, quickly became equated with a pro-national security and border control stance. When I asked about their disapproval of same-sex marriage rights, they took turns explaining that it would turn marriage into a vehicle for criminals, terrorists and other undeserving, dangerous or lazy *foreigners* to deplete the already scarce access to state benefits. In line with Republican right wing logic, they equated homosexuality with that which is foreign

and suspect, a danger to the nation, community, family values, and economic prosperity. That heterosexuals can marry "foreigners" to facilitate terrorist activity was not part of their logic. Instead, heterosexual marriage was presumed an endogamous practice of good patriots (such as themselves) and thus the proper practice of "good ethnics" such as themselves (Puar *Terrorist* 32).

The juxtaposition of antiwar and homophobic sentiments seems less arbitrary given Puar and Rai's claim that "American retaliation promises to emasculate bin Laden and turn him into a fag. This promise suggests that if you're not for the war, you're a fag, it also incites violence against queers and specifically queers of color" (126). In light of the above discussion, this statement speaks loudly about the predicament of queer South Asians in the United States who face state violence yet may struggle to find support in their communities. If their communities temper critiques of the "war on terror" with support for state-sponsored homophobia, then queer U.S. South Asians are left with little room to maneuver for resistant company at home. However, as the following incident proves, the intra-communal equation between endogamy and heterosexuality enables a re-negotiation of same-sex marriage as an avenue back to community-of-place for some queer U.S. South Asians.

At a 2006 conference dedicated to the issues and concerns of queer South Asians across the diaspora, most of the participants were middle-class professionals and same-sex marriage was a—if not *the*—central issue of discussion. Those participants who presented or vocalized their positions were energetically invested in its legalization. As one participant stated, "We are the same as everybody else. We deserve the same rights as everybody else. This is a country where everybody can be what they want to be. That's what this nation is about." This statement clearly invokes the collusion between U.S. nationalism and mainstream gay and lesbian rhetoric. Both discourses narrate America's modern and progressive nature against the backward and barbaric Middle East through the national inclusion of LGBT people.[8] Given the difficulties queer South Asians may face in their immigrant communities, we could read the conference participant's comments as oriented towards inclusion in white heteronormative America.[9]

Yet the equation of heterosexuality with endogamy, articulated at the dinner gathering recounted above, enables a reconciliation—of sorts—with the anti-queer stance of some South Asian communities. This became overt when I overheard a South Asian American lesbian explain how excited her parents were that she was attending this conference and how they had instructed her to find a proper Gujarati girl of such-and-such religion and caste. Her queerness could be somewhat reconciled through participation in endogamy. If the conference could be refocused from within the cultural tradition of arranging "marriages amongst our own" then, at least for this woman, it meant greater inclusion of one's South Asian familial and community ties rather than a severing of them. In this context, to demand the right to marry because "we are the same as everybody else" cannot be heard *strictly* as an assimilative desire to dominant heteronormative white/Anglo society, but rather as a contradictory

sentiment that also communicates a desire for a South Asian American sense of a self in community.

As Anannya Bhattacharjee explains in her analysis of South Asian immigrant bourgeois cultural formation, the "home" or "family" space is where South Asian culture is relegated to persist in the face of pervasive dominant white/Anglo culture. The home/family space is also the domain of cultural duty for the South Asian woman. Accordingly, marriage becomes a particularly significant tradition for the South Asian woman invested in maintaining ties to her community. As South Asian American women approach marital age, the pressure to marry is compounded by the parental pressure to marry *within* the community. For many middle-class South Asian immigrant communities "the pressure on females to achieve is accompanied by strict scrutiny of their freedom to date and freely find marital partners, so that the emphasis is that they become high-achieving but chaste wives. The control of females ensures homogamy within patriarchal family systems" (Purkayastha 107). It is this preoccupation with homogamy through marriage that communicates the familial/community pressure to marry as more than just a desire for heteronormative daughters. Marriage "amongst our own," often coded as the anchor for cultural preservation within South Asian immigrant community, exposes the conflation of "culture" and "race." This conflation is a key strategy of the model-minority racial project. If South Asians are positioned as a "model" racial-ethnic group over and against Black Americans and Latinos/as, then homogamy as tradition of cultural preservation becomes intertwined with desires to maintain the racial boundaries separating a distinctly model "us" from a distinctly *not-model* "them."[10]

Juxtaposing the articulated sentiments at the South Asian immigrant community dinner with the queer South Asian diasporic conference reveals the insidious workings of "civilizing" heterosexuality. As U.S. South Asians navigate racist patriotism in a nation that consigns them to racial inferiority, investment in colonial/modern heterosexuality may seem a seductive avenue for resisting racial degradation and violence. This heterosexuality operates through an investment in "racial purity" (endogamy) and the restriction of women to roles of "wife"/"mother" as bearers of the "race." For both the South Asian immigrant men at dinner and the South Asian American lesbian at the queer diasporic conference, endogamy became the avenue to reconcile an affirming community-based South Asian identity with racist patriotism. Both responses were at once complicit with nationalist discourse yet intent on navigating post-9/11 racism in a collective affirmation of U.S. South Asian cultural identity. In this way, one could argue that a strategic function of heterosexuality, as tool of colonial modernity, is an investment in racial boundaries and biological fictions of "race purity." Any resistance to racism that incorporates an allegiance to this heterosexuality will thus struggle to challenge female-subordinating traditions or forge horizontal cross-racial solidarities with other non-white peoples. Yet deep cross-racial solidarities that reject the logic of "civilizing heterosexuality"—including and especially its patriarchal gender relations—may offer the best preparation against unwitting collusion

with state violence. I now turn to the post-9/11 cases of "mistaken identity" that offer potent examples of this collusion and potential resistant collaboration given post-9/11 shifts in racial formation.

"Mistaken" Identity and Re-membering Our Selves In Relation

The racial blurring of brown peoples that occurs in post-9/11 cases of "mistaken" identity offers avenues for conceiving cross-racial interdependent solidarity because it breaks a fundamental component of racism: maintenance of boundaries. Racial categorizations—race groupings—are fictional, homogeneous abstractions created through the erection of borders that aim to separate cleanly and then control the separation/creation of one "kind" or race of people from other "kinds" or races. Racial categories and the concept of miscegenation are therefore tightly linked. In white supremacist societies, the separations between *non*-whites and other *non*-whites (re)produce the hierarchical binary relation between white racial "purity"/superiority and non-white impurity/inferiority. "The maintenance of whiteness necessitates the conceptual existence of Blacks, Latinos, Native Americans, and other races as tropes of inferiority against which whiteness can be measured and valued" (Lopez 187). That is to say, whiteness depends specifically and especially on the border control of non-white racial groupings. Hence the implementation of immigration, naturalization and antimiscegenation laws controlling national and conjugal borders.

Post-9/11 incidents of "mistaken" identity reassert the white/non-white binary while blurring the border control of defined non-white racial borders. As a result, South Asians become Arabs become Latinos become Arabs in the white racist mind. Yet while these "mistakes" reveal that in the white racist eyes, "all brown people look the same" and any one will do when it comes time to enact patriotic violence, attempts to "correct" such mistakes ignore this truth and reaffirm racialized borders that bolster white supremacy.

South Asians and Latinos were among the victims of post-9/11 cases of "mistaken" identity, members of each racial-ethnic group "mistaken" at times for a "dirty A-rab." Indeed, many have described the "war on terror" (where the presumed suspect is Arab) as a "war on immigrants" (where the presumed suspect is Mexican) with increased border control and violent raids on immigrant laborers. Yet despite this context of shared violence, South Asian community responses have varied. Partha Banerjee, director of the Newark, N.J.-based non-profit New Jersey Immigration Policy Network stated in 2005 that when it comes to the "well established South Asians" in New Jersey, "We never see them come and stand in solidarity with poor immigrants" (Swapan). I have, similarly, noticed, in my Parsi South Asian community in Dallas, attempts to distance ourselves not only from Arabs but also from other non-white racial-ethnic groups. In fact, shortly after 9/11, I endured an incident of airport security harassment. The incident led to an interaction with my own mother that I have continued to revisit as a fundamental moment of insight into the complex contradictions produced by post-9/11 racial formation. When I recounted, in anger and frustration, the humiliating

experience to my mother, she responded, with sincerity and conviction, that the reason I was being harassed so much is because I look Mexican.

I situate this incident next to a similar one recounted by U.S.-based Mexican media artist Guillermo Goméz Peña when arriving at the JFK airport in New York City shortly after 9/11. After making it through all security checkpoints, he and his wife embrace, relieved to have made it home. During the embrace, she affectionately slips her hands in his pockets at which point they find themselves surrounded by policemen who demand to know what weapon she gave her husband. Goméz Peña comments, "As a migrant artist and Chicano veteran of 'mistaken identity,' I now have to deal with new fears of T-W-A-L (traveling while Arab-looking)" (98). This incident of "mistaken" identity disrupts a moment of heterosexual intimacy between "brown folks" that incites suspicion of terrorist activity and police action. As such, it illustrates well how state violence—intent on protecting and (re)producing "us" against "them"—produces the very "failed heterosexuality" that marks "brown enemies" as justified targets. This is echoed in yet another incident of post-9/11 racial profiling when two white men "mistook" a Mexican immigrant in Lancaster, California for an "Arab," and beat him *in front of his family*, doing so—they proclaimed—"in the name of America" ("Cause For Concern").

Remembering these incidents next to each other makes visible how, "in the name of America," the racialized enemy as "failed heterosexual" is violently produced over and over again. It also exposes how "in the name of America" my mother's illogical reaction is produced. Dislodging the biologized racial conceptions of self tightly bound by "traditions" of endogamy necessitates what M. Jacqui Alexander calls "re-membering." This "re-membering," as Alexander describes it, entails an excavation of the contradictions wrought by the dismemberment of colonial modernity and a creative re-membering of the fragments towards a more robust positive sense of self in community. Such acts of re-membering rely on sensing the relationality we have been taught to forget by modern/colonial investments in hard-edged and hierarchical notions of the self. Given the significance of "traditions" to formulations of ourselves and each other, developing a larger relational self-concept would require re-deploying an understanding of tradition "not as *something* that is there to be remembered, but the *process of remembering and forgetting* itself" (Mignolo xv). As South Asian immigrant communities negotiate their racialization in mainstream U.S. society, for example, the need to homogenize or emphasize in more rigid terms what counts as "authentic" aspects of their "culture" results in the reinvention of which "traditions" become symbolic ethnic representations of community (Purkayastha 88). Re-membering the social structural and historical conditions of these negotiations can better enable the fashioning of "traditions" that articulate with the desires for a self in community.

Culture, in this case, would no longer be reduced to biologized racial meaning dependent on traditions of endogamous heterosexuality. Instead, its cultivation would require re-orienting our attention

towards each other, re-membering our interdependence in both its violent and resistant histories, and committing to refashioning traditions that cultivate deeply historical open-ended and defiant understandings of a self in relation. This process begins with dwelling in the contradictions articulated in our survival impulses, mining the desires stifled by them and renegotiating their fulfillment by asking ourselves in whose eyes do we construct our liberatory possibilities.

If I approach my mother's response by dwelling in its contradictions, I can perhaps hear her as saying more than what she means to say and make visible the context shaping the divide-and-conquer logic of what she articulates. To say with such sincerity and conviction that I was stopped by airport security on my way to baggage claim because I look Mexican, my mother communicated a rejection of the racial state's scripting of her/me as potential terrorist. In doing so, she came to life as more than an obedient model minority even as she stubbornly grasped at its divide-and-conquer logic to articulate her resistance. I can hear her not as someone who believes "Mexicans" deserve to be racially profiled, but rather as someone who needs and wants a logic to understand herself positively without having to understand others negatively. Because her cultural/racial self-definition is caught in the modern/colonial constructions of a "civilizing" formulation of heterosexuality, imagining horizontal cross-racial solidarity remains imperceptible. Mining the resistant desires—present in the midst of our contradictory emotions, acts of saying and (non)sense-making[11]—can remedy the failure of imagination as we struggle towards more liberating connections in the name of culture and community.

Conclusion

Cases of mistaken identity are rites of passage for people of color in the United States, according to Alicia Gaspar de Alba. While Gaspar de Alba is referring specifically to Chicanas/os, I think her analysis is one that can shed light on responsible cross-racial identification in solidarity against the forces that impel us to make "mistakes" both in collaboration with and in resistance to the logics of white supremacy. She writes, "The overriding identity question for us is not just 'who am I?' but 'what am I?' Given the relational and oppositional nature of Chicano/a citizenship in Anglo-dominated country, 'what am I?' is further complicated by the mirror image projected from without: 'what do *they* think/say I am?'" (199). It is important that what *they* think/say I am carries institutional weight to affect the way I understand myself and how I see others in relation to myself.

While Gaspar de Alba's *they* refers to those with dominant white/Anglo institutionalized authority, I want to add another *they* to her formulation, that of non-white others who are not of one's own racial-ethnic background. How, for example, do Chicanos/as see South Asians in Texas? Although this *they* does not carry any overt institutional weight, this *they* nevertheless is implicated in our identification processes and greatly impacts our ability to resist dominant perceptions of who we are and ought to be. These different perceptions of post-9/11 state operations might motivate the following ques-

tions: In cases of "mistaken identity," when one attempts to correct the "mistake," in whose eyes does one seek clarification? At whose expense? Towards the dismantling of which violent logics? All of this follows Gaspar de Alba's insight that the fissure between what *they* say/think you are and what *you* say/think you are impels "a moment of decision" (200). A moment of decision that I would like to characterize as one that answers the question: How do you wish to be seen and by whom?

What if the attempt to "correct the mistake" was oriented towards dialogue between those with whom we are mistaken instead of with those who do the "mistaking" as justification for violence? Such a dialogue might shift the frame through which we could respond to such incidents. One could argue that the goal would still be to "correct the mistake"; however, the correction would not necessarily rely on legitimizing the "civilized-white-heterosexual-*us*" versus the "barbaric-brown-fag-*them*" logic. Instead, the clarification could center on a mutual relearning of each other in non-dominant terms—the different histories and traditions of struggle and resistance on which both communities stand. Such a re-membering of one's self in relation to others can expose avenues that multiply one's base of support in this global age of war and imperialism.

Notes

[1] I am using Michael Omi and Howard Winant's development of the term "racial formation" to refer to "the sociohistorical process by which racial categories are created, inhabited, transformed, and destroyed" (55). This is an ongoing process of negotiation between state practices, cultural representations, and social movements. I dwell on the negotiations of peoples within communities with the state racializing practices they endure.

[2] M. Jacqui Alexander names "ideological reassembly" to describe a methodology that makes visible the "ideological traffic between and among formations that are otherwise positioned as dissimilar" (190). As such, "ideological reassembly" searches for the less apparent dimensions of violence that connect incidents otherwise framed as only having to do with race, or class, or gender, or sexual, or colonial oppression. Ideological reassembly is therefore especially useful for highlighting allegiance to "civilizing heterosexuality" in post-9/11 U.S. South Asian efforts to renarrate themselves as model-minority citizens.

[3] The "desire for a self-in-community," as articulated by Alexander, derives from the psychic and physical dismemberment wrought by colonial histories and glimpses a deep knowing amongst colonized people about our interdependence. While this desire often manifests as a desire for belonging, it cannot be satisfied by the narrow state-sanctioned limits of blood or legal kinship ties. Such limits often naturalize "insider" status, presume the relationship amongst insiders as given and unquestionable, and nurture feelings of belonging through the subordinating exclusionary production of "illegitimate" or "undesirable" others. Instead, realizing the desire for a self-in-community necessitates the enactment of a nonbinary, nonhierarchical logic of collective self-determination mobilized by consciousness of one's interdependent relations with a wide range of others whose histories intertwine with one's own through complex relations of power.

[4] Given the deep heterogeneity of the peoples who fall under the term "South Asian," cultivating horizontal cross-racial solidarity amongst these different South Asians is equally crucial, especially given post-9/11 racial

codings of "Muslim" as "terrorist." However, for the purposes of this paper, I am interested in considering the loss of "model" racial status in the United States. Distinctions between South Asians are less likely to be noted in model-minority discourse than those between Asians, Blacks, Latinos/as, et cetera. I thus focus on the resistant potential to re-conceive identity in relation to these group identities given the loss of "model" status against Black and Latino/a peoples.

[5] See Mani, Lata. *Contentious Traditions: The Debate on Sati in Colonial India*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1998.

[6] Girl-child focused service industries refer to NGO sponsored foundations advertising support for the unprivileged girl child in India. Bhaskaran names the "Femina Little Princess Foundation" as a girl-child focused service industry that includes girl magazines advertising "Bollywood Barbie culture" with the stated goal to "empower girl-children in India" (64).

[7] These formulations derive from Paolo Bachetta's development of the concepts "xenophobic queerphobia" and "queerphobic xenophobia." See Bachetta, Paola. "When the (Hindu) Nation Exiles Its Queers." *Social Text*. 61 17.4. (Winter 1999): 141-166.

[8] Jasbir Puar explains that U.S. nationalism relies on gay and queer bodies to reinforce heterosexual norms as well as mobilize "civilizing" discourse that posits the U.S. as sexually progressive in relation to the barbaric and sexually repressive cultures of colonized people. She refers to the latter use of homosexuality in nationalist discourse as "homo-nationalism" (*Mapping* 68).

[9] Heteronormative refers to those practices, ideologies, and traditions institutionalized as "normal" components of heterosexuality. One can thus identify as homosexual yet participate in heteronormative traditions like state-sanctioned marriage.

[10] This is particularly evident when one considers the ways that marriage to white/Anglos may be less scandalous than marriage to differently racialized non-white others. For example, when my father tentatively announced my sister's marriage to a white/Anglo to relatives in India, my eldest living relative there asked: Is he white? When my father answered in the affirmative, she gave her blessing.

[11] I deploy these particular words—"emotions, acts of saying, and (non)sense-making"—as used and theorized by Walter Mignolo. He uses them in the context of explaining a different way of understanding tradition in the organization of community understandings of self and other.

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