TOWARDS “A NEW HISTORY OF MAN”

TOWARDS "A NEW HISTORY OF MAN": ANTICOLONIAL LIBERATION AND THE ANTI-NATIONALIST POSSIBILITIES OF FRIENDSHIP IN SOUTH ASIAN LITERATURE

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TITLE: Towards “A New History of Man”: Anticolonial Liberation and the Anti-Nationalist Possibilities of Friendship in South Asian Literature

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LAY ABSTRACT

This project explores the anti-nationalist possibilities of friendship. Anticolonial revolutionaries of the twentieth century, such as Frantz Fanon, envisioned a humanist politics that refused the violence of both empire and the nation-state. Such a politics, rooted in the wellbeing of the global collective, has been lost in the proliferation of nationalisms in both former empires and colonies; however, I argue that the study of friendship can help enliven these collective politics. This project focuses on the political possibilities of friendships formed in the specific context of South Asian Independence movements. I read a set of South Asian literary texts that depict friendships established across racial, class, caste, religious, gendered, and national difference. Tracing these friendships as they take shape on the ship, in the home, and in the ashram, I ask: how might these depictions of friendships help reinvigorate a revolutionary, anticolonial politics that seeks to progress beyond the violence of the nation-state?

ABSTRACT

This dissertation argues that friendship can enliven the revolutionary humanist politics of twentieth century anticolonial movements. Twenty-first century nationalism, including that of former colonies, extends the violence of empire and breaks from the visions of anticolonial revolutionaries, such as Frantz Fanon, who sought to overthrow imperial domination by also progressing beyond the nation-state. Through a study of friendships that emerge in the context of anticolonial struggle and form across racial, class, caste, national, gendered, and religious differences, I argue that friendship is crucial to the development of a politics rooted in the wellbeing of the global collective and oppositional to both colonialism *and* nationalism.

The main focus of this project is South Asia. Taking the fortification of Hindu nationalism in postcolonial India as a departure point, I read a set of literary texts situated in the South Asian anticolonial context that depict friendships formed across racial, class, caste, national, gendered, and religious difference. I demonstrate how many of these friendships contest strict divisions between self and Other and the colonial, class, and nationalist structures that keep these divisions intact. I organize each chapter according to three spaces that recur in South Asian literature as crucial to the creation and mobilization of friendship across difference: the ship, the home, and the ashram. Moving between these three spaces, I argue that in the emotional bonds of friendship, we can trace the emergence of a collective politics—one that refuses the divisions of self and Other central to the projects of empire and the basis upon which contemporary nationalisms thrive.

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No, we do not want to catch up with anyone. What we want to do is to go forward all the time, night and day, in the company of Man, in the company of all men […]. It is a question of the Third World starting a new history of Man, a history which will have regard to the sometimes prodigious theses which Europe has put forward, but which will also not forget Europe's crimes, of which the most horrible was committed in the heart of man, and consisted of the pathological tearing apart of his functions and the crumbling away of his unity. […]

For Europe, for ourselves and for humanity, comrades, we must make a new start, develop a new way of thinking, and endeavour to create a new Man.

— Frantz Fanon*, The Wretched of the Earth* (1961)

Introduction: Friendship and the "Manichean World" of Nationalism

> *History teaches us clearly that the battle against colonialism does not run straight away along the lines of nationalism.*
> — Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961)

> *This European war of Nations is the war of retribution. Man, the person, must protest for his very life against the heaping up of things where there should be the heart, and systems and policies where there should flow living human relationship.*
> — Rabindranath Tagore, *Nationalism* (1917)

> *This is fraternity, which is only another name for democracy. Democracy is not merely a form of government. It is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint, communicated experience. It is essentially an attitude of respect and reverence towards one's fellow men.*
> — B.R. Ambedkar, *Annihilation of Caste* (1936)

> *Friendship will be the soil from which a new politics will emerge.*
> — Ivan Illich, "Friendship" (date unknown)[1]

In the final scene of E.M. Forster's *A Passage to India*, Aziz—disillusioned with the seeming impossibility of his friendship with the Englishman, Fielding—declares that one day "India will be a nation!" and that he and Fielding "shall [then] be friends" (306). The connection Aziz draws between the coming of Indian sovereignty and the possibility of friendship across national, racial, and religious boundaries arises logically from the colonial context in which Aziz and Fielding's relationship begins and eventually fails: Aziz's trial and Fielding's marriage reveal the prohibitive nature of the power imbalances between them and fortify their allegiances to their "own" people. The end of British occupation thus promises for Aziz the possibility of forming intimate bonds across difference—between himself and Fielding but, more broadly, between Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs who "shall be one!" under a sovereign Indian nation (306).

[1] Qtd. in Nick Montgomery and Carla Bergman (2017).

This scene of Forster's is often called upon for its significance to studies of friendship across racial, national, and religious difference. Indeed, this moment—which contains both Aziz's hope for the mere deferral of his friendship with Fielding and the quiet truth of the friendship's loss—has fundamentally shaped my interest in the connection between the possibilities of friendship and the limitations of nationalisms that emerge within and after colonial rule. Nearly a century after the publication of Forster's novel, Aziz and Fielding's friendship compels me to ask: under which conditions are friendships across national, racial, and religious difference possible? What might these friendships have to offer in the pursuit of anticolonial liberation? And what does the loss or foreclosure of these friendships tell us about nationalism and the fixed distinctions between self and Other upon which nationalism usually relies?

These questions on the political potential of friendship are increasingly urgent given the robust and dangerous forms of nationalism developing today both within India and across the global political landscape. The closure of European borders to refugees and migrants, the nativist foundations of arguments in favour of Brexit in the U.K., American economic isolationism and xenophobia under and after Donald Trump, and the cementing of Islamophobic beliefs in the articulation of Quebecois national identity through Bill 21 all point to a global resurgence of nationalism in the twenty-first century. In particular, I begin with Aziz's proclamation at the end of *A Passage to India* because his vision of unity across religious difference in India is yet to be realized within its postcolonial society. In India, the rise of religious nationalism can be seen in the 2014 and 2019

elections of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the rash of anti-Muslim and anti-Dalit violence in Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, and Bihar, the recent Delhi pogrom in which forty people (mostly Muslims) were killed, and the implementation of the Citizenship Amendment Act (widely opposed as piece of explicitly anti-Muslim legislation). Decades after Partition in 1947, the persistence of such communal violence has taken the form of state-sanctioned Hindu nationalism and resulted in the mainstreaming of Hindutva in the Indian political landscape.[2]

Motivated by the entrenchment of Hindu nationalism in postcolonial India, this project explores the relationship between friendship and forms of nationalism that develop in response to and after colonial rule in South Asia. As many theorists of nationalism in South Asia argue, contemporary Hindu nationalist ideology must be understood in relation to nineteenth and twentieth century struggles against British empire.[3] Chetan Bhatt, for instance, argues that, while many different and conflicting political ideologies animated India's Independence movement, "some key Hindu nationalist figures were also activists within various sections of [this] movement," which gave expression and structure to a Hindu nationalist ideology that had emerged in the nineteenth century (177). Chandrima Chakraborty, in her study of ascetic Hindu

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[2]For a thorough overview of Hindu nationalist violence from Independence into the twenty-first century—and its intensification under what Achin Vanaik calls the "New Modi Regime"—please see Vanaik's *The Rise of Hindu Authoritarianism: Secular Claims, Communal Violence.*

[3] For other examples, please see Himani Bannerji's *Democracy and Demography: Essays in Gender, Nation, and Ideology* (2011) and Shamita Basu's *Religious Revivalism as Nationalist Discourse: Swami Vivekananda and New Hinduism in Nineteenth-Century Bengal* (2002).

masculinity, argues that the "nationalist focus on Hindu ascetics and associated practices in colonial India […] offered a telos of selfhood and nationhood," which has come to shape the Hindu Right today (5). There are clear links between the Independence movement and the rise of Hindu nationalism. However, I argue that, in the friendships formed during the anticolonial struggles of South Asia (including in the Indian Independence movement), we can also see the emergence of a politics rooted in and oriented towards the wellbeing of the collective (or what I refer to throughout as "collective politics"). Such a collective politics challenges the violence of both colonialism *and* nationalism and exceeds the ideological boundaries of the nation-state[4] itself.

Sivamohan Valluvan's definition of nationalism is a helpful starting point for exploring the relationship between friendship and nationalism. He argues that nationalism is both "a wager of non-belonging, an assertion of the nation's 'constitutive outside' […] agitated by concerns about who we definitely are not" (36) and a "form of apprehending the world, of making sense of its order and disorder, of trying to reckon with its frustrations. It is a form of attributing culpability for the world's wrongs that exonerates the self, spares the powerful and blames the weak" (37). The basis of nationalism is often taken to be feelings of belonging or identification with a nation by its subjects; Benedict Anderson argues, for instance, that the imagined community of the nation is bound

[4] The now universalized mode of territorial governance and organization of populations through a nationalized economy, a militarized border regime, and an institutionalized political-legal structure.

together by the promise of "fraternity"—or a "deep horizontal comradeship" for which people are willing to kill and to die (7). Valluvan suggests, however, that nationalism's grip arises not from its promise of fraternity but from its explicit exclusions; in other words, nationalism is more accurately understood as an epistemology grounded in the rejection and repudiation of a set of Others. In his analysis of twenty-first century nationalism in Britain, Valluvan demonstrates how these Others take on multiple forms both external and internal to the nation: "the foreigner," for instance, is a menacing figure because she resides outside the nation but threatens to cross its borders; on the other hand, racial and/or religious Others might already be an unwelcome presence *within* the nation and, as such, present an ongoing and internal threat that must be managed. It is through the creation of such a "constitutive outside" that the nation comes to "acquire a sense of selfhood" and to function as a coherent political community (37).

Throughout this project, I make a distinction between Valluvan's conception of nationalism as a violent, exclusionary political force that entrenches hierarchy and division and what Himani Bannerji, following Fanon, calls "national liberation"—forms of anticolonial struggle that strive for sovereignty *through* the elimination of religious, racial/ethnic, gender, class, and caste hierarchies and that reject nationalism as the basis for postcolonial society (42). As Fanon argues in *The Wretched of the* Earth, national liberation is also exclusionary as it achieves through violence "the restoration of nationhood to the people" by "unifying [the people] on a national, sometimes racial, basis" (46). Yet, such a basis for unification is temporary and strategic. The nationalist

sentiment necessary for liberation must eventually transform into a new humanism—what Fanon describes as "a new history of Man"—that reproduces neither the well-worn racial and national divisions of Europe's "Manichean world" nor privileges the nation-state as an inevitably liberatory form (314). While Western humanism takes religion as its interlocutor and its foil, Fanon's new humanism emerges in opposition to nationalism; it is, as Majid Sharifi and Sean Chabot write, "a participatory and revolutionary humanism shaped by new human beings who no longer seek to destroy each other in the name of national, racial, or economic domination" (263). Anticolonial resistance is the ground from which "new human beings" can emerge. As Anuja Bose writes, for Fanon, "the revolting masses […] and their experiments to construct alternatives […] pointed beyond the divisions of national, colonial, and imperialist rule. Thinking and acting beyond the framework of the nation-state to resist imperial domination was the will of a mass collective subject" (672-3) who could transform nationalist sentiment into "collective action imagined beyond the confines of the nation-state" (674). A truly revolutionary anticolonial politics must, therefore, "not pay tribute to Europe by creating states, institutions, and societies which draw their inspiration from [Europe]" but, instead, re-imagine collective society beyond the violence of both empire and the nation-state (Fanon 314).

For Fanon, this revolutionary anticolonial politics requires the overthrowing of capitalism—a fundamental break from the "institutions" that uphold empire. As he argues, "we know that the capitalist regime, in so far as it is a way of life, cannot leave us

free to perform our work at home, nor our duty in the world" (99). While the national bourgeoisie desires to co-opt anticolonial movements and reproduce an old Manichean world for its own material gain, "a socialist regime, a regime which is completely orientated toward the people as a whole and based on the principle that man is the most precious of all possessions, will allow us to go forward more quickly and more harmoniously" (99). Indeed, the nation-state, which Fanon seeks to progress beyond, is structurally bound to capitalism, as many Marxist theorists writing after Fanon have shown. Daniel Bensaïd, for instance, lays out the three stages of European imperialism, which intricately connect capitalism, empire, and the nation-state:

> Imperialism is the political form of the domination that corresponds to the combined and unequal development of capitalist accumulation. This modern imperialism has changed its appearance. It has not disappeared. In the course of recent centuries, it has undergone three great stages: that of colonial conquest and territorial occupation … that of the domination of financial capital or the "highest stage of capitalism"[5] […] [and] after World War II, that of the domination of the world shared between several imperialist powers, formal independence of former colonies and dominated development. (qtd. in Parry n.p)

[5] "Financial capital" is, in Bensaïd and Benita Parry's configuration, the "product" of empire—wealth created by the exploitation, appropriation, and subjugation of the colonized world's people, resources, and labour power, and achieved primarily through the establishment of capitalist modes of production (Parry n.p).

In Bensaïd's configuration, the last stage of imperialism also marks the rise of the global nation-state system, as destabilized imperial centres, emerging superpowers, and former colonies all operate as and through the nation-state form. As Ellen Meiksins Wood argues, "the world has become more, not less, a world of nation states, not only as a result of national liberation struggles but also under pressure from imperial powers" (23). In the aftermath of empire and in the postcolonial era, old imperial powers "have found the nation state the most reliable guarantor of the conditions necessary for accumulation, and the only means by which capital can freely expand beyond the boundaries of direct political domination" (23).

Bensaïd and Wood's argument that the nation-state system is an extension of empire departs somewhat from Anderson, who suggests there is an "inner incompatibility between empire and the nation" and whose analysis of the state follows *from* the nation (93). The position I take in this project—that the nation-state system is a product of empire and an extension of imperial violence through other means—is more aligned with a body of scholarship that traces the continuities between empire and the nation-state. Indeed, while former colonies remain oppressed by this global system of "dominated development," they are also sites of colonial violence, which consolidates the class interests of the national bourgeoisie. Goldie Osuri, for instance, argues that India's occupation of the State of Jammu and Kashmir demonstrates how "colonial and/or imperial techniques of power are exercised in the (post) colonial nation-state" (2440). While this occupation is often considered to be the result of a bilateral "dispute" between

postcolonial India and Pakistan, Osuri argues that this dispute was fundamental to India's formation as an independent nation-state. In other words, the "moment of Independence" from colonial rule was also "the moment of [territorial] *acquisition*," which helped bring the nation-state into being—both ideologically and through the expropriation of resources that would secure the nation-state's development and future (my emphasis; 2438).

The links Osuri draws between empire and the nation-state also illuminate the connections between imperialism and nationalism, as a form of Othering that helps to fortify the nation-state's borders as well as its expansionist projects. As Achin Vanaik argues, the Hindu Right has long demanded that Kashmir be "integrated' into India—a project served by the intensification of military violence against Kashmiris and the removal of Article 370[6] under the increasingly Hindu nationalist reign of Modi (354). Christopher Bayly's work on the overlap between imperialism and nationalism in Europe is thus germane to the nationalist and expansionist projects in/of former colonies:

> The rise of exclusive nationalisms, grasping and using the powers of the new and more interventionist state, was the critical force propelling both the new imperialism and the hardening of the boundaries between majority and assumed 'ethnic' populations across the world […]. Imperialism and nationalism reacted on each other to redivide the world and its people. (qtd. in Kumar 132).

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[6] Article 370 grants special status and a certain degree of autonomy to Kashmir. Adopted into the Indian Constitution in 1949 as a "temporary provision," its removal was an important part of the BJP's 2019 campaign platform, and the article was revoked under Modi that same year.

In other words, we can think of nationalist violence—including that of former colonies—as a reinvigoration of the violence of empire, similarly rooted in the desire for accumulation and requiring a diverse set of Others that serve, simultaneously, to help expand *and* secure the nation-state's borders.

While there are explicit links between European empire and the rise of the nation-state system, theorists of Subaltern Studies importantly remind us that the development of nationalisms in South Asia and Africa are subject to their own historical processes and, in some important ways, distinct from European nationalisms. Partha Chatterjee argues, for instance, that nationalism in India emerged much earlier than standard narratives—focused on the formal political realm—suggest. Whereas the formation of the Indian National Congress in 1885 is often considered the "beginning" of India's nationalist movement, Chatterjee offers an alternative historiography: much before the official "political battle with the imperial power" began, early nationalists "created their own domain of sovereignty within colonial society [….] by dividing the world […] into two domains—the material and the spiritual" (217). While the former refers to the "outer" or formal political domain—devoted to the functioning of the colonial state—the spiritual or "inner" realm was devoted to cultural matters over which nationalists asserted their sovereignty (217). Although the division of the world into these two domains consolidated an Indian (Hindu) elite as inheritors of the "outside" realm in the postcolonial nation (as I will discuss in more detail later in this Introduction), Chatterjee

argues that historiographies of nationalism in South Asia and Africa must account for the ways these nationalisms reinvent and depart from European models.

While Chatterjee's analysis historicizes the development of nationalism within India, my project is more specifically inspired by early twentieth century anticolonial revolutionaries who were also critics of Indian nationalism. For example, the Indian communist and philosopher M.N. Roy theorizes, in a vein similar to Fanon, alternatives to the nation-state in both its European and postcolonial forms. His concept of New Humanism—a philosophy rooted in the spiritual freedom of the individual—is oriented toward the "cooperative fellowship of man" and opposed to both colonialism and nationalism (Roy qtd. in Kataria, 619). Roy argues that New Humanists strive for the transformation of the Manichean world and the establishment of "a cosmopolitan commonwealth of spiritually free men who will not be limited by the boundaries of national states" (qtd. in Kataria 629). Roy's concern with the dissolution of boundaries and the establishment of a "cooperative fellowship" echoes the thinking of other twentieth century Indian philosophers for whom friendship, fellowship, and spiritual freedom offered an alternative to nationalism's divisions. Writing on Rabindranath Tagore's critique of Swadeshi nationalism, Chakraborty argues that, for Tagore, the establishment of personal friendship across political difference was necessary for India to achieve "unity in diversity" (85). Whereas the development of political, ideologically-driven communities through Swadeshi nationalism created new divisions within Indian society, for Tagore, "personal and community friendships" based on "traditional, intimate,

interpersonal and community bonds" were essential—both for the achievement of an India free from colonial rule *and* for the development of an ethical Man committed to the "spiritual unity of all human beings" (86).

Drawing on this history of South Asian anticolonial thought concerned with friendship and unity, my project argues that friendship has the potential to intervene in nationalism's violence and to enliven the revolutionary humanist possibilities of anticolonial movements. I make this argument by drawing largely from South Asian literature (along with, as I will explain soon, a few archival texts as well) and, in particular, from a set of literary texts that depict friendship across racial, national, caste, class, gendered, and religious difference in colonial South Asia. By focusing on friendships formed in the context of anticolonial uprisings and/or Independence movements,[7] I suggest that we might better understand the anti-nationalist possibilities that arise in struggles against colonialism—and which we might also harness for the betterment of our own, contemporary political conditions. While Aziz and Fielding are not the focus on this project, Forster's portrayal of friendship's possibilities and limitations compels me to turn to other literary depictions of friendship as a method, a way to understand the relationship between friendship and collective politics. Indeed, the

[7] I make a distinction here between "anticolonial uprisings" and Independence movements because certain texts I read (especially in Chapter 1) focus on instances of anticolonial resistance that precede the development of more formal and organized movements against empire. I suggest that, by reading both spontaneous and organized forms of anticolonial struggle together, we can better understand the political potential of friendship and its contribution to a collective politics, which for many revolutionaries (such as Fanon) was central to the goals of organized Independence movements.

texts I read here suggest that the literary form might offer a unique entry point into understanding friendship's revolutionary humanist possibilities.

Firstly, the imaginative nature of literary texts offers a compelling space to rethink categories between self and Other. While sociological and political theorizations against nationalism must first take these distinctions seriously in order to contest them, literature allows us to begin from a place where the divisions between self and Other are more organically unstable. The literary critic George Poulet argues, for instance, that the act of reading productively undermines the fixity of the reader's interiority, imbuing the internal "I" with the thoughts and feelings of another (44). These thoughts and feelings serve to suspend the reader's experience of her own interiority: her "I" becomes the "I" of the Other—the "host of alien words, images, ideas," and "the very alien principle which utters them and shelters them" (45). While Poulet's focus is on the temporary and imaginative fusion of the self and Other through the act of reading, his analysis suggests that literature offers us not intellectual or political insight into the Other, but an embodied experience of a *condition* in which the self is no longer bounded and discrete.

Secondly, the texts I read here trace significant moments in South Asian colonial and anticolonial history (such as the history of mutiny on colonial-era ships carrying indentured labourers from South Asia, the Independence Movement, and Partition) through personal narratives about everyday connections between people—including those of friendship across racial, national, class, caste, gendered, and religious lines. As I will discuss further in the Introduction, friendship is a compelling analytical category partly

because it is a quotidian form of sociality, one that inflects our everyday lives while appearing to be disconnected from the formal political realm. Yet, these texts narrate extraordinary political moments through the ordinary relations of everyday life and, in doing so, refigure these relations as crucial sites of political agency and change. In this sense, the literary form helps us grasp how political meditations on friendship (such as Tagore's and Roy's) might manifest within the realm of the everyday and come to have a historical significance beyond the immediate boundaries of the interpersonal.

The literary nature of this project thus foregrounds both the everyday and the experiential in its political consideration of friendship. In the chapters that follow, I argue that, through these texts, we can better understand how friendship helps us work against the mobilization of difference in service of violence against the Other. In other words, I suggest that friendship offers the fraternity—the "deep, horizontal comradeship," as Anderson says—that the nation promises but (as an essentially exclusionary force) fails to deliver, while enabling a *collective* politics that moves beyond the nation.

Defining Terms

In considering the political significance of friendship, this project shares some of the utopian principles and anti-essentialist thinking of anticolonial humanist theorizations of identity. For instance, in her study of the role of cross-racial and cross-cultural friendship in the Indian Independence movement, Leela Gandhi traces the political limitations of racial, ethnic, and cultural essentialism—or what Edward Said describes as

"identity thought" (Said qtd. in Gandhi xxv). Invoking Said's claim that the binary logic of identity is a remnant of the colonial project—a "hallmark of imperialist cultures as well as those cultures trying to resist the encroachments of Europe"—Gandhi argues that an anticolonial politics based on identity thought risks establishing another set of hierarchies within the sovereign nation (Said qtd. in Gandhi 2). As such, she writes that it is imperative that "postcolonialist scholars break down the stern logic of the colonial encounter by refusing the myths of cultural purity [...] of both the imperial West and its opposite, anticolonial nationalism or nativism" (3). For Gandhi, friendship is an important analytic and practice through which to break down both colonial and anticolonial binaries. Discussing C.F. Andrew's friendship with M.K. Gandhi, for example, she suggests that this friendship poses a fundamental challenge not only to notions of racial difference but to the colonial project that relies on the maintenance of these differences. Friendship thus threatens the sanctity of the colonial project by facilitating an anticolonial politics based not on the "pure oppositionality" of racial distinction but on collectivity[8] across these seemingly essential and immutable categories (15).

While Gandhi writes of a pre-Independence context, we can see how multiple forms of identity thought based on "pure oppositionality" undergird contemporary Hindu nationalism through which nationalists continue to assert their difference from the

[8] My use of the term "collectivity" derives from my engagement with queer theory, which conceives of collectivity as a form of "togetherness" across difference. Miranda Joseph, for instance, argues that political collectivities are neither "unities nor identities" but communities "based on […] shared experience of being socially positioned or marked by difference" and which "enable both safety and action" (209). While I offer a critique of queer theorizations of collectivity further in this Introduction, I find the term "political collectivity" itself helpful, and I use it throughout this dissertation to refer to a diverse community of people who are bound together through a shared experience of oppression and/or a common political purpose.

"Imperial West." While a discrete, upper caste Hindu identity clearly exists in opposition to the Dalit and Muslim Other, so too does it rely on a set of sexual Others and an opposing Western subject whose cultural influence continues to threaten the Indian nation, as the legal history of Section 377—India's recently-repealed antisodomy law—exemplifies. While Delhi's High Court initially repealed 377 in 2009, the Supreme Court reversed the repeal in 2013 under *Kaushal v. Naz Foundation,* arguing that the case for overturning 377 relied too heavily on similar verdicts in Western democracies. "In its anxiety to protect the so-called rights of LGBT persons" the final statement reads, "and to declare that Section 377 IPC violates the right to privacy, autonomy and dignity, the High Court has extensively relied upon the judgments of other [Western] jurisdictions." It goes on: "We have grave doubts about the expediency of transplanting Western experience in our country. Social conditions are different and so also the general intellectual level." By reinstating 377, the 2009 Supreme Court decision invokes a nationalist vision of India that refuses Western encroachment through the maintenance of institutionalized homophobia. While 377 was repealed once more in 2018, its legal history demonstrates both Gandhi's and Valluvan's arguments: that the nation is continually reconstituted through the repurposing of colonial binaries and the creation of multiple and dynamic sets of Others.

The aim of this project is thus to consider how friendship intervenes in "identity thought" and in the forms of nationalism that engage hierarchized distinctions between self and Other, between "Us" and "Them." I use the terms "self" and "Other" throughout

in keeping with theorists of nationalism such as Valluvan: following from the Enlightenment conception of discrete and rational subjectivity, the self is both individual and relational, formed against its difference from the Other and in relation to a community that coheres through the Other's non-belonging. As Valluvan suggests, the forms of difference that constitute Otherness are ever-changing but each have the function of binding the self to a community—a "structure of belonging"—formed in opposition to the Other's difference (38). The friendships I read here intervene in a few particular iterations of the self/Other divide, mostly forming across racial, national, and/or religious difference while also at times engaging differences based on gender, caste and class. Class, as will become clear later in this introduction's discussion of Marxism, plays a special role in my analysis of friendship; it is not only an important material distinction across which friendships emerge in these texts, but an organizing principle that fundamentally shapes racial categories of difference. As such, the friendships I map out here both speak to friendship's potential to challenge conceptions of the self as fundamentally distinct from the Other *and* to disrupt the mechanisms through which these differences emerge.

Friendship as a Way of Life

I turn to friendship as a generative category for several reasons, both specific to the context of South Asia and more broadly applicable to theorizations of collectivity. As my earlier discussion of Roy and Tagore suggests, theorizations of friendship occupy a

significant place in both the history of anticolonial thought in South Asia, as well in the critical work of South Asian and Postcolonial Studies. For example, the philosophical and anticolonial writings of B.R. Ambedkar, Aurobindo Ghose, and Mirra Alfassa (which I discuss in detail in the third chapter) are each concerned with questions of friendship in relation to national liberation and postcolonial society. Much postcolonial criticism on friendship has thus emerged, such as Gandhi's on cross-racial friendship in early twentieth century India, Chakraborty's on masculinity and critiques of ascetic nationalism, and Dipesh Chakrabarty's on Tagore and cross-national friendship. This body of work invokes friendship as an analytical category crucial to our understanding of how anticolonial movements—including those opposed to nationalism—developed in South Asia.

Secondly, friendship presents itself as an important category for theorizations of collectivity across difference more broadly. At the heart of much of the writing on postcolonial humanism, cosmopolitanism, hospitality, and anti-nationalism is the shared question of how we live in relation to others. In particular, how do we get along with others from whom we are different? If nationalism involves the violent process of Othering based on a set of perceived or actual differences, what alternative social and political formations allow us to live together collectively, despite difference and without oppression and injustice? In other words, rather than obscuring difference and establishing uniformity, how can we realize the utopian vision of achieving "unity through the acknowledgement of difference" (Tagore qtd. in Nandy 6)? These questions

both reflect the urgent political stakes of collectivity and form the basis from which a collective politics beyond the nation might emerge.

Our relationships to others—and how we get along *with* others—is also the domain of friendship as both a practice and a category of analysis. I define friendship here in relation to Ambedkar's conception of fraternity,[9] which he articulates in a speech to India's Constituent Assembly in 1949: fraternity is, he says, a "common brotherhood" found within political and social diversity and the basis for a variegated and unified whole ("Debates" n.p.). Drawing from the Enlightenment roots of fraternity as a form of "brotherhood, friendship, community, cooperation" (Asthana 118), Ambedkar's vision of fraternity is of "democracy rooted in the friendship and responsibility of equals alone" (Kumar 337). In this society, "the weakest carr[y] as much force as the strongest" and cooperation across difference continually challenges the concentration of power among the elite (337). The foundation for an ideal society, fraternity thus enables liberty and equality to flourish among people of different religions, race, customs, and traditions. While much of Ambedkar's thinking on fraternity exists in relation to India as a specific and newly independent nation (he writes of fraternity as "a common brotherhood among *Indians*" in particular), he also argues that the emotional and relational roots of fraternity extend far beyond the boundaries of any nation and its citizens ("Debates" n.p.). Related to the Buddhist conception of *maitri* (which Ambedkar defines as fellowship rooted in

[9] B.R. Ambedkar is a foundational theorist of/against the caste system, widely considered to be the "father" of India's constitution.

unconditional love towards all others), fraternity is an expression of the universal: it is "another name for brotherhood or humanity," of love "extended to all beings, foe and friend, beast and man" (Ambedkar, "Buddha and Karl Marx" 449). This love—oriented towards friends and strangers, citizens and foreigners alike—"leads an individual to identify with the good of others" and to challenge the conception of the Other as a "struggling rival [competing] for the means of happiness" (Ambedkar qtd. in Kumar 320). Fraternity is thus oppositional to both individualism and nationalism; in its purest form, it is universal and unifying, that which—in keeping with Fanon's vision of new humanism—might "awaken[…] colonized people from the slumber of non-being […] to forge relationships of mutual recognition […] capable of transforming humanity" as a whole (Sharifi and Chabot 263).

While Ambedkar's particular theorization of fraternity privileges the universal over the national, the word "fraternity" itself is freighted with the intractable (and gendered) history of Western nationhood. It is difficult, for instance, to think through fraternity without beginning from the French Revolution, to which Ambedkar makes explicit reference in his arguments about liberty and equality. Anderson's reliance on fraternity as derived from the French Revolution also places a set of limitations on his conception of the nation. Valluvan argues, for instance, that Anderson—rather than offering a critique of the nation—conceives of the nation as "simply a conduit via which to establish community" even as the establishment of this community engenders violence against the Other (38). The limitations of fraternity as a historically-freighted concept also

include its political consequences for women: while Ambedkar's vision of the Indian nation makes an explicit space for women and women's rights, fraternity as a guiding principle of the French Revolution codified, through the enfranchisement of men, the nation as the political domain of men and a vehicle for the explicit disenfranchisement of women.

Rather than grapple with fraternity's historical weight and gendered exclusions, I turn to *friendship* as that which might foster unity across difference but which, unlike fraternity, has not been captured so thoroughly by the logic of the nation. While friendship might seem like a minor form of relationality compared to fraternity (which immediately invokes a possible set of relations within the *polis*), I argue that friendship is a useful category of analysis because it straddles the line between the interpersonal and the political. In other words, friendship has a clear place in the theorization of political life[10] while maintaining its primary role as an expression of personal emotion based on our individual relationships and our experiences of love for other people. As such, I invoke friendship as a meaningful category of analysis—one that speaks to our political relations with others, but which is not fundamentally tied to the nation in the history of its theorization.

Friendship is, however, a slippery category; Ambedkar, at times, uses friendship and fraternity interchangeably—as do many Aristotelian and Enlightenment writings on

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[10] Aristotle's conception of political fraternity, for instance, derives from his prior meditation on the three types of friendship in *Nicomachean Ethics*: friendships of pleasure, of utility, and of virtue.

fraternity, which also tend to slip easily between friendship, solidarity, community, and cooperation. More contemporary attempts to define friendship as a useful category of analysis for queer theory (which I discuss in more detail later in the Introduction), are also ambiguous, attempting to capture the ineffable nature of friendship by broadening its scope to include a set of impersonal or fleeting relations. In his writing on the intimacy of the AIDS crisis, for instance, Tom Roach conceives of friendship as an "intimacy of estrangement," a "complex, even contradictory, relation involving attraction and resistance, intimacy and separation, sensuality and frigidity; a relation that […] by no means resists the sensual but, perhaps, remains indifferent to the sexual" (4-5). Such a fluid, highly theoretical definition of friendship includes within it the intimacy we might have with others who are similarly undesired by the state, yet still shares the ambiguities of our more quotidian definitions of friendship based on negation: friendship is not, for instance, the same as romantic love or sexual intimacy, though friendship can be a significant part of each and, at times, indistinguishable from either.

Gandhi speaks to the ambiguities of friendship as a category in her writing on Australian activists who—by welcoming asylum seekers in an otherwise hostile environment—put themselves at the small risk of bodily harm: "what might we call this minor (insignificant?) gesture […] committed, as Levinas might tell us, to a tentative proximity to the other, signifying "the surplus of sociality over solitude—the surplus of sociality and love?" "Let us," she writes, "with seeming arbitrariness, call it the politics of friendship" (27). In an effort to work out the "seeming arbitrariness" of friendship while

also accepting the limitations of defining such a slippery category, I think of friendship here as an orientation towards others—a way of relating to others rooted in feelings of love and care—through which we are also deeply *affected,* brought into the world of another which becomes a part of our own. As such, this project brings together three different but connected forms of relationship under the banner of friendship: love between individuals who know and care for each other, between comrades bound together in political struggle, and—in keeping with Ambedkar's emphasis on the universal—between "all beings" who form the basis for a unified "brotherhood or humanity."

Such a conception of friendship is expansive, departing from more everyday definitions based purely on the interpersonal but capturing how collective struggle often requires the political and the emotional to cohere and work together. For instance, political relations between people who might not know each other but who are nonetheless bound together as comrades are often theorized under the category of "solidarity"; however, to conceive of these relations as forms of friendship—as Gandhi does—centres the emotional stakes of our political alliances and opens up the possibility that the experience of fellowship and connection with others might motivate our commitment to revolutionary change. Similarly, to conceive of Ambedkar's utopian vision of fraternity as part of friendship suggests that our seemingly contained emotional connections with each other can grow outward to have real political import; while we often think of friendship as personal rather than universal—as bound between two individuals rather than shared by humanity as a whole—an expansive definition of

friendship highlights not only the "sociality and love" of which Gandhi and Levinas write, but the sociality *of* love, which extends far beyond the individual to touch and transform the collective.

Indeed, if political theorizations of fraternity are situated within the *formal* political realm, there might be some value in thinking through friendship—as a seemingly insignificant and quotidian form of relationality—as a politics from below or within. In other words, if our experience of love for another person can transform how we relate to this person—how we come to see ourselves as aligned with and similar to her—we might ask what kinds of political transformation are made possible if such love overspills the immediate boundaries of our personal lives. In the specific context of South Asian anticolonial history, the study of friendship might allow us to both refuse and intervene in the gendered, class, and caste exclusions of the formal political domain. In her analysis of the relationship between domesticity and the development of nineteenth century Hindu nationalism, for instance, Tanika Sarkar argues that Hindu nationalist discourse harnessed upper caste and middle-class domestic rituals and customs "as the Hindu way of life" to which an independent India needed to return ("Hindu Nation" 223). "Colonization," Sarkar writes, "had made it imperative to introduce an absolute distinction between the self and the Other while emergent nationalism made it equally imperative to stake out claims to sole representational authority over the self"; the household, as a symbol of Hinduism's pre-colonial history and spiritual superiority, thus became a site through which upper caste and middle-class men re-established this authority and legitimized their

eventual role as political stewards of an independent nation (223). The emphasis on domesticity served to recalibrate the Hindu patriarchy by subordinating middle-class women though their role as caretakers of the nation, while explicitly excluding Muslims, lower castes, and working classes from this configuration of the nation. While I return to a specific discussion of domesticity and gender in Chapter 2, I suggest here that a consideration of friendship helps us think through the significance of informal (or "inner," to recall Chatterjee) spaces *outside* of their patriarchal, upper caste/class, and nationalist framing and with attention to the everyday relationships that occur therein. By invoking a capacious definition of friendship, I thus aim to think through a set of relationships in which our everyday loving ties to each other crystallize into a transformative politics rooted in the collective.

Friendship, Intimacy, Collectivity

Gandhi's project is situated within a Derridean philosophical tradition through which she reads a set of friendships between Indian anticolonial revolutionaries and Western anti-imperialists. Tracing these friendships through nineteenth century fin-de-siècle radicalism and utopianism in Europe, she maps out the connections between anticolonial thought in India and anti-imperialist traditions of the West. My project both extends and departs from Gandhi's, focusing on how literary depictions of friendship, situated in the context of South Asian colonial and anticolonial history, might help reinvigorate the revolutionary humanist potential of anticolonial politics. In particular, I

am interested in how a collective politics against colonialism and nationalism emerges from the intimacies mediated through the bonds of friendship and shaped by the particular spaces in which these friendships arise. As such, I draw from work in postcolonial studies on the management of interracial intimacies and the success of colonial governance.[11] As this work suggests, understanding "the intimate as a strategic site of colonial governance [...] [is] a critical vantage point for identifying how categories of exclusion were fortified and made common sense, shaping the constraints in which subjects and citizens were produced, their refusals framed, and their lives lived" (Stoler 894). Postcolonial theories of intimacy largely focus, however, on sexual intimacy and subsequent anxieties about racial purity. If the study of friendship offers a productive addition to theorizations of fraternity, friendship—as one form of intimacy that might challenge "categories of exclusion"—might also be a way to reconsider the primacy of sexual intimacies and to "rethink intimacy beyond the family and the couple" (Love 74). As Heather Love has argued in her writing on queer history, friendship has been of interest to queer studies precisely because friendship occupies a unique role in queer life (as a way of life, says Foucault), an "alternative form of intimacy, a utopian space beyond the constraints of marriage and family" (Love 76). Aziz and Fielding's friendship suggests that friendship is not entirely unregulated or beyond such constraints—Fielding's marriage at the end of the novel, for instance, compounds his sense of difference from Aziz and tightens the grip of his racial and national allegiances. Nonetheless, following Love, we might consider

[11] For example, please see Stoler (2002) and Lowe (2013).

friendship a generative category of analysis precisely because it is relatively *less* constrained as a secondary form of social reproduction.

Indeed, insofar as sexual relationships remain the primary site where racial and national purity are reproduced, they prompt explicit legislation from the state. Stoler writes, for instance, of the meticulous way colonial regimes in Java oversaw the sexual relationships between Dutch settlers and Javanese women, initially encouraging these relationships as a means of managing the sexual desires of Dutch men without having to bear the expense of bringing Dutch women to the colony (48). Stoler argues that the strategy was eventually abandoned as the so-called "effects" of these relationships became untenable i.e., the burgeoning population of mixed children threatened the myth of white racial superiority. Stoler's example makes apparent that the threat of reproduction made sexual intimacy a vital and regulable concern of colonial administration: in managing who slept with whom and to what end, administrators *could* attempt to control the categories of difference on which the colonial project thrived. While the platonic and non-reproductive nature of friendship might make it much harder to regulate than sexual intimacy, friendship can—as many of the examples I explore in this dissertation demonstrate—challenge our conceptions of racial and national purity. In this sense, friendship operates as a "utopian space"—one that flourishes in the interstices

of the state's regulation but that nonetheless disrupts the reproduction of difference between self and Other.[12]

My interest in the political possibilities of our everyday social relations places this project in dialogue with queer theory, with its focus on the intimate as a site of political struggle and change. This project grew out of my engagement, in particular, with recent queer theoretical work on the relationship between "utopian" or unregulated moments of intimacy and political collectivity across identity categories. In seeking alternatives to a contemporary North American gay politics that has abandoned concerns about racism, poverty, and imperialism in exchange for the assimilation (of some) into American nationalism, this strand of queer scholarship explores how our fleeting and seemingly insignificant connections with others gesture towards a future in which collectivity across racial and national lines is realized. José Esteban Muñoz, for instance, conceives of utopia as a future state wherein "multiple forms of belonging in difference adhere to a belonging in collectivity" (20). In his reading of Frank O'Hara's poem, "Having a Coke with You," he argues that through the intimacy of a quotidian act—such as having a drink with someone—we can glimpse a utopian future in which unity coexists with difference; while everyday acts are often dismissed as having neither political nor future potential, Muñoz suggests that seemingly minor intimacies reveal a "mode of exhilaration in which one

[12] While I have suggested that the "slipperiness" of friendship makes it hard to define for academic purposes, this slipperiness also, perhaps, imbues friendship with some of its powers to evade or resist the state's regulation. As I will discuss in Chapter 2, in *A Suitable Boy*, for instance, the relationship between the Hindu character, Maan, as his Muslim lover, Saeeda Bai, catalyzes a set of religious and political conflicts. Maan's *friendship* with another Muslim man, however—while also a source of conflict—is not so heavily policed, even as this friendship contains within it some sexual elements. In this sense, the difficulty of defining friendship also might help illuminate its political potential.

views a restructured sociality" (7). Similarly, Jack Halberstam's recent work on "the wild" argues that our fleeting connections with others in the everyday allow us to see a future where the porousness of identity categories becomes the basis for collectivity across difference. Conceiving of "wildness" as a potentiality born of chaos—of disruption to our ordinary ways of organizing people based on identity— Halberstam argues that embracing the wild might help us "break loose of a set of constraints or determined understanding of what is appropriate, good and right" and complicate the very "building blocks of human identity [...]—what we call gender, sex, race, and class" (126). By tracing instances in music and performance art that momentarily undermine these "building blocks" and allow us to glimpse a collective future, Halberstam argues that wildness functions an "alternative [...] to identity politics, [...] to how we want to think about being—being together and apart" (127).

Perhaps because they both allow us to rethink sexual intimacy as the primary relational mode and foreground the possibility of a unified future outside the limitations of identity, Muñoz's particular conception of utopia and Halberstam's theory of "the wild" have been widely taken up as touchstones for queer theorizations of collectivity. However, both utopia and the wild remain amorphous and limited in their political utility. For instance, while Halberstam argues that the wild enables new ways of "being together" that defy the polarizing logic of identity, the wild itself is articulated as a state of exception; like utopia, it is largely ungraspable, a way of thinking through the future potential of a set of fleeting connections, rather than a theory of political *re*organization

through which we can revolutionize the present.[13] While Halberstam cites Fanon as a guide for thinking through the anticolonial possibilities of the wild, his articulation of collectivity as momentary and intangible fails to offer an alternative to the "Manichean world" that Fanon re-envisions through a sustained, organized collective politics beyond the nation. The focus on fleeting rather than sustained connections also risks reproducing "sex, gender, race, and class" as discrete categories of embodiment rather than mechanisms through which the nation produces itself. While Halberstam argues that the wild might help us resist the interpolation of gay identity into American nationalism, his suggestion that gender, sex, race, and class are "building blocks of human identity" obscures the fact that these are overdetermined categories that form the basis, not of the human, but of "the nation's constitutive outside" (to return to Valluvan's description). Whereas anticolonial humanists such Fanon and Ambedkar theorize collectivity as a form of organized resistance to nationalism, these conceptions of utopia and the wild as momentary, fleeting, and always on the horizon disengage from the more sustained and revolutionary possibility that we might, through collective action, end the mobilization of difference towards nationalist ends.

By turning to friendship as a form of sociality that is both quotidian and sustained beyond the fleeting and momentary, I aim to intervene in some of queer theory's disengagement from anticolonial humanist theorizations of collectivity. I argue that the

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[13] While I am primarily concerned here with the political limitations of its fleeting nature, Halberstam's conception of the wild also does not adequately account for a set of colonial discourses which, based on ideas of civility, refigure colonized and non-white subjects *as* "wild."

study of friendship allows us to think through both the political potential of our everyday connections with others while *also* taking collectivity seriously as part of an organized and revolutionary politics beyond the nation. While friendship, as a form of intimacy, might seem relatively minor compared to our sexual relations, the relationships I discuss throughout demonstrate how friendship—by undermining distinctions based on race, class, gender, and nation—works against the mobilization of difference and *with* an anticolonial politics that envisions an end to nationalism's exclusionary violence.

Marxism and the Production of "Difference"

The possibility that an anticolonial politics rooted in the collective might allow us to think and act beyond the nation-state returns us to Bannerji's conception of national liberation as the fight for sovereignty *through* the elimination of racial, classed, and gendered hierarchies. Insofar as the fight against colonial rule must—as Fanon suggests—"unify [people] on a national, sometimes racial, basis," Bannerji's conception of national liberation refers to those struggles for sovereignty that simultaneously seek to contest or exceed the exclusionary structure of the nation-state itself (Fanon 46). In contrast to nationalisms that "pay tribute" (to recall Fanon's phrasing) to the violence of empire—enshrining a new set of Others both within and outside national borders—national liberation is an "anti-imperialist struggle" which views capitalism as a system of domination and exploitation fundamentally bound to the colonial project (Bannerji 130). Drawing from Fanon's critique of the national bourgeoisie as a counterrevolutionary

force, Bannerji argues that movements of national liberation "read colonialism as a capitalist venture and [seek] to eradicate both foreign and local capital" through the abolition of private property and the overthrowing of the native bourgeoisie (130). Whereas capitalist nation-states "stand for private property at all levels," national liberation "move[s] towards the creation of an egalitarian society" both through the struggle for sovereignty and by "eliminating socio-economic inequalities of property relations" (42).

Bannerji's theorization of national liberation thus helps clarify the relationship between capitalism and the production of Others upon which both colonialism and nationalism rely. In her analysis of the early communist and anti-imperialist struggles of Vietnam and Algeria, for instance, Bannerji demonstrates how property relations and the class system are the organizing principles of unequal social relations: they determine not only class inequalities, the concentration of wealth among the national bourgeoisie, and the unequal distribution of resources under capitalism, but also a set of "social power relations" based on gendered and racial inequalities (42). In seeking to overthrow capitalism as a function and extension of the colonial project, national liberation movements thus aim to interrupt the production and maintenance of these inequalities as an essential part of the struggle for sovereignty.

Like Bannerji, I take capitalism to be the organizing mechanism of the hierarchized social relations that drive empire and which re-assert themselves through the nation-state. Indeed, if "the world of nation states" (to recall Meiksins Wood's phrasing)

has extended the violence of empire, then capitalism must be transformed in order to reimagine a world order beyond that of the nation-state. However, whereas Bannerji's focus is on the relationship between capitalism and the production of inequalities, I am primarily interested in how capitalism produces the forms of *difference* that give shape to the nation-state's Others. Drawing from theories of racial capitalism[14] and the racialization of labour,[15] my analysis of these Others takes, as its basis, the central insights of Marxist theories on the production of difference: that is, capitalism—its organization of labour, its modes of production, and its imposition of a class system—not only organizes itself through the category of race but *produces* this category as a meaningful way to understand the human. In this theorization, "race" refers to a *process* of differentiation and categorization rather than to the grouping of biological characteristics. As Gargi Bhattacharyya writes, race is a "mode of social organization, the mode that categorizes with impassable boundaries" (2). In this sense, "race" is protean, a process of organizing people that includes religious and ethnic differentiation and intersects with the process of gendered differentiation as well (as we see in Hindu nationalism's "Muslim Other," for example, on which I elaborate shortly).

In other words, while we might think of racial categories as insufficient yet necessary ways of capturing the spectrum of human difference (a part of "the building blocks of human identity," as Halberstam suggests), they are, in fact, "ascriptive identities

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[14] For instance, Cedric Robinson (1983), Robin D. G. Kelley (2017), and Gargi Bhattacharyya (2018).

[15] Please see, for example, Lisa Lowe (2015), Patrick Wolfe (2016), and Ashok Kumar et al., (2018).

[…] through which class is lived" and meaningful only insofar as they determine our relationship to labour and capital (Kumar et al., "Interventions" n.p.). Adolph Reed argues, for instance, that race is "a taxonomy of ascriptive difference," an "ideology that constructs populations as groups" and "legitimiz[es] its hierarchies […], including its social division of labor, as the natural order of things" (49). This social division of labour, however, is made possible not only by binding "populations" to a set of seemingly essential characteristics but by categorizing and giving *meaning* to these characteristics through the logic of race. As David Roediger and Elizabeth Esch suggest in their writing on whiteness and labour, racial categories exist not because they are reflections of "natural reality" but because racial "difference is produced in the world of production" in order to serve the accumulation of capital (6).

The categorization of populations through the logic of difference structures the essentialism of "identity thought" and undergirds our conceptions of the Other as distinct from and oppositional to the self. Indeed, the Othering process by which some groups are cast out of the national imaginary relies on the production and circulation of the Other's difference as always and already racialized. In Hindu nationalist India, for instance, a set of racial and gendered fantasies about the Muslim Other refigure Muslims as interlopers within the nation.[16] Anxieties about "Love Jihad" (the "forced" conversion of Hindu women by Muslim men), for example, rest on the distinctions between a perverse and

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16 Please see Tapan Basu, Pradip Datta, and Sumit Sarkar's *Khaki Shorts and Saffron Flags: A Critique of the Hindu Right* for further examples of the racialized and gendered tropes animating anti-Muslim violence in India.

sexually-threatening Muslim Other, on the one hand, and a restrained, honour-bound, and muscular (male) Hindu citizen, on the other. Writing on the 2002 massacre of Muslims in Gujarat, Sarkar traces the long history of anti-Muslim violence in which Hindu men's "perpetual fear of a more virile Muslim male body" converges with "an […] anxiety about emasculation that can only be overcome by doing violent deeds" ("Gujarat" 2875). In her exploration of the formation of Hindu identity, Ornit Shani argues that Hindu identity "is based on the 'threatening Other,' on stereotypes of the Muslim and on Hindu feelings of vulnerability and inferiority" (9). These feelings of vulnerability and inferiority also consolidate a version of the Hindu self, rooted in the upper castes and middle-classes and aligned with the vision of a strong Hindu nation. As Shani suggests, "the rhetoric of Hindutva, of the appeasement of Muslims by the state […], has appealed primarily to upper caste and urban middle-class Hindus who are anxious about compensatory reservation policies for lower or backward caste Hindus" (11). The nation-building project of Hindutva thus requires both the glossing over of caste divisions among Hindus and the refiguring of lower and non-caste Hindus as Others who threaten the coherence of an upper-caste and middle-class Hindu self.

As Shani's analysis of Hindutva's class interests exemplify, recent work on the relationship between Indian anticolonial movements and the rise of Hindu nationalism makes clear links between the nation's Others and its class structure: Chakraborty traces, for instance, the development of an ascetic nationalist masculinity in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to a colonial, upper-caste Hindu elite attempting to "define[…] the

bourgeois nationalist self and its claim to power and self-rule" (20). Nikita Gill argues that, more contemporarily, Hindu nationalism's class, caste, and religious divisions propel Modi's "New Gujarat" model of development: in a context where the needs of capital increasingly outweigh those of labour and where the public's access to state resources is made ever more scarce, the refiguring of Gujarat as a Hindu nationalist space means that "non-Hindus [become] undeserving outsiders" (8). Ravinder Kaur's recent work on the twenty-first century "rebranding" of India makes especially explicit links between class structure, global capital, and the nation-state; while the liberalism of the late twentieth century suggests that the nation-state is made "obsolete" through globalization, Kaur argues that nationalism drives India's increasing power in the global economy and, as such, serves the class interests of its national elite (19).

While largely emerging from Black Marxist traditions, theories of racial capitalism can also help explain how both pre-colonial and pre-capitalist structures in South Asia give shape to a modern nation-state's Others through racial, religious, and caste difference.[17] For instance, Cedric Robinson traces modern conceptions of race to European feudalism, arguing that feudal property relations relied on a process of differentiation *within* Europe from which capitalism did not break but, rather, reorganized on a global scale (26). As Robin D. G. Kelley writes, "the first European proletariats were

[17] Valluvan, for instance, reminds us that, while postcolonial nation-states inherit and adapt the economic structures of empire, "different nationalisms across the Global South trade in a variety of intersecting exclusions as construed by ethnicity, religion, caste, and race" ("Nationalism and Racism" 254). In other words, the self/Other divisions that drive these nationalisms arise from a set of social formations specific to these regions.

racial subjects […], victims of dispossession (enclosure), colonialism, and slavery," whose racialization "evolved […] into a modern world system of 'racial capitalism' dependent on slavery, violence, imperialism, and genocide" (n.p.). While attempts to bring Robinson's work on European feudalism into dialogue with South Asia are few,[18] I suggest that the central arguments of theories of racial capitalism—which take economic relations as the basis for differentiation—might also shed light on the way caste and religion operate as "modes of social organization" in relation to pre-capitalist class structures. Asma Barlas writes, for instance, on the similarities between European and Indian feudalism, both "characterized by simple technology, a rudimentary division of labour, conditional landholding by lords on some form of service-tenure, and […] a hierarchy of personal loyalties" (10). As I will discuss further in Chapter 2, the Zamindari system[19]—while its roots predate capitalism—structured a set of unequal relations based on this rudimentary division of labour, including those between "the largely upper-caste Hindu Zamindars and lower caste and Muslim peasants" (Sarkar, "Hindu Wife" 222). The imposition of British property and legal systems helped codify these inequalities, consolidating power among an upper caste, Hindu (male) elite against whom Hindu nationalism's Others were formed.

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[18] Wendy Cheng's "Strategic Orientalism: Racial Capitalism and the Problem of 'Asianness'" offers a thorough and interesting analysis of racial capitalism's relationship to Asian Studies and to Edward Said's *Orientalism.*

[19] A feudal mode of landownership, formed during the Mughal empire and later systematized under the British in order to mobilize/create a landowning class in service of the Raj.

Moreover, in the friendships I read throughout, multiple forms of difference come together, such as race, class, and caste. By thinking through these forms of difference as modes of social organization bound to and following from a set of economic structures, we can trace the commonalities between race, class, and caste in relation to the nation-state and its divisions, without obscuring their historical and ongoing differences. For instance, by conceiving of race as protean, we can generatively intervene in some of the complex, persistent debates on the relationship of caste to race and class in contemporary India. In his study of the history and origins of caste, for instance, Ambedkar argues for the functional similarities between caste and class as classificatory systems based on the "social division of labour;" he goes on to trace the development of caste as a *unique* class formation—the point at which it becomes an "enclosed class"—to the emergence of endogamy and "the superposition of endogamy on exogamy" ("Castes in India" n.p.). Drawing from Ambedkar, Anand Teltumbde offers a materialist analysis of the emergence of endogamy among agrarian tribes, arguing that the establishment of the varna system —"an intricate ideological contrivance"—secured surplus production in the hands of "vanquishing Aryan tribes" ("Caste and Class" n.p.). In this sense, caste and class share a similar historical function in terms of their relationship to labour and production, yet cannot be conceived of as interchangeable, as critiques of postcolonial Marxist historiographies of India remind us. Caste-based critiques of Subaltern Studies, for example, highlight the absence of caste from Subalternist attempts to "write history from below" (Dipesh Chakrabarty qtd. in Jangam 66). As the historian Chinnaiah Jangam

argues in his critique of Subaltern Studies, the strict division between "subaltern" and "elite" neglects the influence of caste on class composition, such that the "very category of subaltern does not include the dynamics of caste domination and oppression" (66). Attempts to understand the role of caste in both Indian anticolonial history and the postcolonial nation-state must, therefore, also account for the entanglements between caste and class without obscuring the historical specificities of either.

The similarities and distinctions between caste and race remain similarly complex and unresolved. For instance, the 2001 World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance in Durban—in which caste, as a now-global phenomenon rooted in ideas of biology and destiny, was recognized as *akin* to and, at times, interchangeable with race—is considered a turning point in the history of global anti-caste movements.[20] Such a conflation between race and caste remains, however, highly contested: Shaista Patel argues that, while both anti-racist and anti-caste organizers of the early twentieth century drew strategic comparisons between the oppression of Black people in America and Dalits in India, the historical distinctions between race and caste remain central to ongoing Dalit struggles (122). Many Dalit and Indian postcolonial scholars share such concerns, arguing that the conflation of race and caste neglects both the unique pre-colonial history and the contemporary function of the caste system in India. Writing on Isabel Wilkerson's recent work on the relationship

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[20] Please see Ted Svensson's "Humanising the Subaltern: Unbounded Caste and the Limits of a Rights Regime" for a thorough overview of the debates on race and caste of the 2001 Durban conference.

between white supremacy in America and the caste system in India, Arjun Appardurai writes that—whereas whiteness is an explicit "category of domination"—"caste crystallised over several millennia of Indian history, primarily as a cosmology which allowed pastoral and agricultural colonisers from the Northwest of the subcontinent to gradually colonise thousands of groups and communities who were previously not organised into castes" (n.p.).

In the chapters that follow, I think through the multiple social formations—including race, gender, caste, class, and religion—that constitute nationalism's Others. Rather than attempting to parse out the ongoing debates that seek to define these formations in relation to each other (a task outside of this project's scope), I rely on Marxist theories on the production of difference to analyze each of these social formations in relation to capitalism, empire, and the nation-state. As I aim to demonstrate, such a framework is helpful for understanding the relationship between both capitalist and pre-capitalist modes of organization and forms of nationalism that—although they developed in response to colonial rule—now serve as the basis of a postcolonial nation-state rooted in the division between self and Other.

The Ship, the Home, and the Ashram

In order to demonstrate how friendship across difference can intervene in nationalism's exclusionary violence and enliven the revolutionary humanist potential of anticolonial struggles, this project is divided into three chapters, each centred on a

specific space: the ship, the home, and the ashram. These three spaces recur in South Asian literature as crucial sites in which to trace the emergence of collectivity for a few reasons. As I will show, in each of these spaces, people—who might be differentiated by race, nation, class, caste, religion, and gender—are placed in proximity to each other. While, at times,, this proximity causes conflict, it also serves as the basis for friendship across many forms of difference. Indeed, in the texts I read here, the *process* of differentiation is often contested in each of spaces. For instance, the ship, the home, and the ashram are highly organized and disciplined spaces with entrenched hierarchies (racial and patriarchal in the case of the ship and the home and, in the case of the ashram, derived from a submission to God). While the ashram is, in its ideal form, part of a project of detachment or removal from capital (the ashram is meant, for instance, to serve God rather than capital), the disciplinary nature of the ship and the home is crucial to the development of both modern capitalism and the multiple forms of differentiation upon which capitalism, empire, and the nation-state rest.

And yet, each of these spaces is shaped, not by a straightforward disciplinary structure, but by the dialectical relationship between discipline and freedom. If difference is "produced in the [capitalist] world of production" (as Roediger and Esch suggest) and mobilized to distinguish the self from the Other, the friendships in these texts harness the opposing forces and possibilities of freedom—of resistance to these processes of differentiation—that emerge in these highly disciplined spaces. By tracing the connections between friendship and collective uprisings on the colonial ship, women's

organized resistance against sexual violence in the home, and the collapse of the self in the solitude of the ashram, I consider how these spaces, at times, contest nationalist divisions between self and Other and, instead, foster collectivity across racial, national, class, caste, gendered, and religious difference. Moreover, while these three chapters are divided according to three distinct spaces, a few common threads emerge *between* these spaces: in each chapter, for instance, the prison surfaces as a crucial secondary space that intersects with and contributes to the dialectical nature of the ship, the home, and the ashram. A site of explicit oppression, the prison recurs in many of the texts I read here as a space that facilitates collective struggle against this oppression. Further, while my most explicit engagement with women's oppression under the patriarchy occurs in my discussion of the home, the possibility that friendship might intervene in the gendered violence of both colonialism and nationalism recurs at different points in each chapter.

In these chapters, I draw from two archives of texts: historical fiction focused on anticolonial uprisings and/or Independence movements in South Asia, as well as the nonfictional and archival writing of key figures of the Indian Independence movement. Much of the historical fiction I turn to here—by E. M. Forster, Michael Ondaatje, Amitav Ghosh, Vikram Seth, and Bapsi Sidhwa—offers intimate portraits of friendship across racial, national, gendered, class, caste, and religious differences; in these portraits, we can see how an anticolonial politics beyond the nation-state might begin to take shape. Indeed, the complex geographical positioning of these writers themselves (many of whom write about and between both South Asian and western countries) comes to signify the

many crossings across national divisions that we can trace in these texts. The latter body of writing — by Ambedkar, Aurobindo Ghose, Mirra Alfassa, and Bhagat Singh—traces a genealogy of anticolonial and spiritual thought concerned with the limitations of nationalism and interested in the possibilities of unity in postcolonial society. These archival and fictional texts work together through their shared imaginative structures: in the archival writing of the Independence movement, we can see how literary depictions of friendship—of the possibility for unity beyond divisions between self and Other—were also imagined and worked towards in anticolonial movements. In other words, both sets of texts point to forms of collectivity which might be *possible*, even if they have not (as yet) been realized. By placing these texts together, I suggest we can see how the anticolonial and anti-nationalist writing of Independence might work in tandem with these fictional texts, orienting us towards a revolutionary humanism beyond the nation-state.

The organization of these three chapters along the lines of the ship, the home, and the ashram also corresponds with three political formations that come together in this project: empire, the postcolonial nation-state, and a condition of human unity, beyond divisions between self and Other. For example, the first chapter explores three different iterations of the colonial ship moving between Britain and its colonies in service of empire. Insofar as ships were crucial to the development of a globalized economy rooted in ocean-based trade, this chapter traces the relationship between labour, capital, and the racialized divisions between self and Other, which drive the imperial project and which

animate the nation-states of the postcolonial era. Much of the chapter centres on Ghosh's 2008 novel, *Sea of Poppies*, and specifically on the ship's prison where two prisoners, Neel and Ah Fatt, develop a friendship across their racial, class, and linguistic differences.[21] I argue that the conditions of both the ship and its prison enable a collective struggle—between Ah Fatt and Neel, as well as the ship's coolies—against the racialized and colonial class structure which oppresses them all as labourers.

Framing my discussion of *Sea of Poppies* is an exploration of Forster's short story "The Other Boat" and Ondaatje's semi-autobiographical novel, *The Cat's Table.* Forster's text is focused on the relationship between a British captain and an Indian labourer onboard a ship moving from Britain to India, whereas Ondaatje's novel charts the voyage of a group of boys, journeying from Sri Lanka to Britain, who unsuccessfully attempt to resist the colonial and classed order of the ship on which they travel. I argue that, because the relationships among the ships' passengers in Forster and Ondaatje's texts do not manifest a collective struggle against empire's racialized class structure, these texts help us make sense of the revolutionary possibilities of friendship realized in Ghosh's novel. In other words, read against Ghosh's novel, these two texts help us understand *how,* and under what conditions, friendship might be mobilized to revolutionary ends.

The second chapter focuses on the "home" and, in particular, the home as it transformed through Partition and under the newly independent nations of India and

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[21] An earlier draft of the section on *Sea of Poppies* in Chapter One first appeared as "A Shared Burden": Reading Chaos as Utopia in Amitav Ghosh's *Sea of Poppies*," *Translated Worlds: History, Diaspora, South Asia,* special issue of *Postcolonial* Text, edited by Chandrima Chakraborty, volume 10, no. 3/4, 2015, pp. 2-13. This revised and expanded version is included here with the permission of *Postcolonial Text.*

Pakistan. Conceiving of the home as the domestic sphere (largely the domain of women) and as the national "homeland" (the site of anticolonial struggle), this chapter moves between readings of Seth's *A Suitable Boy* and Sidhwa's *Cracking India.* Arguing that an analysis of friendship is key to understanding how each novel articulates a vision of collectivity across religious difference during Partition and its aftermath, I compare the way these novels' friendships intervene—or fail to intervene—in the violence of religious nationalism. Of particular importance in this chapter is both women's experience of sexual violence (in and outside the home) and the role of property relations, which, I argue, contour the anti-nationalist possibilities of friendship. For instance, the friendships between Hindu and Muslim characters in *A Suitable Boy* intervene in some extreme instances of religious nationalism; however, the political potential of these friendships is limited by the structures of land ownership, which keep religious divisions firmly intact and which incubate women's experience of sexual violence in the domestic sphere. In *Cracking India*, however, friendships occur largely between women brought together by their shared dispossession—through the loss of their homes during Partition and/or of their bodily integrity as a result of sexual violence—and help build a collective resistance against the sexual and religious violence of nationalism. By comparing the political potential of friendship in Seth and Sidhwa's novels, I argue that friendship intervenes in nationalism's violence when it works with, and not against, struggles to resist the class system and the patriarchy. This chapter thus returns to the idea that friendship is a form of

"politics from below," rooted in the everyday and in the seemingly minor connections between women.

Finally, the third chapter considers the relationship between friendship, spirituality, and the Indian Independence movement. Focusing on the ashram as a key site in which to trace the emergence of a politics beyond the self and Other, this chapter explores Hindu mystical traditions, which, though they have been co-opted by the Hindu Right to nationalist ends, also contribute to a revolutionary humanist politics that opposes both colonialism and the violence of the nation-state. Reading and contrasting the spiritual and anticolonial writings of Gandhi, Ghose, Alfassa, and Ambedkar, I argue that —in the Independence struggle—we can see how the spiritual and the political might work together towards "a new history of Man." In particular, I argue that the mystical pursuit of self-transcendence (in which the self dissolves to experience communion with all others and with God) orients us towards the creation of universal peace and harmony —or what I call "universal friendship."

The chapter begins with a discussion of Gandhi's Sabarmati ashram in Ahmedabad in which the spiritual and the political distinctly come together in service of Independence. Drawing on Singh's Marxist critiques of Gandhi, I suggest that Gandhian spirituality served to recalibrate the divisions between self and Other and to disengage from an international revolution against class and the nation-state. I contrast Gandhi's ashram to Ghose's Aurobindo ashram in Pondicherry, which Ghose conceived of after his release from Alipore prison in 1909 and established in 1926. Reading *Tales of Prison Life*

—Ghose's memoir of imprisonment and spiritual transformation—alongside the spiritual diary of his friend, Alfassa, I suggest that Ghose and Alfassa's writings offer a compelling vision of the relationship between spirituality and politics: in these texts, we can see *how* the transcendence of self might lay the groundwork for "universal friendship" beyond all divisions between self and Other. Closing out this chapter is a discussion of Auroville, a spiritual city created by Alfassa in 1968 after Ghose's death. As Alfassa writes in her dedication of Auroville, Auroville is "a universal town where men and women of all countries are able to live in peace and progressive harmony above all creeds, all politics, and all nationalities"; it is an "attempt of a collective realization" that "belongs to humanity as a whole," (*Words of the Mother I* 188). While the execution of Auroville has been fraught and fallen short of its ideals, this chapter aims to understand how the spiritual and the political converge in the *pursuit* of "peace and progressive harmony"—an alternative to the Manichean world of imperialism, nationalism, and all forms of violence against the Other.

Conclusion

This project has gone through many iterations over the last few years. As time has passed, the global consequences of nationalism seem to have continually sharpened, as has the need for sustained and organized anti-nationalist movements. As such, I have sometimes questioned the political utility of studying friendship; given that the violence of nationalism—and of racial, gendered, class, caste, and religious divisions—is so tragic

and immediate, how might a study of friendship rooted in literary and historical texts respond to this violence and contribute to its end? The following three chapters are my attempts to answer this question. By turning to and learning from the anticolonial struggles of the past, I hope that this project belongs to the political movements of the present.

Chapter One: Race, Labour, and Collective Uprisings on the Colonial Ship

> *The tears of someone else's longing are affecting me*
> *My chest cannot take the vastness of emotion.*
>
> — Abdulla Majid al-Noaimi, "I Write My Hidden Longing" (date unknown)

> *To have one's survival bound up in such a way is a constant risk of sociality - its promise and its threat. The very fact of being bound up with others establishes the possibility of being subjugated and exploited [...]. But it also establishes the possibility of being relieved of suffering, of knowing justice and even love.*
>
> — Judith Butler, *Frames of War* (2003)

"The Guantanamo poems," writes Judith Butler in *Frames of War,* "are full of longing; they sound the incarcerated body as it makes its appeal" (61). This longing, as al-Noaimi's poem in the collection reveals, is a shared longing, one that reverberates beyond the limits of the prison cells in Guantanamo Bay where al-Noaimi and others are detained, separated, and tortured in service of the American War on Terror. "Whose longing is affecting the speaker?" she asks of al-Noaimi's poem (59). It is the longing of another prisoner, she argues, that profoundly affects the speaker insofar as it is both an extension of the speaker's own longing and an invitation to understand his longing as part of a greater experience that extends beyond the immediacy of the suffering self. Through the Guantanamo poems, Butler explores the possibility that the shared experience of love, desire, pain, and joy can move through the individual body to connect us with others.

I am drawn to Butler's consideration of how prisoners affect each other despite their physical separation because the study of friendship is, after all, partly the study of how and why we are affected by one another. What are the conditions that allow us to affect each other beyond the mechanisms—the body, the self, the prison cell, borders,

racial divisions—that function to keep up separate? What happens when we allow ourselves to be affected by others, changing our sense of self and our relationship to others through the process? These are the questions that form the heart of the project and drive the exploration of the three texts in this chapter: E.M. Forster's short story, "The Other Boat," Michael Ondaatje's *The Cat's Table,* and Amitav Ghosh's *Sea of Poppies.*

The bulk of this chapter focuses on Ghosh's novel, which follows the stories of a group of prisoners and indentured labourers being transported from India to Mauritius on a former slave ship, the *Ibis,* in 1838. The novel traces the complex sets of friendships that the prisoners and labourers develop with each other and that cut across their racial, class, linguistic, and caste differences. Focusing on the friendship between Neel and Ah Fatt—the two prisoners housed in the ship's prison or *chokey*—I argue that, in this friendship, we can trace the emergence of a utopian possibility where the divisions between self and Other come apart. Moreover, Neel and Ah Fatt's friendship lays the groundwork for a collective uprising among the ship's labourers and helps catalyze the mutiny that occurs at the end of the novel: seizing a longboat and some goods, the prisoners and some of the labourers escape their servitude, eventually travelling to Mauritius to form a community with the *Ibis*'s other passengers. I argue that, by tracing this collective uprising through the friendships among the *Ibis*'s passengers, the anticolonial potential of friendship across difference becomes clear: the friendships onboard the *Ibis* lead, not to momentary individual connection, but to a change in the material and economic relations between indentured labourers and their captors.

In order to make sense of the specific relationships onboard the *Ibis*, I place *Sea of Poppies* within the genealogy of maritime fiction on the passage between England and its colonies. Writing on the history of this fiction (commonly recognized to begin with the publication of Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* in 1719 and including the writings of Joseph Conrad, Rudyard Kipling, and Robert Louis Stevenson), John Peck argues that the maritime novel developed in response to the fact that "maritime life permeate[d] and affect[d] the whole of British life" (4). Insofar as "maritime life [was] at the heart of the economic order of society in the seventeenth, eighteen, and nineteenth centuries," maritime fiction served as a way to reckon with the dialectical relationship between freedom and oppression embedded within this economic order: while the openness of the ocean promised freedom from the restrictions of shore-based life, the human body was subject to new forms of labour, discipline, punishment, and regulation on the ship (4). Peck suggests that, while shore-based life had an already-established rhythm that included (some) ethical considerations, life on the ship unleashed a new kind of authoritarianism that sought to control nearly all aspects of the body (6).

While Peck argues that the maritime novel's focus on bodily abuse points to the intractable nature of the ship's disciplinary structure in real life (an argument that, as I will discuss soon, many historians of mutinies and ocean-based workers' revolts contest), the novel itself serves as an imaginative space to contest this structure. Writing on Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe,* for instance, Margaret Cohen argues that the novel is so compelling precisely because it refigures Crusoe—once a mere *part* of the ship's

apparatus—into a full and complete man, in charge of his own destiny (61). In becoming this man, however, Crusoe becomes an active agent of the colonial project, seeking profit in the slave trade, and escaping his own capture in Africa through a "consummate prudence and patience"—a symbol of his self-mastery and his potential mastery over others (61).

If this tradition of maritime fiction, at times, contests the authoritarian nature of the ship while also re-affirming the subjectivity and position of the colonizer, the three texts I read here depart from this tradition. Although "The Other Boat" focuses on Lionel—a British colonial master in the making—the tragic nature of his narrative serves as a critique (though not a revision) of this subjectivity. *The Cat's Table* and *Sea of Poppies,* on the other hand, serve as important postcolonial *revisions* of maritime fiction; to different degrees, they contest the disciplinary structure of the ship by refiguring its colonized subjects as agents—rather than victims—who are driven not by their individual circumstances but their collective condition. As I will argue, however, it is *Sea of Poppies,* rather than *The Cat's Table,* that most convincingly reimagines the ship as a space of anticolonial resistance. In order to understand why, I place Ghosh's novel within the literary tradition of maritime fiction and read it alongside Forster and Ondaatje. Invoking Foucault's conception of genealogical analysis as that which "problematize[s] the present by revealing the power relations upon which it depends and the contingent processes that have brought it into being," I thus begin the chapter reading Forster's short story set on the *S.S. Normannia*, travelling from England to India, and Ondaatje's semi-

autobiographical account of his childhood voyage from Colombo to England onboard the *Oronsay* (Garland 372). While the relationships across race and class in these two texts do not incite a lasting political struggle, I suggest that they nonetheless help explain and clarify the collective possibilities we find in Ghosh.

This chapter is concerned with the development of categories of difference central to empire's capitalist expansion and to the self/Other dichotomies that shape both colonial and postcolonial nationalisms—what Valluvan describes as "the exclusionary terms by which nations obtain symbolic definition and against whom nationalisms orient their political energies" ("Nationalism and Racism" 248). Following Hannah Arendt's writing on racial difference and European nationalism in particular, he argues that "colonial forms of 'race-thinking' […] were […] feeding into the embryonic nation-state imaginations being contemporaneously cemented within Europe" during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (248). Charles Leddy-Owen argues similarly on the links between empire and European nationalism: as he writes, "in an eighteenth and nineteenth century Europe, saturated 'by representations of the imperial world and its peoples,' racial hierarchies set up 'others' against which constructions of 'home' and emerging national identities could be defined" (Hall and Rose qtd in Leddy-Owens 274). In other words,

> It was through racial frameworks that the state classified and regulated its beholden populations, home and abroad, with women, the working classes, and ethnic and religious minority groups such as Jews and the Irish variously and unevenly racially othered in Western contexts, while similarly

> intersectional processes rendered the white, bourgeois male explicitly or implicitly racially superior within the national mythology. (274)[22]

Central to the construction of these racial frameworks are the economic interests that drive imperialism. As the basis for my readings of Forster, Ondaatje, and Ghosh's texts, I thus turn to Patrick Wolfe's recent work on racial categorization in the colonial history of labour. Wolfe traces the emergence of racial categories through the set of capitalist structures that motivate colonial and imperial projects and that produce an "international division of labour" (26). While his analysis is not rooted in colonial South Asia (but, rather, in Australia as a settler colony), it nonetheless helps situate these texts' interracial, inter-caste, and cross-class relationships within the history of modern capitalist expansion—including that of empire's ocean-based trading economies. Historicizing the development of modern conceptions of Blackness and Indigeneity, for example, Wolfe argues that "race is colonialism speaking" through the demands of capital —in particular, that of labour and land (15). Wolfe traces the oppositional but complementary ways racial categories emerge through the logic of property and profit and a perceived "capacity or incapacity for colonial labour": the categorization of Native peoples as a dying group justifies acquisition of land, while "Blackness" as a racial category harnesses the labour of people to work the dispossessed land (24). Put

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[22] In Chapters 2 and 3, I return to a more sustained conversation on the nation-state and, in particular, to the development of South Asian nationalisms. The content of these nationalisms does not necessarily mimic the "racial frameworks" central to European nationalisms but, rather, reflect a set of caste, race, and class formations rooted in/specific to South Asia. However, the mechanisms by which self/Other divisions manifest in the postcolonial nation-state are shaped by, and follow from, the ideological and economic structures of empire, which this chapter explores.

differently, race is "a set of classificatory regimes that seek to order subject populations differentially in pursuit of particular historical agendas" (22). The friendships in these texts, at times, intervene in the function of these classificatory regimes and, as I will argue of *Sea of Poppies* in particular, reveal the potential for collective struggle—for the *re*distribution of power and resources—against the grain of empire's historical agendas.

Wolfe also argues that the process of racialization establishes the "international division of labour at the individual's own sensory experience, soliciting a reflex allegiance to the otherwise disenchanted categories made available in capitalism's secular set of social relations" (26). In other words, race establishes a division of labour rooted in the biology of whole populations, which also conditions the individual's experience of the social world. Wolfe's description of capitalism's "secular set of social relations" is particularly important, highlighting the way these relations refigure the individual's sensory experience entirely through her difference—and at the expense of both her connections with others and her spiritual and non-productive potential. While I return to capitalism's secularizing impulse in Chapter 3, Wolfe's exploration of the individual experience of "an international division of labour" is helpful: many of the friendships in these texts—by undermining one's "reflexive allegiance to disenchanting categories of difference"—offer a glimpse into a new set of social relations beyond the logics of difference that enable the project of empire.

Race and the "In-between" on the *S.S. Normania*

Race circulates as the primary "disenchanting category" in E.M. Forster's "The Other Boat." The story traces the relationship between two friends—the "half-caste" Cocoanut who works as a ship's hand, and Lionel March, the son of a major in the British army—who meet as children on a sea voyage to England and again as adults on their way to Bombay. The romantic and sexual relationship they develop results in chaos and scandal onboard the *S.S. Normannia*: Lionel, learning that Cocoanut has bribed his way onto the ship in order to seduce him, strangles Cocoanut and then commits suicide by drowning himself in the sea. The ensuing scandal arises from the fact that Lionel's relationship to, and desire for, a "half-caste" man profoundly and irrevocably compromises the integrity of Lionel's gendered and racialized self. Indeed, his death is seen as a blessing to the other Britons onboard the ship insofar as Lionel's desires render him "a monster in human form, of whom the earth was well rid" (196).

Forster's story—set in 1901, written in 1957, and published after his death in 1971—is both tragic and novel in its frank depiction of queer sexuality and interracial romance. Yet, the stark rendering of Lionel and Cocoanut's relationship builds upon one of the central questions in *A Passage to India*: if the colonial encounter places colonizer and colonized in close proximity, is intimacy between the two possible, or is it made impossible in service of the colonial project? Placed within the context of Forster's larger body of writing on the passage between the metropole and the colonies, we can read the

consummated sexual relationship between Lionel and Cocoanut as a version of the aborted friendship between Aziz and Fielding. While such a comparison perhaps risks "queering" a platonic relationship, this comparison might help us understand the particular *conditions* that make this consummation possible and contribute to the story's tragic end. Unlike the deferral of Aziz and Fielding's friendship, which gestures to the possibility that they might one day be reunited as equals, Lionel and Cocoanut's relationship is permanently foreclosed.

The ships on which Lionel and Cocoanut travel—as children and as adults—are central to the development of their relationship in several ways. From the very beginning of the story, the passage to and from the colony makes the ship a contaminating force, a vessel that threatens to transport the unpredictability and licentiousness of the "East" more generally. This "contamination" partly stems from the way the ship makes visible a class structure reliant on colonial labour: when Cocoanut and Lionel meet as children, it is not as equals, but because Cocoanut works as a labourer onboard the ship. Their friendship develops when Lionel asks Cocoanut to take him onto the bows where Lionel has never been but which Cocoanut, "having few domesticities, knew well" (168). Onboard the ship, class and race segregations thus become harder to maintain, but no less threatening to the colonial order. Mrs. March, whose husband has left her for a Burmese woman and who is taking her children back to London in a somewhat disgraced state, reads into Cocoanut the contaminating sexual influence of the East. While she believes that their imminent return to London will undo this influence ("I would never allow it

going to India," she says of Lionel and Cocoanut's friendship), Mrs. March regards Cocoanut with suspicion (167). Regarding him as a "silly idle useless unmanly little boy" with a "touch of the tar-brush" and a scheming, manipulative character, she believes his friendship with Lionel threatens to rupture her family's status (170). The ship thus becomes an "in-between" space in two senses: it mediates the physical distance between the metropole and the colony, while also blurring the racial and sexual distinctions between colonizer and colonized.

We can also read the ship as a liminal space in the tradition of Victor Turner whose work on rites of passage has been taken up by scholars of Atlantic and Indian Ocean literatures. For Turner, the liminal space lies "between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention" or, in other words, in-between the ordinary ways of understanding subjectivity (6). Taking up the ritual passage from boyhood to manhood as an example of liminality, he argues that the subject in-between boyhood and manhood exists outside of the everyday insofar as "society's [...] definitions do not allow for the existence of not-boy-not-man" (6). In other words, these subjects do not have a "social reality" and exist instead in an "unstructured" space which is "at once pre-structured and de-structured" (8). Turner argues that liminal space generates intense connection or *communitas,* a state of momentary belonging that "puts all social structural rules into question and suggests new possibilities" of collectivity among people (Turner qtd. in Dolan 14). "Divested of their previous habits of thought, feelings and action"—as well as previous forms of social hierarchy and difference— subjects experience the liminal space

as a "communion of equal individuals" (14). While such a state dissolves when the rite of passage ends, the liminal state is, for Turner, one of temporary collective possibility: here, a kind of "mystical solidarity" among people emerges precisely because previously entrenched ways of knowing are called into question (18).

While, as Peck reminds us, ships were authoritarian and highly regimented spaces, Turner's theory of liminality helps make sense of the cracks in these regimes where connections across race, caste, and nationality emerge. As such, much writing on empire theorizes the ship as a liminal space: in her writing on colonial missionary work, for instance, Rhonda Semple argues that the uncertainty of life at sea "enabled the creation of a sacred liminal space" in which new forms of spiritual life, disruptive to those of the colonial project, were made possible (81). In her exploration of *The Cat's Table*'s autobiographical nature, Laura Savu Walker similarly argues that the *Oronsay* constitutes a rite of passage for Michael—the novel's twelve-year-old protagonist—to which the liminal space of the ship gives form. In my later discussion of *The Cat's Table*, I suggest that postcolonial theorizations of liminality are insufficient and too focused on the relatively privileged postcolonial passenger; nonetheless, theories of liminality are a helpful *starting* point for understanding how the ship might contest its own segregating structures. While the *S.S. Normannia* does not engender a kind of *communitas* between Lionel and Cocoanut, its conditions nonetheless unsettle the racial distinctions between colonizer and colonized.

As it did when they were children, the physical space of the ship places Lionel and Cocoanut in close proximity to each other, reuniting them as adults long after their initial meeting. Cocoanut bypasses the strict racial segregation onboard by bribing the ship's administration and securing a place in Lionel's cabin, where the sexual relationship between the two men unfolds. Initially inured to Cocoanut's advances, Lionel's "resistance weaken[s] under the balmier sky" and they begin to "sleep together as a matter of course" once they enter the Mediterranean (177). While for Cocoanut their sexual relationship is a fulfillment of his long-standing desire for Lionel, for Lionel it is a troubling diversion. Once in India, he plans to end the affair, to marry an English woman named Isabel, and to rise in the ranks of the British army. In the end, however, such aspirations are left unfulfilled: his desires revealed upon his death, Lionel loses his place among his "caste," who remember him only as a racial and sexual deviant (192).

The refiguring of Lionel as a monster upon his death is stark insofar as, prior to the revelation of his relationship to Cocoanut, he is a "specimen of manliness"—handsome, successful, and dutiful—committed to his work as a captain and to his family in England (171). Cocoanut, on the other hand, is referred to not as a man but as a "supple boy" who "belongs to no race" (174). He is also bestial—"climbing about like a monkey" and given to quick movements and unpredictable changes in mood—and, as such, he traverses the boundaries between human and animal (173). Lionel's "manliness" is thus indelibly tied to his whiteness, to his racial difference from Cocoanut who, unlike Lionel, is irrational and unrestrained in his desire. While Lionel is afraid of and, at times,

disgusted by Cocoanut, their likeness is exposed and the instability of their racial differences revealed through their shared sexual desires. Such likeness arises not only from the queerness of their desires but from their shared inability to control them: for instance, Lionel believes that his close proximity to Cocoanut in their cabin "[woke] up so much that might have slept" within him (193). In this sense, both the existence of queer desires—associated as they are with uncivilized sexualities—*and* the inability to master these desires undermine the fictions through which the white self circulates as fundamentally different from and superior to its Other.[23] Indeed, by giving in to his sexual impulses, Lionel "goes native" much like his father did in Burma, shirking familial duties and giving up his position in the army. At the end of story, when Colonel Arthbutnot attempts to hide Lionel's encounter with Cocoanut from Lionel's mother, he does so not only to protect her from the truth but to avoid the fact that such sexual desires might overspill their attempted regulation.

Labour and the Regulation of Bourgeois Intimacy

While his death results in his posthumous expulsion from his "caste," Lionel is committed to maintaining his place in the racial and class hierarchy into which he was born. Believing that he will become "nothing and nobody" should he lose his place among fellow Britons, he ends his liaison with Cocoanut in order to preserve his

[23] Please see Anderson (2005), Evans and Thorpe (1998), and Jenny Sharpe (1993) for explorations of queerness, masculinity, and imperial ships.

connection to both his family and his work as a captain. In this sense, there is an intimate relationship between Lionel's whiteness and his labour; the possibility of becoming "nothing and nobody" stems from his knowledge that it is with "the folk to whom he belong[s]" that he "also ha[s] his work" (192). Indeed, Lionel's seemingly inevitable rise through the ranks of the British army undergirds the story and fuels the anxiety that troubles his relationship with Cocoanut. He is as "any young rising office ought to be—clean-cut, athletic, good-looking without being conspicuous" and with "wonderful professional luck" (171). Ending his dalliance with Cocoanut and marrying Isabel thus promises to preserve his prominent role in the army and, more broadly, his connection to his race.

In this vein, we might make sense of Cocoanut's murder and Lionel's suicide through the relationship between bourgeois subjectivity and the regulation of intimacy. In "The Intimacies of Four Continents," Lisa Lowe traces the emergence of the British bourgeois subject through eighteenth century colonial projects in the West Indies. Lowe argues that the Briton-as-bourgeois subject emerged insofar as "the political economy of slave and indentured labour in the colonies founded the formative wealth of the European bourgeoisie *and* the sense that the labour of enslaved and indentured domestic labour furnished the material comforts of the bourgeois home" (original emphasis; 196). The ability to harness the labour of colonized and enslaved people relied largely on the imposition of a kind of bourgeois intimacy, which Lowe defines as a "biopolitics through which the colonial powers administered the enslaved and colonized and sought to

indoctrinate the newly freed forms of Christian marriage and family" (195). Regulating the sexual and emotional attachments though the nuclear family not only solidified the public/private divide but also determined a racial hierarchy through which labour was divided. Lowe argues, for example, that Chinese indentured labourers were introduced into the plantation economy of the West Indies precisely in order to create a "barrier between [the British] and the Negroes" (Gloster qtd. in Lowe 196). Such a barrier was made possible by a specific division of labour: Chinese coolies refined the cane that Black slaves cultivated, thus becoming a "free race" who "could be kept distinct from Negroes" (qtd. in Lowe 193). The perceived capacity to establish the nuclear family and participate in the rituals of bourgeois intimacy also determined this racial distinction: Chinese women were thought to be predisposed to family life which would, in turn, render Chinese coolies more amenable to authority.

Lowe thus concludes that the imposition and regulation of bourgeois intimacy helped structure the "hierarchy of racial classifications [which] gradually emerged to manage and modernize labour, reproduction, and society among the colonized" (200). Her assertions build upon Stoler's work on how the colonial management of intimacy helped create racial Others. Working from George Hardy's claim that "a man remains a man so long as he is under the gaze of a woman of his race," Stoler suggests that racial distinctions were not only written on the body but also rooted in a set of characteristics that formed the basis of bourgeois subjectivity (Hardy qtd. in Stoler 1). In other words, "the colonial measure of what it took to be classified as European was based not on skin

colour alone but on tenuously balanced assessments of who was judged to act with reason, affective appropriateness, and a sense of morality" (6). As such, the regulation of intimacy preserved racial difference at the level of the body and as a key feature of bourgeois subjectivity. The connection Stoler makes through Hardy thus reveals the process by which Lionel becomes a "monster" once he steps outside the "gaze of a woman of his own race." That his resistance to Cocoanut's advances should weaken precisely at the moment he enters the Mediterranean suggests that both Lionel's queer desires and his inability to control these desires render him bestial, aligned with Cocoanut and the broader degeneracy of the East.[24]

In this sense, we might trace the tragedy of his relationship with Cocoanut—its failure to transcend the colonizer/colonized divide—to the ways the demands of bourgeois intimacy structure Lionel's relationship to his racialization more generally. By ending his liaison with Cocoanut, Lionel attempts to harness a kind of restraint of which he was once capable; prior to his encounter with Cocoanut and upon learning that he will marry Isabel in Bombay, for instance, he "practise[s] chastity even in thought" (193). Whereas deviant and clandestine forms of intimacy with Cocoanut threaten to make Lionel an outcast, the fold of heterosexual marriage promises to preserve his place among the race "to whom he belong[s]" (193). Ironically, the other Britons onboard read Lionel's murder of Cocoanut as evidence of his unrestrained nature, his similarity to the colonized

[24] I refer here to Orientalist ideas about "Eastern" masculinities that were seen as both feminized and uncontrolled. However, it is important to note that imperial conceptions of British masculinity were also shaped against, as Daniel Coleman writes, the "heart of darkness of the South" which, like the East, was also conceived of as degenerate and untamed (238).

Other, but Lionel himself remains attached to maintaining the illusion of his racial difference. As I will discuss in the pages that follow, the characters in *The Cat's Table* and *Sea of Poppies* have a different relationship to the loosening of racial distinctions between self and Other, allowing this loosening to shape their sense of shared political struggle. For Lionel, however, the stakes run too high: the power he exerts over Cocoanut, while ultimately making Lionel into a "monster," has the momentary effect of re-establishing the racial hierarchy between them.

"The Other Boat" thus makes explicit imperial concerns about race, contamination, and deviant forms of intimacy implicit in much of the writing on the passage between Britain and its colonies. Though the relationship between Lionel and Cocoanut fails to generate a collective political will, their relationship—in revealing the instability of the racial differences between them—places Forster's story in conversation with recent postcolonial revisions of such maritime fiction. Michael Ondaatje's semi-autobiographical novel *The Cat's Table* is one such revision, refiguring some key elements of Forster's story and adapting them to the form of a *post*colonial narrative. Whereas "The Other Boat" is told from the perspective of Lionel, *The Cat's Table*—told from Michael's perspective—recovers the racialized subject as an agent in his own story. Part of this agency is made possible by the fact that Michael, unlike Cocoanut, is a middle-class subject, travelling to England as a passenger rather than a labourer.[25]

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[25] I offer a more detailed explanation of the relationship between labour and capital onboard ships in the following sections on *The Cat's Table* and *Sea of Poppies.*

Whereas Cocoanut's ability to assert his agency is minimal, limited to his personal manipulation of Lionel, Michael is able to assert a relative degree of control even in situations in which his own power is restricted. Part of this control, as I will demonstrate in the section that follows, flows from the relationships he develops with others onboard *The Oronsay*. While Cocoanut and Lionel's deaths serve to restore the power relations on the *S.S. Normannia*, *The Cat's Table* helps us begin to understand how friendships across racial, national, and caste divisions might incite a collective struggle against these divisions themselves.

The Ship as Central in *The Cat's Table*

The Cat's Table, published in 2011, follows the voyage of twelve-year-old Michael, travelling from Colombo to England on the *Oronsay* in the early 1950s. Throughout the voyage, he remains fascinated by the self-contained nature of the ship which, untethered as it is to land, is also uninhibited by the laws and customs by which he is otherwise ruled. The *Oronsay* presents for Michael "the chance to escape all order," to find and reinvent himself and to connect with others in previously unimaginable ways (4). The voyage, for instance, facilitates his relationship with Ramadhin, his "closest friend, [his] *machang*" (153) whose friendship forms the basis of his "true and inherent sel[f]" as an adult (147). *The Cat's Table* differs from both Forster's story and Ghosh's novel insofar as Michael's experience on the *Oronsay,* while at times challenging colonial power relations, does not fundamentally change his own relationship to the colonial

condition. Rather, Michael's narrative is ultimately about the loss of possibility and the inescapable nature of social order, symbolized by the ship's impending arrival to the colonial space of England. The events on the ship—the suicide of a prisoner and his daughter, the murder of an undercover police office, the death of a sick billionaire, and, most importantly, the loss of Michael's friendships and of his beloved, Emily—constitute the loss of Michael's "feral" childhood (27). In this sense, *The Cat's Table*, unlike either "The Other Boat" or *Sea of Poppies,* is an origin story—the story of how a coherent self arises through the coercive disciplining of colonial order and the regulation of intimacy through the nuclear family. As such, Michael's narrative, written many years after his voyage on the *Oronsay,* is an attempt to recover the dis-ordered space of the ship and the relationships that were possible therein.

Much of the scholarship on *The Cat's Table* theorizes Michael's voyage through an analysis of hybridity and the culturally-fluid nature of diasporic subjectivity. In her analysis of Michael's identity formation onboard the *Oronsay,* Walker argues that the novel represents the search for identity; by writing the novel, Ondaatje attempts to recover his childhood memories—both real and fictionalized—of the *Oronsay* that came to form his sense of self as an adult. Analyzing the role of the ship itself, Walker writes:

> Within the larger context of the novel, the ocean liner can also be interpreted as a microcosm of the world beyond it—a site for mutually transformative cultural encounters that break down, without totally dissolving, the dualities of self/other, inside/outside, familiar/strange, and

> centre/periphery. Its fixed points of departure and arrival notwithstanding, the sea voyage allows the passengers to exist for each other while in motion which, on a deeper level, becomes a metaphor for the contingent, provisional nature of the diasporic subject's experience. (40)

Michael's voyage is thus both a home to and a reflection *of* his diasporic identity: while the ship becomes the "site for mutually transformative cultural encounters that break down […] dualities," these encounters reflect the complex cultural mixture that constitutes Michael's subjectivity. Similarly, Geetha Ganapathy-Dore argues that the novel traces—through the ship's journey from colony to metropole—the "becoming-Other of the migrant self" and the attendant "power struggles with regard to gender, class, and race that transform the migrant's gaze" (95).

I agree that Michael's voyage onboard the *Oronsay* leads to the breakdown of stern dualities that characterize everyday life on land. However, I suggest here that Ondaatje's novel not only invokes the ship as a metaphor for the hybrid nature of diasporic subjectivity but, rather, demonstrates how the ship—as a vehicle of empire and as a result of its strict hierarchies and forms of discipline—also serves as a space of resistance to colonial power relations and to the discipling of the self through racial, class, religious, and national difference. For instance, while postcolonial analyses of *The Cat's Table* (such as Walker's) tend to focus on the ship as a "site of mutual cultural […] transformation" and hybridity, we can also situate the events onboard *Oronsay* through a different history: that of "maritime radicalism," or the collective class struggle against

colonial authority on the ships carrying people and goods in service of empire. As Niklas Frykman et. al explain in their exploration of "maritime radicalism," the development of an economic structure based on ocean trade routes resulted in an international, mobile, and diverse working class whose connections to each other on ships—the "engines of capital"—manifested a revolutionary politics against the colonial authority (13). As Peter Linebaugh argues, ships were "forcing houses of internationalism" in which a global proletariat—comprised of a racial, ethnic, and linguistic mixture of labourers—was born (qtd. in Hudson 157). Insofar as these ships were authoritarian spaces with strict divisions of rank between captains, serangs, and labourers, resistance to this authority required the collectivization of the labouring classes which, at times, superseded the racial, caste, and linguistic divisions among these classes. As Martyn Hudson argues, "nautical histories of labour […] hint at a new politics of utopia" because ships enabled new modes of "organizing labour, of securing escape from despotism" and of collectivity across racial, caste, and religious difference (158).

This theorization of maritime radicalism is, as will become clear later in this chapter, particularly helpful in thinking through the mutiny onboard the *Ibis* in *Sea of Poppies*, which, unlike the *Cat's Table*, is a narrative centred on empire's labourers rather than its elite. However, I suggest that contextualizing the *Oronsay's* voyage through the history of empire's ocean-based trade and attendant class struggles against authority, rather than through cultural arguments centred on hybridity, helps makes sense of the nascent collective possibilities—the challenges to the colonial order and authority—that

emerge on the *Oronsay.* Unlike the friendships onboard the *Ibis*, those in Ondaatje's novel do not incite a collective uprising that fundamentally changes class relations or redistributes power onboard the ship; in the end, *The Cat's Table* is a bourgeois version of the voyage across the Indian Ocean, following the story of a wealthy Sri Lankan boy who, upon landing in England, fulfills a middle-class fantasy through his colonial education and eventual career as a writer. And yet, on the *Oronsay,* the inevitability of this fantasy is temporarily suspended; a new kind of subjectivity is able to form beyond the otherwise intractable influence of colonial authority and biological family. Reading the ship against the backdrop of both theories of liminality and maritime radicalism, I argue here that *The Cat's Table* illuminates the political potential of friendship across difference while also demonstrating the limitations of these friendships, should they remain tethered to the demands of bourgeois subjectivity and its colonial class structure.

"Places Where There is No Power"

From the very beginning of his voyage, Michael experiences a re-education in the workings of power and the possibilities of its disruption. Relieved to leave the strict discipline of his boarding school in Mount Lavinia—and dreading his return to school upon his arrival in England—Michael learns quickly how to challenge the hierarchical and disciplined nature of life onboard the *Oronsay.* This education comes from the friendships he develops with the diverse and eccentric group of people with whom he dines. His two school-aged friends, Ramadhin and Cassius, his cousin Emily, and a group

of eccentric adults all instruct Michael in how power can be harnessed from beneath, by people who are themselves seemingly powerless. At the same time, the voyage on the ship also signifies for Michael a kind of safety and rootedness that he does not feel on land, either in Colombo or eventually in England. It is only after leaving the *Oronsay* and returning to life with his mother that he begins to feel that he "[doesn't] belong anywhere" (251). This sense of safety emerges insofar as life on the ship facilitates the undoing of shore-based boundaries and because his fellow passengers represent to Michael an alluring form of freedom from restraint. He is drawn, in part, to his distant cousin Emily because "she had a free-spirit, a wildness [he] loved" (11) and to the mysterious Mr. Mazappa for his "wild, raucous humour" (84). While Michael and his new friends, Ramadhin and Cassius, bunk in the lowest quarters and eat at the "cat's table"—the table furthest away from the Captain and the officer class—they thrive on disrupting the boundaries that relegate them to "the least privileged place" on the ship (8). Believing that their lack of privilege renders them invisible, they govern themselves with a single rule: to "each day [...] do at least one thing that was forbidden" (25). They thus attempt to disrupt the fragile balance of power on the ship by sneaking into First Class and by planning to use the Captain's toilet.

Michael's simultaneous experience of safety and freedom arises largely from the adults around him—the other diners at the cat's table—whose eccentricities contrast with what he believes will be the staid and predictable nature of his life in England. While the diners at the cat's table are brought together through chance—and, perhaps, their relative

insignificance—they share a kind of unrestrained and un-coerced orientation to life. Michael is drawn to Mr. Fonseka, for instance, both for the school teacher's love of books and for his serenity—the kind that comes "with the choice of life he wanted to live" (59). Little is known about Miss Lasqueti— a "likely spinster" with "a possible libido"—until years after the voyage, where she is revealed to be recovering from an abusive relationship (73). During the voyage, however, she is a source of fascination for the three boys—her cargo includes "twenty or thirty pigeons caged somewhere in the ship"—as a figure whose past and future they cannot quite discern (74). Mr. Mazappa, too, provides the boys a sense of future possibility previously unimagined. "Half Sicilian and half something else," and sometimes known by his stage name, Sunny Meadows, Mr. Mazappa is a travelling pianist who teaches the boys about music and regales them with stories of his failed romantic relationships (29). By the measures of the ship, the adults at the cat's table are insignificant, lacking in influence and seated far away from the Captain's table where the diners "toast […] to one another's significance" (75). Yet, for Michael, the diners at the cat's table are a source of intrigue and potential; through them he learns that "what is interesting and important happens in secret, in places where there is no power" (75).

Michael's attachment to "places where there is no power" both foreshadows the events to come—the freeing of the ship's prisoner, made possible by clandestine plotting among a group of circus performers—and obscures the class and race relations that continue to organize the *Oronsay*'s passengers and crew. Niemeyer, the ambiguously

"Asian" prisoner onboard, bears the weight of these power relations most conspicuously and comes to signify the struggle between the colonial regime and the seemingly corrupted, racially ambiguous subjects who risk contaminating others. Niemeyer is rumoured to have killed an English judge and is spoken of in whispers by the other passengers. In a similar way to Cocoanut in "The Other Boat" and the prisoner, Ah Fatt, in *Sea of Poppies*, he crosses boundaries between animal and human: he is, for instance, "powerful and self-contained," but confined to the small space beneath the deck where he "eat[s] scraps from a metal tray" (15). His captivity, aside from being a source of fascination for the boys, is also a source of fear insofar as it signifies the possibility of life without freedom. For the children, the "very idea of a *chain,* of being contained, was like suffocation. At [their] age [they] could not endure the thought of it" (15). As such, the knowledge of Niemeyer's captivity fuels the boys' desire to undermine the colonial rules that attempt to restrain them; while those on the ship "who already [had] power continue[d] to glide along the familiar rut they have made for themselves" (75), Michael and his friends undergo constant reinvention, revealing little to each other about their personal histories and resisting normative forms of identification. His friends, for instance, know Michael as "Mynah"—a name that for Michael signifies his "unreliability" but also perhaps the unrestrained self (146). As Michael notes, once he arrives in England, he is "known only by [his] surname" (147) such that the memory of the name "Mynah" is a source of excitement and possibility, a reminder of his feral childhood with Ramadhin and Cassius prior to their arrival in England.

In the dis-ordered space of the ship profound intimacies become possible—between Michael, Ramadhin, and Cassius, but also between Michael and Emily, and Emily and Niemeyer's deaf daughter, Asuntha. While these relationships do not foster a lasting collective political struggle, they do result in the freeing of Niemeyer from captivity. The Jankla troupe—the circus performers who become Asuntha's family after her father's imprisonment—conspire to free Niemeyer with Emily's help. The escape ends in a way reminiscent of Forster's story when Niemeyer, free except for the shackles on his feet, jumps into the ocean, taking Asuntha with him (240). The event marks a stark shift in the tone of the narrative: the excitement and sense of possibility that, before, felt abundant to Michael is replaced by the knowledge that colonial power, at times subverted, ultimately reestablishes itself. While Asuntha and Niemeyer's deaths signal this re-establishment, so too does the ship's approach of Europe, as the escape occurs with "the lights of Naples, or […] Marseilles, in the far distance" (240).

Despite the tragedy of Niemeyer's attempted escape, the relationships on board the *Oronsay* suggest a momentary reprieve from the racial and class boundaries that give structure to the colonial order. Indeed, insofar as the ship constitutes an alternate, "seemingly imaginary world" (13), the boundaries that separate the ship's passengers on land dissolve through their proximity on water. Emily's and Asuntha's relationship, for instance, gestures toward the political possibilities that emerge fully between Neel and Ah Fatt in *Sea of Poppies*. While neither Emily nor Asuntha are imprisoned, their relationship demonstrates the ways friendship can transform relatively powerless people. While Emily

is a "glittering public beauty" and Asuntha is relatively isolated due to her deafness and poverty, the two develop a bond based on their shared experiences of childhood violence and displacement that transforms Emily into "a very different soul" (77). Even Asuntha's deafness produces a particular kind of intimacy with Emily: because she can only hear through one ear by "tak[ing] a tremor of air and interpret[ing] it into sound, and then words," people could not "communicate with her except by coming intimately close" (77). While the span of their intimacy is much briefer than Neel and Ah Fatt's, feelings of kinship between the two girls form the basis for Emily's adult self. These feelings of kinship arise not only between Emily and Asuntha but also between Emily and Asuntha's non-biological family—the troupe of circus performers committed to helping Asuntha and who, in turn, come to replace for Emily her own fragmented biological family. Such a commitment arises from feelings of love—of loving and being loved—and ultimately works to disrupt the colonial power relations that underlie Niemeyer's captivity and that haunt the ship itself as it approaches its destination in England.

If the confusion and relative disorder of the *Oronsay* facilitate the relationship between Emily and Asuntha, so too does it enable a generative form of intimacy between Michael and Emily. In a particularly interesting moment of the text, we glimpse a stage of Michael's psycho-sexual development as it emerges outside of—but converges with—the space of the nuclear family. Confiding in Emily his anguish over the wealthy Hector Da Silva's death at the hands of Ramadhin's dog, Michael experiences for the first time an acute sexual desire, a "mixture of thrill and vertigo" that arises from Emily's presence

(113). The experience of desire overtly reminds Michael of his family and of his relationship to his mother. In feeling desire for Emily, Michael realizes that he has "existed too cautiously with his family" which has been a site of restraint rather than of freedom (114). In fact, he is aware in this moment that he does not even remember his mother, that the "period of separation" from her while she has been in England has resulted in his separating from her both emotionally and psychically (114). He thus believes she will be a "stranger" when they reunite, not only because of their long separation but "because of what occurred with Emily" during this separation (115). Leaving Emily upon their arrival in England thus becomes a traumatic separation; indeed, when Emily and Michael meet years later, he realizes that Emily is "the one [he] has never been able to let go of," and that the feelings of desire and intimacy he felt for her in the cabin have structured his romantic life as an adult (256).

The restrictive nature of the nuclear family—here realized through Michael's interactions with Emily—is offset by the relationships between Michael, Ramadhin, and Cassius. As they are parentless on the ship, their friendships come to stand in for the function of family by providing them each a sense of safety and love while also enabling them to live as "contented feral children," to exist outside the "grasp of family" (27). Such an experience of freedom proves to be temporary and tied to the ship itself: while Ramadhin and Michael at times remain in contact after they disembark, Michael's only encounter with Cassius is, in fact, an encounter with one of Cassius's paintings that depicts the three boys on the ship. The dissolution of their friendships upon arrival works

in tandem with the fact that Michael's mother awaits him on land such that the "grasp" of the maternal and biological eclipses the other affective possibilities contained within the ship. In this sense, it is particularly important that, unlike Forster's story, the story of Michael's voyage begins in the colony and ends in England; where the entrance into the Mediterranean threatens to undo Lionel's claim to bourgeois subjectivity, the arrival in England promises to impose the limitations of this subjectivity onto Michael. Michael's return to his mother reminds us of the colonial underpinnings of family life within England and foreshadows the various forms of discipline Michael will encounter there. The last words Emily says to him upon arrival ("time to go to school I think") recalls to us one of Michael's losses: once he begins school in England, he is referred to by his "family" name rather than the nickname "Mynah."

The *Oronsay*'s arrival to England thus highlights the ship as a liminal space, less encumbered by the laws and customs that regulate intimacies between people and maintain distinctions of self and Other. In placing otherwise disconnected people in close proximity, the voyage from colony to metropole gestures toward the possibility of intimacies across racial, national, and class distinctions to undermine colonial power relations. Upon arriving in England, however, Michael is reabsorbed into the bourgeois conditions that shaped his life in Sri Lanka: he returns to the fold of his biological family, goes back school, marries, and finds success as a writer. As such, I write about Michael's voyage in this chapter not to claim the novel as a testament to the political potential of friendship but because Michael's relationships with other passengers shed light on the

conditions under which friendship might lead to collective struggle: though the intimacies developed onboard the *Oronsay* are temporary, their existence begins to refigure the ship as not *only* a vehicle for empire but as a potential site of resistance to power relations based on difference. Both Forster and Ondaatje's narratives reveal the instability of racial and colonial categories and undermine the strict distinctions between self and Other; whereas this instability results in tragedy for Coconut and Lionel, Michael and his friends —temporarily escaping the demands of bourgeois subjectivity—are able to harness this instability to contest the power relations onboard.

At the same time, however, the temporary nature of Michael's experience of collective struggle clarifies the political limitations of postcolonial narratives rooted in the middle-class subject. Indeed, at the end of the voyage, Michael resembles, not Cocoanut, but *Lionel* whose own happiness as a child travelling from India is cut short in England, where his friendship with Cocoanut ends and where he cannot escape the expectations of his white, bourgeois society. *The Cat's Table* thus suggests that, like Lionel, a similar set of bourgeois expectations await Michael as a middle-class, though postcolonial, subject. In this sense, Ondaatje's novel helps situate the more sustained, truly revolutionary forms of anticolonial struggle we see as a result of the friendships in *Sea of Poppies*. The difference, as I will aim to demonstrate, is rooted in the class structure in which the friendships on the *Ibis* emerge: whereas both Lionel and Michael are tied to a class position that orients them away from their Others, the passengers on the *Ibis* are labourers, bound together across racial, religious, and caste lines. Read alongside "The

Other Boat" and *The Cat's Table*, I argue that we can see how the *Ibis'*s friendships, in the context of a shared class struggle, undermine the distinctions between self and Other which otherwise serve to keep a colonial division of labour and a set of power relations intact.

Friendship in *Sea of Poppies*

The "Other Boat" and *The Cat's Table* demonstrate the limitations of friendship's capacity to respond to and intervene in the conditions of colonial life. These limitations serve as a reminder of the possible problems that arise from thinking about politics and political change through theories of intimacy. In his critique of essentialist conceptions of love, for instance, Christian Lotz argues that love is "a social form that depends on the categorical system of reproduction," one that requires specific "analysis […] under the capitalist mode of production" (137). Working towards a social-material theory of love, Lotz suggests that, in order to understand the current social meaning and effects of love, we must understand it as "exist[ing] through contract, property, money, and capital," rather than as a universal or transhistorical phenomenon (137). While this project takes up friendship as a specific form of intimacy rather than love as a generalized phenomenon, I find instructive Lotz's concern with the economic relations that structure our contemporary conceptions and practices of love. Forster and Ondaatje's texts demonstrate how friendship can interrupt the seemingly essential nature of racial difference without contesting the material conditions of empire and the underlying capitalist logics that help

give meaning to racial difference. Thus, what remains to be seen is whether—and under which circumstances—these friendships might facilitate a collective struggle *against* the creation and mobilization of these differences. To that end, I turn now to Ghosh's 2008 historical novel, *Sea of Poppies*.

In *Sea of Poppies*, two prisoners on board the Mauritius-bound ship *Ibis* develop a unique friendship under intensely inhospitable circumstances. In the confining space of the chokey where they are held captive by the British, the two friends—one a "filthy foreigner" from Canton named Ah Fatt and the other a bankrupt rajah and "fallen outcaste" named Neel—overcome differences in language, religion, race, and class to care for each other in such a way that profoundly disturbs their guard, the subedar, Bhyro Singh (353). Unsettled by the fact that "neither [prisoner] seem[s] to want to overmaster the other," the subedar believes that his prisoners are "not men at all, but castrated impotent creatures"; he thus sets out to make his prisoners men by eliciting from each of them the desire to wield power over the other (353). His attempts largely fail, and in this failure, he "perceive[s] the subtle undermining of his own position" such that he becomes crueler and more determined in his quest, giving only one prisoner an extra helping of food or bribing one man to urinate on the other (353). The subedar's incessant desire to pry the prisoners apart compels a number of questions: what so unsettles the subedar about the prisoners' lack of desire to "overmaster" one another? How does their friendship render the subedar's claim to power tenuous? While Bhyro Singh does, in just one instance, succeed in momentarily rupturing the prisoners' solidarity with one another

(the “filthy foreigner” is also an addict whom the subedar baits with the false promise of opium), how might we read his overall failure to impose hierarchy onto the friendship? Indeed, Neel and Ah Fatt's friendship, developed across differences that initially seem insurmountable, forms the basis for the eventual overthrowing of their colonial masters and, as I will argue in this chapter, offers us a vision of anticolonial collectivity.

This section takes up the particular space of the *prison* (both on and off the *Ibis*) in a broader exploration of collective political struggle. I argue throughout that the prison in *Sea of Poppies* functions as space of mutual awakening and mobilization. Such an argument risks romanticizing the prison, trivializing the role that carceral systems play in maintaining both historical and contemporary colonial regimes. Prisons, like the implementation of a British educational system in India and the spread of Christianity, functioned as part of the civilizing mission and were key sites of colonial discipline (Mann 3). Yet, just as there is a dialectical relationship between freedom and oppression on the ships in these three texts, so too does the disciplinary structure of the prison serve to undermine the prison's function; to return momentarily to Al-Noaimi’s poem, prisoners are separated from each other through their solitary confinement, yet bound together by the knowledge that their individual experiences of pain are an expression of collective suffering. Onboard the *Ibis*, attempts to render Neel and Ah Fatt powerless—by removing them from families, stripping them of caste, forcing exile upon them, and isolating them from the coolies—facilitate the development of a common political purpose against the

colonial project itself. In other words, at times the prison becomes not only a space of violence and discipline but of friendship and collective transformation.

On the *Ibis*, such transformation is rooted in the redistribution of material resources, posing an explicit challenge to colonial power relations and to the primacy of Britain's trade in the Indian Ocean. The mutiny at the end of the novel demonstrates how the appropriation and redistribution of capital might contest the British imperial project itself: having escaped the *Ibis* once on a longboat, Neel, Jodu, Kalua, and Serang Ali—reunited in Hong Kong after the first opium war—abscond with the *Ibis* itself and head towards Mauritius to be reunited with Deeti. The appropriation of the *Ibis* by a group of ex-convicts and lascars is significant, given the ship's role in the development of empire and modern political economy: a former slave-ship, the *Ibis* now carries indentured labourers to colonies where they work in place of slaves. Writing on the forced migration of Chinese coolies to the Americas in the mid-1800s, Mooh-ho Jung writes that "coolies were a conglomeration of racial imaginings that emerged world-wide in the era of slave emancipation" (5). The development of coolies as a category of workers turned on new conceptions of freedom that emerged in the nineteenth century, after the abolition of the slave trade: Indian and Chinese coolies "embod[ied] the contradictory imperial imperatives of enslavement and emancipation" by working—as purportedly "free" labourers—the same plantations once worked by enslaved Africans (13). These two parallel histories of labour—of slaves and coolies, of enslavement and freedom—converge on the *Ibis,* which carries both prisoners whose migration is forced and—as will

become clear—a group of coolies for whom indentured labour marks "freedom" from their former lives.

While the specific context of the *Ibis* is particular to the nineteenth century history of emancipation, we can read the collective struggle of prisoners and coolies against their captors as a part of the long history of maritime radicalism, tracing back to the development of the Atlantic economy in the seventeenth century. In their maritime history of mutiny and worker revolt, Peter Linebaugh and Michael Rediker argue that, for "the classically educated architects of the Atlantic economy," the spectre of worker revolt took shape in the myth of the many-headed hydra—the monster slain by Hercules and a "symbol of disorder and resistance, a powerful threat to the building of state, empire, and capitalism" (2). Insofar as the slow process of expropriation and British expansion into the "new world" created a new class of labourers who could be shipped across the Atlantic, the myth came to "express the fear and justif[y] the violence of the ruling classes" against workers whose resistance threatened to undermine the colonial project in the Americas and the flow of capital across the Atlantic (6). Indeed, the conditions under which such a class of labourers emerged, migrated, and lived helped foster various forms of resistance that could not be contained. Ships crossing the Atlantic became particular sites of revolt where "the emergence of cooperation among workers, in new ways and on a new scale, facilitated new forms of self-organization among them, which was alarming to the ruling class of the day" (40). Following Marx's description of expropriated workers as a "motley crowd," Linebaugh and Rediker trace collective resistance across the

Atlantic to the multiracial, unruly, and unpredictable nature of this emerging class of labourers (20).

Though the *Ibis*'s voyage in *Sea of Poppies* is across the Indian Ocean, its use both as an ex-slave ship and as a means of transporting coolies places the ship itself in relation to the Atlantic economy of which Linebaugh and Rediker write. As I will argue as the chapter progresses, the mutiny on the *Ibis* becomes possible precisely because the coolies and prisoners come to see themselves as a collective of labourers working against their shared oppression. Fundamental, however, to the making of this collective is the friendship between Neel and Ah Fatt, which emerges in the confined space of the ship's chokey. Such friendship, I suggest, is crucial to the materialization of their shared power. Indeed, the united front that Neel and Ah Fatt present to the subedar is motivated not by a coherent political strategy but rather feelings of closeness, of friendship and love, which manifest as a commitment to each other's personal and political struggles. While in his first few days of captivity, Neel is consumed by feelings of disgust towards Ah Fatt and despair at his own fate. That he does not better his own situation at the expense of his cell-mate's (despite frequent opportunities created by the subedar) suggests, however, that the chokey is a site of emotional transformation—one that facilitates love and friendship within the context of what Neel reads as their "shared burden" (299). A former rajah whose immediate material and emotional needs have largely been fulfilled by others, Neel's feelings for Ah Fatt are his first experiences of selflessness, of learning to love and care for another without consideration of his own needs and desires. As he bathes Ah Fatt,

who has soiled himself in an opium-induced stupor, Neel comes to realize how a love detached from the immediacy of one's own needs is possible: "the mere fact of [...] investing one's attention in someone other than oneself created a pride and tenderness that had nothing whatever to do with the response of the object of one's care—just as a craftsman's love for his handiwork is in no way diminished by the fact of it being unreciprocated" (300). Ah Fatt does, however, reciprocate Neel's kindness by bringing Neel into his own life, divulging the tale that led him to the *Ibis,* and keeping Neel's "sanity intact" through his gestures of vulnerability and openness (345).

In this sense, Neel and Ah Fatt's shared experience as prisoners onboard the *Ibis* leads to a powerful form of intimacy between them. We might return here to the question of *why* their friendship troubles the subedar to the extent that it does: what does this friendship reveal about the relationship of intimacy to political disorder and to the subversion of power? In one sense, their friendship comes to signify the intimacy of "spatial proximity"—or the intimate contact between subjects that challenges the racial biopolitics of the colonial project (Lowe 193).[26] Indeed, the chokey is particularly significant not only because it is a site of overt colonial oppression, but because it places two previously disconnected subjects in proximity to each other. For instance, while the

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[26] This recalls my earlier discussion of Lowe who defines intimacy as "spatial proximity." Insofar as coolies were used to create a "middle" race between Britons and enslaved Africans, coolies were "located in masses together, not scattered throughout the colonies" where their contact with slaves was necessarily limited (White qtd. in Lowe 203). Such attempts to manage intimacy were not always successful, however, and could not account for the intellectual, emotional, and sexual crossover that occurred. In this sense, intimacy has a double valence: it signifies both "spatial proximity" as well as the affective ties that emerge between people as a result of proximity (193).

coolies (who form a similarly intractable unit as the convicts) share certain points of commonality between them—language, the experience of exile, intimate knowledge of the caste system, and the desire to relinquish their former selves once onboard the *Ibis*—that facilitate their friendships with each other, Ghosh makes clear that Neel and Ah Fatt are brought together only as result of the colonial project itself (290).

Eventually, however, "their shame and honour [becomes] a shared burden" to Neel and the shared experience of imprisonment challenges his sense of separation from Ah Fatt (299). We see the disruption of the seemingly entrenched lines between self and Other most profoundly in Neel's changing relationship to cleanliness. Prior to his encounter with Ah Fatt, Neel is driven by the "zealous [...] observance of upper-caste taboos" associated with Orthodox Hinduism and the desire to protect his body from contamination (Ghosh 37). While Neel is not a Brahmin, Brahminical traditions structure his interactions with his own body and with the bodies of others. In the cell where they are both held before being transferred to the *Ibis*, Ah Fatt is incontinent and covered in his own vomit; for Neel living in this condition means "cohabit[ing] with the incarnate embodiment of his loathings" (297). Neel's fastidiousness reflects much more, however, than a dogmatic adherence to Hindu tradition or a commitment to class and caste boundaries; rather, Ghosh makes apparent the ways in which cleanliness and the threat of contamination work to maintain Neel's sense of self, of interiority, and separateness from others. When he begins the process of cleaning the jharu (toilet), for example, he is aware

that once he has "touched his cell-mate's shit," he will "cease to be the man he had been;" once he touches the scoop used to clean the jharu, he does, in fact, feel within him "the intimations of an irreversible alteration" (298).

It is important that, rather than just the new experiences of poverty or captivity fundamentally changing Neel, the experience of contamination also leads to his undoing. Neel's process of unbecoming—linked as it is to his experience of disgust—demonstrates how disgust is, as Sara Ahmed argues, "crucial to power relations" (88). Indeed, the fear of contamination by the Other necessitates the regulation of subjects in numerous ways onboard the *Ibis* that are ultimately challenged throughout the course of the ship's voyage. Aside from Neel's aversion to his cell-mate's shit and the conditions of the chokey, racial difference most notably incites disgust and leads to the "hierarchizing of spaces as well as bodies" (88). We see this, of course, in the strict separation of the crew from the prisoners who, being "misbegotten, befouled creatures" are only allowed on the main deck in chains and in the presence of the subedar. Indeed, racial disgust emerges as a regulatory force even in the behaviour of the benevolent and biracial (but white-passing) skipper Zachary, who refuses to allow the Frenchwoman, his love interest Putli, to travel on the *Ibis* because he cannot assimilate the thought of her dressed as a lascar and surrounded by Indians when he knows her to truly be a "delicate rose" (Ghosh 284). As such, multiple manifestations of disgust work to regulate subjects on the *Ibis*, legitimizing the division of labour among them and managing the emotional bonds that are possible.

The hierarchizing of subjects through disgust recalls Lionel's aversion to Cocoanut's contaminating influence and the threat that such influence poses to Lionel's sense of self. Similar to Neel's initial responses to Ah Fatt, Lionel experiences an acute form of disgust when Cocoanut bites him, as a means of expressing not sexual desire but of influence, his *effect* on Lionel. Unlike Lionel's however, Neel's feelings of disgust shift over the course of his captivity and through his relationship with Ah Fatt. His encounters with Ah Fatt's excrement catalyze this shift by re-shaping Neel's sense of self into one no longer furnished by the labour of others; in cleaning the toilet, Neel performs the work associated with the lowest castes, the Dalits "who […] manually handle excreta" and thus become a "polluted caste" themselves (Ramaswamy qtd. in Gatade 32). Writing on one of the 1927 Dalit protests against this forced work, Ambedkar writes that the "Hindu Social Order is based upon a division of labour which reserves for the Hindus clean and respectable jobs and assigns to the untouchables dirty and mean jobs and thereby clothes the Hindus with dignity and heaps ignominy upon the untouchables" (Ambedkar qtd. in Gatade 32). While such caste distinctions remain intact outside the prison where Neel and Ah Fatt are held, the prison strips down such divisions of labour: Neel's wealth and caste —crucial to the construction of his former self—are of little material consequence in either the ship's chokey or the jail cell in which they are imprisoned on land. Indeed, Neel's arrest and imprisonment results in the total loss of his former life; his forced exile to Mauritius—where he will work alongside other convicts and indentured labourers—marks not only the loss of his family but of his status as a landowning rajah.

Neel's disgusting encounter with the jharu thus signals the shift of his feelings of revulsion and separation and marks the emergence of new emotional bonds between the convicts. Cleaning the toilet becomes a collective activity as the other convicts soon begin to help Neel and later extend their friendship to him in the courtyard. Neel reciprocates their friendship; using his knowledge as a rajah and his skills to act as a translator between the prisoners and the zamindars of their villages, he writes letters for prisoners who wish to petition for their land. In other words, the cleaning of the jharu incites not only friendship among the prisoners but the potential for an explicit form of collectivity insofar as Neel—who had once "rarely taken the trouble to read [the letters]" he received as a zamindar himself—now takes on the work of appealing on the behalf of prisoners (299). Most importantly perhaps, overcoming his disgust of the jharu allows Neel to care for and love Ah Fatt as Neel might care for himself, catalyzing the friendship that enables their collective escape from the prison. Only once he has "touched his cell-mate's shit," does Neel prepare to bathe Ah Fatt, trading with the other convicts the ability to write in return for fresh clothes and toiletries for his cell-mate (298). If contamination threatens to disrupt the organizing and hierarchizing of subjects, then the process of being contaminated by another signals a moment of noticeable disruption within the text. It is in this moment that Bhyro Singh becomes most acutely aware of his convicts' relationship to each other and the implications of this relationship for his own power. Eager to prove that he is "uncontaminated by the creatures placed in his power" who have been so contaminated by each other, he thus begins his attempt to undermine their friendship

(352). While one such attempt appears to succeed—Ah Fatt urinates on Neel in exchange for goat dung disguised as opium—the incident demonstrates the necessity of collective resistance and, in part, motivates the prisoners' escape from the chokey and their killing of the British first mate, Jack Crowle.

We might read the relationship between Neel and Ah Fatt as one that manifests a collective political struggle precisely because of how this relationship breaks down the caste and class-based conditions that give shape to Neel's sense of self. In taking on the work of cleaning the toilet, Neel can no longer "risk" contamination as he himself becomes akin to Ah Fatt and the other convicts. Whereas Lionel remains attached to his bourgeois subjectivity and to the colonial conditions that produce Cocoanut's difference, Neel and Ah Fatt's imprisonment challenges the fixity of this difference itself. Such a challenge to caste and class relations in the prison does not, of course, entirely collapse the material differences between Neel and Ah Fatt and, more conspicuously, between Neel and the other convicts. For instance, it is important to note that, while Neel develops an alliance with the other prisoners for whom he writes letters, their respective treatment as prisoners is determined by their individual caste positions. While Neel awaits trial, he lives in a separate section of the jail, "well removed from the other areas where other, less fortunate prisoners were detained" and given particular privileges (such as food from his own kitchen) so that he will not immediately "lose caste" (183). Such a contrast between Neel's treatment and the treatment endured by other, lower caste prisoners demonstrates

how their captors—like the subedar—mobilize class and caste divisions to minimize the threat of "spatial proximity" and to retain hierarchy among prisoners themselves. Nevertheless, Neel and Ah Fatt's "shared burden" suggests that the conditions of imprisonment also disrupt these hierarchies to transformative ends: at the end of the novel when Ah Fatt kills Crowle on both his and Neel's behalf, their freedom arises not only from their eventual escape from the *Ibis* but from the sense of futurity, of promise for a life outside the chokey, made possible through their love for and commitments to each other.

"A Motley Crowd"

In the previous sections, I suggest that an analysis of the colonial division and regulation of labour might enable us to understand *why* some friendships help establish collective political struggle while others do not. In Forster's short story, intimacy between Lionel and Cocoanut threatens the grip of Lionel's bourgeois subjectivity, calling into question the "truth" of his racial difference; in *The Cat's Table*, the disciplining forces of Michael's bourgeois life are temporarily suspended, only to re-emerge upon his arrival in England. The *Ibis,* however, restructures a set of colonial class relations and challenges the well-worn distinctions between self and Other based on race, caste, and class. As I have argued in the Introduction and through Wolfe's conception of an "international division of labour," colonial class relations give meaning to these distinctions as modes of social organization that discipline both the individual body and collective body of entire

populations. The challenge to such class relations onboard the *Ibis* thus strips these distinctions of their power, of their seemingly natural and immutable form.

Indeed, Neel and Ah Fatt's shared burden of imprisonment leads to the revelation that the differences between the self and the Other, inasmuch as these differences manifest through and on the body, are precarious. Their intimacy unsettles the subedar because it poses a threat not just to his power but to the strict distinctions between self and Other upon which his power is based. If colonialism itself is made up of "fractious and chaotic encounters that [...] sponsored politically unsettling forms of intimacy" (Ballantyne and Burton 4), then the relationships that emerge on the *Ibis* suggest that the colonial encounter, in placing once disconnected subjects in close proximity, makes apparent the unstable nature of the differences ascribed to them. For instance, Ah Fatt remains largely racially ambiguous throughout the text, relating to Neel only late into their voyage the story of his birth. The illegitimate child of a Chinese woman and a Parsi man, Ah Fatt is the product of transient subjects who have been brought together through the processes of trade and colonial expansion. With his birth comes the possibility of disorder: as Neel notes upon learning Ah Fatt's name, its corollary in Hindi ("aafaat") means "calamity," which is made literal through the circumstances of Ah Fatt's birth. His illegitimacy and his mixed racialization threaten the sanctity of his father's legitimate marriage and upset the fragile racial division between the Chinese in Canton and the Indian, Arab, and white settlers. Indeed, Ah Fatt's father's refusal to take his son to his native Bombay stems from the fact that the boy's existence,

"fleshly evidence" of unsanctioned intimacies, threatens to incite a "great flame of scandal" (387). While such a "flame of scandal" erupts only years later upon his father's death, Ah Fatt signifies as a mixed-race subject the porousness of boundaries and the ways intimacies exceed their attempted regulation.

For Neel too, the experience of imprisonment results in a series of boundary-crossings that challenge previous ways of identifying himself in relation to others. For instance, the process of becoming powerless introduces Neel to an alternative network of human relations previously unknown to him as a rajah: as he is strip-searched by sepoys, he experiences a feeling he "could never have imagined between two human beings—neither intimate nor angry, neither tender nor prurient—[…] the disinterested touch of mastery, of purchase or conquest" (266). Insofar as the "disinterested touch of mastery" constitutes a new territory of feeling for Neel, it enables another affective experience far removed from the detachment of ownership: his love for Ah Fatt. Similarly, the experience of relative powerlessness makes apparent to Neel the precarious nature of power itself. He learns, for instance, that speaking English well—once a barrier to his attempts to ingratiate himself with British traders unsettled by his command over the language—functions as his only source of resistance as a prisoner. While his captors tattoo Neel with his crime ("forgerer, alipore 1838") in order to identify him as a criminal and to impute criminality onto him as a necessary part of his identity, Neel's use of English disrupts his legibility as Other and as criminal. As he responds in English to the

sergeant who orders his strip-search, Neel comes to realize that "even in his present state, stripped to his skin, powerless to defend himself […], he still possessed the ability to affront a man whose authority over him was absolute" (266). Insofar as a common language calls into question the veracity of Neel's difference, the experience of imprisonment causes his own sense of separateness from others to disintegrate (and perhaps enables him to later handle Ah Fatt's excrement). As such, while Ah Fatt's addiction and his need to be cared for are the catalysts for the utopian potential that grows between him and Neel, such potential is possible only insofar as any semblance of order based upon fixed distinctions between self and Other is also undone.

While I have largely focused on the friendship between Neel and Ah Fatt, the lascars and the coolies onboard the *Ibis* experience a similar rupture of racial and caste distinctions; such a rupture is the result of the "chaotic encounters" brought on by the colonial project *and* the new economy that emerges through the Indian and Atlantic oceans. Writing on the globalization of Indian labour in the eighteenth century, G. Balachandran argues that the influx of lascars into Bombay and Calcutta created a trade-based cosmopolitanism in these cities where racial identity was porous. The term "lascar" itself came to denote "seafarers from the Indian subcontinent as well as many Chinese, Malay, Arab, Sinhalese, and East African seafarers" (33). While the racial fluidity of lascars began to change in the early twentieth century—in order to differentiate the labour of white seafarers from the relatively cheap labour of their subaltern counterparts—Balachandran suggests that lascars of the seventeenth and eighteenth century functioned

as a kind of "race" of labourers unto themselves. Reading Balachadran's assertion in the context of maritime radicalism, we might say that lascars function less as a coherent "race" and more as a *class* in which a collective relation to labour disrupts the ordinary ways of organizing and disciplining subjects through race.

Indeed, the lascars onboard the *Ibis* reflect the racial mixture of which Balachandran and Linebaugh and Rediker write: they come "from places that [are] far apart and [have] nothing in common, except the Indian ocean; among them [are] Chinese and East Africans, Arabs and Malays, Bengalis and Goans, Tamils and Arakense" (Ghosh 13). Despite their difference in origins, Zachary discovers that the lascars "ha[ve] to be taken together or not at all" as, once onboard, they relinquish their sense of separateness from each other and commit to a form of brotherhood that ensures their survival away from land. Such a commitment to brotherhood across racial or national difference is not unique to the lascars. The coolies too, all misfits exiled from or oppressed by their respective lives on land, similarly resist the cruelty of their masters together. When the coolies band together to save Deeti (the dishonoured wife who refuses to burn on her husband's pyre) from rape by the subedar and, in turn, to rescue her lover from execution, they do so insofar as they see the subedar and the first mate as their common enemy, responsible for their collective, rather than individual, oppression. Indeed, it is the subedar's violent treatment of one coolie, Munia, upon the discovery of her relationship with a lascar that catalyzes the mutiny at the end of the novel and demonstrates the extent to which "the ship's womb had made [the coolies] into a single family" (397).

Writing on the role of caste in *Sea of Poppies*, O. K. Singh draws on the work of Paul Gilroy and Vijay Mishra to argue that, while "caste purities were largely lost" onboard ships carrying coolies to British colonies and "replaced by a new form of socialization that went by the name of jahaji-bhai (ship-brotherhood)" (Mishra qtd. in Singh 54), the *Ibis* cannot rightly be read as a space free of caste even as it functions as a space where the customs of the land are not rigidly enforced. Deeti, for instance, while committed to creating a caste-less family among the coolies, carries with her guilt for dishonouring her biological family and regret for relinquishing her caste through her relationship to the Untouchable man, Kalua (Singh 54). Indeed, Deeti commits herself to carrying on certain traditions as the *bhauji* or matriarch of the coolies, making the arrangements for a marriage and ensuring that her new kin continue to do what was "right and honourable" away from land (Ghosh 396). Nevertheless, while the ship does not entirely denude caste of its effects, the ship does become a space wherein the coolies escape the rigid constraints of their respective identities and histories and form a family less inhibited by ordinary customs, traditions, and prejudices. The water that surrounds the ship becomes a metaphor for what becomes possible away from land: in a moment that distinctly recalls Michael onboard the *Oronsay*, Deeti—staring out into the abyss of the ocean—wonders how what she sees can, in fact, be water, "for water surely needed a boundary, a rim, a shore, to give it shape and to hold it in place" (363). The boundlessness of the water mirrors the erosion of old ways of differentiating between and disciplining

subjects: while Deeti and Kalua find refuge as lovers among the coolies on the ship, so too does Munia, exiled from her community on account of her sexual indiscretions. And while the other coolies remark upon Putli's light skin and the notable differences in her education, they nevertheless extend their unequivocal friendship to her. In this sense, Putli's claim when she meets Deeti—that once they are out to sea "there will be no differences between them"—proves true: despite her differences in upbringing and her race, Putli acts as a "child [...] of the ship" in her effort to help Neel and Ah Fatt escape and by attempting to save Kalua from execution (328).

The "new forms of socialization" onboard the *Ibis* also give rise to a set of connections between women that undermine patriarchal ways of segregating and disciplining women's bodies. In her work on Caribbean women's writing on indentureship, Mariam Phirbai explores the concept of *jahaji-bhain* ("ship sisterhood")—a "feminist reworking of the concept of jahaji-bhai […], which emphasizes the distinctly gendered experience of indentureship" and which reveals the significance of women's collective resistance to the violence of indentureship (38). On the *Ibis,* for instance, women are bound together, not only by their experiences of *physical* violence on land, but through a set of desires that exceed and contest patriarchal family structures. While Deeti is awed and affronted by Munia's overt displays of sexuality and her lack of contrition for bearing an illegitimate child, the text draws out the similarities between the two women who find themselves on the *Ibis* in order to live out their unsanctioned desires. Indeed, Munia's claim that she will continue to follow her sexual desires, despite the

consequences to her honour, recalls Deeti's own relinquishment of caste through her relationship with Kalua and the abandonment of her daughter in Calcutta from where she and Kalua flee. While it remains true that Deeti is haunted by guilt for succumbing to her desires while Munia is not, the commonalities and convergences of their stories come to symbolize the possibilities of *jahaji-bhain.* Much like the way Neel and Ah Fatt's struggles become one in the confined space of the chokey, the "sisterhood" of the ship compels Deeti to confront the subedar's violence: thwarting his attempt to rape Munia, Deeti is discovered as the woman who escaped the pyre in his village.

The forging of a "single family" onboard the *Ibis* thus brings us back to Linebaugh and Rediker's conception of a "motley crowd": a multiracial crew, characterized by poverty and "carnivalesque expectations of disorder and subversion" that challenge power relations based on class discipline (28). Indeed, the coolies and lascars form such a crew: brought together as a group of workers through the emergence of Atlantic and Indian Ocean-based trading economies, the coolies and lascars form "new and unexpected connections" that subvert the hierarchizing of subjects both on and off the ship (6). These "new and unexpected connections" take the form of friendship and exceed differences in race and caste to reveal a shared experience as labourers. As Neel and Ah Fatt's friendship demonstrates, the potential of friendship to incite collective political struggle against these differences emerges in the context of shifting class relations: as Neel loses his land, his family, and his caste, so too does he gain a sense of himself as a part of this motley crowd. In this sense, friendship onboard the *Ibis* becomes a mode of

expression, revealing the ways in which the prisoners, coolies, and lascars are all bound together materially. As the fixity of their racial and caste differences disintegrates, what remains are a set of similarities based on their relation to capital under the structuring forces of empire. The possibilities that arise from the undermining of fixed difference is twofold: as Kalua, for instance, discovers upon joining the *Ibis*'s crew, his "willing[ness] to work" supersedes his Untouchability and grants him some respite from the overarching nature and effects of the caste system (205). At the same time, the relatively minimal influence of caste structures allows a shared sense of struggle to develop between the coolies based on their common subjugation as labourers, as the coolies' successful attempt to save Kalua—about to be executed for killing Bhyro Singh—at the end of the novel demonstrates. Onboard the *Ibis*, the "shared burden" of captivity and indentured labour becomes a shared struggle that exceeds the imposition of racial and caste difference itself.

Conclusion

Juxtaposed with the tragic or temporary intimacies across difference in "The Other Boat" and *The Cat's Table*, the events on the *Ibis* suggest that friendship can, in fact, foster collective political struggle against the divisions between self and Other that are central to the capitalist and expansionist projects of empire. Yet, the friendships between Neel and Ah Fatt and between the coolies and lascars show us that in order for friendship to work in the service of this collective struggle, the social division of labour, which

organizes these distinctions, must also be contested. While the intimacies found across racial and class lines in the Ondaatje and Forster narratives reveal the precariousness of these forms of "difference," they do not challenge the economic structures that give meaning to these differences in service of the imperial project. At the end of the *Ibis* trilogy, these economic structures—which threaten to "hasten the end of the Earth"—are fully in place: as Baboo Nob Kissin, the Ibis's steward or *gomusta*, predicts, British victory in the first Opium War and the primacy of its empire will ensure global destruction for the sake of capitalist expansion (Ghosh, *Flood of Fire* 645). Set in place too, however, are the possibilities of resistance. The people in this motley crowd—brought together by the "Gods of money and profit"—refuse the conditions of their individual difference for the sake of their collective freedom (454).

Chapter Two: Property, Dispossession, and Friendship Within the Home in Vikram Seth's *A Suitable Boy* and Bapsi Sidhwa's *Cracking India*

> *My husband had a great wish that I'd step outside the inner chambers. One day I said to him, "I don't need the outside world.' He said, 'The outside world may be in need of you.'*
>
> ―Rabindranath Tagore, *Home and the World* (1916)

> *With her inner eye she saw how her own house and its particular history linked and contained her as well as her whole family with all their separate histories and experiences—not binding them within some dead and airless cell but giving them the soil in which to send down their roots, and food to make them grow and spread, reach out to new experiences and new lives, but always drawing from the same soil, the same secret darkness. That soil contained all time, past and future, in it. It was dark with time, rich with time. It was where her deepest self lived, and the deepest selves of her sister and brothers and all those who shared that time with her.*
>
> — Anita Desai, *Clear Light of Day* (1980)

> *The right of property is, therefore, the right to enjoy one's fortune and to dispose of it as one will; without regard for other men and independently of society. It is the right of self-interest. This individual liberty, and its application, form the basis of civil society. It leads every man to see in other men, not the realization, but rather the limitation of his own liberty. It declares above all the right "to enjoy and to dispose as one will, one's goods and revenues, the fruits of one's work and industry."*
>
> — Karl Marx, "The Jewish Question" (1843)

Home—its meaning and the possibility of return—is persistent in postcolonial scholarship on South Asia. This project is no exception, and in this chapter "home" is the central concept with which I think through questions of friendship, nationalism, and anticolonial politics. Moving from ships—crucial to the making of empire and the establishment of colonial rule—to the conceptions of "home" integral to the creation of the *post*colonial nation, I take up Vikram Seth's *A Suitable Boy* and Bapsi Sidhwa's *Cracking India* as my primary texts in this chapter. I ask: how does the concept of "home" emerge as integral and/or significant to an anti-nationalist politics that resists reductive conceptions of "difference" within anticolonial struggles for sovereignty?

In this chapter, "home" refers to the domestic sphere that was central to the struggle for "Home Rule"[27] in India. To return to Chatterjee's analysis of early nationalism in India, nineteenth century nationalists asserted their autonomy by creating two distinct spheres—the "outer" and the "inner," the material and the spiritual: whereas the "outer" world belonged to the British, the "inner" world was concerned with Hindu domesticity, spirituality, education, and culture where claims for India's sovereignty could first be staked (217). Many postcolonial feminists have argued that this "inner" world served to consolidate the authority of (mostly) upper caste and class Hindu men—positioning them as the agents of anticolonial struggle in India and the inheritors of the postcolonial nation's "outer" sphere—by subordinating women through their role as caretakers, rather than architects, of the nation. Mary Hancock argues, for instance, that nineteenth century nationalists brought (middle class) Hindu women into the fold of nationalist politics by securing their place in the inner realm; women—refigured as goddesses and mothers of the nation—promised to restore India to its precolonial purity through their role in the domestic sphere (878).

In taking up the home as a site of analysis, my aim is to re-conceive of women's role in the anticolonial project beyond these nationalist and patriarchal narratives of domesticity. I do this by exploring how the home facilitated a set of *anti*-nationalist possibilities during Partition and in newly independent India. How do Seth and Sidhwa's

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[27] I use this term in its broad sense, referring to nineteenth and twentieth century national liberation movements (such as Ireland's) that sought to overthrow imperial powers and achieve sovereignty or self-government. In the context of Indian Independence, however, "Home Rule" often refers to M.K. Gandhi's specific conception of it, which I discuss further in this introductory section.

depictions of the home space refigure the home as a potential space of disruption, one that at times resists the robust forms of religious and national identity emerging during Partition and under Home Rule in the 1950s? In particular, how do the friendships (especially, though not exclusively, between women) in these novels illuminate the political influence and importance of our everyday connections, even if these connections appear to have little impact on the outer or formal political realm? In order to explore these questions, this chapter returns to nationalism (and particularly, to religious nationalism) as its primary focus and considers how friendship—as a quotidian form of sociality—disrupts a nationalist politics rooted in the religious difference of the Other.

In its effort to think through the connections between friendship and the domestic space, this chapter is particularly concerned with the relationship between religious nationalism, Partition, and property relations. I focus on Partition as both a historically significant event, fundamental to the formation of postcolonial South Asia, and a consequence of the religious nationalism that intensifies among Hindu, Sikh, and Muslim communities during the Independence movement. Indeed, the violence of Partition marks a distinct turn away from the hopeful possibility articulated by Aziz at the end of *A Passage to India* and shared by many leaders of the Independence struggle: that Hindu, Muslims, and Sikhs "shall be one!" after the end of British rule. For instance, M. K. Gandhi conceives of Indian Home Rule as the rejection, not of the English, but of the modern civilization—the "modern methods of violence" and division—that the English represent (*Hind Swaraj* v). He argues that resistance to modernity can be found in both

the rejection of industrialization and the pursuit of wealth, and in the return to a pre-colonial Indian civilization concerned with the spiritual welfare of the individual and the community.[28] Religious unity was fundamental to the resurgence of this old civilization: "The Hindus, the Mahomedans, the Parsees and the Christians," he writes, "who have made India their country are fellow countrymen, and […] will have to live in unity" in order realize the non-violent ideals of Home Rule (28). The religious nationalism that fuels Partition thus signifies not the turn away from the violence of British modernity, but the extension of this violence well into the post-Independence era.

While Partition drives the plot of *Cracking India* in explicit ways, the trauma of Partition is understated in *A Suitable Boy,* framing the narrative in indirect yet fundamental ways. In both texts, the role of private property emerges as a mediating force, managing the relations between individuals, religious communities, and the nation-state and determining the grip of a nationalism based on religious difference. While the friendships in *A Suitable Boy* intervene in the most violent forms of religious nationalism, these are friendships primarily between the Hindus and Muslims who are bound together through their mutual owning of property. In depicting a secularized version of the state, *A Suitable Boy* reimagines an Indian homeland where the unequal distribution of property is normative and fundamental, shaping the ways in which religious conflict unfolds. On the

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[28] As Gandhi writes of the British, "[M]oney is their God" and India's true independence from the British will arise only if it refuses industrialization as a basis for a postcolonial society (*Hind Swaraj* 19). In his concern for the spiritual welfare of Indians and in his opposition to British capitalism, Gandhi was united with anticolonial thinkers such as Tagore, who wished to reinvigorate India's spiritual traditions. I return to a much lengthier discussion of the relationship between these traditions and Independence in Chapter 3.

other hand, the friendships in *Cracking India* are largely between women who are *dispossessed*—who lose their homes, families, and/or bodily integrity, either through the religious and gendered violence of Partition or through the everyday sexual violence of patriarchal society. I argue here that, unlike *A Suitable* Boy, the friendships in *Cracking India* undermine the fixity of religious and national difference insofar as these friendships run against the grain of unequal property relations. Himani Bannerji's explanation of "bourgeois nationalism"—as a form of nationalism which "stand[s] for private property at all levels"—emphasizes the central role property relations play in structuring nationalist violence (42). Nation-building projects invested in securing the class interests of the bourgeoisie "create national ideologies which […] deflect from actual social and cultural relations of power" and, instead, codify a set of gendered, class, racial, and religious differences through which to divide labour and organize property (42). Whereas the friendships in *A Suitable Boy* keep intact a set of property relations rooted in the landowning and middle classes,[29] the friendships among the dispossessed in *Cracking India* generate a political movement from below.

Sexual violence, too, recurs in both *A Suitable Boy* and in *Cracking India* as a fundamental and structuring phenomenon, revealing the patriarchal conditions that bind

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[29] My aim here is not to collapse "middle-class" with the landowning classes, which (as I discuss in the forthcoming section on the Zamindari system) pre-date the development of capitalism in India. However, a detailed Marxist historiography of the emergence of the Indian middle-class is outside the scope of this project. As such, I rely on the work of many historians who trace the rise of an Indian middle-class to the mid-nineteenth century, a consequence of both pre-colonial forms of land ownership and the imposition of British legal and economic systems (please see Tanika Sarkar's *Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation: Community, Religion, and Cultural Nationalism* and Tirthankar Roy's *India in the World Economy: From Antiquity to the Present*, as examples).

together the private and the public spheres. While sexual violence in *A Suitable Boy* occurs largely within the home, *Cracking India* portrays sexual violence as ubiquitous, occurring in the home and on the streets before erupting on a mass scale as a part of the nationalistic violence of Partition. Read together, these texts' depiction of sexual violence suggests that the *gendered* nature of the private sphere—while fundamentally oppressing women—also facilitates a set of connections between women that exceed the ideological limitations of nationalism. In *Cracking India,* for example, the creation of a refuge for "fallen" women shows us how women's resistance to patriarchal violence cuts across religious and class boundaries when such resistance divests from normative property relations. Unlike in *A Suitable Boy*—where the ownership of private property is largely uncontested—the various forms of dispossession in C*racking India* help create an anti-nationalist politics both within and outside of the home.

Situating the Home in the Anticolonial Context

In her exploration of three Indian women's memoirs, Antoinette Burton argues that "home can and should be seen not simply as a dwelling place but as a foundation of history" (4). Mining the archives of home that women have left behind—memoirs and journals, for instance—functions as both a method of recuperating women in historical narratives of nationhood that skew toward men, as well as a way of complicating the dichotomous relationship between history and the home space. In other words, thinking through the home space enables us to recover forgotten women as "material witnesses to

history" (7) who invoked their role in and relegation to the home as a method of "claim[ing] a place in history at the intersection of private and public" (3).[30]

The possibility that women might "claim a place in history" through the home was an integral part of both colonial and anticolonial projects. Rosemary Marangoly George argues, for example, that English women found political significance within the public sphere by settling in and running a household in India. Insofar as the creation of a seamless, well-run domestic space was an explicit political project in India—a way of demonstrating the supremacy of British values—British women were able to gain influence within the public sphere, demonstrating their primacy over Indian women through the domestic space. Such influence in the public sphere, George suggests, was unique to the colonial context where the home was much more explicitly politicized than it was in the metropole. Where English women lacked an "authoritative self" at home, they gained one through the colonial home space (100). In this sense, the supposed distinctions between the public and private spheres were contested as part of colonial rule itself, prior to the nationalist movements in which Indian women, such as those of whom Burton writes, harnessed their roles in the home in service of the anticolonial project.

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[30] Chatterjee argues that the inner and outer spheres of Indian nationalism cannot be equated to the "private" and "public" spheres of modern European liberal ideology; whereas the public/private divide served to preserve the "inviolability of the private self," the inner sphere refigured Indians as explicitly political subjects (221). However, many feminist critics of Chatterjee (such as Sarkar and Swapna Banerjee) argue that Chatterjee's analysis reproduces "a schematic distinction between the private and the public" that relegates women's role in anticolonialist movements to the home and erases the history of their mass political organizing (Bannerjee 461). In keeping with feminist work devoted to undermining this "schematic distinction" and rethinking women's role in politics, I use the language of "private" and "public" instead of "inner" and "outer" for the rest of the chapter.

Of particular interest to me is Burton's work on Janaki Majumdar's unpublished memoir, *Family History,* which traces the life of Majumdar's mother, Hemangini Bonnerjee. Burton argues that Bonnerjee—married to the first president of the Indian National Congress, W.C. Bonnerjee—refigures the domestic space as essential for the development of anticolonial politics in India. Majumdar links, for instance, her mother's ability to adapt to life in London—and to weather the loss of caste as a result of her migration—to W.C. Bonnerjee's pursuit of nationalist work. By securing her children's elite educations in the metropole and creating her own set of cosmopolitan connections therein, Bonnerjee facilitated her husband's political work through the maintenance of the home and family. The Bonnerjee household in Calcutta, for example, became a political hub—attracting the cultural elite that comprised much of the nationalist reformist movement—in part due to Majumdar's hospitable home space, which she similarly maintained once in London. As Burton writes in *Family History*, "W. C. Bonnerjee's public profile, though certainly never neglected, is arguably eclipsed by the drama of the orthodox Hindu (and, later, Christian) woman struggling to maintain her identity, to guarantee her family's coherence, and above all to establish a viable, stable home for herself and her children, despite the upheavals of temporary exile" (924). Burton thus recuperates the Indian woman as an "angel in the house" who, in taking up the domestic space as her own, refigures the home as a crucial site of nationalist politics. In *Family History,* such a reconfiguration of the home is enabled by the cosmopolitan nature of the Bonnerjees' life. The family's mobility —its movement between England and India—

reflects its "bourgeois, anglophile status" (923). Burton accounts for the specificity of the Bonnerjees' elite circumstances but nonetheless argues that these circumstances recover the domestic as a central part of the nationalist project.

While Majumder's story demonstrates how middle-class Indian women harnessed their role in the domestic sphere in service of the nationalist project, other analyses focus on women *across* classes and castes whose domestic roles enabled their active participation in the anticolonial movement. As Hancock argues, Gandhian nationalism in particular refigured women's space as "sites of political intervention" by calling on women to shift notions of domestic work in keeping with the goals of Independence (877). The Swadeshi movement called on women to leave home to participate in political protest and transformed the terms of "women's work" (such as spinning cloth) which became labour, not only for the home and family, but for the nation. While Gandhi "envisioned women entering public life as selfless, devoted social workers" in keeping with a gendered division of labour, the Swadeshi movement refigured women, not as passive recipients of this division of labour, but as active participants in the anticolonial project (Kishwar 1871).

I summarize some of this work on the role of domesticity in Indian anticolonial politics in order to make sense of my own attempts to recapture the home from patriarchal narratives. While Burton's writing on Indian women's memoirs is particularly illuminating, it seeks to recover women's active role in the *nationalist* project. While this chapter extends Burton's argument that women's role in the domestic sphere exerts an

important influence on the public sphere, I argue here that we can read the home as a space that *undermines*—rather than aids—nationalist projects which otherwise consolidate middle-class interests and fortify religious distinctions. By focusing on the friendships that emerge within the home, I attempt to trace an anti-nationalist politics that intervenes in violence against the Other and reimagines the role of the domestic in the nation more broadly. To this end, I read *A Suitable Boy* against *Cracking India.* I argue that—while both texts demonstrate the private sphere's influence on public politics—*A Suitable Boy* is ultimately too focused on the friendships among the middle classes to disinvest from the increasingly tense nationalist politics of 1950s India. The contrast between the two texts' investment in and depiction of property relations, sexual violence, and (post) Partition secularism illuminates the conditions under which friendships within the home can work against, rather than for, the nation.

The Challenge of Friendship in *A Suitable Boy*

A Suitable Boy charts the development of a new India in the 1950s through the personal events—births, marriages, and deaths—within the Mehra family. Of central importance to the narrative is the search for a suitable husband for the Mehra family's youngest daughter, Lata, whose various marriage prospects come to represent the multiple political directions that India can take upon its inception. Lata's primary love interest, for example, is her Muslim colleague at university, whose religious identity is the catalyst for the persistent conflict that disrupts the tranquility of the Mehra family: Lata's mother,

Mrs. Rupa Mehra, is not only adamant that Lata marry early but that she marry a Hindu man. Lata's other suitors include a good-natured but ineffectual poet, Amit Chatterji, and a reliable but otherwise nondescript shoe salesman, Haresh Khanna, who is unable to marry his true love, a Sikh woman whose parents forbid her from marrying outside her religious community. The triad of lovers Lata is faced with come to reflect the very struggles that the Indian nation faces as it attempts to form a national identity in the aftermath of a British exit and the violence of Partition. Lata's choices—between a strong sexual and romantic bond with a Muslim, a creative but unstable life with a poet, and a predictable future with a successful businessman—mirror the incipient nation's negotiations to pursue either a politics of religious conflict or tolerance, an artistic ethic in the tradition of Tagore, or development in the vein of Western capitalism.

It will become clear throughout this chapter that I am disappointed with Lata's choice of husband. Perhaps this betrays no more than the fact I have a somewhat anachronistic and, indeed, politically fraught attachment to the triumph of the "love" marriage over the arranged one, but my quibble with Seth's ending is also political: at first glance, Lata not only denies her romantic impulses in marrying Haresh Khanna but reproduces the Hindu home as a stable element within the sovereign Indian nation. While some of this chapter is devoted to offering a more complex and nuanced reading of her marriage and, more generally, of the relationship between friendship, marriage, and religious nationalism in *A Suitable Boy*, the reproduction of the stable Hindu home

through Lata's marriage reads as a harbinger for the increasing religious intolerance that marks 1950s India.

The "home" in *A Suitable Boy* figures prominently both through the novel's focus on marriage and domesticity (while Lata's marriage is central, it is one of several plots that explore women's relationship to the domestic sphere) and on property relations—the role of private property—in the newly independent India. The Baitar House of the Nawab Sahib, for instance, is the site of both political and interpersonal tensions: the impending abolition of the Zamindari system renders Baitar House a contested space, subject to appropriation and redistribution by the parliament (in lieu here of the nation-state) and one that houses a set of contested gendered relations. In Baitar House, the Muslim practice of *purdah*[31] is negotiated, for instance, when Begum Khan rejects *purdah* in order to enter into the world of politics. In becoming the state's only female Muslim politician and acting on behalf of Muslims contesting the Zamindari Abolition Bill, Begum Khan's negotiation of women's role in the home collides with questions about the role of Muslims as a minority in the Indian nation-state. As Priya Kumar argues in her work on secularism in newly independent India, gendered relations in Muslim communities were of *national* interest, the grounds for negotiating whether Muslims were to be "strangers within the nation" or citizens whose rights as minorities could be woven into the fabric of the nation itself (xvii). As this chapter will show, Baitar House is a crucial site in the

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[31] *Purdah* refers here to women's physical seclusion from men within the home; it is a religious practice of certain Muslim and Hindu communities, although it is discussed in *A Suitable Boy* only in relation to Muslim households.

novel, bringing the gendered politics of the home into dialogue with both the religious and secular politics of the state *and* serving as an explicit site for negotiating postcolonial property relations.

Aside from Baitar House, there are multiple forms and formations of home that the novel negotiates in relation to its depiction of the burgeoning Indian nation. In addition to Lata's impending marriage and the tribulations of the Mehra family, the novel traces the tumultuous home-lives of four other families: the Kapoors, including the Revenue Minister, Mahesh Kapoor, his younger delinquent son, Maan, his elder son, Pran, married to Lata's sister, and his long-suffering wife known only as Mrs. Mahesh Kapoor; the Tandons, comprised of the Kapoors' daughter, Veena, her husband, and their mathematically gifted son, Bhaskar; the Chatterjis, the wealthy and eccentric family into which Rupa Mehra's eldest son, Arun, married; and the Nawab Sahib—the owner of Baitar House and Mahesh Kapoor's friend—and his two sons, Firoz and Imtiaaz. Together, the individual and overlapping struggles of the five families come to symbolize the breadth of political struggles—over marriage, property, religious devotion and conflict, the changing nature of gendered relations—that emerge within the newly independent nation. While not all of these struggles are directly related to the formal political sphere, their existence reflects the political realities of the moment. By mapping the relationships between these families and between family life and national politics, the diverse relationships that form within the home offer some resistance to Hindu nationalism.

While the marriage plot focused on Lata is at the centre of the novel, the friendships between the characters are of equal significance, pivotal to how the narrative weaves together the personal and the political, the private and the public sphere in 1950s India. Indeed, the friendships in the novel appear to offer the most obvious alternative to the forms of Hindu nationalism that drive the narrative: Seth's characters—and the relationships they develop under the increasingly communalistic politics of newly independent India—contest the most extreme versions of nationalist violence that threaten the fabric of everyday life in Brahmpur. While I argue that the friendships here do not, in the end, catalyze a sustained form of resistance against nationalism, these friendships demonstrate how a set of interpersonal connections—rooted in the everyday—inform and affect the workings of the formal political sphere. From the outset, the novel invokes friendship as a primary form of interpersonal intimacy, distinct from but no less significant than the romantic or sexual intimacies that are at the foreground of the narrative. When Lata ends her affair with her Muslim lover, Kabir, whom her mother has forbidden her from seeing on religious grounds, Lata feels as though she is not only denying him romantic love but that she is "desert[ing] [their] friendship" which amounts to the more grievous of betrayals (201). The friendship between Maan and Firoz, which I will discuss in detail soon, is central to the novel's attempts to rescue the intimate connections between Hindu and Muslim men from the trauma of Partition. At the same time, friendship surfaces as an important *political* category, in both implicit and explicit ways. When Begum Khan debates the Zamindari Bill in the Supreme Court against

Mahesh Kapoor, for instance, the Revenue Minister in charge of pushing the Act forward, she invokes the "friendship of convenience" between Muslim and Hindu landowners which has historically rendered them allies—albeit complicated ones—in the politics of land ownership (308). Indeed, Jawaharlal Nehru—India's first Prime Minister—enters the narrative explicitly at the height of his own political precarity, having been deserted by fellow Congress members who have fled the party under his leadership. He thus desires the comfort of his old friendship with Lady Mountbatten, his personal and political companion, whom he refers to as his "old friend with whom he celebrated the midnight hour of independence [but who] was now far away" and whose sage advice would have wisely guided him through the political crises of the moment (1072). In this sense, many of the friendships in *A Suitable Boy* bind people across religious and national categories—Hindu and Muslim, Indian and British—at the level of interpersonal connection and in the formal political sphere.

These interpersonal connections across religious and national divisions, however, also catalyze much of the conflict in the novel. When Maan, the Hindu dilettante and son of Mahesh Kapoor, falls in love with Saeeda Bai, the Muslim singer, their affair exacerbates the already tense situation between Hindus and Muslims in Bramphur as it grapples with the impending Zamidari Abolition Act and the building of the Shiva Temple right next to—and overshadowing—Brahmpur's mosque. When Maan, in a fit of jealousy over Saeeda Bai stabs Firoz, the conflict enters public discourse as a religious one, ultimately resulting in the voting out of Mahesh Kapoor in favour of the Muslim Waris

Khan as Minister of Revenue. Moreover, Lata and Kabir's romance—the novel's central conflict—comes to signify much more than the personal prejudices of Mrs. Mehra, but rather the parallel political conflict post-Partition. As Lata decides to "desert her friendship" with Kabir after all, Nehru's hold on his vision of a democratic and religiously tolerant India grows increasingly tenuous. The Congress Party has, as he mourns, "fallen into the hands of conservatives, many of whom saw India as a Hindu state where others would have to adapt or suffer the consequences" (1072). In this sense, the reproduction of the traditionally Hindu home that Lata's eventual marriage to Haresh signifies is more broadly reproduced under Indian Home Rule.

While Lata's marriage coincides with and symbolizes the increasing grip of Hindu nationalism in the public sphere,[32] the domestic sphere continues to house a set of friendships across religious lines that, at times, intervene in Hindu nationalism. In other words, the narratives of friendship intervene and contest the exclusionary logics of nationalism where the marriage plot, focused on Lata and her three suitors, does not. For instance, Mrs. Mehra's horror at the prospect of having a Muslim son-in-law is made starker and more untenable by the fact that Kabir and his family are adjacent to the

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[32] For example, Malini Bhattacharjee argues that the Hindu nationalist organization, Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) gained popularity in the late 1940s and early 1950s because of their disaster relief organizing during the communal riots in Bengal in 1946 and in refugee camps during Partition in 1947. "Under [M.S.] Golwalkar's leadership," she writes, "the Sangh played a major role in organizing relief and protection for the Hindu refugees who were fleeing from East and West Pakistan. During this time, the RSS formed several relief committees across Punjab and Bengal, such as the Hindu Sahayata Samiti, Punjab Relief Committee and the Bastuhara Sahayata Samiti, which distributed food, clothes and blankets in refugee camps to the Hindu refugees and even provided protection to Hindu families from Muslim attacks" (n.p). Bhattacharjee's example draws a close link between the rise of Hindu nationalism in the public sphere and the personal loss of home among refugees.

Mehras' social circle. Unknown to Mrs. Mehra is the fact Haresh meets Kabir's father—a mathematician at the university—at a party and, upon realizing that his friend Kedarnath's son would benefit from speaking with the professor, takes Bhaskar to meet Dr. Durrani at his home. When Bhaskar is lost in the Pul Mela stampede, it is Kabir—having agreed to volunteer at the Hindu festival—who recognizes him as his father's young friend and who returns Bhaskar home to his parents. When this incident is relayed to Mrs. Mehra, she "grow[s] unsteady with shock," and is overcome by the worry that these connections will make Lata's affair public knowledge (831). We might also make the conjecture, however, that part of her discomfort stems from the realization that she and Kabir have a shared community and that Kabir's commitment to this community cuts across religious lines. Indeed, Veena describes Kabir's generosity to Bhaskar as akin to godliness, which both alarms Mrs. Mehra and makes apparent the parochial nature of her religious chauvinism.

Similar to the Tandon and the Durrani households, the networks of friendship in and outside of the Kapoor family home are at times at odds with the religious nationalism that increasingly characterizes the public sphere. Mrs. Mahesh Kapoor, for instance, runs her household in the cosmopolitan style of Hemangini Bonnerjee: "the kind of household [Mrs. Mahesh Kapoor] ran—had always run—at Prem Nivas involved offering hospitality at all hours to all kinds of people—often strangers, political associates of her husband (831). While Mrs. Mahesh Kapoor's devout Hinduism is seemingly at odds with her husband's political commitment to secularism, her hospitality extends beyond her

immediate religious affiliation. We see this particularly in the long-standing friendship between the Kapoors and the Nawab Sahib's family. The friendship between Maan and Firoz is, in particular, worth pausing on for several reasons. While Maan's attack of Firoz comes to symbolize and exacerbate the broader political tensions between Hindu and Muslims in the run-up to the election, we can read their friendship as one that also recovers the possibilities of male friendship from the trauma of Partition. In her exploration of the male body as a site of contestation during Partition, Kavita Daiya argues that male friendships across religious or ethnic difference became increasingly untenable during and in the aftermath of Partition. As the male body was refigured as both a warrior in defence of the nation *and* its own "site, limit, and evidence of ethnic identity and national belonging," the bonds of friendship based on pre-Partition kinship structures disintegrated as new national and religious communities emerged (70). After the knife attack, both Maan and Firoz's bodies become sites of "evidence" in the way Daiya describes: by spreading the false rumour that Firoz has died, Waris Khan reconstructs Firoz's wounded body as a symbol of the anti-Muslim hatred rooted in the Hindu male body and consolidated through the political structures of the nation-state. The pamphlet that spreads the rumour of Firoz's death, for instance, emphasizes Maan's unrestrained violent nature—he is described as "free to strangle more Muslim women and slaughter the flower of Muslim manhood" (1358). Mahesh Kapoor thus represents the possibility that this unrestrained nature, passed down from father to son, will be further entrenched in

the formal political sphere: should he be elected, the pamphlet warns, "no one's life or honour would be safe" (1358).

While Maan's attack on Firoz refigures their bodies as sites of religious conflict, their friendship itself serves to undermine this conflict. Prior to the incident at Saeeda Bai's, for instance, Maan defends Firoz from a violent Hindu mob attempting to see if Firoz is circumcised in order to confirm that he is Muslim. The incident is significant insofar as Maan, just before attacking Firoz as a romantic enemy and using a knife against him, defends Firoz by grabbing a *lathi* (sword) from the crowd and declaring Firoz his "brother" with whom he is celebrating the Hindu festival of Bharat Milaap (1156). Later, during Maan's court case when he is tried for attempted murder, Firoz—prompted by his father—perjures himself, testifying that Firoz himself fell on the knife that wounded him. While the novel does not end with the restitution of Maan and Firoz's friendship in full, Firoz's decision to forgive Maan on the stand signals the possibility of reconciliation between the two friends—and perhaps more importantly, between their fathers.

As with Maan and Firoz, the persistent friendship between Mahesh Kapoor and the Nawab Sahib gestures to the post-Partition possibilities of male friendship across religious divides. While Mahesh Kapoor is the author of the Zamindari Abolition Act that threatens to dispossess the Nawab Sahib of his land, their friendship is characterized as distinct from (though not wholly unaffected by) their political differences. Indeed, when Mahesh Kapoor accidentally interrupts the Nawab and the Raja of Marh as they are strategizing their opposition to the Zamindari bill, the tension is diffused on the basis of

long-standing friendship. The Nawab Sahib insists, for instance, that had Mahesh Kapoor known about the attempted seizure of Baitar House (by the Hindu nationalist Home Minister, L.N. Agarwal,) that Mahesh Kapoor would "have done anything in his power to help" prevent the seizure (358). While their friendship *is* jeopardized when Maan stabs Firoz, the memory of Mrs. Mahesh Kapoor's kindness compels the Nawab Sahib to spare Maan imprisonment. Significantly, it is only after Maan's acquittal that the novel resolves the conflict over the Shiva Linga. Ordered by the Hindu fanatical Raja of Marh in order to antagonize Muslims, the building of the Shiva-Linga is at the forefront of the rising tensions between Hindus and Muslims in Brahmpur. The end of the novel—though it does not resolve conflict—does tell us that the Shiva Linga, during its installation which is overseen by the arrogant Raja and his son, frees itself from the ropes being used to erect it and ends up in the Ganga, "its bloodstains slowly washed away" (1442).

The Secularization of Nationalism in *A Suitable Boy*

While the friendships I discuss above, at times, challenge the everyday forms of religious nationalism that circulate in Brahmpur, they do not fundamentally shift the grip of nationalist politics, which are tightening in both the public and the private spheres as the novel comes to an end. The entrenching of religious nationalism is apparent in the resolutions of many of the overlapping narratives, both personal and political: at the same time as Lata and Maan give up their relationships with their Muslim lovers, Waris Khan wins the election by distributing flyers claiming Firoz's death. Thus, while the novel ends

with Lata's wedding (declared by her best friend, Malati, to be a "mistake"), the political narratives linger in an unsettled way. The novel ends, for instance, before Maan finds out that his friend, Rasheed—the young Muslim Socialist from whom Maan learns Urdu—has committed suicide near the Barsaat Mahal. While I discuss Rasheed in further detail later, the lack of clarity surrounding his death suggests that there is much unsettled and unfinished about the novel's political conflicts.

Much of the writing on *A Suitable Boy* argues that the novel is a realist text that historicizes the post-Independence trajectory of the Indian nation-state. Priyamvada Gopal writes that the novel "determinedly recuperates nineteenth century European realism" in the vein of the epic novel, which uses a complex political backdrop to narrate an intimate family saga (107). Similarly, Neelam Srivastava argues that the novel is a "utopian developmental narrative […], an 'imitation' of a foundationalist history, written from a secular nationalist perspective" (131). For these critics, Seth's use of a seemingly detached and objective narrator to convey events arising from the horrors of nationalism (the student uprisings and the riot at the Pul Mela, for instance) places the critique of these nationalisms outside of the novel's scope. In their critique of *A Suitable Boy*, Himanshu S. Mohapatra and Swarna Renu Mohapatra argue that the novel's commitment to such objectivity is troubling, amounting to a passive reading of Indian nation-building in the 1950s. They suggest that, unlike the realist novels of Austen, Eliot, and Dickens—whose highly detailed and lengthy descriptions of everyday life also function as "vivid inscriptions of [the] very complex history of capital and labour, coercion and democracy,

colony and empire" (Ahmad qtd in Mohapatra 41)—Seth's account is a kind of "reflectionism, involving only an inventory of the surface" (42). While I disagree with the argument that *A Suitable Boy* offers merely a *reflection* of political life in post-Independence India, rather than a complex exploration of the historical and economic conditions which undergird this political life, I do agree that the novel's narration—with its intricate historical detail—positions it as an objective and accurate historical account aligned with the postcolonial nation-building project.

Srivastava's exploration of secular nationalism is helpful for understanding the political effect of Seth's use of realism. In her readings of secularism in postcolonial Indian literature, Srivastava argues that *A Suitable Boy* resolves its religious conflict through a framework of secular rationalism—or a Nehruvian political philosophy that aims to create a multicultural, secular India through a "middle-class Hindu framework" in which religious difference is tolerated but kept out of the formal political sphere (49). By "relegat[ing] religious practice to the private sphere," secular rationalism bolsters middle-class Hindu values of religious tolerance while refiguring religious practice as a private affair rooted in the sanctity of the home (62). As Priya Kumar writes, "secularist discourse in India has allowed its agenda to be overdetermined by the Hindu Right" precisely because such discourse requires the private sphere to be protected as a religious space, not only for Muslims and other religious minorities but for majoritarian groups who wish to re-assert their rights as political subjects (38).

Srivastava suggests that Seth follows a Nehruvian politics in that the novel celebrates such secular rationalism, both through a seemingly objective but implicitly Hindu narrator and through the irreligious and liberal figure of Mahesh Kapoor. Indeed, Mahesh Kapoor is obsessively committed to his secularism: he dismisses his wife's Hindu devotion as "mumbo jumbo" and carefully manages his public association with Hinduism for the sake of his career (15). While his refusal to mix religion with politics contrasts with the Hindu nationalist minister, L.N. Agarwal, who desires Hindu mastery over Muslims in the public sphere, the novel also demonstrates how—as Kumar suggests—the relegation of religion to the private sphere converges with and contributes to the development of a Hindu nationalist politics. For instance, Lata's marriage to Haresh and Maan's decision to end his relationship with Saeeda Bai reorients both Lata and Maan towards their Hindu communities and, as Srivastava argues, functions as an implicit condemnation of the turbulence caused by their inter-religious relationships (69). While the private sphere enables friendships across religious lines, the novel also brings its characters back into the fold of the Hindu home, thus strengthening the role of the private sphere in the mediation of political conflict based on religious difference. Thus, for Srivastava, secular rationalism "coincides with Nehruvian secular nationalism"—or the project to build an Indian national identity outside of the logics of religion (48). By relying on a form of secularism based, however, on both a tacit set of middle-class Hindu values and on the fortification of religious difference within the home, such nationalism

functions through the creation of not just a non-Indian Other in general but a non-Hindu (i.e., Muslim) Other specifically.

Moreover, their return to the fold of their Hindu communities—through marriage for Lata and through his newfound devotion to work for Maan—demonstrates how the private sphere maintains the sanctity of the Hindu community by keeping intact its gendered relations. For instance, Lata marries Haresh precisely because she does not feel passion—and, therefore, the emotional pain—she experiences with Kabir. Explaining to Malati why she has chosen to marry Haresh, Lata declares that she's not "herself" with Kabir with whom she turns into a "jealous, obsessed woman who can't get a man out of her head" (1417). In choosing not to suffer through the effects of such passion for the sake of romantic love, Lata also comes back to a version of herself that closely aligns with the exceptions of Hindu womanhood organized around obedience and loyalty to the family unit: while Mrs. Mehra feels Lata's pursuit of Kabir to be a "shameless" betrayal of the familial bond, Lata heals this rupture and regains her mother's trust in deciding to marry Haresh (180).

Maan similarly considers his violence toward Firoz a consequence of his passionate love for Saeeda Bai, one that brings calamity to his family: while his father loses the election partly as a consequence of Maan's actions, his mother's grief hastens her death by a stroke while Maan awaits trial. In choosing to end his "illicit" relationship with Saeeda Bai and to shake off his purposelessness in order to reorient his life to his business in Banares, Maan begins to fulfill his father's expectations of him as a way,

partly, to make amends for the family harm he has caused. Thus, the characters' retreat into their Hindu community refigures the private sphere as "safe"—a container for and barrier to unruly emotions. As Srivastava notes, the Muslim characters—important as they are to the very foundation of the plot—do not experience the same kind of agency or redemption as their Hindu counterparts. The final scene with Kabir shows him dejectedly wandering the Barsaat Mahal, the scene of Lata's and his first date. Saaeda Bai, so much previously in a position of power to accept or reject Maan, is left devastated with neither her singing voice nor Maan (68).

In this sense, I agree with Srivastava's analysis: the novel settles its religious conflicts through a set of middle-class Hindu values situated within the home. Yet, I argue that the framework of secularism might be too limited to make sense of the role of the private sphere in the novel as a whole. Importantly, there are a few ways in which Seth also offers a quiet indictment of his own resolution; though the novel's premise is the reproduction of the Hindu family, the so-called sanctity of the family is also the shared bitter joke between the novel and its readers. Most of the scholarship on *A Suitable Boy*, for instance, sidelines the character of Malati, Lata's best friend and her clear foil. While Lata is presented as eminently marriageable—and desiring of marriage—Malati's relationship to the institution of marriage is much more fraught. A casual Socialist raised by a family of all women, Malati deliberately pursues short-lived and illicit relationships with men (most often with married ones) and largely refuses to entertain the possibility of marriage herself. When Malati's mother chastises her for her stubbornness and

encourages her to marry one of "the five boys whose father [she] met in Nainital," only we as readers are aware that Malati has, in fact, slept with the father of these five boys and thus deliberately and covertly foreclosed the possibility of marrying one of his sons (1466). Malati's spiritedness and non-conformity contrasts with Lata's seriousness, serving as a reminder that—though marriage is the focus here—it remains less sacrosanct than the premise of the novel suggests.

In addition to Malati's flagrant disregard for marriage, the patriarchal family unit —though it might be desired—is portrayed as profoundly flawed. The inclusion of the Sahgal family into the Mehra narrative, for instance, depicts the family in one of its most corrupt and destructive forms. The Sahgals, old friends of Mrs. Mehra's late husband, come to represent the most atrocious iteration of the nuclear family. When Lata and Mrs. Mehra visit the Sahgals in Delhi on their way to meet Haresh in Kanpur, we learn—through his attempts to assault Lata—that Mr. Sahgal has been assaulting his daughter, Kiran, since childhood. The fictive sanctity of the nuclear family comes to shroud the Sahgals, protecting Mr. Sahgal from consequences of his actions and rendering Kiran pathologically anxious. Indeed, this chapter in the trajectory of the novel—emerging at a pivotal moment in Lata's decision to acquiesce to her mother's desire to consider Haresh as a potential husband—bolsters Lata's desire to marry while nonetheless calling into question the institution of marriage itself. Lata recalls in the moment of her thwarted assault (when Mr. Sahgal enters her room, she scares him away by threatening to scream) the kindness of her father and the safety of her own family. She remembers in particular

the joviality of her father who, in contrast to Mr. Sahgal, provided a source of stability for the family. On one level, Mr. Sahgal serves as an example of how the nuclear family sanctifies forms of violence against women. But Mr. Sahghal serves a unique and significant function in the narrative, sandwiched in-between Lata's first meeting with Haresh and memories of her father. Indeed, the incident precedes and prompts Lata's decision to see Haresh again. Whereas she leaves their first meeting feeling ambivalent—though she likes his eyes, she finds that he is "not westernized in the proper sense" and that he is "too certain of the correctness of his views"—her orientation towards him changes after and in part because of her time in Delhi with the Sahgals (579). While there is no direct relation between her experience of attempted assault by Mr. Sahgal and her eventual decision to marry Haresh, the sequence of events bears consideration. It is of note that when Haresh meets Mr. Sahgal that he "takes an instant dislike to him," which, while Lata might not observe at the moment, comes to bear on her perception of him as sincere and genuine, lacking in both Mr. Sahgal's affectations and disingenuous forms of flattery (630). Later, in writing letters to Haresh, she displays a warmth and affection toward him, marking a clear departure from her initial indifference.

Lata's encounter with Mr. Sahgal also helps brings to the fore the relationship between domesticity, women, and private property that otherwise hangs in the background of the novel. If Lata's feelings for Haresh are influenced by both her violent encounter with Mr. Sahgal and Mr. Sahgal's dislike of Haresh, marriage provides Lata with a measure of protection from men *outside* of the family, such as Mr. Sahgal. Such a

form of protection is classed, rooted in middle-class visions of domesticity, which refigure women as the property of landowning men. As Sarkar writes in her analysis of domesticity in nineteenth century India, the increasing political resistance of peasants, tenants, and lower castes challenged the authority of landowning men who re-asserted their control in the home over women. In other words, "class anxieties were expressed as anxieties about the collapse of an entire order of privileges, most powerfully articulated through […] the loss of virtue in women" (*Hindu Wife* 16). Such anxieties impeded liberal reforms in women's education and property rights and, instead, entrenched women's function as objects, as proxies for the land and property that passed between father and son. In a context where landowning men's right to property was more and more frequently contested, women—who "neither inherited their father's land nor had a definite right to their husband's"—became increasingly controlled as vehicles through which property was protected and inherited (18).

While Sarkar argues that the increasing control over women trapped them in cycles of violence within the home (as Kiran experiences at the hands of Mr. Sahgal), we can read in Lata's marriage the way middle-class domesticity—in refiguring women as the property of landowning men—also creates a barrier between women and the violence of men *outside* the family. When Mr. Sahgal comes up to Lata and Haresh at their wedding, for instance, his behaviour toward Lata—while still unsettling in its continued sexualizing of her—is made less threatening by Haresh's presence: Mr. Sahgal, after congratulating them on their marriage and on the fact that Lata is a "good girl," leaves

immediately and does not approach Lata again (1470). As will become clear in my analysis of marriage and violence in *Cracking India*, the "protection" of women from men outside the family rests on middle-class men's authority and their right to protect their property; the poor and working-class women in Sidhwa's novel are subject to the violence of both their husbands *and* of strangers. This is not the case with Lata, however. While we do not know how her marriage with Haresh will unfold, his clear difference from Mr. Sahgal suggests that marriage—and the creation of a new domestic space—will afford Lata some protection from the violence of other men.

Property Relations and the Failures of Friendship

Much of the scholarship on *A Suitable Boy* makes note of the novel's near-exclusive focus on the emerging Indian middle class. Priyamvada Gopal argues that—through the Mehras' search for a suitable boy—we can see *how* this middle-class emerges through a framework of postcolonial modernity: Mrs. Mehra seeks, for instance, an alliance for Lata that will at once allow the family to retain Hindu caste structures while also privileging certain forms of westernization through an English education. The simultaneous deference to tradition and embracing of the west culminates in a kind of "middle-class conformism" insofar as both Lata and Maan "sacrifice youth's dream, passion, and romance in the name of family and stability" (Mohapatra and Mohapatra 44). In this sense, secular rationalism and "middle-class conformism" converge: the private sphere incubates and reproduces a set of middle-class Hindu values that circulate

under the guise of "secularism" and—as becomes clear by the end of the novel—create the conditions for Hindu dominance in the political sphere.

Despite scholars' focus on secularization and the emergence of a Hindu middle-class, few have written about the importance of private property to the middle-class narratives in *A Suitable Boy*. I argue here that by thinking through the role of private property, we can better understand *why* religious differences are entrenched throughout the novel and why friendships across religious difference—while persistent—pale in comparison to the increasing hold of Hindu chauvinism on both the private and public spheres. Indeed, Seth's focus on the middle-class demonstrates not only, as Gopal and Srivastava argue, a troubling commitment to objectivity and the Nehruvian project, but the centrality of property in creating and maintaining religious division.

In her history of communalism and nationalism in India, Asma Barlas argues that the introduction of private property into India by the British was crucial to the development of nineteenth century violence between Muslims and Hindus and to postcolonial power relations based on religion, caste, and class. The Permanent Settlement Act of 1793, she writes, "transformed zamindars, former tax farmers, into landowners," creating a "landowning gentry" as well as a class of peasants who "lost their rights to a customary rent and permanent tenure and were reduced to landlords' mercies" (12). While the introduction of private property created a new class structure based on landownership, it also entrenched a set of pre-existing inequalities at the level of religion and caste. In Bengal, for instance, Muslims were barred from becoming landlords

and obligated to hand over land to wealthy Hindus who, in turn, oversaw a group of poor Muslim and lower caste Hindu tenants. However, the new landowning gentry in North-Western provinces was comprised of Muslim *tuluqdars* (aristocrats) who, along with their Hindu counterparts in other provinces, made up a new landowning elite. As Barlas writes, this elite aligned itself with colonial rulers and sought to codify its right to land as a class made up of separate *groups*; in other words, Hindu and Muslim elites were given "fixed seats in and separate representation on various councils" that oversaw the division of land and the relations between landlord and tenant (14). In this sense, the Permanent Settlement Act simultaneously created a new class structure based on private ownership while also "preserving, if not intensifying, pre-capitalist forms of exploitation and appropriation" based on religious, caste, and class inequalities (Patnaik qtd. in Barlas 7).

Insofar as the emergence of a new kind of property relations created an elite both religiously distinct *and* invested in the same class structure, the inheritance of property was a pivotal concern both prior to and after Independence. As Zoya Hassan writes in her history of Hindu and Muslim "personal laws," religious violence in India can be traced through legal reforms that sought to codify inheritance rights at the level of religious community; in other words, the exigencies of property converged with the "politics of religious self-assertion" (5). In her investigation of civil marriage in India, introduced by the British in 1872, Nandini Chatterjee similarly argues that civil marriage contributed to the "hardening of religious and other ascriptive social boundaries in India under colonial rule" (528). Though the introduction of civil marriage is largely considered an attempt at

the forced secularization of Indians, Chatterjee suggests that it entrenched divisions between pre-existing personal laws that oversaw property and family relations based on religious affiliation. In other words, the introduction of civil marriage meant that Hindus and Muslims appealed to the state for recognition of their personal laws so that civil marriage would not dispossess men of their rights under personal law. Chatterjee suggests, for example, that non-Christian men did not want to give up their "right" to gendered inheritance laws that disproportionately favoured men (551). As such, and insofar as "it was official British colonial policy not to interfere in Indian religions," Hindu and Muslim personal laws were legally codified and thus, their differences, entrenched (537).

In *A Suitable Boy,* the relationship between private property and religious difference is pivotal to both the narratives focused on marriage and on friendship. While Mrs. Mehra's horror at the prospect of Lata marrying Kabir reflects her Hindu chauvinism, it also reflects her attachment to Hindu property laws which she believes will properly protect Lata in the future. In a short but pivotal scene, Lata argues against her mother's chauvinism by listing Mrs. Mehra's close Muslim friends: "Like Uncle Safi? Like the Nawab Sahib of Baitar? Like Firoz and Imtiaz?" (182). Mrs. Mehra responds not by refuting that she has Muslim loved ones but by asserting that Lata will suffer because of (what she understands as) Muslim property laws: "He [Kabir] will marry you—and next year he'll say "[t]alaq talaq talaq and you'll be out on the streets. You obstinate stupid girl!" (182). While Mrs. Mehra's understanding of "triple talaq" and her

assumptions about Kabir leave much unconsidered, her response to Lata demonstrates how differentiation through personal law circulates as crucial to the novel's religious conflicts. Indeed, the changes to Hindu personal law in newly independent India converge with Mrs. Mehra's attachment to a kind of postcolonial modernity (to recall Gopal's reading) in which Hindu traditions are mixed with Western forms of liberalization. The Hindu Code Bill, introduced in 1943 though not passed until 1956, "conferred a semblance of equal rights on women in the sphere of property and marriage," by allowing "intercaste marriage, reinforc[ing] monogamy, and ma[king] divorce possible" (Hassan 6). This is not, of course, to refigure Mrs. Mehra's chauvinism as a political stance but to suggest that her sensibilities and desires reflect those of a broader Hindu elite reckoning with questions of property, inheritance, and gender reform in the 1950s.

Property relations are crucial not only to the novel's marriage plot but workings of friendships across religious difference. For instance, while the friendship between Mahesh Kapoor and the Nawab Sahib largely withstands the political pressures of the Zamindari Abolition Act, the strong foundation of their friendship arises in part because they have shared investments as property owners. As Srivastava argues, the aims of the Act itself are conservative; rather than legislating land redistribution that would fundamentally shift the power dynamic between landowners and tenants, the Act seeks to reform only the worst excesses of the Zamindari system (134). Thus, while Seth narrates the conflicts surrounding the Act as a part of a larger conflict between Hindus and Muslims, the undergirding conflict is between landowners and tenants, against whom

both the Nawab Sahib and Mahesh Kapoor are implicitly aligned. The Nawab—though he feels uneasy associating with the anti-Muslim Raja of Marh—is willing to strategize with him in order to stop the Act from going through. Such an alliance is based on their class interests, which cut through religious conflict. In the palpably awkward moment when Mahesh Kapoor arrives at Baitar House and interrupts their strategizing, the complex overlap between the three men's class investments emerges: though Mahesh Kapoor, disgusted by the Raja, storms out in anger and leaves his political disagreements with the Nawab unsettled, Mahesh Kapoor's very presence at Baitar House serves as his apology for not preventing the attempted seizure of the house a few days earlier. In this sense, Mahesh Kapoor shares the conservatism that Srivastava attributes to Seth; though a gradual and limited challenge to the Zamindari system might dispossess the Nawab of some of his land, Mahesh Kapoor lends his support insofar as the Act leaves intact their shared access and right to property—the Baitar House for the Nawab Sahib and Prem Nivas for Mahesh Kapoor.

While shared class interest provides a basis for Mahesh Kapoor and the Nawab Sahib's persistent friendship in the context of increasing religious conflict, the background figure of Rasheed—a student Socialist more or less unaccounted for in the scholarship on *A Suitable Boy*—illuminates the ways in which property relations *limit* the political potential of the friendships in the novel. Indeed, Rasheed's ostracization from his family (as a result of his political beliefs) and his eventual suicide highlight the fact that many of the friendships that survive the violence of the public sphere emerge in a middle-

class context where property relations are uncontested. Rasheed, however, is actively involved in the contestation of these property relations and, in several ways, serves as a bridge between the novel's middle and working-class characters, between landowners and peasantry. An active member of the Socialist Party at Brahmpur University, for instance, Rasheed is also Maan's Urdu teacher with whom Maan develops a close but unlikely friendship. As Ian Almond writes, Rasheed is Maan's "inverse"—a tragic figure whose obsession, mental instability, and fierce political commitments contrast with Maan's seeming ease in the world (47). We see the contrast between the two characters particularly starkly when Maan accompanies Rasheed to Rhudia, the village where Rasheed's family lives as small-time landlords: while Maan lays about, dreaming of Saeeda Bai, Rasheed works to secure the rights of his family's tenants in Rhudia, now promised under the Zamindari Abolition Act.

Almond traces the differences between Maan and Rasheed through Rasheed's experience of mental distress, arguing that Seth's Muslim characters inhabit a "darker world of gloom, disappointment, suicide and madness" (44). This is certainly true of Rasheed; whereas Maan recovers from his scandal and retreats into his Hindu community, Rasheed experiences no such redemption. While Almond convincingly argues that such a difference reflects Seth's attachment to the tragic Muslim figure, the tragedy of Rasheed's life stems, in part, from his refusal to maintain the class interests of his family. Rasheed's family excommunicates him precisely because he refuses to adhere to the personal laws that enshrine his rights to property. When Rasheed attempts to give away his family's land

in support of their tenants, his father removes his legal claim to the land, stating that Rasheed's "communist schemes will not work" in Rudhia. While Rasheed argues that his father cannot "dispossess [him] like that" because the "law of [their] community is clear," he is, in the end, dispossessed for what his father believes is an abuse of this law (737). In this sense, the stark contrast between Maan and Rasheed's outcomes must be read not only as a reflection of religious difference but of class interest. Whereas Maan redeems himself by coming back to the middle-class family, Rasheed is cast out as a class traitor.

While Rasheed serves as a foil for Maan, so too does he become a foil for Firoz as a Muslim character who, unlike Rasheed, is spared a tragic fate. We can see the distinctions most clearly in the contrast between their respective friendships with Maan: while Maan and Rasheed's friendship is permanently foreclosed due to Rasheed's death, the novel leaves us with the hope that Maan and Firoz will be reunited as friends. Moreover, as I have discussed earlier in this chapter, Firoz and Maan's friendship affords them *both* with a measure of protection from increasingly communalist tensions: while Maan saves Firoz from an angry mob, Firoz de-escalates increasing calls for revenge by refusing to provide testimony that will convict Maan. In both situations, Maan and Firoz assert their authority as middle-class men in order to protect the other from falling victim to the political conflicts that characterize the public sphere. The fact that Rasheed experiences no such protection, however, highlights the classed conditions in which most of the novel's friendships emerge; in other words, while Maan and Firoz intervene in religious violence on each other's behalf, their commitments to each other do not threaten

an existing class structure. In this sense, it is significant that Rasheed is a victim not only of religious conflict but of *class* conflict that expresses itself in religious terms; while Maan prepares to leave Rhudia early to reunite with Saeeda Bai, Rasheed finds his own authority increasingly contested on the grounds that his class commitments are incommensurate with his legal and familial duties as a Muslim son.

By foregrounding property relations in my analysis of *A Suitable Boy*, my aim has been to think through the political limitations of friendship rooted in a middle-class context where unequal property relations remain uncontested. The friendships between Maan and Firoz, Mahesh Kapoor and the Nawab Sahib, and Lata and Kabir (as only a few examples) demonstrate the ways friendship across religious difference can be an important site of anti-nationalist contestation; nonetheless, these friendships do not fundamentally shift the growing forms of religious nationalism that characterizes the public sphere at the end of the novel. While analyses of secular rationalism and "middle-class conformism" help explain how nationalist narratives both obscure and mobilize religious divisions, these analyses do not necessarily explain how religious differentiation might be *fundamental* to an Indian classed society. Thinking through the history of property relations thus clarifies Himani Bannerji's conception of bourgeois nationalism, with which I began this chapter, as that which "stand[s] for private property at all levels," and which reproduces a set of gender, class, caste, and religious inequalities in its organization of property (42). The work of Barlas, Hassan, and Chatterjee demonstrates how the introduction of private property and the subsequent codification of inheritance

law entrenched a set of religious divisions at the level of the private sphere and among the Indian middle-class. While the friendships in *A Suitable Boy* at times contest the mobilization of these divisions for nationalist ends, these friendships largely occur along class lines and maintain the private sphere as that which keeps intact the boundaries between Hindus and Muslims. In the following section, I turn to *Cracking India* which, I argue, depicts a set of friendships that successfully challenge the gender, class, and religious divisions fundamental to unequal property relations. Whereas the friendships in *A Suitable Boy* are limited by their middle-class context, the friendships in *Cracking India* are largely among the dispossessed, between people bound together—both before and during Partition—by the violence of poverty and the patriarchy. These friendships pose a more fundamental challenge to Partition's nationalisms precisely because they are friendships formed and emerging from below.

The Anti-Nationalist Possibilities of Women's Space in Sidhwa's *Cracking India*

Bapsi Sidhwa's novel *Cracking India*—published in 1991 and later the basis for Deepa Mehta's film *Earth*—offers another, compelling way into thinking through the connections between women, domestic space, and nationalism, which inform the geopolitical landscape of Partition and which reverberate in *A Suitable Boy*. Set in Lahore at the moment of Pakistan's formation, *Cracking India* maps the physical and

psychological violence wrought by the Radcliffe Commission.[33] Told from the perspective of Lenny, a young girl from a wealthy Parsee family and centred largely on her relationship with her beautiful and charismatic Ayah, the novel closely aligns the inner lives and experiences of women with the broad political upheaval of Partition. This alignment arises from the close attention Sidhwa pays to the ubiquitous sexual violence faced by both Lenny and Ayah; Sidhwa traces the importance of such harassment to Lenny's sexual and gendered development and links the pervasiveness of everyday or "inconspicuous" forms of sexual violence to the widespread incidences of rape and sexualized murder that women faced during Partition. The home becomes, as I will argue, central to the way the women in the text form a set of friendships that resist patriarchal violence. As such, Sidhwa's novel offers an important addition to feminist projects that seek to understand how domestic space relates to changing notions of homeland and, perhaps, intervenes in the violence that arises as a part of the nation-building project. In particular, the house next door to Lenny's—which becomes a collective refuge for Hindu, Muslim, and Sikh women who have been raped and subsequently disowned by their families—refigures the domestic space as one that resists the mobilization of religious difference in the service of nationalist violence.

At the novel's core is a whole set of relationships that form between women across age, religion, class, and caste. I explore these relationships through the multiple

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[33] The Radcliffe Commission—headed by the British lawyer, Sir Cyril Radcliffe—drew the boundary between India and Pakistan (called the Radcliffe Line) on August 12th, 1947.

meanings of friendship that I outlined in the Introduction. While some of these relationships—such as Lenny and Ayah's, which I will discuss in detail shortly—are based on the interpersonal, intimate feelings of love and connection that develop between two people, other connections between women evoke Leela Gandhi's more diffuse definition of friendship as a set of "minor […] gesture[s]" based on our ethical relationships to others, on our "tentative proximity to the other, [and] signifying "the surplus of sociality over solitude—the surplus of sociality and love" (37). While many of the significant connections between women in *Cracking India* are made between relative strangers brought together by their shared experience of sexual violence, I suggest that it is helpful to place these relationships within a broader study of friendship for several reasons. In her work on feminist friendship and kinship structures, Esha Niyogi De argues that friendship is "a metaphor for gendered solidarities across difference," one which foregrounds the political utility of women's emotions (120). While patriarchal and nationalist structures require women's "filiative loyalties," feminist friendship re-orients these feelings towards other women and enables the "forging of friendly solidarities in breach of familial [and national] boundaries" (121). Niyogi De's emphasis on the *feelings* of friendship speaks to both the relationships between women who know and love each other and those, even as relative strangers, whose emotional lives are entangled through their shared experiences of sexual violence. The importance of these emotional entanglements become clear, for instance, when Mrs. Sethi (Lenny's mother) risks her own safety by venturing out in her car at night to rescue "fallen women" who have been

abandoned by their families. Moreover, the framework of friendship is helpful for understanding how Mrs. Sethi's relationships with "fallen women"—though they are rooted in an unequal class structure—might work to undermine this structure rather than to re-inscribe it. Azza Basarudin and Himika Bhattacharya suggest, for instance, that friendship as a category of analysis helps foreground the emotional life of solidarity —"the intimacies, heartaches, struggles, anxieties, and joys"—while also contesting a set of power relations that might be reproduced through acts of solidarity (45). Whereas solidarity pivots on the difference between self and Other (for example, we often have solidarity with people from whom we are different and who might, at a given time, be more oppressed by a set of political structures, such as gender or race, than we are), friendship offers us more room to think through what is shared *across* difference. In *Cracking India,* the shared experience of patriarchal violence forms the basis on which women contest the creation and mobilization of class and religious differences for nationalist ends. However, to think of these relationships as friendships does not require us to collapse or neglect crucial differences across class and religion in search of what is shared; rather, by foregrounding the emotional entanglements between women across class and religion, I suggest that these relationships contain within them the potential for reciprocity, for the collective healing of women across class.

Of central importance to my analysis of the novel is the relationship between Lenny and Ayah, which traverses the binaries of child/mother, lover/beloved, and employer/worker. The relationship between Lenny and her Ayah is largely situated within

the home both because Ayah runs the household and because she stands in for Lenny's mother as the primary caregiver. In return, Lenny forms an attachment to Ayah that is at once child-like and sexualized: she is jealous of Ayah's lovers whom she sees as a threat to her bid to keep Ayah firmly within their shared domestic space. When the possibility arises that Ayah might leave her to marry the masseur, Lenny—in her anger—imagines herself a possible substitute for the masseur: "Don't you dare marry him!" […] "You'll leave me…Don't leave me!" [she] begs, kicking Masseur" (168). Crucial to this moment is the fact that Lenny misunderstands the political context in which Ayah considers marrying Masseur whom she both loves and who she hopes can protect her from the increasing religious tensions in Lahore. Indeed, when Ayah suggests that she might have to leave Lenny, it is not for marriage but for safety as she contemplates leaving Lahore to return to her family in Amritsar.

Lenny's inability to fully grasp the political context of her relationship with Ayah is significant for a number of reasons. On the one hand, this inability is reflective of the naiveté of the child narrator whose fears of abandonment within the family are exacerbated by the surrounding political circumstances. On the other hand, Lenny's emotional response to the prospect of Ayah's leaving is no different from the reactions of men in Ayah's life, betraying a kind of possessiveness over Ayah that runs through the novel in the form of many different people. Masseur, too, bristles at the possibility that Ayah might leave for Amritsar and asks her why she will not marry him instead. Ice Candy Man's increasing violence towards Ayah, as I will argue in the following pages,

also functions as a bid to secure her as *his*, though he masks his kidnapping of her as a means of cleansing Hindus from the neighbourhood. In this sense, Lenny's reaction to Ayah makes evident both the personal tensions that drive the novel's plot *and* the way these tensions become entangled in the mire of nationalist politics.

Despite the centrality of these sexual tensions to Ayah and Lenny's relationship, I suggest here that we can read their relationship as a form of *friendship,* in that it affords them both a degree of safety and mobility under the patriarchal conditions in which they live. To claim Lenny and Ayah's relationship as a form of friendship is neither to deny the familial nature of their bond—similar to mother and child—nor obscure the unequal class relations between them. As Ambreen Hai reminds us in her reading of Ayah and Lenny's fraught relationship, Ayah is a labourer working for Lenny's wealthy family and is thus subject to the same kinds of violence and marginalization as are other women of her caste and class. Nonetheless, Lenny and Ayah provide each other with mutual protection against the ubiquitous sexual violence that characterizes their everyday lives. Lenny, for instance, accompanies Ayah on her outings with her suitors, which allows her to make sure Ayah is not violated sexually. As Lenny describes, she "keeps an eye on Ice Candy Man's toes" which occasionally "snake out and zero in on its target" under Ayah's sari (29). While Lenny makes sense of her own protective stance over Ayah as a way of keeping Ice Candy Man's "candy bribes coming," she also becomes aware that her protection of Ayah is mutually beneficial, a form of mutual care (30). When Lenny's cousin—known only as Cousin—attempts to molest Lenny, Ayah intervenes, which

Lenny regards as a form of reciprocity for her watchfulness over Ice Candy Man's toes. Such protection allows both Lenny and Ayah a measure of safety within and outside of the home. While Ayah is subject to violence outside the home in the form of Ice Candy Man's toes and the advances of men as she walks down the street, Sidhwa also makes clear the ways in which the domestic sphere is a site of violence against women. Lenny's nascent understanding of her own sexuality form in relation to Cousin, who exposes himself to her, gropes her breasts, tackles her, and suggests he will "show" Lenny what rape is when she is older. Ayah is subject to the attentions of Lenny's cook, Iman Din, and Lenny's mother, Mrs. Sethi—otherwise protected from street-based violence—is beaten by her husband at home. When Ice Candy Man's mob storms Lenny's house in an effort to kidnap Ayah, Lenny, trusting Ice Candy Man's intentions, tells him where Ayah is; yet, Lenny later sees her actions as a catastrophic betrayal of her relationship with Ayah and their shared history of protection. While Lenny sees her compulsive honesty as the cause of her actions, she believes the betrayal itself is unforgivable, the reason for her perpetual "guilt-driven and flagellating grief and pining for Ayah" (196).

Sidhwa thus documents in detail the insidious and overt forms of sexual violence that characterize women's everyday life. As the novel begins, Lenny's "world is compressed," comprised of only three streets on the "affluent fringes of Lahore" (11). Nonetheless, within that compressed space is a fraught patriarchal world to which we are immediately introduced through the figure of Ayah whose beauty and "rolling bouncy walk" renders nearly all her interactions with men volatile and potentially dangerous (13).

Other forms of sexual violence are abundant throughout but nevertheless naturalized, especially in the patriarchal and private world of the home. Cousin's persistent advances toward Lenny are woven into their shared life in Godmother's house, inserted into their otherwise quotidian conversations when he shows her his genitals, attempts to kiss her, or tries to "educate" her on the dangers of electricity by suggesting she put her fingers in an electrical socket. Even conspicuous and more disturbing forms of violence—the kinds by which Lenny and other women are clearly affected—are normalized through the mechanisms of caste, class, and gender. When Papoo—the spirited and much-abused seven-year-old daughter of the servant, Muccho—is married off to an elderly man, the tension among the women guests is palpable in Sidhwa's narration. The sight of the groom—"a dark, middle-aged man […] with an insouciant air of insolence about him"—shocks the women (199). Papoo too is wearing "shocking-pink lipstick, white powder, and smudged kohl" when Lenny finds her asleep in her regalia before the wedding (197). The juxtaposition between Papoo's earlier liveliness—her resilience in the face of her mother's abuse—and the description of her on her wedding day—made up and dressed as an adult but napping like a child—is jarring. Such a juxtaposition makes Lenny acutely aware of their material differences: though Papoo is younger than Lenny, Papoo's marriage is inevitable, her fate circumscribed by her caste and class. As Lenny watches the wedding, she is aware of the "grotesque possibilities awaiting Papoo" and the spectre of violence that hangs over the ceremony (199). After the ceremony, Papoo fades out of the narrative and the incident itself recedes into the background of the increasing

nationalist violence that grips Lahore. In this sense, Papoo's marriage is both naturalized, absorbed into the narrative as an everyday form of violence against women, and folded into the emerging large-scale violence of Partition.

In tracing the experiences of Ayah, Lenny, and Papoo, and by making apparent the ubiquitous nature of sexual violence in everyday life, Sidhwa shows the remarkable continuity between sexual violence prior to and during Partition—in the home and in the struggle for a "homeland." Sidhwa highlights nationalist violence against women for the severity and significance of this violence: Ayah's kidnapping and sexual exploitation at the hands of Ice Candy Man, for instance, cannot be ignored or managed by Ayah herself as it signifies an attack on the (Hindu) nation. Partition undoubtedly amplifies the violence women experience: the brutality of the attack upon Muslim women on a train from Gurdaspur to Lahore, for instance, marks in the novel the beginning of political chaos in Lahore and, specifically, in the lives of Lenny's friends and neighbours. The event is a turning point for Ice Candy Man whose sisters are murdered on the train and who thus becomes a Muslim nationalist in response to his grief, "lobbing grenades through the windows of Hindus and Sikhs" and desiring to "kill someone for each breast […] cut off the Muslim women" (166). However, while such violence against women is novel for its scale and brutality, Sidhwa makes clear how this violence emerges from an already sexually violent context in the everyday; as Ayah, Papoo, and Lenny's experiences suggest, the threat of rape remains throughout the novel, allowing us to trace the seismic sexual violence of Partition back to ordinary life under patriarchy.

Women as Property and the Gendering of Nationalism

In narrating the continuities between women's experience of sexual violence prior to and during Partition, Sidhwa lays bare the function of this violence as a means of gendering women as the *property* of men. Indeed, Lenny's experiences at the hands of Cousin have the explicit effect of gendering Lenny *as his*, which Cousin himself knows and desires. When his sexual advances lead only to Lenny's contempt, Cousin appeals to Lenny's nascent womanhood as evidence of both the rightness of his desire and of his claim to her: "[Lenny] loves approximately half of Lahore…Why can't she love me?" Cousin asks, before agreeing to "wait a couple of years before touching [her] breasts again" (245).

As Cousin's relentless attempts to marry Lenny suggest, domesticity—and, in particular, marriage—is central to the process through which women become the property of men. While Sarkar's work on domesticity among the Hindu elite explains how marriage transforms women into the property of landowning men, *Cracking India* maps out the way marriage refigures women as property at all class levels. Papoo's experience of violence, for instance, begins in her mother's house and ends in her husband's. While it is Papoo's mother—rather than her father—who abuses her, this abuse nonetheless serves the aim of disciplining her into a gendered and classed subject. In a particularly violent scene where Muccho kicks Papoo who "lies deathly still, crumpled up in a dusty heap," Muccho explains herself on the basis of Papoo's failures as a daughter: she is

"disobedient, bone lazy, loose charactered […] a whore" who will shame the family and cause the early "death of [Muccho]" (150). Muccho's violent attempts to discipline Papoo fail; Papoo emerges from her "dusty heap" to spit water in her mother's face and escape her clutches, prompting Lenny to realize that Papoo—who refuses to be "browbeaten into early submission"—is "not like any [other] girl" she knows (151). However, while Papoo resists her mother's violence, she does not escape the violence of child marriage and forced domesticity. In this sense, the sudden absence of her lively spirit from the frame of the narrative comes to mark the *disciplinary* function of marriage; the quiet resignation of the women at Papoo's wedding suggests not only that the "grotesque possibilities that await Papoo" are commonplace but that these possibilities hang over women as a part of the conditions of marriage itself.[34] While my later discussion of Mrs. Sethi and Ayah will explore the particular class dynamics of domestic violence, the figure of Papoo helps clarify how marriage disciplines women as the property of men, preserving and naturalizing violence at the level of the everyday.

Indeed, much of the scholarship on women in Partition argues that the eruption of mass sexual violence under extraordinary political conditions emerged from the objectification of women as property in the everyday. As Nighat Said Khan writes, "the rape done by the men of one community to the women of another [was] a way of 'dishonouring' the Other in real and symbolic subjugation" (137). This subjugation is

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[34] For a detailed exploration of marriage as a disciplinary structure tied to property rights and a sexual division of labour, please see Srimati Basu's *The Trouble with Marriage: Feminists Confront Law and Violence in India* (2007).

both real and symbolic insofar as women's bodies are considered property to which men maintain their claim through the language of "honour." As Deepa Narasimhan-Madhavan argues, "the control of [a woman's] sexuality through her body becomes the most effective means to uphold or disrupt honour. In the case of the [P]artition, it was this aspect of female sexuality that was distorted, while also magnifying pre-existing conceptions of women as property that already permeated the societies" (415). As men's claims to a "homeland" are both intensified and threatened, the ordinary patriarchal conditions that refigure women as property enable, under Partition, women's bodies to become ready sites of contestation. Rana's story of the brutal rape and murder of the Muslim women in his village exemplifies the connections between "honour" and property: separating men from women and forcing men to watch the rape of women becomes a part of the broader process that dispossesses Rana's family—and their fellow villagers—of their land.

The continuities between women's objectification and the eruption of mass sexual violence also clarifies how this objectification is constitutive of religious nationalism. In her study of gender and nationalism in India, Sikata Bannerjee traces the relationship of the Hindu patriarchy to hegemonic conceptions of nation. Bannerjee argues that Hindu nationalists conceive of ideal maleness as "muscular," both in physical strength and in moral fortitude. While theories of Hindu muscularity in the nineteenth century placed greater emphasis on morals and values, ideal Hindu maleness in contemporary India has "become codified in terms of the warrior tradition" and conceives of men as strong

warriors acting in physical defence of the nation (171). As Chandrima Chakraborty argues in her study of Hindu masculinity and ascetic nationalism, "the reconstruction of Hindu manhood through a celebration of Hindu warrior myths offers a potent framework for violent confrontation with other religious communities and with dissident Hindus" (185). The consolidation of the warrior myth in the figure of ideal Hindu manhood has a particular set of consequences for women, who become metonyms for the nation as "mother-goddess" and who legitimize the aggression of the warrior against the threatening Other (117). Bannerjee similarly suggests that Hindu women are central to the Hindu nationalist discourses that invoke men as warriors insofar as women both stand in for the nation—the defence of the nation from its Others is the defence of Hindu women and vice versa—and provide the forms of social reproduction—bearing and raising children who themselves will become warriors—which enable the nation itself.

The conception of women as the moral centres of the nation and as metonyms *of* the nation is integral to many theorizations of Hindu nationalism's development both prior to and after India's independence, as my earlier discussions of Chatterjee, Chakraborty, Sarkar, Burton, and Hancock have suggested. Bannerjee builds on these theorizations to think through the relationship between sexual violence and nationalism bound to conceptions of Hindu muscularity. In particular, she argues that rape and other forms of sexual violence form the crux of this nationalism in two distinct but overlapping ways: one, because Hindu women are symbolic of the nation, the violation of women's bodies becomes a question not of women's safety and dignity, but of men's muscularity

and their ability to defend the nation; two, insofar as the rape of women threatens the coherence and function of a nation, the rape of "enemy" women serves a nationalist cause (168). In other words, if "the creation of a nationalist political doctrine usually includes the construction of an ''Other'' who is seen as the enemy of the citizen warriors defending nation as woman," then the citizen warrior must both defend his "own" women/nation from harm *and* perpetrate harm against women belonging to and coextensive with the Other (172).

Through its explicit discussion of the mass rape and sexualized murder of Muslim (as well as Hindu and Sikh) women, *Cracking India* demonstrates how the logics of women-as-property and "nation-as-woman" converge during Partition, motivating the conflicts between Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs. While we, as readers, are not explicitly witness to any of these incidents of sexual violence, they provide the context for the second half of the novel as Lenny comes to learn of this violence through the stories that circulate around her and from her growing awareness of herself as a gendered subject. In one of the novel's most acerbic passages, for instance, Lenny recounts meeting Gandhi who visits Lahore in the Spring of 1947. Surrounded by "enema-emaciated women [with] faint shadows beneath their limpid eyes," Gandhi advises Lenny's mother to cure Lenny's sickliness by "flush[ing] her system," a suggestion to which Lenny first takes offence and then defers as she meets Gandhi's gaze (96). While there is no direct link drawn here between the sexualization of women and Gandhian nationalism, Lenny's narration of her encounter suggests an implicit one. In lowering her gaze before Gandhi, Lenny becomes

one of the young, emaciated women who surround him; momentarily, she is entranced by "the concealed nature of the ice lurking deep beneath the hypnotic and dynamic femininity of Gandhi's non-violent exterior" (96). Notably, Lenny suggests that it was not until she "realized the full scope and dimension of the massacres" did she understand the power behind Gandhi's exterior. While she reads his power over her as feminine—his gaze is a "pure shaft of humour, compassion, tolerance, and understanding"—it is nonetheless a sexual and sexualizing power (231). In leading to her lowering her eyes for the first time under a man's gaze, Lenny's encounter with Gandhi genders her, placing her within the fold of all the other women surrounding him.

The gendering nature of Gandhi's gaze draws a link between nationalism and the process through which women become the property of men more broadly under the patriarchy. We can see this process at play most clearly through the figure of Ayah, whose physical beauty and charisma draws a diverse group of men—a Muslim, a Sikh, a Hindu, and a Chinese silk trader all vying for her affections—together in a fragile yet functional pre-Partition community. Indeed, much of the first half of the narrative centres around the communal life—what Daiya calls a "cosmopolitan community of friendship"—that these men share with Lenny and Ayah as they spend their days together in Queen's Garden where people of different religions, ages, and genders frequently mix (68). As the violence of Partition grips Lahore, however, these forms of communal life dissipate. Lenny notices, for instance, that Queen's Garden has become sparse and segregated by religion, a reflection of changes in the city more broadly: while "one day everyone is

themselves—the next day they are Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Christian" (101). Lenny notes that Ayah, in particular, becomes a "token," a Hindu "carried away by a renewed devotional fever" (101). Indeed, the relationships between Ayah's suitors become increasingly fraught, as their "cosmopolitan community of friendship" is overwhelmed by a set of divisive nationalist discourses.

The increasingly tense relationships between Ayah's suitors recall Daiya's argument that Partition's nationalisms both recruited the male body in order to establish religious difference and made impossible male friendship across these differences. The threats of violence that Ayah's suitors make to other men and to each other seek to differentiate the body on the basis of religious affiliation. In one instance, Ayah's usually mild-mannered Sikh suitor proclaims that "once the line of division is drawn in the Punjab, all Muslims to the East will have their balls cut off!" (139). However, the increasingly tense relationships between these men also demonstrate how nationalist discourses divide men, in part, by marshalling an already-established conception of women-as-property. In other words, the sexual competition between Ayah's suitors—managed prior to Partition through Lahore's cosmopolitanism and its possibilities for communal life—gains new purchase in the context of nationalist violence. For instance, it is significant both that Masseur—the man who Ayah loves—is killed on his way to marry her, whereas Ice Candy Man—the most possessive of Ayah's suitors and convinced of the nationalist cause—kidnaps Ayah under the guise of cleansing the neighbourhood of Hindus and by inciting the violence of a Muslim mob. In Ice Candy's Man's actions, we

can see how nationalist violence converges with and harnesses the everyday violence women face under patriarchy and within the family. As we come to understand from the very beginning of the novel, men—regardless of religion, caste, and class—seek to possess Ayah: "[s]tub-handed twisted beggars and dusty old beggars on crutches drop their poses and stare at her with hard, alert eyes. Holy men, masked in piety, shove aside their pretences to ogle her with lust. Hawkers, cart-drivers, cooks, coolies, and cyclists turn their heads as she passes…" (12). While Ayah is able to resist most men's desires to possess her, her fate at the hands of Ice Candy Man illuminates how nationalist violence during Partition harnesses a set of patriarchal conditions that already subjugate women at the level of the everyday.

Dispossession and the Organization of Violence

I am interested in thinking about the sexual violence in *Cracking India* through the language of property because such violence functions to *dispossess* women—not only of their land and the physical space of their homes but of their bodily integrity through which access to family and community is secured; in other words, for many of the "fallen" women, the experience of rape renders them outcasts through the logic of honour. Hamida—Lenny's second nanny—believes, for instance, that her children are safer without her given that, in her absence, they can still retain ties to their larger family and community. By thinking through sexual violence as a form of dispossession, I suggest that we can map the common experiences of Sidhwa's characters under patriarchy. While

not all of these women lose their homes, families, or resources, almost all experience a loss of control over their own bodies and are unable to recapture this control without risking their ties to children and family. In this sense, a consideration of property and dispossession intervenes in the scholarship on *Cracking India* that takes material differences between women—based on class, caste, and religion, for instance—as immutable barriers to solidarity and the possibilities of friendship against the patriarchy.

In her writing on *Cracking India,* Ambreen Hai argues that Ayah's story as a victim of sexual violence during Partition is allegorical, standing in for women's experience of Partition more generally. Indeed, Ayah is the only character in the novel who faces such extreme violence; while other women's experiences of rape and assault are on the periphery, the violence Ayah faces drives the novel's plot and fundamentally shapes the lives of Lenny and her family. Hai argues that Ayah's experiences thus come to stand in for those of other women in both a narratively limiting and politically untenable way. In particular, Hai suggests that Ayah's narrative partakes in the myth that middle-class women were not victims of Partition's sexual violence but, rather, the saviours of working-class women. Writing of the scene in which Lenny's grandmother "saves" Ayah from Ice Candy Man's predations by visiting their house in Lahore's red light district, Hai argues that "Sidhwa's belaboured focus on the graphic details of that [Ayah's] over-used body deflects attention from and substitutes for what could not be imagined about upper-class female bodies, allowing proximity only by expending its indignation upon the permissible distance of class and ethnic difference" (400). For Hai, Ayah's role within the

narrative is not only to symbolize the devastating nature of Partition's violence against women but to preserve the myth of bourgeois womanhood—of the inviolable middle-class Indian woman—as well.

I suggest, counter to Hai's reading, that Ayah's narrative ultimately works to connect women who—despite real and material differences in class, caste, and religion—suffer in a set of shared ways that are in themselves significant and illuminating. In particular, the trajectory of Ayah's experiences under the patriarchy—from her experiences of everyday occurrences of sexual objectification to the horrific nature of her experiences under Partition—draws a link between the quotidian forms of violence under the patriarchy and the catastrophic forms that emerge within the context of political upheaval and religious nationalism. Such a link, even while it is focused on Ayah as the sole victim and survivor, encapsulates the function of sexual violence as it affects *all* women: to reduce women to the property of men through which the boundaries of the nation are then contested. While Hai argues that the focus on Ayah locates too much in the bodily experience of only one woman, I suggest an alternative reading of the novel's allegorical nature: by tracing Ayah's experiences of violence from the everyday to the extraordinary, Sidhwa connects her characters through their experiences of violence under the patriarchy, though the *degrees* of violence might differ. For instance, while Ayah's experiences of violence are central and certainly the most disturbing, the fact that Lenny's mother is beaten at home is no less pivotal to the text as a whole. Lenny, in particular, is shaped by the many forms of violence against women that she witnesses: just as she

listens to the wailing of women next door in the refuge for fallen women, she also hears the "terrifying thumps" of her father beating her mother as they argue about his affair with another women (224).

These forms of violence are not, however, identical across class. The violence experienced by Ayah and by the largely working-class and rural women in the refuge, for instance, is "visible" to the outside world because much of this violence happens outside of the family. Unlike Lata, whose marriage might protect her from the predations of someone like Mr. Sahgal, the sexual violence against working-class and rural women serves as *evidence* that they are not the sole property of their husbands. Their status as "fallen women" thus transforms their personal losses into an outcasted political subjectivity. By contrast, bourgeois domesticity both obscures the violence Mrs. Sethi experiences and helps contain this violence at the level of the family. While Mrs. Sethi is clearly affected by the mass sexual violence that occurs during Partition, her status as a middle-class Parsi[35] woman both protects her from men outside the family and subjects her to violence within the home. With the exception of Lenny, who sees her mother's bruised body in the bathtub, the beatings remain largely an invisible secret kept between Mrs. Sethi and her husband.

While writing on the role of the ideal Hindu (rather than Parsi) woman in early Indian nationalist discourses, Swapna Bannerjee's exploration of middle-class

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[35] Parsis held a neutral position during Partition's violence (which I discuss in more detail soon). This meant that Parsi women were much less frequently the victims of the sexual violence that Hindu, Muslim, and Sikh women experienced as a direct result of Partition.

domesticity in colonial India is nonetheless helpful for situating Mrs. Sethi within the family and the gendered class structure. Indian nationalists, she writes,

> charted a new vision of the domestic ideal and prescribed a specific code of conduct for middle-class women, thereby carefully distancing them from other social classes. These 'new women' embodied the refined virtues of the chaste, self-sacrificing traditional Hindu woman combined with the helpmate role of the Victorian lady. They were increasingly distanced from working women of lower social groups who as Partha Chatterjee noted, were represented as loud, vulgar, unrefined, querulous, and sexually promiscuous. (444-5)

The increasing distance between middle-class and working women intersects with the production of the nuclear family as increasingly important: "the colonial scene in urban India," Bannerjee suggests, "emphasized the relationship among man, woman, and child as a unit and stressed the role of the family as a haven from the oppression of an outside world dominated by foreign rule (459). Through the violence in the Sethi home, we see these various dynamics at play: while violence against working-class women (and girls, such as Papoo) in the novel overspills the boundaries of the family, the violence against Mrs. Sethi—a secret shared only between Lenny and her parents—both emerges in and consolidates the privacy of the family unit.

Mrs. Sethi's relationship to domestic violence thus illuminates the way class *shapes* patriarchal violence in both overlapping and distinct ways for the women in the

text. For instance, Godmother, by attempting to "rescue" Ayah from Ice Candy Man's house, crosses the boundaries of the public and private that help preserve men's violence against women. Such a crossing is made possible both by Godmother's middle-class status and her position as a Parsi. While Hai suggests that Godmother—as a middle-class woman entering an impoverished neighbourhood—participates in a "self-congratulatory, fantasized recovery and restitution of the ravaged Ayah," it is important to note that, by demanding to see Ayah in her home, she also undermines the patriarchal structure of the domestic sphere (400). No such intervention, however, is possible for Lenny's mother; though Mrs. Sethi, as a Parsi woman, does not suffer the sexual violence of Partition, her experience of domestic violence is both obscured and legitimized by the demands of bourgeois domesticity. Mitra Sharafi writes, for instance, that the 1936 Parsi Marriage and Divorce Act enshrined "the right to use violence against one's spouse" (187-8). While the same Act was considered favourable to women because it prohibited men's extramarital relationships with prostitutes, Sharafi argues that the influence of conservative middle-class men's organizations also "fortified [men's] right to beat their wives" as a means to maintain unequal power relations (188). While Mrs. Sethi's experience of violence is vastly different from Ayah's, the language of the Marriage and Divorce Act suggests that domestic violence against women is enshrined at all class levels, especially through the disciplinary structures of marriage. In this sense, Hai's reading of class is limited. Indeed, Sidhwa might obscure the way middle-class women experienced the sexual violence of Partition. However, her narrative—with its emphasis on the multiple forms of violence

against women—demonstrates how class, though it might organize patriarchal violence by degree and severity, does not eliminate this violence itself.

Much of the literature on *Cracking India* largely ignores the relationship between property and women's experience of the patriarchy and, instead, interprets Lenny's mother's role in the narrative purely through an analysis of privilege. Madhuparna Mitra argues, for instance, that Mrs. Sethi "engages in humanitarian efforts to assist women who have been victimized by Partition violence" by "[r]eaping the benefits of class, and of being a member of the "neutral" Parsi community" (32). Mitra goes on to explain how, in an effort to manage her husband's violence, "Mrs. Sethi leads a dual existence: while she rescues women from the clutches of other predatory males, she has to don the helpless feminine persona to maintain her status as a wife. She has only circulated, displaced and passed on the violence done to her and other women, not put a stop to it" (34-5). While it is true that Mrs. Sethi uses the resources available to her as a middle-class woman belonging to the "neutral" Parsee community, Mitra's reading begins from the assumption that Mrs. Sethi's class position *could* (or perhaps should) place her outside of the patriarchy and that, because she is not outside, her personal interactions with the patriarchy become evidence of a "double life." In this reading, similar to Hai's, class fundamentally separates women rather than organizing the ways women become the property of men. When Lenny's mother rescues a cat from being beaten by Iman Din, however, we see how the experience of violence might even blur the distinctions between human and non-human: Mrs. Sethi rescues the cat by attacking Iman Din with a fly-

swatter. While Mitra reads Mrs. Sethi's assumption that the cat is female as evidence that she is "consumed vicariously with the psychological traumas of the brutalized women she works to rescue, and her own at home" (33), her reaction also suggests that the connective thread between herself and others is shared suffering under patriarchal violence.

If class organizes the way women experience violence based on their relationship to private property, then—as many Marxist feminists have argued—the undoing of unequal property relations poses a challenge to patriarchy. Lise Vogel writes, for instance, on both the possibilities and limitations for solidarity between women across class lines:

> In a particular society, shared experiences of and cultural responses to female oppression may produce a degree of solidarity among women across class-lines. While this solidarity has a basis in reality, and can be of serious political import, the situation of women in the dominant and exploited classes are fundamentally distinct from a theoretical perspective. Only women in the subordinate class participate in the maintenance and replacement of the indispensable force that keeps a class-society going—exploitable labour-power. (154)

While the theoretical and historical differences between women across class lines remain, property keeps these differences intact: "As the socialist tradition has argued, the issue here is property. If property comes to be held by men and bequeathed to children, then female oppression becomes a handy way to ensure the paternity of those children" (154). To recall my earlier discussion of Sarkar on the relationship between property and domesticity in India, the control of women serves to both consolidate the authority of

landowning men *and* ensure that property is passed down along patrilineal lines. The needs of patrilineality also shape women's role in religious law. As Hassan argues in her work on Hindu and Muslim personal laws, the fact that women were written out of inheritance law "was a crucial factor in maintaining their subordination to men" and harnessing their reproductive labour (6). In the case of Parsi personal law, which disinherited Parsi women only if they married non-Parsi men, inheritance laws served to both bind women to the community and preserve the interests of the middle-class whose resources remained internal to the community (Sharafi 221).

Insofar as property relations serve to subordinate women to men while also segregating women from each other along class lines, the refuge for fallen women is a compelling site to think through *how* women, by contesting these property relations, might form a collective solidarity against the ubiquitous nature of sexual violence. To suggest this is not to read the women's refuge as a classless space or to ascribe a set of Marxist politics to Mrs. Sethi. Rather, the appropriation of the domestic sphere as a refuge *from* violence—rather than a container for it—exceeds a set of class, national, and religious boundaries that otherwise harm women so acutely during (as well as before and after) the upheaval of Partition. Formerly the house of a Hindu doctor and his family, the house is meant to be given to a refugee family who left a similar property in India, but instead comes to house throngs of women—Muslim, Hindu, and Sikh alike—abandoned by their families. Lenny and Cousin spend hours peering into the house's courtyard from their balcony, watching the women who live there and hearing their wails at night; while

Lenny remains largely ignorant of the real violence that underlies these wails, she is aware that the home contains an unbearable kind of collective loss. She sees in Hamida, for instance, an "eerie desolation" that both haunts and compels her to take care of her new ayah as she did her last (202).

The refuge for fallen women occupies relatively little space within the novel—we know of the happenings within it only through Lenny's sporadic observations from atop her balcony—but, in connecting women through the collective trauma of sexual violence, the refuge contests the seemingly intractable grip of nationalist politics. While the women are housed in the courtyard and Lenny believes them to be living in a "women's jail," the refuge is a fundamentally domestic space where Lenny sees "village women washing clothes, crossing the courtyard with water canisters, chaffing wheat and drawing raw mangoes for pickling" (201). The courtyard is guarded by a Sikh man who oversees the transport of food and supplies, and Mrs. Sethi—a seemingly passive woman in other respects—plays a central role in running the refuge and taking care of the women. As Hai notes, the rescue efforts are sign of "a collective force of matriarchal power" within the Parsi community, and a direct result of Lenny's mother and Godmother's access to resources (408).

That their economic power is harnessed for the purposes of housing women, however, illuminates the potential for women's space to undermine the strict religious and national boundaries on which Partition's violence thrives. Indeed, the women in the house stand in for one another; as much as Lenny tries to discern the distinct voices of women

wailing, she is aware only of a collective set of "cries that verge on the inhuman" (224). And while we do not witness Ayah's suffering or hear of it narrated by Ayah herself, we hear her story through the figure of Hamida who, like Ayah, has also been abducted, raped, and separated from her children. While Hai argues, as I have discussed earlier, that the novel betrays a bourgeois politics in refusing to let Ayah speak, we might actually read Hamida's narration of her own suffering as akin to and symbolic of Ayah's, a way of connecting Hindu and Muslim women along the lines of a shared sexual trauma by collapsing their stories into one. As Hamida slowly begins to share her suffering with Lenny, their shared domestic space becomes a site of kinship as Lenny, who cannot fully grasp what has become of Ayah, nonetheless begins to care for Hamida and to understand how "monstrously unfair" the suffering of abandoned women is, both within and outside the refuge (227).

Unlike in *A Suitable Boy*—where women like Lata have much to gain from maintaining their allegiance to normative property relations—*Cracking India* demonstrates how contesting these property relations might liberate women who are, under the patriarchy, dispossessed at all class levels. While it is possible to read, as Mitra does, Mrs. Sethi's role in the narrative as a "humanitarian" based on her difference from more exploited women, we can also read the home for fallen women as a space that—even temporarily—shifts the material relations between women in order to form both a meaningful response and an alternative to patriarchal violence. Rather than falling under the ownership of another middle-class family with its own patriarchal hierarchy, the

abandoned house becomes a communal space for women, funded and run through the combined efforts of the community and contributing to women's collective healing. In this sense, Lenny's description of the refuge as a "women's jail" recalls for us the conflicting forces of freedom and oppression similarly at play in Neel and Ah Fatt's *chokey*: the refuge is both a consequence of women's oppression under the nationalist logics of ownership and site of relative safety, of connection between women.

Insofar as Mrs. Sethi's private wealth—which she redirects into the collective project of the refuge—is essential to the proper functioning of the refuge, her role in the narrative might be more aptly described as one of feminist solidarity rather than of friendship. However, by placing the relationships between women in *Cracking India* within a broader study of friendship, I wish to reiterate Niyogi De's conception of feminist friendship as a type of "solidarity across gendered borders" rooted in new and subversive networks of feelings; in other words, "feminist friendship characteristically disorients accepted familial and geopolitical feelings" and, instead, re-orients these feelings toward care for the Other (122). While the boundaries between feminist solidarity and friendship are porous, friendship foregrounds the emotional life of our political connections and helps undermine the power imbalances that might otherwise inhere to acts of solidarity. For instance, while the novel ends with the return of Ayah to her family in Amritsar and Lenny confronting the fact that she will never see Ayah again, the creation of the refuge allows the narrative to shift its focus from Ayah—as either an individual example or symbol of violence against women—to women's *collective*

experience of dispossession and the possibility of healing. If the refuge is a part of the healing process for "fallen women," so too might it be for Mrs. Sethi, whose emotional life is formed in relation to both her own experiences of violence and, to recall Mitra's analysis, the "psychological traumas of [other] brutalized women" (33). Through the emotional entanglements between Mrs. Sethi and other women, we can read her desires to rescue women as an expression of her own suffering, which her involvement in the refuge might also begin to heal. In this sense, while "fallen women" remain relative strangers to Mrs. Sethi, an important kind of reciprocity emerges in their relationship to one another: the re-direction of Mrs. Sethi's resources serves not only the dispossessed women in the refuge but gestures towards the possibilities of women's collective healing of which she, too, is a part.

Conclusion

By reading *Cracking India* against *A Suitable Boy*, my aim has been to think through the conditions under which friendship across difference can be mobilized *against* the violence of religious nationalism. Whereas the friendships in *A Suitable Boy* contest the most extreme versions of religious nationalism, their political utility proves limited insofar as these friendships emerge from among the middle-class and maintain its property relations. While the friendships between Maan and Firoz, Lata and Kabir, the Nawab and Mahesh Kapoor, and Maan and Rasheed refuse communalist violence and the strict divisions between Hindus and Muslims, they are shaped by a set of classed

conditions that sustain religious division. The relationships between women in *Cracking India*, however, mobilize against these conditions themselves: though their class positions vary, their shared experiences under the patriarchy overwhelm a class-based interest in preserving unequal property relations and the religious violence that intensifies during Partition. The anti-nationalist possibilities of these friendships thus lie in their opposition to a set of property and class relations that keep religious, gender, caste, and class differences intact. While Foucault writes of friendship as a "relationship that is still formless," the "sum of everything through which [we] can give each other pleasure," so too might these friendships—formed across religious, gender, caste, and class difference—contest the structures of our difference and help us work against the violence of nationalism (136).

Chapter 3: Mysticism, the Ashram, and "Universal Friendship" Beyond the Nation-State

> *The heading of this essay "Buddha or Karl Marx" which suggests either a comparison or a contrast between two such personalities divided by such a lengthy span of time and occupied with different fields of thought is sure to sound odd […]. What can Buddha teach a Marxist? None-the-less a comparison between the two is attractive and instructive. Having read both and being interested in the ideology of both a comparison between them just forces itself on me. If the Marxists keep back their prejudices and study the Buddha and understand what he stood for I feel sure that they will change their attitude. It is of course too much to expect that having been determined to scoff at the Buddha they will remain to pray. But this much can be said that they will realise that there is something in the Buddha's teachings which is worth their while to take note of.*
>
> — "Buddha or Karl Marx?" B.R. Ambedkar (1956)

> *He [the Nationalist] is ready to lead the chosen people into the desert for its long wanderings, though he knows that often in the bitterness of its sufferings it will murmur and rebel against his leadership and raise its hand to stone him to death as the author of its misery […]. If he embraces Anarchy, it is as the way of good government. If he does not shrink from disorder and violent struggle, it is because there can be no security and without that struggle no peace, except the security of decay and the peace of death. If he has sometimes to disregard the law of man, it is to obey the dictates of his conscience and the law of God.*
>
> — "The Heart of Nationalism," Aurobindo Ghose (1908)

> *The method of the west is violence. Wherever the people of the west have felt a wrong either justly or unjustly, they have rebelled and shed blood. As I have said in my letter to the Viceroy of India, half of India does not believe in the remedy of violence. The other half is too weak to offer it. But the whole of India is deeply hurt and stirred by this wrong, and it is for that reason that I have suggested to the people of India the remedy of non-co-operation. I consider it perfectly harmless, absolutely constitutional and yet perfectly efficacious. It is a remedy in which, if it is properly adopted, victory is certain, and it is the age-old remedy of self-sacrifice.*
>
> — "Freedom's Battle," M.K. Gandhi (1922)

> *Cast aside the youthful dreams of a revolution within ten years of Gandhi's utopian promises of Swaraj in One Year. It requires neither the emotion nor the death, but the life of constant struggle, suffering and sacrifice. Crush your individuality first. Shake off the dreams of personal comfort. Then start to work. Inch by inch you shall have to proceed. It needs courage, perseverance and very strong determination. No difficulties and no hardships shall discourage you. No failure and betrayals shall dishearten you. No travails (!) imposed upon you shall snuff out the revolutionary will in you. Through the ordeal of sufferings and sacrifice you shall come out victorious. And these individual victories shall be the valuable assets of the revolution.*
>
> — "To Young Political Workers," Bhagat Singh (1931)

In the text of a 1942 address on All India Radio, B.R Ambedkar, speaking as the leader of the Independent Labour Party, which he formed in 1936, puts forth his conception of working-class internationalism: "Labour's creed," he says, "is

internationalism. Labour is interested in nationalism only because the wheels of democracy […] work better in a community united by national sentiments. Nationalism to Labour is only a means to an end" ("Indian Labour" 41). This "end," Ambedkar goes on to explain, is the international unification of all people: the establishment of "an all-pervading sense of brotherhood, unifying all classes and nations, with 'peace on earth and goodwill to man' as its motto" (37).

For Ambedkar, such unification across class and nation is possible only through the convergence of the political and the spiritual. In his comparative study, "Buddha or Karl Marx?" for instance, he argues that Marxists and Buddhists share an ultimate goal: the unity of all people across nation and class and "an end [to] the sorrow and misery in the world" (450). Both Buddhists and Marxists, Ambedkar suggests, consider the abolition of private property fundamental to the establishment of such unity: Marx and the Buddha believed that "class conflict […] is the cause of misery," that the desire for wealth gives rise to the mastery of one group over another and results in "the misery and unhappiness of man" (447). He says that for Marxists, therefore, the path forward is Communism, which emerges from three fundamental and intertwined tenets: violence, the dictatorship of the Proletariat, and the eventual end to class society across the world. For Buddhists, however, the "end [to] the sorrow and misery in the world" arises not only from the abolition of private property but from the annihilation of the *original* cause of greed and division: the delusion of self, or the (mis)conception of the self as distinct from others and from God. Through a strict commitment to the Noble Eightfold Path,

Buddhists transcend such a delusion and transform the "self" into equanimity and harmony with the surrounding world. Such a transformation results in *maitri*—the unconditional love for, and a deep connection with, "all beings, foe and friend, beast and man" (449). In Ambedkar's analysis, Communism alone cannot establish universal harmony and unity; while it can abolish private property as a source of division and conflict between self and Other, it does not contend with the delusion of self as *fundamental* to the creation of such division in itself. As such, Ambedkar suggests that political movements that seek to "unify[…] all classes and nations" must take up spiritual practices necessary for and devoted to the creation of *maitri*.

Ambedkar's comparative study might seem, as he himself remarks, very "odd" for the links it draws between the seemingly divergent preoccupations of political theory, on the one hand, and spirituality on the other. However, by illuminating the possible relationship between the spiritual and the political, Ambedkar's essay foregrounds my aim in this chapter. In shifting from the space of the "home" that emerges in response to colonial rule and becomes a site of nationalist violence, I return to a question that I posed in the Introduction: how did twentieth century anticolonial movements envision a new, collective, and liberatory politics against colonialism *and* nationalism? In the particular context of the Indian Independence movement, how and why did some anticolonial revolutionaries see *spirituality* as crucial to the development of a politics that unifies, rather than divides, "all classes and nations?" In the writings of these revolutionaries, how does spirituality circulate as a *method* that might help build a world which does not "pay

tribute" (to recall Fanon's phrasing) to colonial rule by extending or transforming this violence in and through the nation-state?

This chapter traces the connections between spirituality and politics in the Indian Independence movement through a set of Hindu mystical texts. In particular, I focus my discussion on the relationship between the spiritual and political in three sets of writings that theorize an anticolonial politics of unity beyond the nation-state: that of the Hindu mystics, Aurobindo Ghose (or Sri Aurobindo) and Mirra Alfassa; of M. K. Gandhi, who is often described as the political and spiritual "father" of India; and of the Marxist revolutionary, Bhagat Singh.[36] I begin with Ambedkar's writing on Buddhism, however, because he offers us a way *into* thinking about the "self" in spiritual terms. Indeed, his essay provides a uniquely clear exposition of the relationship between a central *mystical* tenet (one shared, as my forthcoming discussion on mysticism will explain, across both Hinduism and Buddhism) and the development of a collective, liberatory politics: that is, the self is not only a delusion, but one that can be transcended and replaced by universal love and connection between all beings.[37] In this chapter, I argue that the pursuit of self-

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[36] In the section that follows, I situate my use of Hindu spiritual texts (especially those of Ghose) in relation to my critique of Hindu nationalism; in particular, I suggest that, though some mystical writings have been co-opted by (or align themselves with) Hindutva, the pursuit and/or experience of self-transcendence—crucial to all mystical traditions—offers a way *out* of all forms of sectarianism, including nationalism.

[37] Further in this chapter, I explain why a study of Hindu mysticism in particular is important to understanding the politics of Indian Independence. I begin with Ambedkar's text, however, because his explanation of self-transcendence and its relationship to politics is much clearer and more accessible than those explanations offered in Hindu mystical texts. I have spent many years, long before I began working on this dissertation, reading and trying to understand these texts, and I aim in this chapter to translate them for others who might be not be so familiar with them, or with mysticism in general.

transcendence[38] can thus serve the development of a *political* subjectivity that refuses the mobilization of the Other for nationalist, imperialist, or capitalist ends.

As part of my argument, I offer a critique of how spirituality was often deployed during the Independence movement to violent ends (as it continues to be in increasingly Hindu nationalist India). Indeed, for Fanon, many of "Europe's crimes" have been also been committed in the name of spirituality though they, ultimately, demonstrate Europe's spiritual poverty: Europe, he writes, "has stifled almost the whole of humanity in the name of a so-called spiritual experience" but "today [it] sway[s] between atomic and spiritual disintegration" (311-2). The spiritual poverty of Europe has, in part, led to the violence of colonial rule. As he writes in *The Wretched of the Earth*:

> Europe's crimes, of which the most horrible was committed in the heart of man, and consisted of the pathological tearing apart of his functions and the crumbling away of his unity. And in the framework of the collectivity there were the differentiations, the stratification, and the bloodthirsty tensions fed by classes; and finally, on the immense scale of humanity, there were racial hatreds, slavery, exploitation, and above all the bloodless genocide which consisted in the setting aside of fifteen thousand millions of men. (314)

However, while these "so-called spiritual experience[s]" have shored up the self and justified, fortified, and obscured violence against the Other, I aim to show here how

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[38] Also referred to, in mystical literature, as "no self," "liberation," and "oneness." I use these terms inter-changeably throughout.

certain forms of spirituality might help us work *towards* "a revolutionary humanism shaped by new human beings who no longer seek to destroy each other in the name of national, racial, or economic domination" (Sharifi and Chabot 263). Spirituality cannot replace political movements against colonialism, nationalism, or capitalism nor can it transform, on its own, political structures that keep intact violence against the Other. However, I suggest that the spiritual pursuit of self-transcendence might work with these political movements in service of the liberation of all people. In the convergence of the political and (this form of) spirituality might arise, perhaps, "a new history of Man" (312).

Throughout this project, I have argued that friendship contests the distinctions between self and the Other that are furnished by capitalist modes of social organization and upon which nationalism relies. I have defined friendship as an *orientation* toward others based on love. Such love manifests between people who know and care for each other, as well as (to return to Leela Gandhi's conception of friendship) in the "surplus of love" which compels someone—perhaps with only a "tentative proximity to [an]other"—to see another's struggles as part of her own (27). In this chapter, I think through *maitri* as the experience of friendship on a universal scale—one which manifests through the transcendence of self and in the realization of love and connection with all other beings. Both Buddhist and Hindu (along with Jain) texts often translate *maitri* as "universal

friendship."[39] Lakshman Shastri Joshi—Gandhi's advisor in his protests against Untouchability—translates the Hindu conception of *maitri* (derived from the Maitri Upanishads) as the "universal friendship […] [of] pure love directed at all human and other beings without exception" (184). The twenty-first century Buddhist yogi, Stephen Parker, writes that "one who embodies *maitri* becomes a friend to all. In this sense of universal friendship, […] there remain no enemies of any intensity, within or out" (102). *Maitri* is thus unconditional love towards all others experienced and expressed as friendship: as Thich Nhat Hanh writes, "the word *maitri* has roots in the word *mitra,* which means friend. In Buddhism, the primary word for love is friendship" (5). Friendship in its universal form thus becomes synonymous with peace, harmony, and unity, and I use these terms interchangeably throughout this chapter. Such a definition of friendship is, of course, distinct from our more everyday understanding of friendship as a bond between people who—should they still experience the self—sometimes experience conflict and disharmony with each other. However, as this project has explored, friendship traverses the distance between self and Other by bringing us into another's world. The "universal friendship" of *maitri* might, therefore, serve as the purest or most ideal form of friendship in that it transcends all divisions between self and Other. In this chapter, friendship circulates in both its universal form and as an interpersonal bond

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[39] As the philosopher and religious historian, Surendranath Dasgupta, translates *maitri* in his *History of Indian Philosophy,* Vol. 1.

between spiritual seekers, which works in service of peace and harmony among all beings.

This chapter thus argues that the pursuit of self-transcendence is of *political* consequence, that which might contribute to an anticolonial politics seeking to progress beyond the nation-state and to establish universal friendship among all people. The previous two chapters have focused on the ship and the home as key sites through which to understand the role of friendship in anticolonial politics. This chapter focuses on the ashram as a site crucial to the pursuit of universal friendship. I begin with a brief discussion of M. K. Gandhi's ashram in Ahmedabad, which is key to understanding the relationship between the political and the spiritual during the Independence movement. Sabarmati ashram, for instance, was central to the development of his conception of *swaraj* or "self rule": the transformation, through spiritual devotion and self-discipline, of the individual into the self-governing political subject of Independence. As a part of my discussion of Gandhi, I also think through Bhagat Singh's Marxist critiques of Gandhi's *ahimsa* (non-violence); I suggest that Singh's critiques help illuminate the limitations of Gandhian spirituality and contrast them with the more liberatory political possibilities that I see arise in the writing of Ghose and Alfassa. As such, I take as my primary sites of inquiry the Sri Aurobindo ashram (which Ghose founded in Pondicherry in 1926), the Alipore prison, which Ghose regarded as the ashram that housed his spiritual transformation, and Auroville—the city/ashram that Alfassa (his friend and compatriot) built after Ghose's death and which "belongs to humanity as a whole" (*The Mother* 89).

Reading Ghose's mystical writings alongside the diary of Alfassa, I suggest that, in these ashrams, we can see how the mystical pursuit of liberation from the self might nurture a collective politics that "unif[ies] all classes and nations" (Ambedkar 37).

It is important to note that its focus on mysticism gives my chapter an inevitably experimental form. As most writing about the role of spirituality in India's Independence movement demonstrates, attempts to discuss mysticism in the (largely secular) Western academic tradition are fraught, given that each tradition tends to respond to a different view of subjectivity. For instance, while Ghose's mystical writing responds in part to the limitations of the rational and discrete Enlightenment subject, mysticism's main interlocutor is the conception of self as distinct from God, which predates the Enlightenment subject and collapses the distinction between the human and the Divine.[40] As such, the turn to mysticism as a method to think through post-Enlightenment political questions is both generative and difficult. In the sections that follow, I offer a critique not only of Gandhian spirituality but of other aspects, interpretations, and uses of Hindu mysticism that I see as antithetical to a politics of collective liberation. Despite these critiques, however, I argue that the quest to transcend the self and realize the possibility of

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[40] For example, Marxist and poststructuralist critiques of Enlightenment subjectivity argue that the self is not discrete, all-knowing, and transhistorical but, rather, the product of historical and economic forces. However, the "self" as it circulates in mystical writings (while also distinct from the Enlightenment conception of self) is much closer to a *pre*-Enlightenment cosmology that saw the human as a microcosm of the universe or an expression of the Divine. My use of "self" in this chapter is derived from mystical traditions which can, as I argue, help transform the various forms of violence unleashed by and organized through Enlightenment subjectivity. Moreover, I use the term "Divine" here in keeping with Ghose and other mystics: as synonymous with "God"—that which is beyond immediate perception, but which imbues all forms of life and can be understood/experienced through devoted practice (such as prayer or meditation). This is a definition largely consistent across mystical traditions.

"universal friendship" can enliven and inspire an anticolonial politics of unity that also refuses the violence of the nation-state. Such an argument is not prescriptive—I do not suggest that everyone must *become* a mystic but, rather, that the central tenets of mysticism must be taken seriously for their potential contribution to the realization of new political formations.[41] My argument is, at its core, non-secularist: it requires, if not a persistent belief in the ineffable world of mysticism, a temporary faith in the possibility that the self can be transcended.

Situating Hindu Mysticism in the Context of Hindu Nationalism

Throughout this chapter, I define mysticism, in keeping with historians and philosophers of mysticism, as a form of spiritual devotion that appears across religions and that reflects "the universal yearning of the human spirit for personal communion with God" (Zaehner 5). Often distinct from everyday practices of religion based on ritual, social convention, and moral orthodoxies, mysticism, as Andrew Harvey writes, is the "search for the truth of the mystery of a Spirit that pervades, creates, and transcends all things and of each soul's conscious identity with it beyond all space and time" (6). In

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[41] In this sense, I think of Hindu mysticism as a possible *method* for working towards a set of political goals, in a similar way that Liberation Theologians see Catholic mysticism as an "important intervention against domination by structures and practices based on gender and race, by the economic and military power of late capitalism and its client national security states" (Moylan 34). Such a method does not absolve these spiritual traditions from their role in historical or contemporary wrongdoings; rather, it can help "challenge [both] sacred and secular systems" of oppression and domination by working *with* Marxist, feminist, and anticolonial movements (34). As such, my own position on the role of the spiritual in political movements largely aligns with Ambedkar and that of many Liberation Theologians: while I do not think every individual person must pursue self-transcendence, I do think that political movements will benefit from the spiritual insights of these traditions.

India, this "universal yearning" brings together many different religions and spiritual traditions, including Hinduism and Buddhism. For instance, Hindu mysticism is a reflection of this "universal yearning" found, largely, within the Upanishads, the "multifaceted core of [Hindu] mysticism" (7). In this mystical tradition, "the aim of human life and the source of liberation from the chains of life and death" is to find communion with God, to realize that "every human being is naturally one with Brahman [God]" (8). The experience of communion in Hindu mystical texts is an articulation of the Buddhist conception of *Nibbana*: the transformation of the self, through the Eightfold Path, in which the individual's liberation from the self "open[s] to the fact that he is but a tiny part of a measureless whole" (Ambedkar 448). Indeed, in Hindu mystical texts, the "pure love" of *maitri* is re-articulated as Divine Unity—the feelings of unconditional love and universal friendship that arise through *Nibanna* or communion with God.

While many different religions share a set of mystical beliefs, I focus here on Hinduism for its important relationship to British colonial history in India, as well as to the history of Indian anticolonial organizing against the British. As Chandrima Chakraborty argues, colonial discourses conceived of Hinduism as a religion based on asceticism and on the rejection of political, social, and economic life. This static conception of Hinduism came to define Indian society as a whole and justify the colonial project: in other words, "the Indian populace's moral degradation, physical weakness, and political apathy" was seen to necessitate the "restorative attentions of a 'secular' and 'modern' Britain" (2). The refiguring of India as a society preoccupied with spiritual

matters established its difference from Britain and served both colonial and anticolonial interests. As Leela Gandhi argues, many Westerners—disaffected by the materialism and religious conservatism of the West—were drawn to India as the home of spiritual possibility. At the same time, this "spiritual-affective pull gained an anticolonial complexion" as India's spiritual difference from the West became an organizing point for Independence struggle (120). Asceticism became not a symbol of political apathy but evidence of India's right to self-rule as "eminent Hindu ascetics such as Swami Dayananda Sarasvati, Shri Anandamurti, Swami Vivekananda, and Sri Aurobindo […] founded organizations for ascetics to serve the community and the nation" (Chakraborty 3). Thus, as this chapter shows, there is significant overlap between Hindu mystics and the nationalists fighting for Indian Independence during the twentieth century. The mystical and anticolonial work of Ghose and Alfassa, which I discuss in particular, suggests that in India the history of anticolonial thought includes the history of Hindu mysticism.

To take Hindu mysticism as my focus is not without its considerations and potential limitations. Indeed, Ambedkar converted to Buddhism in 1956 after nearly twenty years of attempting to reform Hinduism which, as he argues, consecrates the caste system through both the teachings of its religious texts (the Vedas, in particular) and the formation of a religious society defined and constrained by these teachings. In *Annihilation of Caste,* he clarifies the particular and inescapable relationship between Hinduism and the caste system:

> Religion compels Hindus to treat isolation and segregation of castes as a virtue […]. If Hindus wish to break caste, their religion will come in their way. But it will not be so in the case of non-Hindus. It is, therefore, a dangerous delusion to take comfort in the mere existence of caste among non-Hindus, without caring to know what place caste occupies in their life and whether there are other "organic filaments" which subordinate the feeling of caste to the feeling of community. The sooner the Hindus are cured of this delusion, the better. (281-2)

Caste hierarchies are thus embedded within Indian society, trapping lower or non-caste Hindus and giving shape to "the feeling of [Hindu] community." As the women's rights activist Pandita Ramabai argued in 1888, the caste system also fundamentally shapes Hindu patriarchy. "When caste became an article of Hindu faith," she writes, so too did the oppression of women (4). While *sati* ("widow-burning") among high castes prevented women's re-marriage and kept intact caste endogamy, child marriage and the sexual exploitation of Dalit and lower caste women enshrined violence against women at all caste levels (40).[42]

Hindu mystical thought—with its rejection of a conception of self separate from others and from God—is distinct, in some ways, from the everyday religious structures

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[42] A different project would be able to adequately offer an overview of Ambedkar's writing on caste, especially in relation to Gandhi and Ghose, who also theorize caste and its relationship to postcolonial India. A comparative analysis of caste is beyond the scope of this project, however, and my focus here is on another aspect of Independence struggle that connects Ambedkar, Ghose, and Gandhi: the pursuit of liberation from the self and the development of an anticolonial politics that strives for human unity beyond the independent nation-state.

that shape Hindu society along caste and gendered lines. I argued in Chapter 2 that the Hindu religious practices within the home—with their emphasis on women's obedience and intra-community marriage—fortified a set of patriarchal and nationalist structures. In this chapter, I read Hindu mysticism as a distinct set of beliefs and practices, still part of Hinduism as a broad category, but potentially less restrictive than the beliefs and practices that shaped domestic space in the previous chapter. Bal Krishna Sharma, for instance, argues that "Upanishadic thought had the impact of somewhat relaxing [caste] rigidity" through its emphasis on a universal oneness with God (45). Moreover, while my discussion of early twentieth century women mystics focuses largely on women who travel to India from the West, the experiences of these women suggest that mysticism might also offer an alternative to a set of patriarchal norms, which oppress *all* women on the basis of their distinction from, and subordination to, men.

Despite my particular focus on the mystical branches of Hinduism, projects that focus on any aspect of Hindu spirituality must contend with the reality of caste and gender-based violence as a central part of Indian society. Indeed, Hindu mysticism, like more everyday forms of Hindu religious practice, has a troubling relationship to the development of Hindu nationalism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries—to the consolidation of power among Brahmins and to the disempowerment of Muslims and lower castes in postcolonial India.[43] As such, my aim in this chapter is not to recuperate

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[43] Bidyut Chakrabarty and Bhuwan Kumar Jha's *Hindu Nationalism in India: Ideology and Politics* is one such example. I return to Chakrabarty and Jha's book and to a discussion of Hindu nationalism later in this chapter's section on Ghose.

Hindu mysticism from its role in nationalist, caste, or gendered-based violence but to think through its central insight—that "the source of liberation from the chains of life and death" is communion with others and with God—as one which might also contribute to a politics *against* such violence. In taking this central insight seriously, I also suggest that certain mystics must be *re*-read in a tradition that emphasizes their articulation and/or experience of self-transcendence. Ghose, in particular, has become an important figure for the Hindu Right; as Chetan Bhatt and Parita Mukta write, certain strands of Ghose's thought have been crucial to the "later development of Hindu nationalism, including many of its contemporary manifestations in the diaspora" (412). I suggest that his importance to the Hindu Right emerges both from the co-optation and misreading of mysticism by Hindu nationalists *and* from Ghose's own Hindu nationalist ideas. Nonetheless, Ghose remains a central figure in both Indian anticolonial history and the history of mystical thought; his writing, which provides crucial insight into the nature (and political potential) of self-transcendence, cannot be ignored by the Left and made the exclusive domain of the Hindu Right. My reading of Ghose thus neither obscures nor ignores his relationship to the rise of Hindutva but opens up a different set of possibilities for engaging with his work: I suggest that in his work, despite its contradictions, we can see how the both the pursuit and experience of self-transcendence is, in essence,

oppositional to all divisions between the self and Others—including those that drive Hindu nationalism.[44]

"Self-Mastery" and the International Struggle for Independence

In the last three epigraphs with which this chapter begins, the three nationalists, Gandhi, Ghose, and Singh each articulate a vision for the independence of India based on devotion and sacrifice. For the Marxist Singh, devotion and sacrifice is intimately connected to the material: revolutionaries are devoted not to the self but to the political cause, to the taking up of arms, the seizure of factories and land, and the re-distribution of resources. For Gandhi, devotion and sacrifice begins at the level of the individual body; self-discipline and the relinquishment of material attachments restores the body's spiritual capacity as a "truth-force"—a vehicle for the non-violent pursuit of Truth (*Satyagraha*).[45] For Ghose, devotion to the cause of Independence is, at times, violent, but it is also spiritual: by breaking the unjust laws of the British, the nationalist sacrifices himself to serve "the law of God" (359).

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[44] I am suggesting here that we read Ghose in the same way we might continue to read Gandhi who (though he has not been absorbed by the Hindu Right) has been an important figure for the more secular nationalisms of the Indian nation-state and whose writing is, rightly, subject to critiques by Dalits, feminists, and scholars of African Independence movements. Reading Gandhi now must, therefore, be part of a new, alternative tradition in which we deny neither its co-optation by nationalists nor its intrinsic limitations, but which seeks to understand its continued historical and political significance. For similar attempts to read Ghose beyond the tradition of the Hindu Right, please see Leela Gandhi (1996) and Payel Chattopadhyay Mukherjee (2020).

[45] In Gandhian philosophy, Truth is synonymous with God. As Gandhi writes, "when you want to find Truth as God, the only inevitable means is Love, i.e. non-violence" (*My God* 17).

Through their focus on devotion and sacrifice, Singh, Gandhi, and Ghose each put forth a theory of the self in relation to politics: in order to devote oneself completely to a cause, an individual's discrete sense of self, of separateness from others and from the common goal, must be relinquished. For Ghose and Gandhi, this relinquishment inextricably links the spiritual and the political: liberation from the demands of the self allows the individual to both contribute to Independence and to experience *moksha,* or communion with God.[46] While God does not factor into Singh's conception of devotion, Marxist political movements that sought to reorganize the material conditions of life through decolonization *also* required of their political workers an unrelenting form of sacrifice: "the sacrifice of the individuals," Singh writes, "at the altar of the great revolution that will bring freedom for all, rendering the exploitation of many by man impossible, is inevitable" (*Jail Notebook,* "To Young Political Workers"). In Singh's configuration, both the revolution and the individual sacrifice done in service of the revolution, is fated—not by God but by the conditions of exploitation against which political workers rise up.

While Ghose, Singh, and Gandhi differ in their methods for achieving Independence, their common focus on devotion and sacrifice helps clarify the stakes of anticolonial struggle in India, which was not only of national significance but of *global* political import. For Ghose and Gandhi, the devotion and sacrifice of Indians towards

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[46] Gandhi describes *moksha* as "self-realization," the experience of "seeing God face to face." Independence was thus not only a political goal, but a part of his desire to attain *moksha* towards which, he writes, "I have been striving and pining to achieve these thirty years" (*My God* 58).

Independence was in service of the political and spiritual transformation of the world: as Gandhi writes, “I want the freedom of my country so that other countries may learn something from my free country, so that the resources of my country might be utilized for the benefit of mankind” (Gandhi qtd. in Misra 59). In a similar vein, Ghose argues that India’s sovereignty would serve to bring “together [the world] into an overriding and consummating oneness” which would, eventually, replace all nation-states (“The Fifteenth of August 1947” 537). For Singh, India’s independence was fundamentally bound to class struggle and, as such, promised to align India with a world-wide proletarian revolution. In a telegram written in celebration of Lenin Day in 1930—and read out in court the following year during his trial for the murder of a British police officer—Singh makes clear the internationalist goals of India’s anticolonial struggle. “On Lenin Day,” he writes, "we wish success to the great experiment Russia is carrying out. We join our voice to that of the International working-class movement. The proletariat will win. Capitalism will be defeated. Death to Imperialism” (qtd in. Sacarelli and Varadarajan 114).

The global significance of Independence struggles thus drew both spiritual seekers, committed to India’s role in universal spiritual transformation, and Marxists, interested in the international revolution of the working-class, from all over the world. In her study of the Independence movement’s global nature, Kumari Jayawardena traces a group of European and American women who renounced their former lives, families, and identities in order to settle in India and join the Independence movement. Jayawardena

maps out the two particular paths that these women's anticolonial work took: a commitment to Socialism, Marxism, and women's rights (in the case of Evelyn Roy, Margaret Cousins, and Agnus Smedley), and an interest in Theosophy and Mysticism (as in the case of Annie Besant, Margaret Noble, and Mirra Alfassa). Despite the difference in their motivations and methods, Jayawardena argues that these women were united in their belief that the Independence movement was a source of inspiration and change, the beginning of a new world where the oppression of women and of workers would begin to disintegrate. For instance, Leela Gandhi traces the migration of Western women to India through the history of fin-de-siècle radicalism. Arguing that the "potent combination of evolutionary biology, geology, and Biblical criticism" in the late nineteenth century allowed for new epistemologies to emerge—scientific, on one hand, and spiritual, on the other—Gandhi suggests that Eastern religions became of particular interest to women and the working classes, both alienated by the class and religious (i.e., Christian) systems of Western modernity (122). Jayawardena argues similarly in her explanation of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century "new woman." "Spurred on by the principles of the French Revolution and *The Declaration of the Rights of Man,*" women began organizing around education, birth control, labour and wages, and their right to bodily self-determination (5). As such, "defiance of social convention and dissidence in politics and religion became the attributes of the independent woman of the period" and this "new woman" travelled, organized, read and wrote, and undertook new spiritual beliefs outside the bounds of Christianity (5). While we can view "the new woman's" interest in Indian

spirituality as an unequivocal extension of her imperial power, Jayawardena argues that these women's involvement in Independence was also a reflection of the "universal causes and historic movements" embedded in the Independence struggle itself (11). In other words, the fight against the British offered the possibility of freedom from both British rule and from the predations of capitalism and patriarchy that reverberated throughout the world.

Friendships between Indian and Western actors in the anticolonial struggle formed an important part of the political and spiritual work of Independence. As Jayawardena writes, "in the heyday of imperialism, some of the most renowned [spiritual] leaders, […] leaders of national liberation movements, […] and communist pioneers of the region, […] had Western women as their advisors, soul-mates, companions, or wives" (12).[47] For these Western women, friendships facilitated the transition from their former lives in the West and, for spiritual seekers in particular, enabled a total devotion to the spiritual path. The friendship between Sister Nivedita (formerly Margaret Noble) and Swami Vivekananda, for instance, mediated her transition from Irish nationalist to Indian mystic committed to women's struggle for basic education. Similarly, Mirra Alfassa's friendship with Ghose (of which I write in more detail later in this chapter) was fundamental to both

[47] Many of the studies on friendship across race and nation focus on those between Indian men and Western women, with scant attention paid to those between Indian and Western women. This absence reflects, perhaps, the way Indian women have been written out of patriarchal narratives of the nation, as well as Indian women's critiques of white women involved in the anticolonial struggle. Jayawardena notes, for instance, that while Swami Vivekanada argued that Annie Besant's critique of Hindu patriarchy was imperialist, Pandita Ramabai believed that Besant's interest in Hindu spirituality served the interests of Hindu patriarchy (61). As such, while I have argued that the Independence movement offered hope for an international struggle against both imperialism and patriarchy, there was much disagreement what counted as genuine anti-imperialist and anti-patriarchal work.

Ghose and Alfassa's work as mystics and to the function of the Aurobindo Ashram as a collective space of worship. The friendship between Gandhi and Mirabehn (formerly Madeleine Slade) developed prior to her arrival at Gandhi's Sabarmati Ashram in Ahmedabad from England in 1925, whereupon she became both his disciple and comrade in the Non-Cooperation movement. These friendships have been studied at length by Jayawardena and many others and are not, in and of themselves, my main interest in this chapter. Rather, I am interested here in understanding how the spiritual pursuit of liberation from the self enlivens the political transformation of the world from one of division to one of unity. Particular friendships between mystics can serve this transformation; as my later discussion of Alfassa and Ghose's friendship will show, the "oneness" of their bond illuminates how—through the transcendence of self—peace, harmony, and "universal friendship" can manifest among all beings.

Gandhi's ashram in Ahmedabad is a helpful starting point for understanding how matters of spirituality gained political purchase during the Independence struggle. As Karline McLain writes in her history of Gandhian conceptions of "universal well-being," Gandhi's ashrams were an integral part of the individual's transformation into a political subject worthy of Independence:

> For Gandhi, the essence of freedom was not political liberty; it was self-rule in the sense of self-mastery and restraint. He argued that such self-rule was central first and foremost at the individual level, as part of everyday

> communal life, or when each individual practiced self-rule, the whole community could flourish and attain universal well-being. (469)

For Gandhi, self-mastery was a crucial step towards liberation from the self and was thus guided by a set of spiritual practices. As Gandhi writes in his autobiography, "the foundation of *satyagraha* was laid" by his vow of *brahmacharya* (celibacy), which began to re-shape his body as a vehicle for both individual and national freedom (qtd. in McLain 470). Non-Cooperation, as he declares in a speech in Mangalore in 1920, is "a spiritual weapon, because it demands discipline and sacrifice from us. […] It is a spiritual weapon, because it brings out the best in the nation and it absolutely satisfies individual honour if a single individual takes it, and it will satisfy national honour if the whole nation takes it up" (*Freedom's Battle* n.p.). The individual's attainment of freedom is thus the basis for India's freedom: "If we become free, India is free" (*Hind Swaraj* 73).

Gandhi's Sabarmati Ashram, founded in Ahmedabad in May of 1915, was developed as a place where people could transform themselves into self-ruling subjects in service of Independence. When the ashram opened, he wrote that "the object of this ashram is that its members should qualify themselves and make consistent endeavour toward the service of the country not inconsistent with universal welfare" (qtd. in McLain 473). As McLain outlines, members of the ashram were thus asked to commit to a set of principles, including the devotion to God, nonviolence, celibacy, physical labour, economic independence (through farming), removal of Untouchability, and religious tolerance—each which served to train the body in self-discipline *and* to contribute to the

ashram as a communal space. The communal nature of the ashram was central to Gandhian philosophy in a few significant ways. It was through the act of living with others that individual self-mastery became the basis for "universal well-being" or *sarvodya.* The sacrifice of bodily pleasures and the requirement to take on manual labour, for instance, required "residents to work together as a family, practicing both affection and discipline, for the betterment of all" (478). As Ajay Skaria argues, the cultivation of friendship among the ashram's residents was crucial to the pursuit of *sarvodya:* "Gandhi's friendship—part of the ashram vow of the equality of religions—was based not on the principle of intimacy but on that of equality" (976). In other words, Gandhi's conception of friendship was political more than personal, a way of working towards "universal brotherhood" while respecting religious differences between Hindus and Muslims (976). Friendship was cultivated not through the building of intimacy but through *seva* (service) to another and through the shared experience of suffering that arises from self-discipline and physical labour. The communal nature of the ashram—in which everyone was equally responsible for work and for their own practice of self-discipline—served to "create a bond between two absolutes" who were not otherwise tied by "a shared history or culture" (979).

The cultivation of friendship through service was not realized in its ideal form. As McLain notes, the residence of a Dalit family at Sabarmati drew the anger of upper-caste residents who refused to participate in the ashram's daily chores out of fear of being "polluted." The ashram's communal structure, however, relied on principles of

interdependence and was thus designed to undermine caste discrimination:[48] insofar as each resident was called on to contribute to the feeding, clothing, and general well-being of the community as a whole, Gandhi argued that the ashram "set out to remedy what it thought were defects in our national life," including the scourge of Untouchability (qtd. in McLain 474). Aside from its role in cultivating friendship, the communal nature of Sabarmati ashram served as an example of Gandhi's vision for post-Independence India rooted in village life. As Suresh Misra argues, Gandhi's vision was non-statist; he desired an independent nation relatively free of centralized control. In other words, he argued that "Independence must begin at the bottom. Thus, every village will be a republic or *panchayat* having full powers" (Gandhi qtd. in Misra 58). The aim of the ashram was, therefore, to serve as a model for this new India, where the self-ruling individual became the basis of self-ruling villages or republics. In Gandhi's configuration, the form of the village offered a necessary alternative to that of the nation-state; while the nation-state is a source of violence and division, the village, as a site of communal living based on "community consciousness and participation," would allow people to become "citizens of the world" (61).

Gandhi's focus on discipline as the path toward freedom (both individual, national, and universal) demonstrates why the ashram itself is a compelling space to think

[48] While Gandhi sought to end Untouchability, he is widely critiqued by Dalits for his defence of the caste system, which he believed—once reformed—would provide the social division of labour necessary for the creation of an ideal society. As Ambedkar argues in his debates with Gandhi, "the Mahatma seems to me to suggest in its broadest and simplest form that Hindu society can be made tolerable and even happy without any fundamental change in its structure, if all the high-caste Hindus can be persuaded to follow a high standard of morality in their dealings with the low-caste Hindus. I am totally opposed to this kind of ideology" (*Annihilation of Caste* 340).

through questions of anticolonial politics. Broadly conceived of in the cultural imaginary as sacred but apolitical spaces, ashrams—like the ship and the home—are structured by the opposing forces of freedom and restriction. As Gandhi's principles for living in Sabarmati suggest, the disciplining of the body might result in the freedom *from* the body and its worldly needs. At Sabarmati, the strict adherence to the principle of celibacy, to a disciplined schedule of activities (which included individual and community prayer), and to vows of poverty and simplicity was the *process* through which the self would both realize its spiritual potential and transform into a political subject. At the same time, the discipline of the ashram served its communal structure; the relinquishment of individual need for those of the collective was the basis upon which society could be re-formed—beyond the divisive logics of capitalism and the nation-state—through the communal structure of the *panchayat.*[49]

While Sabarmati is key to understanding both the nature of the ashram and importance of spirituality to development of Independence, it does not fully manifest the connections I see between anticolonial politics, mysticism, and the possibilities of

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[49] This is not to say, of course, that ashrams (including the ones I discuss here) are outside the currents of imperialism, nationalism, and global capital, as the recent global interest in the ashram—as a spiritual space connected to the practice of yoga—suggests. James Manigault-Bryant argues in his study of yoga's relationship to racial capital, for instance, that the institutionalization of the ashram through the Western embrace of yoga implicates both yoga and the site of the ashram within racist systems of production. Tracing the transformation of the Kripalu Yoga Centre in Massachusetts from the "guru-disciple ashram model to an educational centre," he suggests that the professionalization of yoga renders both the practice and the places of practice commodities in the market system (49). Manigault-Bryant argues in particular that the commodification of yoga mirrors missionary work: in the Kripalu Yoga Centre, new yoga teachers are invited to participate in the Centre's "Africa Yoga Project," which aims to lift Africans out of poverty and slums by teaching yoga as a marketable skill (47). Kripalu Centre thus becomes both a site of spiritual practice (an ashram) and a physical space where the logics of racial capitalism converge. Nonetheless, the aims of Sabarmati ashram clarify how, through the strict discipline of the body and the re-imagining of society along communal lines, the ashram might serve as a vehicle for both spiritual *and* political freedom.

"universal friendship" beyond the nation-state. The critiques of Gandhi's political strategy by his Marxist contemporaries are helpful, for instance, in understanding the limitations of Gandhian spirituality. Bhagat Singh, whose own involvement in the Independence struggle began through his participation in the Non-Cooperation movement, became a fierce critic of Gandhian non-violence (*ahimsa*). After the incident at Chauri Chaura in 1922—when a group of Non-Cooperation protestors set fire to a police station after police killed three protestors—Gandhi, who condemned the use of such violence as a part of Non-Cooperation, suspended the movement. For Singh, the suspension of Non-Cooperation was evidence of the limited political utility of *ahimsa*. As Chaman Lal writes in his introduction to Singh's writings, "there is no doubt that the withdrawal of Non-Cooperation had the effect of radicalizing youth" and pushed a group of revolutionaries—including Singh—away from non-violence and towards the writings of Lenin and Trotsky (*Jail Notebook,* Introduction). Singh thus joined the Hindustan Socialist Republic Association and, with other members, wrote in 1930 a treatise called "Philosophy of the Bomb," which contested non-violence as the *only* means of realizing India's freedom:

> Satyagraha is insistence upon Truth. Why press, for the acceptance of Truth, by soul-force alone? Why not add physical force also to it? […] The question is really, therefore, not whether you will have violence or non-violence but whether you will have soul-force plus physical force or soul-force alone. (Singh et. al qtd. in Nair 650)

Moreover, while Gandhi believed that Independence would liberate India's poor from the violence of industrialization and restore economic self-sufficiency, Singh argues that non-violence served to re-establish, rather than undermine, capitalism's class divisions. In a speech given shortly before his execution, Singh rallies political workers and articulates his prescient concern that a "free" India would see an Indian bourgeoisie in the place of the British: "What difference for a peasant if Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru replaces Lord Irwin?" he asks, arguing that Independence by use of "soul-force alone" would result in a free nation in the hands of "Indian capitalists" (*Jail Notebook,* "To Young Political Workers"). While Singh argues that Gandhi is a "bourgeois tool" because of his disengagement with the peasantry as a proletarian class and for his role in the conciliatory Gandhi-Erwin Pact of 1931,[50] we can also trace in Singh's critique of *ahimsa* the limitations of Gandhi's use of spiritual principles to guide his political strategy. Indeed, Gandhi's belief that the *political* project of Independence begins at the level of individual self-mastery—through celibacy and self-discipline, for instance—risks subordinating political needs to moral orthodoxies. As R. C. Pradhan argues about Gandhi's vision of moral conduct, "all Truth-based actions constitute, according to Gandhi, the moral life, which is itself integrated into the spiritual life of man" (35).

It is not clear, however, *why* the use of physical force necessarily contradicts the "spiritual life of man"—unless the pursuit of Truth is itself circumscribed by a set of pre-

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[50] The Erwin-Gandhi Pact removed the British salt tax that had been imposed on Indians and released the political prisoners of the *salt satyagraha*. The pact was considered by more militant strands of Independence to be too conciliatory, however, as it formally ended the civil disobedience movement.

determined moral principles. Indeed, if, as Singh and his comrades argue in *Philosophy of the Bomb*, freedom from both capitalism and imperialism requires the measured and purposeful use of violence, Gandhi's conception of spirituality—organized around a set of moral precepts—disengages from the political needs of the working-class both within and outside of India. For instance, the containment of protest to prayer, boycott, and non-violent marches led to the "bottling up of great struggles [and] gave rise to great confusion, demoralization, and mutual strife" among more militant strands of the movement (Ghose qtd. in Gudavarthy 83). As Ajay Gudavarthy argues, "Gandhian politics served to facilitate the emerging alliance between Indian big bourgeoisie […] and elite political leadership against the 'revolutionary struggle of the people'" (83). Indeed, for many Marxists writing both during and after Independence, Gandhi's work as a representative for the Indian merchant class in South Africa reflected a personal affinity for big business, which was fortified over the next few decades of Independence struggle. Such an affinity persisted despite the fact that it was at odds with his emancipatory political goals: as Ambedkar remarked during his debates with Gandhi, "the Mahatma is trying to spiritualize politics. Whether he has succeeded or not, politics have certainly commercialized him" (qtd. in Coovadia 44).

In addition to these Marxist critiques of non-violence, I also share a set of personal reservations about Gandhi's emphasis on moral subjectivity as a political tool. My own attempts to read through Gandhi's correspondence with Sabarmati's residents have been very uncomfortable and challenging. In his letters to Mirabehn, for example,

the preoccupation with the body as the site of self-mastery results in his knowledge of and commentary on all aspects of her life in the ashram: how much she eats, how often she prays, the consistency of her bowel movements, the frequency with which she cries, etc.[51] While Gandhi sought to transform his followers' devotion to him into devotion to the political struggle, it is hard not to find Mirabehn's reverence for Gandhi somewhat disturbing: "Every time," she writes, "I was separated from Bapu [Gandhi], I used to suffer excruciatingly" such that Gandhi began to instate periods of separation in order to train her out of her suffering (qtd. in *Going Native*, Weber 250). Recent historical work[52] has also suggested that Gandhi's pre-occupation with self-discipline also led to an exertion of power over women; he sought, for instance, to "test" his sexual restraint by sleeping naked with his women followers and grandniece. I bring these examples up not to point out hypocrisy but to suggest that the pre-occupation with morality has serious political limitations (in its disengagement from proletarian revolution, for example) and might result in a pre-occupation *with* the self at the expense of others, as Gandhi's "experiments" with women suggest.

Moreover, while Gandhi's pursuit of Truth through devotion to God is similar to Ghose and Alfassa's pursuit of Divine Unity, I suggest here that Gandhi's spiritual belief system departs from those of Ghose and Alfassa, who consider strict moral codes to be a spiritual hindrance. In his critique of *ahimsa*, for instance, Ghose writes:

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[51] Please see *Beloved Bapu: The Gandhi-Mirabehn Correspondence,* edited by Tridip Suhrud and Thomas Weber (2014).

[52] Please see Girja Kumar's *Brahmacharya: Gandhi & His Women Associates* (2010).

> I believe Gandhi does not know what actually happens to the man's nature when he takes to Satyagraha or non-violence. He thinks that men get purified by it. But when men suffer, or subject themselves to voluntary suffering, what happens is that their vital being[53] gets strengthened […]. What one can do is to transform the spirit of violence. But in this practice of Satyagraha it is not transformed. When you insist on such a one-sided principle, what happens is that cant, hypocrisy and dishonesty get in and there is no purification at all. Purification can come by the transformation of the impulse of violence, as I said. (*India's Rebirth* 385)

Thus, for Ghose, "voluntary suffering" shores up our *perception* of the self as its own discrete entity because it begins from a set of moral precepts that divide the world between self and Other, between right and wrong. The true "transformation of the impulse of violence," he suggests, arises from neither rejecting nor accepting such precepts and from living according to a principle fundamental to mysticism: that there is unity in everything—good or bad, right or wrong—because all thoughts, feelings, actions, objects, and creatures are an expression of the Divine. As Ghose's critique of non-violence suggests, such a belief in unity does not enable the oppression or suffering of people but, rather, marshals "the force and energy of thought and action arising from communion with or self-surrender to that within us which rules the world" (106). In other words,

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[53] In Ghose's writing, "vital being" refers to "the region of consciousness between the physical and the mind, i.e., the region of emotions, feelings, passions" (*India's Rebirth* 378). I have been referring to the "vital being" in this chapter as the "self" which is, in many mystical texts, also called the "ego".

"thought and action" must resist moral distinctions and, instead, follow from the knowledge that all distinctions arise from and entrench the delusion of self; only then can the mystic begin to relinquish this delusion and realize her communion with the Divine.

Whereas Gandhian morality serves, perhaps, to shore up the self as a discrete entity, in the mystical texts I read in the following section, we can see the *beginning* of the dissolution of the self through which the conditions for "universal friendship" might emerge. Focusing my discussion on Ghose's memoir, Alfassa's diary, and the establishment of Auroville as a city/ashram, I suggest that these texts offer compelling accounts—distinct from Gandhi's—of the relationship between politics and spirituality. Gandhi's conception of "self-mastery" risked consolidating class and caste divisions in the independent nation-state; in Ghose and Alfassa's writing, however, we are able to trace the possibility of an alternative trajectory for the spiritual life of the self—one which need not recalibrate divisions between self and Other but might, instead, lead to their eventual end.[54] In their articulation of mystical experience, I thus suggest that these texts demonstrate how the pursuit of self-transcendence might work with, rather than against, the "unif[ication] of all classes and nations" and the establishment of universal friendship among all people.

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[54] I read Ghose and Alfassa's writing here in the same tradition that we might read Catholic mystics, such as St. John of the Cross and St. Teresa of Avila, and Sufi mystics, such as Rabi'a al-Basri and Jalāl ad-Dīn Mohammad Rūmī: as writings that record instances of, or glimpses into, self-transcendence. As I will suggest, these experiences of transcendence do not mean that the self has been permanently overcome but that the possibility of "no self' has been, for these mystics, established. While Gandhi was an ardent pursuer of oneness, there is little on record to suggest that he experienced, even temporarily, his desire for *moksha.*

The Prison as an Ashram: Ghose's *Tales of Prison Life*

Tales of Prison is Ghose's lyrical exploration of his year in Alipore jail, where he was imprisoned from May 1908 to May of 1909 after the British administration falsely accused him of colluding in a bomb blast that killed two British women. A British-educated scholar and writer, Ghose was actively involved with the more extremist factions of the anticolonial movement, believing that both the measured use of violence and the establishment of Socialism—of "democracy and equality between the rich and the poor"—were necessary parts of the national liberation project (26). His memoir, however, is less of an indictment of the British Raj and prison system (though it is this as well) than it is a memoir of a mystical experience that catalyzes Ghose's turn from anticolonial activist into spiritual leader. In this memoir, as in *Sea of Poppies* and (to a lesser extent) *Cracking India,* the prison re-emerges as a site of both oppression and possible freedom from the limitations of the self. Neel and Ah Fatt's *chokey* onboard the *Ibis* and the women's "jail" in *Cracking India* suggest that the suffering of imprisonment might be harnessed for transformative ends. As his memoir unfolds, we see that Ghose regards Alipore not as a jail but as an ashram; the overlap between the inhumane conditions of the prison and the ascetic nature of the ashram leads him to rename the prison in his writing as "Alipore Ashram."[55] In particular, his solitary confinement functions as the method through which he manifests his yogic ideal: the experience of "no self" and of unity with

[55] This is reminiscent of much of Gandhi's writing on Sabarmati, where he often refers to the ashram "Sabarmati Prison" and its residents as "inmates." Please see, for many examples of Gandhi's writing on Sabarmati, Thomas Weber's *Gandhi as Disciple and Mentor* (2004).

the surrounding world. While, as we saw in Chapter 1, the reconceptualizing of prison as site of spiritual awakening risks romanticizing the violence of the carceral system and minimizing its pivotal role in the management of empire, the spiritual life possible within the prison is, for Ghose, an affront to colonial authority and evidence of British subjugation under a universal God: "If God were not to manifest in prisons, in huts, in ashrams, in the hearts of the miserable," he asks, "then should He manifest in the luxurious palaces of the rich or the comfortable beds of pleasure-seeking, ego-blinded worldly folk?" (28).

The conditions under which Ghose lived in Alipore are similar to those of the prison where Neel is jailed prior to his transfer to the *Ibis:* Ghose and other political prisoners are "kept like animals in a cage, given food unfit for animals" and forced to "endure water scarcity, thirst and hunger, sun, rain, and cold" (21). Such inhumane conditions facilitate his mystical realization by breaking down his attachments to the material world and by reforming his experience of social relations outside of race, class, and caste divisions. In other words, the process of imprisonment reveals for Ghose the truth of a fundamental mystical tenet: the body and the mind—through physical need and through the act of thinking—create the illusion of the individual self and prohibit the self from experiencing true communion with God and the surrounding world. As Ghose explains, devotion to the body and to the mind manifests "an ignorance [that] is lifelong slavery and subordination" and imprisons even "free" people whose "condition[s] [are] just as wretched as those who spend their days in prison" (78). Insofar as the prison

provides no external stimuli, no distraction from the nature of the self, and no material comforts, it functions as a kind of ashram where attachment to the self might be relinquished. In other words, Ghose realizes a new state of being in Alipore which overwhelms an old "ignorance" based on distinctions between self and Other.

In Ghose's description of Alipore, caste and class differences between the prisoners are superseded by their shared experience of incarceration and by the "impartiality" of the British prison guards who treat all their prisoners with a similar contempt (22). Such impartiality makes the maintenance of caste hierarchy among prisoners impossible insofar as "[r]ich, poor, brahmins, businessmen, shudra, Bengali, Marata, Punjabi, Gujarati all stayed, slept, and ate together with a wonderful feeling of brotherhood" (21). Claims to castelessess—even in seemingly communal spaces such as Alipore—must be regarded with a degree of skepticism; as many scholars of the caste system remind us, the workings of caste are often insidious, invisibly settling across institutions, social movements, oceans, nations, and eras.[56] We might read Ghose's description of the "brotherhood" made possible in Alipore, not as evidence of the prison's castelessness but of its interruption of an otherwise normalized caste hierarchy that works in the service of British imperialism. Michael Mann, for instance, argues that the caste system in India grew more robust under British administration, which sought to invoke the caste system as a strategy of "divide and conquer." Brahmins in particular functioned as native informants for the British, enabling British administration to mobilize the

[56] Please see Soundarajan and Varatharaja (2015) and Patel (2018) for examples.

divisions within the caste system as "evidence" for India's lack of cohesion, its inability to self-rule, and its need for foreign control (23). Melitta Waligora similarly argues that "caste is a fact of India but not in an ahistorical, all-embracing, idealized, brahminical, fixed-hierarchal manner. The way 'caste' and the 'caste system' are conceptualized today is, to a certain extent, the result of colonial ideology and practice" (142).

However—insofar as the function of the British prison system in India was meant to discipline unruly subjects—the demands of the prison, at times, contradicted the mobilization of caste hierarchy for imperialist ends. As Stephen Morton explains in his study of narratives of sedition under the British Raj, for Thomas Macaulay and other architects of the prison system in India, the prospect of indefinite imprisonment through forced removal, the loss of community, and separation from family was thought to cause a "peculiar fear" in Indians (qtd. in Morton 186). This fear rendered imprisonment a particularly effective method of control inasmuch as it made use of prisoners' loneliness, loss of stability and intimacy, and fear of the unknown. The mobilization of fear is, of course, central to penal systems both within and without the British Empire and is well-documented in the field of prison studies.[57] In Alipore, however, we can see particularly clearly how the forced collapse of caste distinction is meant to incite fear and uncertainty in the individual prisoner by separating him from the conditions that make up his life on the outside world. In a similar way in which Neel is forced share a cell with Ah Fatt in

[57] Please see Foucault (1978), Davis (2003), and Anderson (2005).

order to strip him of caste, so too do the conditions in Alipore force upon Ghose an end to his Brahminical rituals.

The stripping of Ghose's caste happens through both his forced communal life in the shared spaces of the prison as well as through his experience of solitary confinement. When he is kept with other prisoners, the process of learning how to defecate in front of others reminds Ghose of his loss of self-control. While much of the caste hierarchy in the larger world is kept intact within the prison—the *methar* (sweeper) is, for instance, still charged with the work of cleaning up waste in prison as he is outside—Ghose becomes visibly dependent on the goodwill of the *methar* in Alipore, relying on him to escape the "noxious and fetid smells" that otherwise dominate the shared cells (17).[58] Similarly, Ghose's relationship to caste is re-oriented through the forced use of a single bowl in his cell with which to perform all the daily rituals of living. Ghose describes this bowl as "free from all caste restrictions, beyond discrimination: in the prison cell it helped with the act of ablution; later with the same bowl [he] gargled, bathed," ate food, and drank water (16). Accustomed to the fastidiousness and choice available to wealthy Brahmins, Ghose's initial reaction—and one that sharply recalls Neel's reaction to having to handle Ah Fatt's waste—is disgust. However, his bowl eventually provides the means through which he "acquire[s] an unsought lesson in controlling his sense of disgust" (16). Eventually referring to his bowl as his "dear bowl" and thanking it for its service, Ghose's

[58] A limitation of this project is that many of the friendships I focus on (such as between Neel and Ah Fatt in *Sea of Poppies*) demonstrate how friendship transforms a person with a relative degree of power *over* another. A yet insufficiently answered question is what friendship might do, not for someone like Ghose, but for the *methar.* I aim to think through this question in the conclusion.

disgust transforms into gratitude for his new, seemingly cruel conditions: "Where else," he asks, "could [he] find such an aid and a preceptor to get rid of the sense of disgust?" (16).

The efforts of prison guards to instill in Ghose the "peculiar fear" of uncertainty by disorienting caste relations among prisoners thus largely fails. On one level, such failure stems from the fact that the prisoners' shared experience of cruelty results in the "wonderful feeling of brotherhood": through common hardship, "convicts, […] fellow nationals, peasants, iron-mongers, potters, the *doms* and the *bagdis,* and [Ghose] […] learned the ways of the Lord who dwells in everybody, this socialism and unity, this sense of nation-wide brotherhood" (22). On another level, however, this failure emerges from the fact that the cruel and sparse conditions of the prison present the "marvellous chance and favourable condition for learning yoga and rising above dualities" (21). As the memoir takes shape, we see that "rising above dualities" means not only overcoming differences between himself and other prisoners but all distinctions between self and Other: feelings of "brotherhood" with his fellow prisoners transforms into a broader communion with others—including the prison guards who confine him—and with God.

Ghose's solitary confinement in a small, windowless cell becomes the vehicle for his experience of oneness. We see through Ghose's writing how Alipore, in mimicking the solitude and discipline of an ashram, breaks down individual attachment to the material world and its conception of discrete selfhood in such a way that undermines colonial authority. In the beginning of his confinement, for instance, Ghose mourns the loss of his

freedom, of his uninhibited experience of space, only to realize that—in forcing him to use the same small space for sleeping, eating, meditating, and defecating—the British have granted him a form of knowledge that they themselves lack: that "the body is an instrument for the fulfillment of the religious life," rather than a vehicle to satisfy our desires and protect us from our aversions (77). No longer distracted by the demands of the body or the outside world, Ghose comes to understand that "imprisonment is the perennial condition of man"—including of the "European materialists" who have imprisoned him—who cannot see beyond their own thoughts and feelings to experience a true communion with others and with God (78). As such, the cell becomes the site of Ghose's *sadhana,* his daily meditative practice where he aims to shed the human ego and attain "complete freedom" through surrender to God (94). When the British release him in 1909, his freedom comes not from leaving Alipore but from the "power of Brahman-realization," or this surrender to God over which the British have no control (91).

In this sense, the binary between colonizer and colonized, which the British seek to keep intact in Alipore, comes undone for Ghose through the process of imprisonment itself. By manifesting the doctrine of *sattwa* (or goodness)—which seeks to redirect the passions and aversion of the ego to meditation—Ghose's *sadhana* renders his time in Alipore "a unique lesson in love" (23). His small cell comes to house the "all-pervading Brahman" (or God) through which he grows to appreciate and love the simplest and most mundane aspects of his surroundings. The tree in the courtyard becomes a balm for his solitude and a reminder of beauty; the cows grazing in the prison yards became a source

of companionship for Ghose and his fellow prisoners. In this sense, Ghose's solitude enlarges, rather than diminishes, his connection to the world beyond his prison cell; he comes to understand "how deep can be the love of man for all created things, how thrilled a man can be by a cow, a bird, even an ant" (24).

Such an experience of love extends even to his captors, the prison officers, of whom he feels a "special need to speak of [their] kindness and human conduct" (38). While these acts of kindness are infrequent compared to the ordinary, "inhuman cruelty of the British prison system," even sporadic glimpses of human kindness are significant for Ghose, illuminating the potential for harmony between people even under the most inhospitable conditions (38). Indeed, in his anticipation of national liberation and the establishment of true "equality, unity, and nation-wide brotherhood" in India, Ghose "pre-vision[s] the arrival of that auspicious day in the love of [his] fellow accused and prisoners and the British administrator's practice of equality towards [them]" (27). The achievement of such unity across and outside of India becomes, for Ghose, an intertwined spiritual and political goal: upon his release from Alipore in 1909, he is clear that his contribution to the Independence movement will be the practice and teaching of mysticism through which "people of all classes in [his] country will band together as one living mass at the sacred altar of the World-Mother, represented here by our Motherland" (27).

Ghose's time in Alipore thus shapes a new conception of the national liberation project profoundly connected to the possibility that the self might be transcended.

Ghose's turn to mysticism serves as both a response to the tyranny of Western reason and an attempt to recover mysticism as a form of politics in its own right. In his writing on unity, history, and the stages of human societies' development, he argues that Enlightenment conceptions of individual will and reason result in political and social stagnation—a world in which "the unrestrained use of individual illumination or judgment" will "lead […] to a continual fluctuation and disorder of opinion [rather] than to a progressive unfolding of the truth of things" (*The Human Cycle* 19). In other words, all social movements built upon the conception of Western subjectivity will suffer from the continual ruptures between self and Other, from the self-interest of the individual who forsakes humanity to "satisfy his own ideas and desires" or the ideas and desires of a group with which he is aligned (20).

For Ghose, the ultimate aim of human development is the "complex unity of mankind," (*The Human Cycle* 437) which supersedes desire and difference by allowing "difference to coexist with unity" (326). The sovereign nation (or what Ghose calls the "nation-unit") is fundamental to the realization of such human unity which will, in turn, make the "nation-unit" obsolete. In Ghose's configuration, India's sovereignty is necessary for two reasons: one, like Fanon who also desired a new world order that would end violence against the Other, the shift from colony to nation was a crucial step insofar as colonial subjugation operates *through* violence and inhibits the building of human unity. Second, and specific to Ghose's thinking, India had a particular role to play in bringing about this new world order rooted, not in the nation-state, but in universal

spiritual transformation. In his speech on the day of India's Independence, he writes that India's newfound sovereignty will allow for

> the resurgence and liberation of India and her return to the great role which she had played in the progress of human civilization; the rise of a new, greater, brighter, and nobler life for mankind which for its entire realization would rest outwardly on an international unification of the separate existence of all the peoples, preserving and securing their national life but drawing them together into an overriding and consummating oneness; the gift by India of her spiritual knowledge for the spiritualization of life to the whole race; finally, a new step in the evolution by which uplifting the consciousness to a higher level, would begin the solution of the many problems of existence which have perplexed and vexed humanity, since men began to think and to dream of individual perfection and a perfect society. ("The Fifteenth of August 1947" 537)

"International unification" thus begins at the level of the nation, which "provides a larger mould for human aggregation in which the [human] race, and not only classes and individuals, may move towards its full human development" (*The Human Cycle* 326).

In Ghose's theorization, however, mysticism succeeds in facilitating this process of unification not because it holds a more *nuanced* view of subjectivity than one grounded in reason and rationality, but because it views any conception of self as both a hindrance to collective harmony and a delusion that can be shed. While Ghose responds in part to

the limitations of the discrete Enlightenment subject central to modernity, his main reference point is the essential unity between the human and the Divine. As such, while Ghose foresees the creation of a united world free of violence and poverty—where "the wealth of the community will be […] shared by all those who help create it" (326)—he argues that such a world will arise only through the realization of "inner oneness" that emerges from the transcendence of self and communion with the Divine (383). In other words, he suggests that political movements seeking to create unity and harmony among all people cannot do so without the "universal friendship" of *maitri* and the "pure love" of the *sadhana*, which arise through the surrender of the self to the Divine. Such unity, Ghose suggests, "must take birth in the soul and rise from the hidden and divine depths within" (383). The ashram he founded in Pondicherry in 1926 was thus meant to be the site of this birth, the place where the process of national and international unification could begin through the collective devotion to spiritual life. In this sense, Ghose puts forth a type of prefigurative politics: the inner spiritual work of the individual, the transcendence of the distinction between self and Other, makes possible true "equality, unity, and nation-wide brotherhood" within the independent nation; in turn, the establishment of unity within the nation sets in motion the international unification of sovereign nation-states.

Ghose's conception of Hinduism as the basis or root of such unification is worth pausing on. In their writing on the origins of contemporary Hindu nationalism, Bidyut Chakrabarty and Bhuwan Kumar Jha argue that Ghose's theorization of nationalism

helped "la[y] the foundation of Hindu nationalism as an ideology seeking to create and consolidate a strong India on the basis of her rich civilizational-intellectual heritage" (14). While Chakrabarty and Jha are clear that Ghose himself disagreed with a fundamentalist politics that sought to exclude Muslims from the emergent Indian nation and hoped to create, instead, a national liberation movement that "combined strength of the Hindus and Muslims," Ghose's reliance on the Vedas in his theorization of Indian nationalism—and his desire to restore the past greatness of Indic civilization—ties together the independent nation-state with Hindu theology (46). They argue that, though universal harmony remained the goal of Ghose's "nationalism […] [of] spiritual transformation," the turn to Hindu scripture helped create the conditions for an imagined Hindu nation that refigures Muslims, not as a part of India's "rich civilization-intellectual heritage," but as a possible impediment to the achievement of unity within the nation itself (Ghose qtd. in Chakrabarty and Jha 56). While the turn to scripture for guidance in the creation of universal harmony need not be a nationalist or exclusionary turn in and of itself, it is true that Ghose's positioning of India as a "spiritual leader" to rest of the world has enabled a contemporary Hindu nationalist politics. As Chakraborty argues, strands of anticolonial thought rooted in "India's distinctive spiritual identity" has given rise to an ascetic yet violent masculinity central to the project of Hindutva (55). Jyoti Puri similarly argues that the anticolonial re-framing of Hinduism as "India's invaluable gift to the world," has led, under Modi, to the explicit branding and consolidation of India as a primarily Hindu nation (320).

Indeed, Ghose's postulation of mysticism refigures India as a spiritual leader through its emergence as a *necessarily* Hindu nation. In *Tales of Prison Life*, he argues that it is only through Hinduism that such international unification can occur insofar as Hinduism is a "universal religion that embraces all others," one "not circumscribed by the confines of a single country" (120). While Ghose's suggestion that Hinduism belongs to no particular people or nation contradicts the tenets of contemporary Hindu nationalism, the singularity he ascribes to Hinduism is both implicitly and explicitly nationalist. In *India's Rebirth*, for instance, he describes Islam as a source of division and threat: "Hindu-Muslim unity," he says "cannot be arrived at on the basis that the Muslims will go on converting Hindus" because of "their fanatic faith in their religion" (388).[59] As such, while Ghose's goal for the Independence movement—that it "overcome[s] the egoism of individualistic life and bring[s] about a perfect principle and rational order of society in a harmonious world"—remains collective, he also puts forth a conception of Hinduism that is distinct and superior and which, in order to bring about this "harmonious world," must form the political *basis* of an independent India (*The Human Cycle* 201).

As such, I do not claim here any individual mystic as an exemplar of a "pure" politics of love, harmony, or universal friendship; to do this would, I believe, reduce the

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[59] It is important to note here that Ghose is not suggesting that Muslim/Hindu unity cannot be achieved or that such unity is undesirable; rather, he is (no less problematically) laying the blame for disharmony on Muslims who he reads as sowing division. His writing in both *India's Rebirth* and *The Human Cycle* suggests, however, that he believed unity between Muslims and Hindus was *necessary* for India's true independence and for the spiritual transformation of the world to begin. As such, he puts forth a conception of India, still Hindu-dominant, in which harmony might be possible: "Our ideal therefore is an Indian Nationalism, largely Hindu in its spirit and traditions […] but wide enough also to include the Moslem and his culture and traditions" (*India's Rebirth* 138-9).

Divine to the limitations of the human. Indeed, to read Ghose's memoir as an experience of self-transcendence, as I do here, is not to suggest his self has been permanently or unequivocally overcome—a *process*, for all mystics, that is cultivated and deepened over the course of years or a lifetime.[60] Rather, I suggest we can read Ghose for the possibility that inheres to his mystical pursuits: that, from a sustained and devoted spiritual practice, a state of oneness might emerge. Much of Ghose's work—focused on how the search for oneness might facilitate a set of new political formations beyond the distinctions between self and Other—is thus lost in the selective readings of his work by the Hindu Right. In an effort to understand the aspects of Ghose's writing antithetical to these nationalist divisions, I turn now to a consideration of Aurobindo Ashram in Pondicherry and of Auroville, the city/ashram built for Ghose upon his death and designed to help realize his vision for human unity: "a universal town where men and women of all countries are able to live in peace and progressive harmony above all creeds, all politics, and all nationalities" (Alfassa qtd. in *Biography* 89).

"A Harmony Out of the Whole World"

Upon his release from Alipore, Ghose more or less resigned from the active Independence movement to build the spiritual community of the Aurobindo ashram,

[60] In his work on Integral Yoga, for example, Ghose lays out separate stages through which the self—including all its affinities and aversions—is permanently transformed, of which his experience in Alipore was just the first/beginning. Indeed, many of Ghose's speeches found in *India's Rebirth*—a collection that records his most Hindu nationalist ideas and which has been particularly important for the Hindu Right—were made before his mystical experience in Alipore. Perhaps we can trace the emergence of the more universal, anti-nationalist potential in his thought (especially those found in *The Human Cycle*, written in 1918) to his time in Alipore.

which he hoped would contribute to the political and spiritual transformation of the world. At the heart of Ghose's vision for transformation was his friendship with Mirra Alfassa (also known as "the Mother"), a French mystic who renounced her life in the West to become Ghose's lifelong spiritual partner; though she began her time at Aurobindo ashram as his disciple, she quickly became his spiritual equal, a teacher of mysticism in her own right. Upon her arrival in Pondicherry, Leela Gandhi writes, "Mirra Alfassa became in due course the Mother of the devotional Ashram community and Sri Aurobindo's spiritual collaborator" (119). Such a collaboration, she argues, arose from Alfassa's recognition of Ghose as a spiritual "soul-mate" and from her own affinities with the Independence struggle of which Ghose had been so deeply a part: like other "European women and men who arrived in colonial India at the turn of the century to fulfill the secret imperatives of a spiritual vocation or destiny, the Mother […] strongly identified with the cause of Indian independence and the contingent reformation of Indian social and political life" (91). Liberation from the self was a crucial aspect of this social and political reformation—a way of transcending the "Manichean divisions of race, class, gender, and species" from which so much suffering arises (125). Citing Alfassa's spiritual diary—in which she records her struggles to shed the "gross illusion of 'me' and 'mine,' the intolerable burden of this obscure and cumbersome self"—Gandhi thus traces Alfassa's attempts to transcend these divisions by shedding the "illusion of separation between ourselves and others" (Alfassa qtd. in Gandhi 126).

Gandhi traces the roots of Alfassa's friendship with Ghose through the political and social changes of the end of the nineteenth century—through the "potent combination of evolutionary biology, geology, and Biblical criticism" that led to the rise of fin-de-siècle radicalism and its rejection of Enlightenment conceptions of reason (122). In particular, she reads Alfassa's pursuit of self-transcendence against Kant's conception of the political ethical agent. In her reading of Alfassa's diary, for instance, Gandhi argues that we can understand Alfassa's turn towards mysticism through the limitations of Kant's conception of reason and of the contradictions he sees between religion and "absolute moral freedom" (126). For Kant, Gandhi argues, the moral freedom of Man compels a total "self-sufficiency" that relies neither on the "mere worship" of God nor on attachments to other people (126). Fundamental to Enlightenment thinking is this conception of the moral subject; whereas for Kant this moral subjectivity was crucial to the development of humanity in its ideal form, Gandhi argues that—for fin-de-siècle radicals such as Alfassa—the attachment to pure reason and to discrete subjectivity inhibited humanity's spiritual and political freedom and propelled them towards the spirituality of the East.

I am indebted to Gandhi's exploration of the political history of Alfassa's mysticism and, in particular, to her writing on the friendship between Alfassa and Ghose. However, I suggest here that the turn to Kantian notions of the political ethical agent might overshadow the most interesting and provocative mystical claim—that is, that the conception of a discrete self, separate from others and from God, is both illusory and

contingent, based not on truth but on a set of delusions that both pre-date and suffuse Enlightenment subjectivity. While Western philosophy can help us make sense of the political and historical conditions that took Alfassa to India and to the ashram, it cannot necessarily help us understand how and why mysticism is an important and relevant cosmology in its own right. Indeed, for Alfassa, the violence of colonialism and the disharmony of the world was not merely a consequence of Western reason but of the collective delusion of self. Writing on May 3rd, 1914, for instance, Alfassa prays for "perfect Unity" with the Divine: "May the 'I' disappear" such that "I may be nothing else but only Thou!" (*Prayers and Meditations* 68). For Alfassa, as for Ghose, it is the "I" that prohibits the experience of perfect communion and harmony with the surrounding world: "What is most lacking in human beings is clarity and order; each element, each state of being, instead of fulfilling its function in harmony with all the others, wants to be all in itself, perfectly autonomous and independent. That, besides, is the ignorant error of the whole world, it is a global error repeating itself in millions and millions of examples" (95). To undertake Divine work is, therefore, not only to reject the limitations of Western reason but to strive for the collective liberation from the self—the "global error" from which much suffering arises. Thus, for Alfassa, the transcendence of self was the basis, not only to achieve India's freedom, but to "build […] a harmony out of the whole world" (124).

Aurobindo Ashram was founded in 1926 as a first step towards the creation of "harmony out of the whole world"—a place where mystics could strive to liberate the

self. Like Gandhi's Sabarmati Ashram, Aurobindo Ashram was also organized to promote communal life; as Anne Gleig and Charles I. Flores write, "[l]ocated in the middle of Pondicherry, Aurobindo insisted that the ashram was not a retreat from the world and that all residents were required to work," which was shared among residents to ensure that everyone's basic needs were met (46). Each person's spiritual work, however, was self-directed rather than communal: as the ashram's principles state, residents are "left free to determine the course and pace of their *sadhana* according to the path that best suits their own natures" so long as each person "surrenders to the Divine […] so that it may work to transform one's being" (n.p).

Ghose and Alfassa's deep and profound spiritual friendship played a crucial role in guiding the inner transformation of the ashram's disciples. As one of their longest-serving disciples, Nirodbaran, writes in his account of ashram life, Ghose and Alfassa were revered, not as two distinct spiritual leaders, but as "Shiva and Shakti"—or consciousness and energy, the two manifestations of the Divine which are one in Hindu philosophy (48). In the day-to-day life at the ashram, they split their duties—Alfassa serving as the "guiding hand" in the disciples' everyday spiritual practice and Ghose as the ashram's *guru* or mentor (49). As Nirodbaran notes, "while one felt in Sri Aurobindo's atmosphere a wide and large freedom of nature, the Mother's contact always brought us to the hard reality of things" (50). While such a split ran, perhaps, along gendered lines (Shiva and Shakti are often described in the terms of "masculine" and "feminine"), Ghose and Alfassa write of each other as spiritual equals who have transcended the division of

gender: "Without him," says Alfassa "I exist not; without me he is unmanifest" (qtd. in Nirodbaran 48). In his letters about his relationship to Alfassa, Ghose similarly writes that the "Mother and I are one but in two bodies" (*The Mother* 82). Indeed, Alfassa's spiritual realizations emerged from her deep connection with Ghose, as did his; as Nirodbaran writes, "with the Mother's help, he covered ten years of *sadhana* in one year and, without her, his "stupendous realisations could not have taken such a concrete shape on this terrestrial base" (48). As such, their disciples often considered the friendship between Ghose and Alfassa to be an *expression* of Divine Unity—a manifestation of "inner oneness" made possible through the transcendence of self. As Nirodbaran writes, "the two consciousnesses were one" and, in this, the disciples "were given the unique opportunity of witnessing […] [something] rare in the spiritual history of man" (50, 49).

After Ghose's death in 1950, Alfassa conceived of Auroville as an ashram/city which would both honour Ghose's profound mystical insights and make universal the "inner oneness" manifested in their friendship. As her disciples describe the origin of Auroville:

> The task of giving a concrete form to Sri Aurobindo's vision was entrusted to the Mother. The creation of a new world, a new humanity, a new society expressing and embodying the new consciousness is the work she has undertaken. […] The Ashram founded and built by the Mother was the first step towards the accomplishment of this goal. The project of Auroville is the next step, more exterior, which seeks to widen the base of this attempt to

> establish harmony between soul and body, spirit and nature, heaven and earth, in the collective life of mankind. (*Words of the Mother I* 204)

As such, Auroville—founded in 1968 twenty kilometres outside of the Aurobindo Ashram — was built to be a *futuristic* city, a prototype for the new world Alfassa and Ghose envisioned. Alfassa describes Auroville as the "city of the dawn"—one that is both an experiment in collective living and an "attempt toward world peace, friendship, fraternity, and unity" (190). The establishment of complete harmony among Auroville's residents would serve as a "living embodiment of an actual human unity"—a harbinger for a future yet to come but made possible through collective effort (193).

Auroville has been a site of fascination and possibility for individuals seeking alternatives to societies rooted in the violence of nationalism, capitalism, and imperialism. As Anuradha Majumdar writes in her history of Auroville, the city/ashram is based on Ghose's ideals of human unity which include "a free-world union" formed, not on subjugation and authority, but through "a complex unity based on diversity […] which regards mankind as one single nation" (295). As such, it has drawn people from all over the world and had, at its peak, nearly three thousand residents, each who have committed to the "sincere attempt to bring peace and unity among men" (Alfassa, *Words of the Mother I* 196). In certain ways, Auroville is a part of the history of twentieth and twenty-first century history of utopian community-building. For example, women's land-based movements—which gained traction in the US and Britain in the 1970s and prompted the global establishment of women's communes and peace camps—were a part of the larger

global mobilization against the predations of nationalism, capitalism, and patriarchy. Writing on the Women's Encampment for the Future of Peace—established in 1983 in Seneca Falls, New York— Keriden L. Lewis writes that the camp was a "point of transformation on an immediate personal scale" for its residents, as well as on "the greater political scale," as residents of the camp mobilized for nuclear disarmament and a future free of the suffering of war (29). While Auroville is, similarly, an experiment in community living geared towards the creation a harmonious and unified future, the root of this harmony is found—not in the establishment of identity-based communities—but in the collective *sadhana* through which residents strive to transcend the self. As Alfassa writes, "in human life the cause of all difficulties, all discords, all […] sufferings, is the presence in everyone of the ego with its desires, its likes and dislikes" (*Words of the Mother I* 164). The mystical task is to relinquish this "ego" (self)—not in order to establish uniformity among residents—but, rather, to "express the Divine Unity upon earth through an organized and harmonious diversity" (43).

As such, the internal structure of Auroville is aimed at creating harmony among its residents which will, in turn, serve as the foundation for "world peace, friendship, fraternity, and unity." In keeping with Ghose's vision that the spiritual transformation of the world would eliminate poverty and the suffering borne by the poor, Alfassa writes that "money [will] no longer be the sovereign lord" in Auroville which will "have money relations only with the outside world" (189). As part of its role as both a refuge from the outside world and a harbinger for a future world, all property is collective in Auroville:

"nothing belongs to anyone in particular" and everything is "to be utilised with [Alfassa's] blessings for the welfare of all" (208). All residents are expected to work for the upkeep of Auroville and such work is considered a part of the spiritual path, "a way […] to develop one's capacities and possibilities while being of service to the community as a whole" (190). As such, the work of transcending the self is both individual and collaborative, requiring devotion to both individual contemplation and to collaboration with others across a difference in values, "national rivalries, social conventions, self-contradictory moralities and contending religions" (202). In other words, residents of Auroville must "be convinced of the essential unity of mankind and have the will to collaborate for the material realization of this unity" by working together, giving up individual possessions, and setting aside personal allegiances for the realization of collective unity with the Divine (192). Alfassa's friendship with Ghose serves as a guiding principle for the "union" residents might develop with each other. As she describes the purpose of Auroville's collective structure:

> At the summit of the being […] there is a Supreme Truth […] independent of all the circumstances of birth, country, environment, education; […] it is in the consciousness of That that you must unite. To be one in aspiration and ascension, to move forward at the same pace on the same spiritual path, that is the secret of a lasting union. (237)

This lasting union, she argues, is a realization of the Divine and the basis for the establishment of universal friendship, harmony, and peace, both within and outside of Auroville.

While the vision of Auroville is utopian, its execution has been much more fraught. As Ian Parker writes in his study of the history of Auroville, its aim to establish itself as a type of "commons" for the use of all people, has been plagued by hierarchy and fracture from its inception. The land on which Auroville is built—once the site of fourteen Tamil villages—is contested by some groups of villagers who lay claim to the land and who have refused integration into Auroville (384). While Alfassa believed that the integration of villagers through the building of schools and the provision of food and clean water was crucial to her utopian vision, Auroville has yet to resolve its role in the forced displacement of villagers and the creation of land disputes. Moreover, the desire to build a community that does not rely on money internally has led to a prohibitive dependence on the wealth of the outside world; as residents must prove their financial independence in order to live in Auroville, the city has become a hub for Indian and Western elite, rather than an intentional community for all mystics. As such, a set of problems very much rooted in the self and its desires and hierarchies have emerged; for instance, rising numbers of incidents of sexual harassment and violence against women among residents required Auroville's governing body to explicitly attempt to "reduce sexual harassment through education, responsive security and internal justice systems" ("Sexual Harassment,"*Auroville Today* n.p.). Despite the unique spiritual basis

upon which Auroville was conceived, its problems thus remain fairly pedestrian and familiar; as Jayawardena writes in her study of mysticism and anticolonial politics, though Auroville "was to be a model for the future […], like all experiments in community living, serious problems arose about the running of the venture in addition to financial, climatic, and logistical difficulties" (217).

Several scholars argue that Auroville's problems arise from its foundational errors —namely its disengagement from actual forms of inequality, which have now been woven into the fabric of the community itself. Jessica Namakkal argues, for instance, that "Auroville not only wanted to be free from the horrors of history, but also from the reality of the present, failing to recognize that the material conditions of the past were the basis of […] their projections of the present into the future" (70). Such failure, she suggests, has led to the utopian experiment becoming an extension of the colonial project; by assuming villagers would *want* to integrate into Auroville, "Aurovilians failed to recognize the different subjectivities of local populations, shaped through […] centuries of struggle with colonizers from all over the world" (62). These foundational problems seem, to me, indisputable and certainly prohibitive for the realization of human unity. However, while there is much academic scholarship on Auroville's failures, much of this

scholarship disengages from the more technical and spiritual aspects of Auroville's origins and, as such, also obscures some crucial elements of its utopian project.[61]

For instance, both Alfassa and Ghose conceived of Auroville as an "evolutionary experiment" that would be the "the starting point of [human] unity" (Majumdar 281). In other words, both its successes and failures would ideally help sharpen and clarify the process by which the world could be transformed through/into a state of oneness. As Alfassa writes, Auroville is "for the *growth* of consciousness and consecration to the Truth that has [yet] to be realized" (my emphasis; *Words of the Mother I* 197). Such growth and realization would not, in Alfassa and Ghose's configuration, occur immediately or seamlessly but, perhaps, over "a hundred, five hundred or a thousand years" (Alfassa qtd. in Majumdar 56). The persistence of violence among or against Auroville's residents suggests, for instance, that this growth might occur slowly, inhibited by the very difficulty of achieving self-transcendence and by the possibility that

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[61] For example, Namakkal's suggestion that Alfassa's vision for the future was a set of "projections" rooted in the present is, of course, true. However, Namakkal also glosses over the very particular and complex relationship between the past, present, and future that arises in mystical thought. For instance, the ideals of Auroville suggest that a just society in the present is important for the realization of a unified future. Yet, while it might seem contradictory when read through secular paradigms, many strands of mystical thought do not conceive of the future as *necessarily* beholden to or directly following from the past. Rather, a future born of the collective experience of transcendence constitutes a radical *break* from the past (similar, perhaps, to how in Judaeo-Christian theology, the collective "Last Judgement" signifies the beginning of an entirely new phase of existence in "Heaven" or "Hell"). There are many necessary critiques of this worldview which often contributes to, neglects, and creates a set of political injustices in the present. I, myself, do not think that the belief in a "break" from the past is viable or politically useful—indeed, this whole project has been devoted to tracing the political and historical continuities between colonial and postcolonial eras through empire and the nation-state. As such, I agree with Namakkal's critique that Auroville (in its practices, if not its ideals) has disengaged from current political realities. Nonetheless, purely secularist readings seem to take their own worldview for granted. While some of their critiques still stand, these readings would be more convincing if they arrived at their critiques, not through the framework of contradiction and failure, but by sincerely engaging with (and having knowledge of) the particular spiritual paradigm from which Auroville emerges.

individual residents, as Alfassa writes, "ha[d] not attained the level of consciousness" necessary to undertake sustained and devoted spiritual work (*Words of the Mother I* 239). However, the slow and difficult process of transcendence does not, in itself, suggest that the achievement of oneness is either impossible or politically insignificant, and the problems in/of Auroville do not necessarily amount to its failure as an experiment.

Perhaps what these academic critiques *do* remind us, however, is that the work of mysticism—which might unfold only over the course of "a thousand years"—is incomplete on its own. Insofar as many utopian projects, such as Auroville, take shape in contexts of poverty, inequality, and ongoing coloniality, Namakkal's critique (while I disagree with her reading of Auroville as more or less a failure) is also instructive: it reminds us that, in order for these projects to meaningfully contest political injustice and resist becoming the exclusive domain of the privileged, they must also be firmly rooted in the political struggles of the present, even as they look towards the future. In this sense, we need not read Auroville's problems as evidence that spiritual life is oppositional or irrelevant to the achievement of political goals; rather, we can read these problems as reminders that the spiritual—as one method of overcoming the divisions between self and Other—must work *with* political movements that also seek to revolutionize the world. Only then, perhaps, will experiments like Auroville fully realize their role in the transformation of suffering and division into the experience of unity, harmony, and universal friendship.

Conclusion

I have attempted in this chapter to bring together three interests that have characterized much of my life in the last decade: a political opposition to the divisions of the nation-state, a fascination with friendship as both an interpersonal and universal form of connection across division, and a personal interest in mystical conceptions of the Divine. I have argued here that, while Gandhi's use of spirituality risks consolidating the self, the mystical pursuit of transcendence enlivens the political struggle for harmony and human unity. In Ghose and Alfassa's writings, for example, the political and spiritual converge on a set of levels as they hope that the anticolonial struggle in India will catalyze the beginning in a new world based on the "pure love" of Divine Unity and the universal friendship of *maitri.* I am critical, as I have discussed earlier, of Ghose's positioning of India as a "spiritual leader," which has become a basis for the development of Hindu nationalism; however, I have aimed to show here *how* mystical conceptions of the Divine might help liberate us from the violence of nationalism itself by re-forming the world beyond the divisions between self and Other. Indeed, I began this project with the question of how, following Fanon, the postcolonial world might be transformed beyond the restrictive structures of the nation-state; the Aurobindo ashram and Auroville serve as one possible answer. I cannot, of course, say definitively that our mystical pursuits will lead to the "unification of all classes and nations," as Ambedkar desires, or to the "complex unity of mankind," which Ghose's teachings serve. Perhaps in the convergence

of the political and the mystical, however, lies Fanon's “new history of Man,” which might be yet to come.

Conclusion: Reflections on Suffering and Friendship

Your pain still hangs in air,
Sharp motes of it suspended;
The voice of your despair —
That also is not ended:

When near your death a friend
Asked you what he could do,
'Remember me,' you said.
We will remember you.

Once when you went to see
Another with a fever
In a like hospital bed,
With terrible hothouse cough
And terrible hothouse shiver
That soaked him and then dried him,
And you perceived that he
Had to be comforted,

You climbed in there beside him
And hugged him plain in view,
Though you were sick enough,
And had your own fears too.

— Thom Gunn, "Memory Unsettled" (1990)

> *I will the end of your suffering, but my love cannot collapse this abyss of skin and bone and pain between us. I can only transcend myself through empathy; at the side of a hospital bed I suspend my self, my needs and preoccupations, and become wholly consumed by love for the sufferer […]. When we feel pain in our bodies it can dull our senses to the world; we turn inward, and the pain encases us like a cocoon. Love for the other in pain can do much the same. I do not look at the separation; I have eyes, a body,"only for there, for the other."*
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> — Diane Enns, "Love's Limits" (2015)

In the last few years of writing this dissertation, two very difficult and significant events happened within my inner, close circle of friends. In March 2018, a friend of mine, who I had known since my undergraduate life in Montreal, made the difficult decision to have a medically-assisted death after years of suffering from a rare, painful, and degenerative disease. Three months later, while her death still felt raw and unresolved, my best friend—with whom I had shared nearly all aspects of everyday life for over a decade —was suddenly diagnosed with leukaemia. The day of this diagnosis has been, for me, a

sharp division of time—a marker of a *before* and an *after*, a pre-and-post-cancer reality according to which I have since lived. The streetcar ride I took from Glad Day Books, where I had been when my friend called with the results of her blood test, to where she was waiting in Toronto General Hospital served as the short period of transition between these two realities: this was not *my* diagnosis, but the irrevocable change in my friend's life also changed me and how I understood myself in relation to others. While I had, up until that moment, spent most of my time preoccupied with my own work, my thoughts, and my everyday concerns, I now—for the first time—felt wholly consumed by and devoted to someone else's suffering. The next few months were spent at the hospital, sitting with my friend while she went through lumbar punctures, while she met with teams of doctors, while she began chemotherapy, and while she (we) anxiously waited for information about what would happen next. A part of this waiting was also reckoning with the possibility of her death, something my friend and I did not know how to do immediately but which we have since learned how to confront, talk about, and face together.

The above poem by Thom Gunn captures the shared suffering of gay men during the HIV/AIDS epidemic of the 1980s; its context is very different from my friends' and my contexts, from our own experiences with illness and death. Yet, this poem was a favourite of my friend who lived for years with a degenerative disease. While she did not know many people who shared this disease or whose lives were so shaped by illness, I believe this poem—with its articulation of friendship as a balm to a suffering both

individual and collective—made her feel less alone. Like Gunn's speaker, my friend's suffering was unique but it was also part of a collective life she shared with others, especially her friends. Our lives were very different—while I lived as an able-bodied person, mobile and oriented towards the future, she lived with limited mobility and with a future that always felt uncertain and out of reach. Yet, I believe I was able to offer some genuine comfort and love to her over the years; she also extended to me her unequivocal generosity when my "own fears" and sufferings surfaced, regardless of whether or not these were matters of life and death. Since her passing, Gunn's poem has stayed with me, reminding me of the lessons I learned from our relationship about how to be a friend to someone who is facing a serious and possibly terminal illness. After her death, I deeply mourned all the ways I had been absent and pre-occupied during the last two years of her life. However, it was only a few months later that these lessons in friendship became a source of guidance: when my best friend was diagnosed with leukaemia, I better understood how to be there *with* her in the fear and uncertainty that such a diagnosis brings.

I have devoted most of my adult life to exploring a particular question that has arisen, in part, from my experience of friendship. Since my early twenties, I have sought (both in and outside of my academic life) to better understand what it means to have a "self," to experience myself as distinct from others while knowing, as Judith Butler writes, that I am fundamentally "bound up with others […] through a set of relations without which we cannot survive" (61). If, as Butler argues, our interdependence creates

both the conditions for violence and suffering *and* "the possibility of being relieved of suffering, of knowing justice and even love," how might the experience of love challenge the divisions between self and Other from which so much violence and suffering arises (61)? My interest in this question has been, in part, spiritual—the result of having grown up with a devout Hindu mystic for a parent, and from my own practice of Buddhism over the last ten years. It is also political, a question that has shaped my values and the way I see myself in relation to political struggles, both those that affect me directly and those largely borne by "Others." My own experiences have suggested that, in the loving bonds of friendship, there is the possibility for strict divisions between self and Other to come apart. Indeed, while my interest in the spiritual and political possibilities of friendship is longstanding, the events of 2018 sharpened and clarified these possibilities for me. I can say genuinely, and without appropriating the suffering of my friend being treated for leukaemia, that there were times in her treatment where the lines between her suffering and my own became very unclear. For me, the experience of loving someone in pain meant, as Diane Enns observes in her essay "Love's Limits," that it was no longer "always apparent where one self ends and another begins" (36). When I re-organized my everyday life and my plans for the future in keeping with the uncertainty of my friend's prognosis, for instance, I did not feel as though I was making these changes for another but because *I*, too, had changed.

As Enns notes, the experience of another's pain does not overcome the self; it cannot bridge the "abyss of skin and bone and pain between us" and spare someone we

love from her suffering (38). However, loving someone in so much pain did offer me a new *experience* of my self as one—not nearly as autonomous or discrete as I once believed—but intimately connected to, and at times an extension of, another. This experience of a new self was not mine alone but, I believe, one my friend shared as she witnessed my suffering in response to hers. As she worked to get through her treatment, so too did she work to protect me from her physical pain and from the fear (both hers and mine) that the treatment would not work. In her attempts to protect me was the long history of our friendship in which she had also experienced my pain as an extension of hers. Indeed, it was only two years earlier that she had carried me through a serious bout of mental illness which she had also felt acutely even if, like me, she could not transcend the "abyss of skin and bone and pain" to heal this illness completely. To feel another's pain so acutely is not easy; with feelings of intense love come anger and fear, resentment and confusion, periods of distance along with those of extreme closeness. As Enns writes, this complex mix is the nature and product of love, a state in which "I experience myself as both a self *and* an other" (original emphasis; 36). While Enns' focus is on romantic love, my own experience of friendship is similar: while we cannot always protect our friends from pain, the experience of love in friendship allows us to share this pain between us and to traverse the distance between ourselves and another.

Although our friendships may not always be able to prevent our own and others' suffering, my experience of friendship has crucially shaped the way I think about forms of suffering that arise from our political conditions and which, therefore, might be changed.

In particular, my friendships have influenced the way I understand and oppose the suffering caused by nationalism. As my personal reflections might suggest, my starkest experiences of shared suffering have emerged in response to illness, rather than to nationalism. Yet, the increasingly Hindu nationalist politics of India—where I was born, have lived, and continue to retain a deep set of personal and political connections—have felt very close to me, even as I am largely inured to the violence of these politics. I have watched from afar as my family, friends, and comrades in India organize against, suffer from, and (sometimes) embrace nationalist politics. In the diaspora, Hindu nationalism has been adopted and reshaped by wealthy caste Hindus who belong to many different parts of the political spectrum. Increasingly hailed by these politics, I have sincerely engaged in efforts to resist them and to align myself with anti-nationalist movements both within and outside of India. Especially since the overturning of Section 377, it has become clear that India is a much safer place for me to return than it is for Muslims and Dalits to live.

The friendships upon which I reflected earlier have been a part of my life in Canada, seemingly far removed from the political situation in India. Yet, if the violence of nationalism requires and thrives on strict divisions between self and Other, the times when my own sense of self has been transformed by another have suggested to me that friendship might contest the very logics of nationalism. My relationship to literature has sharpened the connections I see between friendship and anti-nationalist politics. Indeed, Gunn's poem, which passed from my friend's hands to mine, has allowed me to better

imagine her experience of the world, to get to know her more intimately than I did before. The imaginative space of literature has thus, for me, been of both political and personal consequence. It has helped me bridge the distance between myself and others and, in doing so, illuminated how—through the love of friendship—we might ease many forms of suffering, including those that arise from a set of divisive political structures.

This project thus follows from my experience of friendship as that which might compel a transformation of self. Insofar as this transformation may change how we see ourselves in relation *to* others, this project explores, through a set of literary texts, the relationship between the transformative possibilities of friendship and a set of political formations which seek to keep people apart. Tracing the continuities between empire and the nation-state, I have focused on the race, caste, class, gendered, and religious divisions that organize our experiences of self and drive violence against the Other. By reading a set of texts situated in the context of South Asian anticolonial struggle, I have argued that friendships across these divisions might help us envision a "new history of Man"—a world beyond the nation-state and its many forms of violence.

Not all friendships can help us envision this new, anti-nationalist history. Rather, as I have argued, the liberatory potential of friendship emerges most sharply in spaces that contest the economic and political structures that give shape to the self. The ship, the home, and the ashram are, as such, particularly intriguing spaces to trace the possibilities of friendship; in each of these spaces, the opposing forces of freedom and oppression open up paths for a new set of political formations beyond the self and Other. In the ship,

friendships between prisoners and coolies catalyze their resistance to the colonial class structure, which oppresses them collectively as labourers. In the home, the emotional ties that arise from the shared experience of sexual violence generate, in the case of *Cracking India*, a collective resistance to patriarchal violence; this resistance crosses class boundaries and intervenes in the violence of religious nationalism. In the ashram, devotion to the spiritual path can have political consequences; the pursuit of self-transcendence can enliven a collective politics against colonialism and nationalism, helping us work towards a world rooted in the "universal friendship" of *maitri.*

Several of the texts I have discussed throughout this dissertation focus on the emotional and political transformation of someone who, having lost their material comforts and privileges, develops friendships with others based on a newfound but shared experience of suffering. In *Sea of Poppies,* the stripping of Neel's wealth and caste facilitates his friendship with Ah Fatt; this friendship becomes the basis for a collective political resistance to the colonial class structure which oppresses them both. In Ghose's *Tales of Prison Life*, the experience of imprisonment catalyzes a sense of brotherhood among prisoners and between Ghose and the *methar* (sweeper) which, in turn, help transform Ghose's experience of self into one of unity and harmony—of "universal friendship"—with all others. In *Cracking India*, the "feminist friendships" (to recall Niyogi De's term) between Mrs. Sethi and the women of the refuge emerge from the shared experience of sexual violence and help contest the gendered and classed property relations which oppress women, to different extents, at all class levels. The emphasis in

these texts is thus on those subjects who either *lose* much of their class or caste privileges (in the case of Neel and Ghose) or whose privileges do not wholly protect them from those who are more powerful (in the case of Mrs. Sethi, who is spared the extreme sexual violence of Partition but who is still beaten by her husband). In this experience of suffering and relative powerlessness emerges the possibility for love and struggle with those—like Ah Fatt, the lower caste prisoners in Alipore, and the working-class women of Lahore—who have long been oppressed by colonial, class, and caste divisions.

Perhaps these texts—with their focus on the political and emotional transformation of the relatively privileged—suggest that friendship is the domain of the (once) powerful, something that mostly pertains to those whose "self" has historically converged with oppressive political structures, rather than to those who have always been Othered by these structures. Such a suggestion reflects these texts' particular (perhaps limited) perspective but does not undermine friendship itself as a crucial political and relational category. As my personal reflections on friendship suggest, the transformative potential of friendship does not belong to those who suffer *less* but to all those who, through the experience of love, are changed by another. As I have argued throughout, this individual transformation can become the basis of a political struggle against the very conditions that produce and shape violence against the Other. While we may know comparatively little about the inner lives of Ah Fatt, the "fallen women" of the refuge, or Ghose's fellow prisoners, my reading of these texts has suggested that, in the experiences of Neel, Mrs. Sethi, and Ghose, we can trace the possibility of our *collective* liberation

from colonial, patriarchal, class, caste, and religious violence. As such, the friendships in these texts—regardless of the perspective from which they are told—are of larger political consequence, at times orienting us towards the possibility of our shared liberation from the nation-state and its divisions.

At the heart of this project is my belief that—so long as the violence and suffering caused by these divisions persist—it is our political and spiritual duty to re-imagine the self beyond its difference from the Other. Insofar as the revolutionary humanist visions of Fanon were not realized through the anticolonial liberation struggles of the twentieth century, it remains our task to hold on to these visions and to work in service of a different world. Our friendships might, thus, serve as an expression not only of our capacity to love, but of our commitments to all people, including ourselves, who will benefit from this new world. While the end to this suffering and violence may not be achieved in the near future, the work towards it connects us to all others with whom we share life—including those we mourn but for whom we must also continue to live.

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