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the effectiveness of the AMC. The explosive politics of reservations sparked by the Mandal Commission's recommendations, and the populist efforts to politically exploit these recommendations by elements in the state's congressional leadership led to caste warfare and, unexpectedly, to heightened tensions between Hindus and Muslims. Ultimately, Spodek contends, the weakening of these institutions and the failure of leadership led to the "shock city" of the 1990s and 2000s: a city of staggering inequality that also witnessed, in 2002, some of the worst communal violence between Hindus and Muslims in the nation's history.

Spodek's focus on the trajectories of key leaders as a device through which to tell the history of Ahmedabad, while provocative and delivering of insights, can also sometimes prove limiting since the career of an individual will have unity in ways that an entire city cannot have. For this reason, the chapters of the third section of the book, which do not revolve around singular figures, somewhat lack a unifying thread and read more disjointedly than do the chapters of the two previous sections. That said, this is a fine, timely book, offering a valuable expansion of the literature on South Asian cities, not just in providing an account of Ahmedabad, but also in compelling a re-evaluation of some of our categories of the cartography of analysis.

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**Bakirathi Mani. *Aspiring to Home: South Asians in America.* Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012. 310 pp. \$85.00 (cloth). \$27.95 (paperback).**

*Aspiring to Home* uses the concept of "locality" to explore the processes by which South Asians develop an identity as immigrants within the U.S. Mani examines many cultural "texts" such as the Miss India beauty pageant, a variety of arts festivals, films and stage productions including documentaries, as well as two literary texts, Jhumpa Lahiri's *Interpreter of Maladies* and *The Namesake*. Her analysis takes account of the complex intersections of the various influences of social class, the historical moments of both emigration from India and immigration into the U.S., gender, religion, sexual orientation, and the cultures of the parts of the subcontinent from which the individuals immigrated. For example, historical events such as 9/11-affected South Asians in the U.S. who were often suspected of ties to Islamist movements which in turn affected South Asians' relationship to the U.S. At the same time, the American discourse of multiculturalism with its emphasis on assimilation, is, as Mani says, "an insufficient mode of understanding racial formation" (12). Instead, Mani exposes how Asian American popular culture allows for an expression of resistance as what she calls "a powerful phenomenology of belonging" that can be both antiracist and anti-capitalist, even while it is important to note too that many South Asian cultural texts are also assimilationist to a large extent (12). In addition, she explores the effects of India's neo-liberalism and America's doctrine of multiculturalism on ideas of identity among South Asians in the U.S. Much of her research is conducted as a participant observer at beauty pageants and arts festivals, so some of her observations benefit from anecdotal experience. Mani begins with the stereotype of South Asians, imposed from without and subscribed to by many South Asians, of themselves as the model upwardly mobile minority group, represented highly among the professional class, and as overwhelmingly Hindu. As such then Mani points to a version of South Asian identity that she describes as "a singular narrative of ethnic and national community" in spite of the diversity among South Asians who come from such varied places as Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Bangladesh, East Africa, Fiji, Nepal, for example, as well as being from a variety of religious backgrounds and sexual orientations. In addition Mani frequently refers to the wave of immigration to the west coast of the U.S. by Punjabi Sikhs, early in the twentieth century, whose social status within their adopted country was very different from that of late twentieth century immigrants who move comparatively smoothly into the middle class and professions. So in

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spite of the somewhat homogenous version of South Asian identity sometimes put forward, South Asians are a diverse group which some popular culture conveys.

Mani argues that "[t]heorizing locality requires expanding the historical and geographical scope of Asian American studies," but she asserts that "the impact of South Asian anticolonial nationalism on Asian American politics is rarely discussed, even though these same movements against British imperialism shaped the broader context of the Civil Rights movements" (9-10). The homogenization of racial identity that characterizes Asian Americans and South Asians as "alike" in the U.S. benefits from a concept of locality that "provides a more capacious means of attending to the phenomenology of racialized experience," and of debates about "the relationship between the domestic and the diasporic as sites for the production of Asian American subjectivity" (10). Mani argues that "with few exceptions these debates have not taken into account the specificity of South Asian diasporic history, culture, and politics" (10). Locality, then,

takes seriously the intimate and often vexed relationship between domestic racial formations and global structures of capital. It also highlights the compelling power of state-sponsored nationalisms, experienced as ideologies of multicultural belonging and as neoliberal constructs of postcolonial citizenship. (7)

This complex conglomeration of influences appears in various ways in the cultural texts Mani examines, such as in the Miss India pageant awarding its crown to a Hindu and Hindi-speaking contestant who represents India, in turn, as Hindu. The framework of locality is also flexible enough to allow us to understand how the American concept of multiculturalism appears to allow for an easy assimilation of South Asians into American culture, even while it actually produces a new form of South Asian identity that "multiculturalism" cannot conceptualize in its somewhat facile ideal of ethnic groups existing alongside one another. Locality, therefore, functions as the process by which "the affective experience of migration produces new forms of race- and class-based community," and is the "means by which first- and second-generation immigrants, of varying regional, religious, and linguistic backgrounds, come to experience what it means to belong" (3).

Surprisingly, perhaps, the most compelling section of the book is Chapter 3, "Beauty Queens: Gender, Ethnicity, and Transnational Modernities at Miss India USA." This chapter draws upon a complex set of ideas to determine how South Asian identity, in this case, is influenced by what Mani calls "narratives of entrepreneurship and capital accumulation symbolized by this recent group of immigrants"

(123). Yet many of the contestants perform political commentaries on India within a cultural format that we might expect to preclude all but normative displays. Mani argues "that the organizers of Miss India USA attempt to create a coherent ethnic group within the larger racial formation of the U.S. and a cohesive diasporic community in relation to an ideal of India" (125). This formation draws upon Bollywood for its means of constructing ideals of femininity, but Mani characterizes this as a discourse of "commercial Hindi." The attention Mani pays to the movement of global capital allows her to scrutinize both the ethos of the "American Dream" and its meritocracy of individual achievement, which the Miss India pageant promotes by flaunting the contestants' successes in education and finance. But the beauty pageants Mani observes also "can unexpectedly reproduce pluralist discourses of multiculturalism" and can "dynamically reconfigure the transnational terrain of racial subjectivity" (15). As such, the beauty pageants provide useful evidence of cultural identity in the process of its production.

Mani's chapter about Jhumpa Lahiri, entitled "Postcolonial Locations," develops the argument about the further dimension of historical circumstance that determines South Asian identity in the U.S. which is the politics of postcolonial India. As Mani says, "the time of immigration engenders a postcolonial subjectivity" (31). The chapter provides an evocative illustration of this in discussing, for example, the *Interpreter of Maladies* story, "When Mr. Pirzada Comes to Dine" told by a girl narrator who observes Mr. Pirzada watch the descent towards war between India and Pakistan on the television in her American home. The narrator Lillia learns about the events in East Pakistan, observing the differences and similarities between her Hindu family, from Calcutta, and Mr. Pirzada, who is Muslim and whose wife and daughters are missing in East Pakistan in a complex set of identifications and distinctions based on religion, language, custom and diaspora. Meanwhile Lillia's schooling in the U.S. has scarcely provided her with a geography for understanding the subcontinent. In many ways though, this is the weakest chapter in Mani's book. The writing slides between textual analysis and explanations of the historical context, for example when Mani explains the Cold War context for the war between West Pakistanis and Bengalis in East Pakistan, in a way that suggests that Lahiri's text examines this context. Characteristic too of the book as a whole, although most strikingly in the chapter on Lahiri, is Mani's tendency to move slowly towards her argument, stepping back and piling up critical frameworks that allow her prose to become repetitious and a little plodding. Close editing would have corrected this tendency in many cases, but the tendency makes the book unnecessarily slow-reading in places. The pace

improves late in the book, suggesting that Mani is less comfortable with literary analysis perhaps than with the ethnographic discussions of other forms of cultural text.

The chapter based on the Andrew Lloyd-Webber Broadway homage to Bollywood, *Bombay Dreams* is more successful, in part because of Mani's role as participant observer. Although she finds that the production "domesticated *Bombay Dreams* into yet another ethnic American musical [that becomes], a multicultural performance of ethnicity," (209) and "propagated a troubling vision of Indian secular nationalism," (210) the discussion benefits from Mani's role as participant observer as an audience member. The musical gives Mani another opportunity to examine the triangular relationship between India, Britain and the U.S., since the musical began in London and underwent revisions when it was adapted for Broadway. Mani shows just how complex this triangle is when she cites Meera Syal, who wrote the original script for the West End production, and as Mani says, assumed "a naturalized historical relationship South Asia and Britain" (222) when Syal said, "with colonization there's been a love-hate relationship between us for over 300 years" (222). Interestingly, in describing Bombay as "the richest, most vibrant city in India boasting more expensive real estate and more millionaires than Manhattan," (226) which Mani regards as the discourse of Indian neo-liberalism and links to the American discourse of multiculturalism in which South Asians fit as the "model minority," Syal uses language very similar to the American discourse which, as Mani posits, marks India as a modernized country. The producers of the English version of the musical assumed that English audiences would have a familiarity with India based in part on media productions such as *The Jewel in the Crown*. New York audiences were largely South Asian, however, and therefore had a different relationship with India. In addition, the New York cast consisted of South Asian Americans, allowing a unique opportunity for diasporic South Asians to participate in a production that allowed them to explore their identities as immigrants and South Asians. The result is that the musical becomes what Mani describes as "an ethnographic and performative text integral to the production of South Asian locality" (213). Unfortunately, due to the political landscape of post-9/11 New York, in which the production's opening coincided with the Republican National Convention the rhetoric overwhelmingly focused on security, which means that, "a musical that was nominally about India became a spectacular performance about contemporary America" (213). The effect is the erasure of any Muslim presence in the production, even while the "cast members viewed *Bombay Dreams* as a rare opportunity to perform as South Asians, and allowed Mani herself to explore

the contradictory affects that [she] experiences, as a viewer who identified with the performers onstage and who disidentified with the ideological representations of Indian and U.S. nationhood generated through their performances. [Her] inability to reconcile this public representation of South Asia with [her] private identification as South Asian highlights the predicament of identifying with mainstream South Asian diasporic popular culture, specifically in terms of its racial, sexual, class, and caste politics. (215)

In her Epilogue, Mani cites the "disparate locations" that she occupied in viewing and interpreting the cultural texts her book discusses, which surely serves to elucidate the complex process of identifications and disidentifications, "assimilation or resistance, belonging or marginalization" (253). This is a fascinating and complex study of the multiple cultural influences that coincide in productions of South Asian identity in the United States.

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