

Broken Passages and Broken Promises:
Reconstructing the Komagata Maru and Air India Cases

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Abstract

My dissertation examines two events in Canada's past that have played formative roles in the debate about the place of the South Asian diaspora within the Canadian nation. The first is the 1914 Komagata Maru incident, in which 352 British subjects of South Asian origin aboard a Japanese ship – the Komagata Maru – were denied entry into Canada and forced to return to India. The second is the 1985 bombing of Air India Flight 182, an event that claimed the lives of almost 300 Canadian citizens, most of South Asian origin, who were traveling from Canada to India. My dissertation reads literary and cinematic reconstructions of the Komagata Maru and Air India cases as crucial sites of healing as well as archives in which the historical memories of diasporic groups are recorded. Drawing on but also extending the work of Benedict Anderson who argues that nations are imagined communities formed by both remembering and forgetting, I suggest that works of fiction can counteract the nation's tendency to forget. In this specific instance, I argue that certain kinds of fiction can prevent the Canadian nation from "forgetting" the Komagata Maru and Air India cases and, in so doing, can contribute to the project of shaping the nation in more inclusive ways by insisting that certain acts, with all the consequences that followed from those acts, *did* take place.

Keywords: Diaspora, Migration, Homeland, Memory, Nation, Nationalism, Imaginary, India, Canada, Race, Identity, the Komagata Maru incident, the Air India bombing, Community.

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who fought courageously for racial equality in 1914.

For the victims of the 1985 Air India bombing,
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Introduction:
**Broken Passages and Broken Promises: Reconstructing the Komagata Maru and
Air India Cases**

Two historical events that need to become the cornerstones of the Indo-Canadian ethos are the Komagatamaru incident of 1914, and the Air India tragedy of June 1985. We have to write about these events, talk about them, cross-reference them at every turn until they become literary and cultural archetypes of the history of Canada.

-Uma Parameswaran, “Dispelling the Spells of Memory”

Broken Passages and Broken Promises

In a poem titled “On the Shores of the Irish Sea,” South Asian Canadian writer, poet and critic Uma Parameswaran brings together two events that have played formative roles in the debate about the place of the South Asian diaspora within the Canadian nation. The first is the 1914 Komagata Maru incident, in which 352 British subjects of South Asian origin aboard the Japanese ship – the Komagata Maru – were denied entry into Canada and forced to return to India. The second is the 1985 bombing of Air India Flight 182, an event that claimed the lives of almost 300 Canadian citizens, most of South Asian origin, who were traveling from Canada to India. Parameswaran’s poem, written in the year 2000, is the first of two poems grouped together under the heading *Kanishka Poems*, in which Kanishka refers to the official name of Air India Flight 182. In a preface to both poems, Parameswaran tells us that the poems have been written “[f]or June 23, 2000: 15th anniversary of the crash of *AI Flight 182*” (11). Here, the year is significant: it marks the arrest of Ripudaman Singh Malik and Ajaib Singh Bagri, two prime suspects in the bombing of Air India; it is also the year Lata Pada, a woman who lost her two daughters and husband in the explosion, narrativized her experience of trauma in an autobiographical dance performance called *Revealed by Fire*, which premiered at the Harbourfront Theatre in Toronto.

When Parameswaran writes that “Fifteen years have passed. Fifteen summers / with the length of fifteen long winters” (1-2) in the opening lines of her poem, she is making a reference both to Wordsworth’s “Tintern Abbey,” and to the bombing of Air India Flight 182. As an ode, “Tintern Abbey” is essentially about remembering. Wordsworth famously says in his *Preface to Lyrical Ballads* that poetry is “emotion recollected in tranquility.” His deliberate efforts to reconstruct the scenes of five years past upon his return to Tintern Abbey become the basis of this great ode. Parameswaran is doing something similar: she is revisiting the Komagata Maru incident and the Air India bombing and attempting to enshrine them in the public record. She is thus explicitly following in the footsteps of Wordsworth. But whereas Wordsworth is memorializing something which has personal and individual significance, Parameswaran is memorializing something of communal and political significance.¹

In the opening stanza of Parameswaran’s poem, the first person speaker appears to be engaged in her own recollections of the past, in a kind of reverie from which she awakens only to face the grim reality that her child and husband are no longer with her, that their lives have been claimed in the deadly explosion. Thus, she tells us that she “reach[es] to feel her little fingers / that so trustingly encircle” hers (3-4) “only to see her floating on spindrift foam / far in the open sea” (6-7). She also “curve[s] [her] legs to entwine his warmth” (9) but what she feels instead is “the empty chill of cold sheets” (10). For Parameswaran, the Air India bombing must be remembered as a dark moment

¹ Numerous scholars have commented on “Tintern Abbey” as a nature poem. Sunil Kumar Sarkar, for example, suggests that the poem shows us how ineluctably the poet’s mind is connected with nature, or, rather, with the whole of the creation, and it shows us how the spirit of nature, or, of the universe, converses with him, or how that spirit instructs him about the ‘still, sad music of humanity.’ (39)

in the history of Canada, one that not only marks the loss of lives, but one that also symbolizes the exclusion of South Asian Canadians from the national imaginary. Thus, when Parameswaran calls the bereaved “victims twice over” (13), she seems to have in mind the fact that they have lost their loved ones *and* that Prime Minister Brian Mulroney called India’s Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi to apologize for India’s loss, thereby positioning the bereaved, the victims, and the trauma itself as peripheral to the nation rather than part of it. Parameswaran wants readers to recognize that the nation has forgotten the Air India bombing and its victims. Parameswaran’s use of powerful imagery, together with the vivid language that she brings into play, work not only to render the first person speaker’s feelings of loss more real, but also to make the trauma more memorable, to enshrine it in the reader’s imagination. The ability of literature to endow the trauma with imaginative detail, as I shall suggest throughout this thesis, is one of the reasons why literary texts play such a crucial role in the process of cementing the trauma in the national imaginary. In this case, Parameswaran’s poem not only describes the feelings of loss experienced by the bereaved, but revivifies them by imagining them in precise detail, offering us insights into how loved ones might be remembered, how the bereaved might have *felt*.

In the poem, the Air India bombing constitutes the second in a series of three important dates for the South Asian Canadian community. The first is July 23, 1914, “when Komagata Maru was driven into the open sea / while people and newspapers screamed: Keep Canada White” (53). Parameswaran’s use of words like “driven” and her invocation of an image of Canadians lining the shore, screaming that Canada should remain a white man’s country, work to draw attention to the violence underpinning the

event, and to the vulnerability of the Indians aboard the Komagata Maru ship who were forced to depart into the “open sea” (53). The Komagata Maru incident – July 23rd, 1914 – is linked to the Air India bombing which took place, we are told, on “June 23rd, 1985” (59), and then to “June 23rd, 2000,” a time “when the criminals who sent limbs and hearts / hurtling through the sky into the Irish sea, have still not been brought to book / because of an Inquiry that drags its feet” (68-71). The phrase “brought to book” might be read in two ways. It might be understood as referring to the absence of any public inquiry into or legal consequence for the bombing at the time the poem was written. It was not until 2005 that the Canadian government responded to the demands of the bereaved for an inquiry into the investigation into the bombing of Air India Flight 182. The phrase might also refer to the fact that when Parameswaran was writing, the Air India bombing had not been brought into very many imaginative fictions. While Parameswaran acknowledges what she calls the “sunnier” historical moments such as February 21, 2000, when South Asian Canadian lawyer Ujjal Dosanjh became the first South Asian Premier of British Columbia (moments that represent the growing presence of South Asians in the Canadian public sphere), she insists that we must remember the Komagata Maru incident and the Air India bombing as the “dark day[s] of ignominy” (59) that represent the exclusion of racialized minorities from the national imaginary. Parameswaran makes such a claim in her article “Dispelling the Spells of Memory,” which I have cited in the epigraph to this introductory chapter. “On the Shores of the Irish Sea” thus might be read as Parameswaran’s attempt to inscribe the Komagata Maru and Air India cases into the public record.

For Parameswaran, it seems that the 1914 Komagata Maru incident and the 1985 Air India bombing constitute important nodal points at which the histories of India and Canada overlap, and thus they metonymically reflect South Asian Canadian diasporic identity which is fractured and which is always trying to achieve a balance between India and Canada. For instance, in the poem, the speaker, who appears to be South Asian Canadian, tells us that in Canada's rivers she has "seen [her] own – / the singing waters of [her] native Narmada / Kaveri whose rapids feed ancestral fields" (21-23). With her double vision, the speaker has "brought Ganga to our Assiniboine," (25) and "seen the fluteplayer dancing / on the waters of La Salle" (27-28). The merging of the Indian holy river, the Ganga, with the Assiniboine, a river in Western Canada, is a metaphor that Parameswaran uses frequently; in fact, "Ganga in the Assiniboine" is the title of one of her poems. The image is meant to reflect in metaphorical terms the South Asian immigrant experience. As Parameswaran herself explains in an essay, "Every immigrant transplants part of his native land to the new country, and the transplant may be said to have taken root once the immigrant figuratively sees his native river in the river that runs in his adopted place" ("Dispelling" 79-80). Parameswaran's poem suggests that the diasporic subject's split identity, her precarious attempts to straddle the border between India and Canada might be embodied in the Komagata Maru incident and the Air India bombing, both of which are sites "where there and here come together" ("On the Shores" 49) and "make us [the immigrant community] who we be" (50). Thus, if the Komagata Maru incident and the Air India bombing represent the collusion of India and Canada *and* symbolically stand for racial exclusion, then they seem to represent for Parameswaran the

immigrant's double vision and the possibility that she may be rejected from both India and Canada, the homeland and the diasporic space.

I read Parameswaran's poem as a starting point for all my thinking about the Komagata Maru incident and the Air India bombing because it addresses in embryonic form some of the issues crucial to this dissertation. These issues include the (often disingenuous) promise of the nation to include minorities and their histories as part of its official record, and the diasporic subject's attempt to respond to that promise.

Parameswaran's poem also evokes in dramatic form a trope that I refer to throughout this dissertation – “the broken passage” – a trope that speaks to the material reality that neither the Komagata Maru ship nor the Air India plane was able to land at its intended destination. In both cases, there was a literal broken passage. When the passengers aboard the Komagata Maru – 24 Muslims, 12 Hindus, and 340 Sikhs (Johnston, *Voyage* 33) – arrived in Vancouver, Canadian officials, most notably Malcolm Reid, fought hard to detain them on the ship, and to prevent them from going to the courts to test the Canadian law. For two months, the passengers sat in Vancouver's harbour while Reid ordered extensive medical examinations of the passengers; he limited their supply of food and water; he tried to convince the owners to order the ship back; and he denied the passengers direct contact with their lawyer J. Edward Bird, and their supporters Hussein Rahim and Bhag Singh, who had formed the Shore Committee. After two months in the Burrard Inlet, all but twenty who were returning immigrants were turned away, even though they were British subjects and had the right to settle anywhere in the Empire, including Canada, a British dominion. The passengers finally returned to India on September 29, 1914, where more tragedy took place as troops of the British Empire,

suspecting that the passengers had become aligned with the Ghadar movement, a “seditious” movement based in North America that was devoted to the overthrow of the British Raj, opened fire. Twenty of the passengers were killed, 193 arrested, and 62 sent to Punjab (Basran and Bolaria 100).²

The Air India bombing claimed the lives of 329 people, 280 of whom were Canadian citizens or landed immigrants, when the plane exploded off the coast of Ireland. What occurred in the aftermath of the bombing is perhaps even more significant: Canada was slow – if not completely reluctant – to accept responsibility for what happened. As the Government of Canada’s final report on the Air India bombing suggests, the government “took a defensive stance early on in relation to the Air India bombing and maintained the attitude throughout the years in its interaction with the families of the victims” (“Post-Bombing Investigation” 545). The investigation into the event was the longest in Canadian history and in the end, only one person was convicted of the crime – Inderjit Singh Reyat – a Sikh man from British Columbia who was charged and found guilty in 1991 for the bombing at the Narita Airport and for aiding in the construction of

² The Ghadar movement, which took place between 1914 and 1915, drew its support largely from Sikh farmers in North America and a small group of Indian students and revolutionaries from the United States. Perhaps the most prominent member of the Ghadar movement was an Indian revolutionary and political exile named Lala Hardayal, who lived in the United States and was committed to Indian freedom. Hardayal and his supporters put out a weekly newspaper called the *Ghadar*, after which their party was named (M. Mukherjee 30). Although the passengers of the Komagata Maru were not involved in the Ghadar movement, they were exposed to its ideology. Ghadar literature was brought aboard and the passengers were spoken to by Ghadar nationalists. Johnston suggests that “[f]or men who had come more or less directly from their villages, all this was new and, perhaps, difficult to digest. But for those who had been in the Far East for a year or more, these were things they had heard before and they were ready to listen” (*Voyage* 32). Rahim and Bhag Singh, who were among those that had formed the Shore Committee, openly supported the Ghadar movement.

the bomb that exploded aboard Air India Flight 182 (“In Depth: Air India”).³ The victims of Air India Flight 182 were thus written out of Canada’s national imaginary and rendered stateless.

As traumas that tend to conjure up images of in-betweenness, of a third space, to use Homi Bhabha’s term, the Komagata Maru incident and the Air India bombing seem to capture, for writers like Parameswaran, among others, the condition of the South Asian Canadian diasporic subject who is formed not only by the pull of both the homeland and the hostland, but also by the possibility of exclusion, of being rejected by either side. Thus, what the literature suggests is that these events are rarely read in strictly literal terms. Rather, they tend to be understood as broken passages and broken promises, as saying something about South Asian Canadian diasporic identity, about the place of South Asians in the Canadian national imaginary, and about the Canadian state’s failure to be genuinely inclusive towards racialized others. In many of the literary and cinematic responses to the broken passage, therefore, the Komagata Maru and Air India cases are complicated by the fact that these events are symbolically linked to questions of diasporic and racialized identity. For Ali Kazimi, whose documentary film *Continuous Journey* (2004) I discuss in Chapter two, the broken passage is a site of exclusion that can be tied to the ongoing efforts on the part of the state to relegate the racialized other to the subordinate position of outsider and to forget her histories of trauma and exclusion.

³ Less than one hour before the explosion aboard Air India 182, another suitcase containing a bomb that was intended for Air India Flight 301 to Bangkok exploded at Narita Airport in Tokyo Japan, killing two baggage handlers and injuring four others (Rae 1).

One of the aims of this thesis is to show that films like Kazimi's or poems like Parameswaran's are part of a growing body of work, mainly by South Asian Canadian artists, who want to remember the immense suffering and pain attached to the broken passage. The work of South Asian Canadian poet and writer Sadhu Binning fits neatly into this category. In his poem, "The Heart-Breaking Incident" the first person speaker gazes at the shore in Vancouver, trying "to enjoy the music of the waves" (14), but the only thing he can hear are "the angry Punjabi voices / from the Maru" (15-16). For him, the turning away of the Komagata Maru is not only a "heart-breaking incident" as the title suggests, but also a site of tremendous shame. Thus, while he is haunted by the memory of the event, we are told that "the walking stones" (17) laugh and "turn their faces and walk away" (20), unwilling to give him the kind of closure that he seeks. Written in 1994 in both English and Punjabi, Binning's poem is one of the earliest literary efforts to unearth the Komagata Maru incident from Canada's hidden archive and to memorialize the feelings of loss and trauma that the broken passage evokes.

Broken passages, the literature suggests, are intimately tied with broken promises. Because the state must engage in an ongoing process of forgetting events like the Komagata Maru incident and the Air India bombing in order to maintain its image of multicultural civility, it inevitably fails to meet the expectations of the minority community for whom remembering is a matter of necessity. State forgetting takes place in stealthy and often complicated ways. For example, in Chapter five, I read the Canadian government's 2008 apology for the Komagata Maru incident as a kind of forgetting, although it might not seem to be. The apology, I suggest, serves to bracket off and forget the past, even as it (overtly) revisits and remembers that past. Today, writers

and activists who are demanding apologies or remembering the tragedies are essentially demanding that the nation remember the pain and trauma attached to the broken passages of the Komagata Maru incident and the Air India bombing.

Productive Remembering and the Possibility of an Inclusive Nation

The struggle between the South Asian Canadian diasporic community's desire to remember the trauma and the dominant community's attempt to forget it is captured in a controversy that took place around the memorializing of the Komagata Maru incident in 2006. Punjabi Canadian painter Jarnail Singh was commissioned by the Progressive Intercultural Community Services Society (PICS) to paint a mural on the side of the Guru Nanak Niwas senior citizens' building in Surrey, B.C. The mural incorporated two images: one was of the passengers who sailed aboard the Komagata Maru, and another of the ship in Vancouver's harbour, and directly beneath, it was written: "Komagata Maru-1914, We remember!" One reporter notes that soon after the mural was unveiled, residents of the city complained, first that PICS had not received the necessary permit to put the mural up, and second that the exclamation mark after the phrase "We Remember!" was too provocative and too emphatic (Colley). Although this controversy might be understood as trivial, and as easily remedied by the removal of the exclamation mark, I suggest that it has a much more serious subtext. Specifically, it registers a conflict between the South Asian Canadian community's demands for memorializing trauma and the hegemonic group's resistance to those demands. It is worth noting that in Quebec, the provincial motto, that which is written on all car license plates is "Je me souviens," which literally means, "I remember." The fact that French Canadians are permitted to remember their French history, to memorialize it in a slogan – "Je me

souviens” – raises questions as to why racialized minority groups and their histories are not accorded the same rights. For the nation, remembering the rejection of the passengers aboard the ship threatens to shatter Canada’s image as a humane, multicultural nation. It threatens to reveal that beneath the façade of good governance and the nation’s traditions of civility is a much more violent history of racial exclusion.

Numerous critics have made arguments for the need to memorialize minority histories in order to counteract official forgetting. Amritjit Singh, Joseph T. Skerrett Jr., and Robert E. Hogan, for example, have argued that the racialized community is often engaged in a struggle over memory with the dominant community:

As part of the ongoing argument between history and memory, marginalized groups often attempt to maintain at the centre of national memory what the dominant group would often like to forget. The process results in a collective memory always in flux: not one memory but multiple memories constantly battling for attention in cultural space. (6)

Remembering the broken passages of the Komagata Maru incident and the Air India bombing, two events that are symbolic of racial exclusion, is crucial to challenging the dominant community’s forgetfulness and its false claims of multicultural benevolence.

In the context of the broken passages of the Komagata Maru incident and Air India bombing, Vijay Mishra has suggested that while remembering the 1914 incident might unite the South Asian Canadian community around a shared sense of loss, remembering the Air India bombing has the potential to be unproductive, to divide the diasporic community along religious lines because the bombing is linked to prior ruptures that took place between the Hindu and Sikh communities in India. He notes:

I have referred to traumatic incidents/themes (the *Komagata Maru* incident, the theme of the *watno dur*) as being the sources of the grand narratives of diasporas. The Air India explosion was also a source of trauma but it had a variety of effects, depending on where you stood on the Khalistan question. Unlike the *Komagata Maru* incident, it is not a trauma that could be ‘unproblematically’ invoked by all (East) Indians in Canada. Indeed, it had the effect of blasting open tensions within the Canadian South Asian population. (43)

For Mishra, the Air India bombing is a much more volatile and unpredictable site of memory because of its links to the Khalistan movement, which was devoted to the creation of a separate Sikh state called Khalistan and began in India in the late nineteenth century, but became most prominent in the late 1970s and the early 1980s. In June of 1984, when Prime Minister Indira Gandhi ordered the Indian army to invade the Golden Temple, the holiest Sikh shrine, in order to get at suspected Sikh militants, Sikhs in North India and abroad (UK, Canada, US, and Germany) became especially radicalized. The attack on the Golden Temple known as “Operation Blue Star” was followed by the assassination of Indira Gandhi by her two Sikh bodyguards in October, 1984 (Blaise and Mukherjee xix). In response to Gandhi’s assassination, thousands of Sikhs were killed in North India in a state sponsored pogrom. The Air India bombing occurred on the one-year anniversary of “Operation Blue Star” and was understood as a response by Sikh extremists to the violent unrest in India.

Despite the communal tensions underlying the Air India bombing, I want to argue that literary fictions have the power to do what Mishra says can’t be done: to use the

trauma to unite the community. In her short story, “The Management of Grief,” Bharati Mukherjee, for example, works through the mutual hostility between Hindus and Sikhs and then makes the valuable point that the Air India bombing is a shared tragedy. Because the heroine, Shaila Bhave, registers her suspicion towards an elderly Sikh couple, but then finds common ground with them, the final reconciliation is very moving. Anita Rau Badami’s *Can You Hear the Nightbird Call?* (2006), which I discuss in Chapter three, is also doing something similar. It is registering prior tensions and traumas in order to move beyond them and engage in a productive remembering of the past, one that can unite rather than divide the South Asian Canadian community around a shared sense of loss. What these texts suggest is that certain types of remembering are productive while others come in the way of the formation of the nation. While remembering events like the Komagata Maru incident and the Air India bombing is important, an excessive and nostalgic investment in past conflicts is counterproductive for the diasporic subject. As I shall show, this idea is captured most poignantly in Badami’s novel by the character of Bibi-ji whom we are told, says, “Forgetfulness was good...A bad memory was *necessary* for a person wishing to settle in, to become one of the crowd, to become an *invisible minority*” (*Nightbird* 136-37).

Thus, while my thesis suggests that counter-hegemonic texts challenge national forgetting, it also considers what these texts say about remembering and how they themselves engage in the process of remembering the past. Certain texts like Mukherjee and Blaise’s journalistic account of the Air India bombing *The Sorrow and the Terror*, or Saywell’s documentary film *Legacy of Terror* communalize the memory of the trauma and are thus examples of counterproductive forms of remembering. Another example of

divisive and counterproductive remembering manifests in the attempts made by the Sikh community to represent the suspected bombers of the Air India disaster as martyrs. At the 2007 Vaisaki parade held in Surrey, British Columbia, Talwinder Singh Parmar, the man accused of being the mastermind of the Air India bombing, was represented as a heroic figure when his photo was put on display. At the 2010 parade, newspapers once again reported that “pro-Khalistan flags were raised and photos of Sikh ‘martyrs’ displayed” (“Khalistani Flags”). Thus, only when the Komagata Maru incident and the Air India bombing are remembered in inclusive ways can a new type of nation based on the active remembering of historical events emerge.

Remembering the Air India bombing must be done carefully, but so should the memorializing of the Komagata Maru incident; for both events have the potential to engender further ruptures. For instance, when a plaque commemorating the Hindu, Sikh, and Muslim passengers of the Komagata Maru was erected in Vancouver in the 1970s for the seventy-fifth anniversary of the trauma, historian Ranjini Srikanth says that it became a site of controversy between groups who argued that the trauma was an exclusively “Sikh event” and others who claimed that it was a more inclusive “Indian event.” According to Srikanth, South Asian Canadian activist Charan Gill “remembers, there were many in the community who wanted to highlight the Sikh identity of the passengers and point to the Komagata Maru as a Sikh sacrifice” (88). Srikanth goes on to explain that after the Indian government’s attack on the Golden Temple and the riots that erupted in North India, the Indian community became increasingly divided along religious lines and this “contributed to the Sikhs’ feeling that the *Komagata Maru* should be memorialized as a Sikh event” (89). Although the passengers aboard the ship were

mostly Sikh, to memorialize the trauma as a Sikh event is to engage in a deliberate forgetting of the facts: in 1914, the passengers were discriminated against in Canada because they were “Indian” and not because they belonged to a particular religious community.

Texts like Eisha Marjara’s *Desperately Seeking Helen* (1999), which I discuss in Chapter three, suggest that the trauma might be a source of clarity and might be put to use in constructive ways. For Marjara, the trauma triggers a realization that her eating disorder was linked to the humiliation she felt at her mother’s failure to assimilate to the dominant white Canadian culture. Parameswaran’s “An Invocation Dance for Lata Pada,” the second *Kanishka* poem, similarly suggests that the trauma need not be read merely as a site of loss and despair; rather, it can be also understood as a source of tremendous energy and creativity. Before the poem begins, Parameswaran tells her reader that Lata Pada, to whom she refers in her title, withdrew for five years after the trauma and then “returned to the world of dance, and is now the Artistic Director of *Sampradaya Dance Academy* in Toronto” (14). The first person speaker of the poem wants to understand how the trauma that “struck down all that was” hers (16) has now raised her “to dance exultantly” at the goddess’ side and “to sing in celebration” (18). The trauma, Parameswaran seems to suggest, has generated a very productive dance. More importantly, the poem suggests that the positive outcome of the trauma will have significance for Canada, or what the speaker calls “this lovely land of endless skies” (24). Texts like Parameswaran’s, which offer a more hopeful perspective of the broken passage, suggest as I do in this thesis, that remembering the trauma can be useful and can contribute positively to the process of nation-formation but only if it is put to use and

remembered in ways that bring the diasporic community together against official forgetting and the processes of exclusion.

Re-membering Then and Now

In bringing together the Komagata Maru incident and the Air India bombing, my project has two aims. The first is linked to my overarching argument about the role of remembering and the placing of remembered events in the historical archive of the nation. By recovering two events that have been suppressed in the national imaginary, I argue that we are not only challenging the nation that is built on forgetting past traumas, we are also contributing to the project of building a new nation based on the memories of diasporic communities. Second, I argue that remembering these two events together challenges the dyadic structure that separates the nation's past from its present – a structure that has been foundational for imagining a teleological narrative of national progress – and to suggest instead that the present is always in some way an extension and reproduction of the past. Although Marx was writing in a very different context, he reminds us in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* that what seems to be new and revolutionary is actually only a reenactment of the old. He writes:

An entire people, which had imagined that by means of a revolution it had imparted to itself an accelerated power of motion, suddenly finds itself set back into a defunct epoch and, in order that no doubt as to the relapse may be possible, the old dates arise again, the old chronology, the old names, the old edicts, which had long become a subject of antiquarian erudition, and the old minions of the law, who had seemed long decayed. (17)

If, as Marx suggests, much of the past – “the old chronology, the old names, the old edicts” – lives on in the present, then 1985 can be understood as bearing some of the traces of 1914. The most notable similarity is that during both these periods South Asian Canadians were constructed as outsiders, although in different ways. Historian Ian McKay notes that during the early twentieth century, Canada was “in essence, a White settler society, and the nationalism of the majority of its population was a British nationalism” (350). Canada imagined itself as a predominantly white community comprised of settlers who were mostly of British origin and who sought to remain loyal to the British Empire. In 1908, Canada put into effect two orders-in-council that would prevent the entry of Indians into the dominion. The first of these was the “continuous journey policy” which “prohibited the landing of any immigrant who came other than by a continuous journey” and the second was the requirement that “all Asian immigrants entering Canada possess at least \$200” (Johnston, *Voyage* 4).⁴ Insofar as there was no direct steamship from Canada to India, and \$200 was an exorbitant sum of money, even for wealthy Indians at this time, Canada prevented Indians from entering the dominion, without ever having to refer to the issue of race. These orders reflected Canada’s general discriminatory attitudes towards non-whites, as well as its more specific concern – a concern shared by the British – about the growing body of radicalized Indians in North

⁴ Imperial authorities in India also condoned Canada’s exclusionary policies. Concerned that the Ghadar movement was becoming a stronger and more powerful presence on the west coast of Canada, British authorities encouraged Canada’s exclusionary immigration policies. Thus, in a telegram dated March 30, 1908, the Viceroy of India suggests to the Secretary of State in London that if “through booking [should] be reopened or should any other shipping company offer direct passage to Vancouver,” then “the Colonial Government should take measures it considers necessary to restrict immigration to Canada” (“Viceroy to Secretary of State”).

America that were seeking racial equality in North America and an independent India, free from British rule.

In 1985, the dominant attitude towards racialized immigrants continued to be hostile, even though Canada had officially enacted the policy of multiculturalism and had opened its door to non-white immigrants. In *Undesirables* (2011), Kazimi describes his own experience of racism in Canada in the 1970s and 80s:

South Asians were not only shunned but subjected to racial taunts and slurs. All too often, they were accompanied by brutal physical violence, peaking in a man being pushed to his death in the path of an incoming train in a Toronto subway station. To this day, I hear pain, anger, humiliation and sadness in the voices of friends who survived this period, as they acknowledge, ‘It was a different thing; those were really racist times.’ (4)

Kazimi’s experience is certainly not unique and has been confirmed by writers like M.G. Vassanji whose novel *No New Land* captures the very incident that Kazimi speaks about in which a non-white man died when he was pushed onto the tracks of the subway in Toronto. Emerging during this period, it is perhaps hardly surprising that the Air India bombing was not understood as a Canadian event and did not generate a sense of national grief. As Sherene Razack has speculated, “the disappearance of the Air India bombings from public memory has something to do with the fact that the bombings were an act of violence largely against a Brown people, and an act intended to intimidate or coerce a Brown state, in this case, India” (2). The failure of the state to deal with the Air India bombing is an index of the larger failure of multiculturalism: as films like *Sturla*

Gunnarsson's *Air India 182* suggest, it is because the Canadian state didn't understand the conflicts linked to the diasporic homeland that it was unable to anticipate and prevent the bombing.

A month after the bombing, *MacLean's*, one of Canada's most well known national magazines, released a series of four articles by different writers on the bombing of Air India Flight 182 that together formed the cover story for the July 8, 1985 edition of the magazine. What is interesting about these articles is perhaps not what they document but what they forget. For instance, while Glen Allen tells us that that "[a]cross Canada, Indian communities held memorial ceremonies" or that "when they [the victims] fell from the sky into the chill waters of the Atlantic off the coast of Ireland last week, grief...swept through Indian communities from Vancouver to Halifax" (26), what is interesting is that he makes no mention of the grief felt by the nation as a whole. Such a critical aporia attests to the fact that the nation was not grieving for the victims of the bombing, that it had distanced itself from the trauma rather than trying to understand it as a Canadian loss. In the first article in the collection, Ross Laver documents Mulroney's call to Rajiv Gandhi, but fails to consider what the phone call implied: that the state didn't see the victims as Canadians. Thus, it is not surprising that until the last article, the cover story doesn't mention that the victims were largely Canadian citizens. The cover story therefore not only registers the nation's forgetting and its attitude towards racialized minorities, it also engages in this process of erasure.

While the structure of my project challenges the assumption that the nation is characterized by a linear march forward, I also suggest that there is a potential for progress, and that this potential lies with the proliferation and quality of the work that

encourages remembering. We have seen such a proliferation perhaps most notably in the past ten years with the emergence of novels like Badami's *Can You Hear the Nightbird Call?* (2006), apologies like Stephen Harper's to the South Asian Canadian community for the Komagata Maru incident (2008), museum exhibits like the "Komagata Maru Stories" (2011) or illustrated books like Kazimi's *Undesirables: White Canada and the Komagata Maru* (2011).

A couple of interesting observations might be made about the differences between the earlier responses to the trauma and some of the more recent ones. For one thing, whereas the earlier accounts of the Air India bombing including Blaise and Mukherjee's *The Sorrow and the Terror* (1987 and 1988) and Saywell's film *Legacy of Terror: The Bombing of Air India* (1999), focus on and reinscribe the divisions between Hindus and Sikhs, a later account such as Gunnarsson's *Air India 182* (2008) tends to undermine the binaries that are set up in the earlier texts, binaries that come in the way of productively remembering the trauma. Similarly, whereas Sharon Pollock's *The Komagata Maru Incident* (1976) tends to represent the passengers of the Komagata Maru as abject victims, Ajmer Rode and Jarnail Singh's representation of the passengers in the "Komagata Maru Stories" draws on Pollock's work but portrays the Indians aboard the ship in more nuanced ways, as both victims and agential subjects. Thus, we might understand the more recent texts as building on the momentum established by earlier efforts to remember the past. Another observation that might be made is that whereas earlier texts tend to be written in the form of historical and journalistic accounts of the trauma, the more recent texts emerge in the form of museum exhibits, apologies, inquiries, imaginative fictions, websites, illustrated books, and so on. The very diversity

of the media involved in memorializing the event might be read as a sign that the broken passage has entered the public record and popular consciousness.

Between the state's desire to forget and the diasporic community's insistence on remembering, a series of positions are occupied, some of which are explored in this thesis. I explore, for instance, the forgetting of these traumas in canonical history textbooks and schoolbooks that might be used to shape the national imaginary. I also examine the representation of the broken passage in poems, plays, novels, films, art exhibits, documentaries, journalistic accounts, and historical studies, and contend that these distinct modes of recovery and recuperation work to inscribe the broken passage in both the South Asian Canadian diasporic and the Canadian national imaginaries, though they do so in different ways. I also consider the responses of the state to the Komagata Maru and Air India events, responses especially in the form of formal apologies and public inquiries. Finally, I conclude with the possibility that a more inclusive nation might be emerging because of the efforts of activists, artists and critics determined to bring the past back into the present. As Pada reminds us:

[T]he arts are very important tools for agents of change....[T]he arts are not dispensable frills in society; they are completely vital because *the arts help us tell our nation's stories*, be it through literature, dance, theatre and music. I am of the firm belief that artists are courageous people, unafraid to confront the truth. *I think they have to be given the credit for shifting mindsets.* (13 Oct. 2010 italics added for emphasis)

To shift the mindsets of people, their imagined ideas about the nation, I would add, is potentially to alter the shape of that nation.⁵

Chapter Divisions:

This thesis is divided into five chapters. Chapter one lays out a theory of the nation and its links to remembering and forgetting and draws on the works of Benedict Anderson, Ernest Renan, Walter Benjamin, Daniel Coleman, Himani Bannerji, and Eva Mackey. This chapter considers how state forgetting takes place through Canada's official policy of multiculturalism, which purports to be about remembering but also covers over and eclipses difference. It also traces a brief history of Canada's canonical textbooks in order to see how the nation has been imagined across time, and finally it analyses the contemporary textbooks taught in school for the way they remember and forget certain events. Against official forgetting, this chapter reads historical and journalistic texts that engage in the opposite process: that of remembering and inscribing the trauma onto the national consciousness. Among the texts considered in detail here are Gurdit Singh's *Voyage of the Komagata Maru, or India's Slavery Abroad* (no publication date), Hugh Johnston's *The Voyage of the Komagata Maru* (1989) and Clark Blaise and Bharati Mukherjee's *The Sorrow and the Terror* (1988).

Chapter two focuses specifically on the documentary responses to the broken passage and examines three documentary films: Shelley Saywell's *Legacy of Terror: The Bombing of Air India* (1999), Sturla Gunnarsson's film *Air India 182* (2008), and Ali Kazimi's *Continuous Journey* (2004). I argue that documentary texts, while often understood as giving us the "facts" are inevitably always involved in imaginative

⁵ A complete transcript of the interview with Lata Pada can be found in the appendix.

reconstruction in some form and thus should not be thought of as a distinct category. Thus, I read many of these documentaries as both offering fidelity to fact and as giving us imaginative detail about the trauma. Chapter three considers three fictional responses to the broken passage: Bharati Mukherjee's short story "The Management of Grief" (1988) Anita Rau Badami's novel *Can You Hear the Nightbird Call?* (2006), and Eisha Marjara's film *Desperately Seeking Helen* (1999). These imaginative fictions are important, first, because they engage in the process of working through the trauma and coming to terms with the past in healthy and productive ways. Second, because these fictions have greater creative license than documentary films, they imbue the trauma with imaginative detail, and in so doing allow us to re-experience what happened. Thus, the documentary films and the imaginative fictions should be read together as co-constituting the inscription of history onto the national imaginary.

In Chapter four, I consider postmodern treatments of the Komagata Maru incident and the Air India bombing in Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* (1987), Sharon Pollock's play *The Komagata Maru Incident* (1976), and Srinivas Krishna's film *Masala* (1993). In their playfulness, these postmodern texts serve to disrupt the bland surface of respectable nationalist narratives; and in this sense, they are useful. However, their very transgressive play may be a problem for scholars who wish to reclaim the traumatic past in all its sobriety and solemnity. Thus I argue that texts such as *The Satanic Verses* and *Masala* work somewhat against the thrust of more conventional narratives and that in fact they can easily feed into apolitical and unprogressive agendas.

Chapter five focuses on the responses made by the state to the claims and challenges of minority groups, specifically those made in the form of official apologies

and public inquiries. Thus, this chapter considers Stephen Harper's 2008 apology for the Komagata Maru incident, the 1914 state inquiry into the Komagata Maru incident, and the 2006 inquiry into the Air India bombing. The apologies, I argue in this chapter, are intended to soothe and placate minorities, but the instability of these performances, performances that open up the past, even as they attempt to close it, means that minority subjects can use them against the state. The inquiry is a more complex structure and works in the interests of the state's desire to forget the past by endlessly deferring action under the guise of offering what is framed as a scientific and fair assessment of the "facts."

On a more personal note, as a member of the South Asian Canadian community, I have an interest in exploring the histories of the Komagata Maru incident and the Air India bombing. These events capture (in dramatic form) something about my own experience as someone who has always had to negotiate the politics of race in a society where whiteness occupies a position of privilege. In carrying out this project, my aim is to contribute to the growing body of scholarly, artistic, and activist work that seeks to resuscitate these traumas so that they become enshrined in the nation's public memory.

Because I did not want this thesis to be detached from events and people, there are many references to actual discussions, email exchanges, and interviews with writers, activists, and people connected to the Komagata Maru and Air India cases. Specifically, I have corresponded with South Asian Canadian activist, Jasbir Sandhu, who was involved in asking for an apology for the Komagata Maru incident from the Canadian government; I have interviewed South Asian Canadian novelist Anita Rau Badami and Lata Pada, one of the relatives of the victims of the Air India bombing; I have exchanged emails with

Deputy Press Secretary Andrew MacDougall about Harper's apology and with Hugh Johnston about his text *The Voyage of the Komagata Maru*; and finally, I have discussed the Komagata Maru incident with artists Ajmer Rode and Jarnail Singh. Of the texts that I have included, a number were very difficult to lay hands on, such as the text of the apology which I discuss in Chapter five, Gurdit Singh's *Voyage of the Komagata Maru* which I found at the Nehru Memorial Library and Museum in New Delhi, India, and Eisha Marjara's film *Desperately Seeking Helen* which I had to acquire personally from the filmmaker herself. The difficulty I had in accessing some of these texts attests to the complexity of the politics of remembering and forgetting, and to the fact that many of the responses to the 1914 Komagata Maru incident and the 1985 Air India bombing still remain peripheral to the more canonical Canadian literary fictions.

Like the activists who want an official apology from the nation for its past wrongs, I also want the Canadian nation to accept responsibility for its broken promises, and to remember rather than forget what happened to the passengers aboard the Komagata Maru and the victims on Air India Flight 182.

Chapter One:
**“Official” Forgetting and “Subversive” Remembering: The Politics of Nation-
Formation**

The main battle in imperialism is over land, of course; but when it came to who owned the land, who had the right to settle and work on it, who kept it going, who won it back, and who now plans its future – these issues were reflected, contested, and even for a time decided in narrative. As one critic has suggested, nations themselves *are* narrations. The power to narrate, or to block other narratives from forming and emerging, is very important to culture and imperialism, and constitutes one of the main connections between them. (xiii)

-Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism*

Introduction:

In his “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” Walter Benjamin famously critiques the notion of a teleological narrative of historical progress and instead argues that “[t]here is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism” (256). What Benjamin means is that the hegemonic version of history, a version which represents the views and values of the ruling class and which is very often written in a straightforward and linear form, subjugates the history of brutality and barbarism that underwrites those views and values. For Benjamin, it is the task of the radical critic then to “brush history against the grain” (257) by reading for those hidden moments of oppression, injustice, and horrific violence and by seizing that version of the past which “threatens to disappear irretrievably” (225). In this chapter, I want to use Benjamin’s “Theses” as a starting point for understanding “official” constructions of the Canadian nation, a nation that, as we well know, prides itself on multicultural harmony and traditions of civility. In the same way that Benjamin reads documents of civilization as always eclipsed documents of barbarism, I suggest that we may read the Canadian nation as encoding double and conflicting histories. Beneath its traditions of tolerance, peace,

and good governance, we may discern a dark and far more dystopic history of racial oppression and violence. Canadian critics such as Linda Hutcheon and Daniel Coleman have drawn attention to the violent histories of Canada that lurk in the shadows of the nation's public and much celebrated image of beneficence and hospitality. As Hutcheon argues, "[w]hile the view of Canada as a tolerant, welcoming nation is to some extent valued, . . . it must not be accepted without acknowledging an equally compelling history of intolerance" (*Other Solitudes* 11).⁶ Similarly, Coleman argues that in order to produce and sustain its public persona, "to sit comfortably with [its] claims of multicultural civility" (8), Canada has had to engage in a conscious discourse of forgetting: it has had to forget the violence perpetrated against racialized minorities, the genocidal atrocities committed against the Indigenous people, and a "whole range of injustices in between them" (8).

The importance of memory, of the conscious historicizing of events in the formation of nationhood, has been highlighted by a number of theorists. In his classic 1882 essay, "What is a Nation?" Ernest Renan argues, in the context of the history of France, that nations come into existence by an act of forgetfulness, by an active erasure of the past. Renan suggests that "[f]orgetting is a crucial factor in the creation of the nation. . . Every French citizen has to have forgotten the massacres of Saint Bartholomew,

⁶ For Hutcheon, Canada has a long history of intolerance:

from the extermination of the Beothuk in Newfoundland to the restriction of the other native peoples to reserves; from the deportation of the Acadians to the cultural denigration of French Canada in Lord Durham's Report; from the head tax collected only on Chinese immigrants to the displacement and internment of all Japanese Canadians during the last war; from the deportation of the sick, poor, unemployed, or politically radical in the first decades of this century to the refusal to accept European Jews before the Holocaust. (*Other Solitudes* 11)

or the massacres that took place in the Midi of the thirteenth century” (11). Renan’s essay might be usefully juxtaposed with Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*, not only because, together, these texts are among the most influential works on nationalism ever written but also because they present theories of nation-formation that are in stark contrast to one another.

Whereas Renan argues that nations are formed and essentially united through a deliberate covering over or erasure of the brutal and violent past, Anderson’s work might be read as suggesting the very opposite: that the modern nation is shaped through collective imaginings, through a shared exercise of memory. Anderson claims that the nation is not a strictly fixed geographical space; it is an “imagined community” “because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear from them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion” (15). Thus diverse members of a nation think themselves united; they imagine themselves as occupying not only a shared temporal and geographic space but also an affective one, even though they may never come into contact with one another. For Anderson, then, the formation of the nation hinges on a particular kind of remembering, one based on a shared national imaginary.⁷

⁷ For Anderson, the advent of print-capitalism plays a crucial role in the formation of the nation; in particular, the newspaper and the novel, he suggests, make it possible to “imagine” the nation as a coherent entity in which individuals are understood as connected to one another. These two forms of narrative draw attention to a particular mode of temporality, namely that of synchronicity or simultaneity, that, for Anderson, is necessary for imagining the nation as a connected whole. For Anderson, the realist novel in its very structure renders it possible for readers to imagine a world in which multiple characters are simultaneously engaging in different activities. Although the novel’s fictional characters may be unaware of one another, these characters are bound together by virtue of the fact that they belong to and occupy the same fictional space. The newspaper, Anderson suggests, explores the same logic as the novel. Each person

If nations are “imagined spaces” made by remembering but also forgetting, what is crucial to nation-formation is precisely *what* is remembered and *what* is forgotten. As Edward Said suggests in the epigraph to this chapter, “the power to narrate, or to block other narratives from forming and emerging is very important to culture and imperialism” (xiii) and to the process of nation-formation. For Canada, remembering events like the Komagata Maru incident and the Air India bombing which have historically symbolized the exclusion of certain groups has the potential to challenge the image of tolerance and multicultural civility that the nation wants to keep intact.

The forgetting of past wrongs, their being expunged from the dominant historical record, is essentially an attempt to write out such wrongs from the hegemonic version of the nation’s history, to suggest that they never happened in the first place. That is, to gloss over or willfully elide the memories associated with the 1914 Komagata Maru ship and the 1985 Air India plane from Canada’s historical record is not only to devalue these traumatic events and question their very occurrence; it is also to deny rightful recognition to the South Asian Canadian diasporic community for whom these events are of particular importance, and for whom they symbolize a struggle for belonging in the Canadian nation and the painful possibility of being excluded from it. By contrast, to recuperate past traumas involving minority communities and to retrieve them from the

reading the newspaper, Anderson tells us, “is well aware that the ceremony he performs is being replicated simultaneously by thousands (or millions) of others of whose existence he is confident, yet of whose identity he has not the slightest notion” (39). The events reported in the newspaper on a daily basis, for Anderson, establish among readers a shared history of the nation. That is to say, the nation is this shared act of consuming the events reported in the newspaper. Although Anderson does not address the issue of memory in explicit terms, he certainly implies that the consumption of the news will, over the course of time, develop into a shared collective memory.

depths of Canada's historical archives is to blast open the "homogeneous, empty time" of history, to use Benjamin's phrase, and to counteract the state's elisions by forcing it to remember precisely that which it wishes to forget. A conscious and deliberate remembering of the nation's forgotten past can strategically serve to alter the composition and text of the Canadian nation, to re-member it, and in so doing, ultimately to transform it into a more inclusive and more heterogeneous space. To this extent, remembering the histories of those aboard the Komagata Maru ship who were unjustly turned away from Canada's border at the turn of the century, as well as the traumatic bomb blast that claimed the lives of hundreds of Canadians aboard Air India Flight 182 is a matter of urgency for many Canadians, especially those of South Asian origin.

Under the general rubric of remembering and forgetting in this chapter, I will consider first how the Canadian policy of official multiculturalism partakes of the process of official forgetting in the sense that it endorses a papering over of events like the 1914 Komagata Maru incident and the 1985 Air India bombing, even as it paradoxically seems to promote a remembering of diasporic pasts. I will then consider how forgetting takes place in dominant historical accounts of the nation, especially those accounts that are taught to children in the Canadian school system. When these textbooks are examined chronologically, what they seem to show, as I shall argue, is the way the Canadian national imaginary has changed from its explicit investment in forgetting past wrongs like the broken passages of the Komagata Maru and Air India Flight 182 to a gradual – albeit very reluctant – movement towards remembering. Thus, rather than understanding the dominant national imaginary as static, I read it as changing and as always in a state of flux, as capable of including the histories of minority communities, even though it may

not want to. Finally, this chapter focuses on certain journalistic and historical texts—most notably Gurdit Singh’s *Voyage of the Komagata Maru, or India’s Slavery Abroad* (no publication date), Hugh Johnston’s *The Voyage of the Komagata Maru: The Sikh Challenge to Canada’s Colour Bar* (1989), and Clark Blaise and Bharati Mukherjee’s *The Sorrow and the Terror: The Haunting Legacy of the Air India Bombing* (1988) – that have, and might continue to challenge the nation’s desire to forget. I also consider the limitations of these texts in their efforts to memorialize past traumas, even as I examine the possibilities that they afford. The alternative or counter-hegemonic memory must be understood therefore not as a straightforward and simple response to “official forgetting” but rather as a heterogeneous archive, one that is marked by complexity, multiplicity, and even disjunctures.

“Official” Forgetting:

Multiculturalism

In 1967, Prime Minister Lester B. Pearson set up the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism in order to address the ongoing conflict between the two “founding nations” or the “two solitudes” of Canada: the English and the French. Book Four of the report published by the commission outlined special recommendations for the *integration* of ethnic minorities (Dewing and Lema 4), whose presence had been growing in Canada, especially since the introduction of the 1967 non-discriminatory immigration act under which the state opened its borders for the first time to the people of non-European nations. In response to the report’s recommendations, Prime Minister Pierre Eliot Trudeau introduced in October of 1971 the official policy of multiculturalism, guaranteeing that Canada would be defined as a multicultural nation within a bilingual

framework, and promising equality, freedom, and justice for *all* Canadians. As Trudeau proclaimed to the House of Commons:

We believe that cultural pluralism is the very essence of Canadian identity. Every ethnic group has *the right to preserve and develop its own culture and values* within the Canadian context. To say we have two official languages is not to say we have two official cultures, and *no particular culture is more 'official' than another*. A policy of multiculturalism must be a policy for all Canadians. (qtd in Hawkins 220 italics added for emphasis)

The Prime Minister's proclamation solidified Canada's image of a pluralistic nation, of a nation that benevolently grants its others "the right to preserve and develop its own culture and values" as long as those values do not transgress the "Canadian context" (220). In 1982, the policy of multiculturalism was further institutionalized in Section 27 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, which guaranteed "the preservation and enhancement of the multicultural heritage of Canadians" (Dewing and Lema 6), and in July of 1988, it was made into a law in Parliament.

What is particularly important about Canada's image of multicultural benevolence is that it is projected as timeless and ahistorical, and as such, it negates the notion of historical memory and partakes of the process of forgetting moments of colonial and racial violence such as the Komagata Maru and Air India cases that lie on the darker side of the nation. Both Eva Mackey and Coleman have insisted that Canada's image of timeless benevolence is a historically contingent phenomenon that can be traced back to the early 19th century when Canada sought to model itself on a British code of morality

and ethics that was believed to be superior to the supposed (amoral) code of conduct of the United States. For Mackey, the myth of the “Benevolent Mountie” represented and consolidated the assumption that Canada “managed the inevitable and glorious expansion of the nation (and the subjugation of Native peoples) with much less bloodshed and more benevolence and tolerance than the violent US expansion in the South” (1). Coleman, like Mackey, links Canada’s constructed image of benevolence and civility to the issue of race, although he does so in more explicit ways. Specifically, Coleman argues that since the turn of the century, Canada has produced itself as a “civil” nation, wherein civility has been conflated with English Canadian whiteness. For Coleman, therefore, what he calls “white civility” in the title of his work is a mode of conduct that serves two functions: on the one hand, it helps to manage and exclude “non-white” individuals who are unable to conform to the white racial norm; on the other hand, it functions to distinguish Canada from its “uncivil” American neighbour.

Multiculturalism engages in a cosmetic recognition of difference rather than a more profound recognition of racial, economic, and social injustice. One reason for this perhaps is because the official policy, the 1988 Multicultural Act, focuses less on redressing economic and social inequality than on recognizing more abstract notions like the “culture” and “ethnicity” of particular groups. The policy, for example, suggests that the nation will acknowledge “the freedom of all members of Canadian society to preserve, enhance and share their cultural heritage” (qtd. in *Documenting Canada* 657). It also offers vague claims such as the promise that Canada will “[encourage] the preservation, enhancement, sharing and evolving expression of the multicultural heritage of Canada” (658). It might be argued thus that it is this apolitical ethno-cultural

framework solidified in the 1988 Act that makes it possible for Canada to present itself as a nation that remembers ethnic minorities, but one that in actuality only engages in a selective “remembering” that is ahistorical and apolitical. Commenting on the tendency of multiculturalism to recognize only superficial signifiers of difference, to museumize cultural others, Graham Huggan writes:

[M]ulticulturalism continues to operate as a form of willfully aestheticizing exoticist discourse—a discourse which inadvertently serves to disguise persistent racial tensions within the nation; and one which, in affecting a respect for the other as a reified object of cultural difference, deflects attention away from social issues – discrimination, unequal access, hierarchies of ethnic privilege – that are far from being resolved.
(126)

Huggan’s claim is echoed by scholars such as Kogila Moodley who argues that Canadian multiculturalism focuses on token forms of difference like “‘saris, samosas, and steel bands,’” and does so “in order to diffuse the ‘three R’s:’ ‘resistance, rebellion, and rejection’” (qtd. in E. Mackey 66). Similarly, Himani Bannerji critiques multiculturalism for what she argues is its engagement with a “power-neutral difference” (96), that is, a kind of difference that appears to be uninflected by the politics of race, class, and gender. Among writers, Linda Hutcheon observes, similar concerns have been raised about multiculturalism: concerns, she says, “about stereotyping, about fossilizing cultures into unchanging folk memories, [and] about reducing ‘otherness’ to singing and dancing or exotic foods” (*Other Solitudes* 14).

Within the parameters of multiculturalism, acceptable forms of difference, it seems, are only those that make it possible for the Canadian nation to imagine itself as multicultural without threatening the structure of the nation. According to Sunera Thobani, the South Asian diasporic subject, therefore, learns very quickly that “the wearing of the salwar-kameez will be tolerated, even admired, but not the hijab” (170). For the Canadian nation, the Indian salwar-kameez represents an exotic and non-threatening form of remembering, which might easily be consumed by the dominant Canadian community, while the hijab appears as too powerful a signifier of the Canadian-Muslim subject’s historical selfhood. Thus, if we read Trudeau’s description of Canada’s policy critically, what becomes clear is the way difference gets swallowed up by the nation. He states, “the government will seek to assist all Canadian cultural groups that have *demonstrated a desire and effort* to continue to develop a capacity to grow and *contribute to Canada*. (qtd. in E. Mackey 65-66 italics in the original). The non-white subjects of the nation must be different but in a coordinated rather than fragmented way, or a common rather than unique way. Multiculturalism is thus in a rather peculiar way a homogenizing discourse, even though it doesn’t seem to be. Within the framework of multiculturalism, plurality paradoxically becomes singularity; particularity also becomes universality; multiculture also becomes monoculture; and remembering also becomes forgetting.

My willingness to critique multiculturalism does not mean that I want to dismiss it altogether. Multiculturalism should be viewed not as a completed structure but as a site of immense potential for subversive redeployment. Multiculturalism, precisely because it is such a controversial topic, regularly attacked by the Left, the Right, and the liberals,

offers significant possibilities and might be read as a site of potential promise. As Stuart Hall notes, multiculturalism – as a political doctrine and policy of governance – has long been a site of proliferating contestation:

It is contested by the conservative Right, in defence of the purity and cultural integrity of the nation. It is contested by liberals, who claim that the ‘cult of ethnicity’ and the pursuit of difference threaten the universalism and neutrality of the liberal state, undermining personal autonomy, individual liberty and formal equality...Multiculturalism is also contested by modernizers of different political persuasions. For them, the triumph of the universalism of western civilization over the particularism of ethnic and racial belonging established in the Enlightenment marked a fateful and irreversible transition from Traditionalism to Modernity. This shift must never be reversed...It is also challenged from several positions on the Left. Anti-racists argue that it – wrongly – privileges culture and identity over economic and material questions. Radicals believe it divides the united front of race-and-class against injustice and exploitation along ethnically and racially particularistic lines. Others point to various versions of commercialized, consumerist or ‘boutique’ multiculturalism...which celebrate difference without making a difference. (“Multi-cultural” 211)

In Canada, the major debate about multiculturalism seems to be between two groups: One group includes critics such as Bannerji, Mackey, Coleman, Huggan and Hutcheon among others who have critiqued multiculturalism for the way it engages in a

forgetting of racialized differences, and the other includes critics such as Clark Blaise and Bharati Mukherjee (whose work I will discuss later in this chapter) and Neil Bissoondath who have tended to treat multiculturalism as a discourse based on remembering difference, and thus have attacked it for the way it encourages immigrants to be “ethnic.”⁸ Taken together, these arguments point to the very complexity of Canada’s celebrated policy of multiculturalism, and to the radical possibilities that multiculturalism might afford if it is transformed or pushed in new directions. In this sense, I am taking my cue from Hall, who, writing in the context of contemporary Britain, reads multiculturalism as potentially encoding radical possibilities, and argues that in order to produce such possibilities, the government must, among other things, “expose and confront racism in any of its forms” and address “the gross inequalities and injustices arising from the absence of substantive equality and justice, and exclusion and inferiorization arising from the lack of recognition and insensitivity to difference” (“Multi-cultural” 232). In the context of my thesis, what I suggest is that a radical form of multiculturalism may be possible, a form which is genuinely more incorporative and inclusive, if the histories of white racism in Canada, like the broken passages and broken promises of the Komagata

⁸ For example, in his controversial book *Selling Illusions: The Cult of Multiculturalism in Canada*, Bissoondath critiques multiculturalism for what he argues is the way it compels the racialized subject to be ethnic, to cling to her roots, and to associate only with her “people,” leaving her feeling trapped or imprisoned within the confines of ethnicity. Canadian multiculturalism, Bissoondath tells us, has forced him to recall the past, to live in it, rather than to live as a Canadian. Lamenting what he sees as the loss of a Canadian culture, Bissoondath states: “And it is here that multiculturalism has failed us. In eradicating the centre, in evoking uncertainty as to what and who is Canadian, it has diminished all sense of Canadian values, of what is Canadian” (71). Bissoondath’s critique is no doubt problematic: it implicitly celebrates a hegemonic “white Canadian culture” and fails to understand the complexity of multiculturalism and the paradoxical way in which it operates as a discourse of forgetting while seeming to be a discourse about remembering.

Maru and Air India cases, are recognized and inscribed in the public imaginary, if they are incorporated into the nation's official history and taught to children in school.

Official Histories

In Canada, canonical history textbooks from the 1940s to the current era narrativize the Canadian nation by selectively remembering and forgetting elements of the past. Since these texts can be understood as playing a role in the construction of the national imaginary, when read alongside one another they produce a genealogy of Canada's collective imaginings, its "invented traditions," to cite Eric Hobsbawm.⁹ Ranajit Guha, one of the founders of the Subaltern Studies Collective, argues in his analysis of India's colonial history, that it is necessary to study elitist historiography, even though it writes out the history of the subaltern groups. Elitist historiography, he writes, offers us insight into "some aspects of the ideology of the elite as the dominant ideology of the period" and "[a]bove all it helps us to understand the ideological character of historiography itself" ("Historiography" 2-3). To examine dominant

⁹ What Hobsbawm suggests is that the traditions which often seem to be timeless – traditions like the singing of the national anthem or the raising of the national flag – are invented by members of the hegemonic classes in order to construct a certain narrative about the nation and to create a kind of social cohesion among members of that nation. For Hobsbawm, these invented traditions can be understood then as a

a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past. (1)

By drawing attention to the constructedness of traditions that underlie the nation, Hobsbawm suggests that the nation is neither a fixed geographical space nor an ideologically neutral construct. Rather, he suggests that the traditions on which it draws are based on selective memories of the past. As Hobsbawm suggests, these traditions "attempt to establish continuity with a *suitable* historical past" (1 italics added for emphasis), and that continuity is often "largely factitious" (2). For Hobsbawm, then, the nation comes into being by both a remembering and a forgetting of history. I return to Hobsbawm's work in Chapter three.

Canadian history therefore might be to better understand the workings of dominant ideology and the way this ideology may have shifted across time. Thus, some of the earliest and most well known texts such as Arthur Lower's *Colony to Nation: A History of Canada* published in 1947, and Donald Creighton's *The Story of Canada*, first published in 1959 and then as a second edition in 1971, are interesting precisely for what they omit – the history of the Komagata Maru incident – and for the way they represent Canada as a story of white triumphalism in which explorers and settler-invader subjects, all of whom are white and all of whom are male, emerge as heroic and celebratory figures. The fact that Lower registers some of the histories of racial discrimination (like the Chinese head tax) while Creighton, who was writing some twelve years later, tends to overlook them entirely, might seem to contradict my argument that the nation moves teleologically from a forgetting to a reluctant remembering of past wrongs, but I argue that it does not. Since Lower acknowledges histories of oppression and seems to approve of them as markers of Canadian independence, his text can be read as engaging in a different kind of forgetting, one which contributes to the ongoing subjugation of racialized minorities.¹⁰ Subtle differences aside, both Lower and Creighton represent the nation as a struggle between the French and the English, and in so doing, imagine the

¹⁰ Lower, for example, mentions and justifies the Chinese Exclusion Act. He writes: Even before its completion the Canadian Pacific Railway had begun to arrange for steamer service across the Pacific. Most of the British Columbian sections of the road had been built by Chinese labour and that experience had decided British Columbians that the Asiatic was not going to be allowed to crowd into their province and swamp its white population. Against the Chinese, Canada built up such defenses as the 'head-tax.' (446)

nation as coming into being because of the valiant efforts of its imperial founders, its white forces.

Canadian history textbooks emerging from the 1990s seem to record a shift in the way the nation is imagined: thus, texts such as Alvin Finkel et al.'s *History of the Canadian Peoples* (1993) and J.M. Bumsted's *A History of the Canadian Peoples* (1998) re-insert into the nation histories of ordinary people and minority groups, even though they maintain the same kind of narrative trajectory as earlier texts, tracing Canada's movement from "colony to nation." What is different in these accounts is the tone in which history is recorded: it is less authoritative than earlier accounts of the nation and more conscious of the multiplicity of historical perspectives. In *History of Canadian Peoples* (1993), for example, Alvin Finkel et al. claim that their objective "was to write a survey of Canadian history that incorporated new research in Canadian social history and included developments in the lives of all Canadians, not just the rich and powerful" (xix). Moreover, rather than naturalizing racist ideologies and thus implicitly condoning them as some of the earlier texts had done, these texts draw attention to and critique racial violence. Bumsted, for example, begins by documenting what he calls the "invasion" rather than the "arrival" of the European settler subject, and the eradication of Native populations. He also critiques Canada's treatment of the Chinese when he explains that the Canadian railway "was built on the backs of Chinese coolies" (215).

The critic Ken Osborne attributes the shift in the way the nation is remembered in history textbooks, a shift that he says begins in the 1970s, to a series of external pressures. He writes:

By the 1970s, the shortcomings of the conventional nation-building narrative were becoming too obvious to ignore. In a Canada that was in fact and in policy increasingly *multicultural, where hitherto-ignored minorities were making their presence felt, where the rhetoric of human rights was increasingly heard, and where the old master-narratives were found wanting, the conventional story of Canada's 'two founding peoples' came under increasing scrutiny.* Room had to be found in the national story for First Nations Canadians, as well as for women and cultural minorities. In addition, the turn to social history complicated the traditional narrative, not only by drawing attention to the topics previously ignored, but also by calling taken-for-granted assumptions of significance and periodization into question. (597 italics added for emphasis)

What Osborne seems to be pointing to is the possibility that the imagined shape of the nation may change, that external pressures such as the growing presence of minorities and the focus on multiculturalism might compel those writing hegemonic accounts of history to remember the nation differently. From the 1970s onward, the nation, Osborne suggests, was remembered as a more inclusive and more pluralistic space than it had been previously. And yet, it should be noted that there are limits to this new inclusive perspective. Because these Canadian history textbooks retained the shape of earlier ones in terms of their basic chronology, minority histories continued to be framed as marginal in relation to the ostensibly more important narrative about the struggle between the French and the English. In these texts, therefore, there is still no mention of the

Komagata Maru incident, and no reference to the Air India bombing, even though these texts claim to trace Canada's history from the colonial period to the 1990s.

More recent historical textbooks like Margaret Conrad and Alvin Finkel's *Canada: A National History* (2003), and Roger Riendeau's *A Brief History of Canada* (2007) are not dramatically different from those written a decade earlier, except in one instance: these texts, however briefly, include the Komagata Maru incident as part of the history of Canada.¹¹ Thus these texts seem to reveal not only a desire to write more inclusive histories, but also a certain reluctance to displace hegemonic accounts of the nation that celebrate events like the Battle of the Plains of Abraham in which the English are represented as having defeated the French. In Riendeau's account of the Komagata Maru incident, the name of the Komagata Maru is never mentioned; it is simply referred to as an "alien" ship (229), and the event is not registered in the index of the book. Moreover, Riendeau seems to acknowledge, on the one hand, the racism that underpins the event when he explains that the ship left the shores "amid cries of White Canada Forever" (229) and, on the other hand, to deny it by reducing the event to a symbol of "British Columbians' insensitivity to Asian immigration" (228). Conrad and Finkel similarly reveal in their account of the Komagata Maru incident a conflicting desire to acknowledge and deny what happened. Thus, while Conrad and Finkel register the Komagata Maru incident, they also frame the event as peripheral rather than central to the nation's history by failing to index it, and by overlooking the complexity of the trauma and the full extent of its violent underpinnings. For example, rather than mentioning that

¹¹ I have deliberately chose Riendeau's text because it is an American publication. Thus, we can begin to understand how Canada is being represented not only from within but also outside the nation.

the passengers aboard the ship were threatened at gunpoint and forced to leave Canadian shores, Conrad and Finkel frame the turning away as a much more civil act, and as a matter of legality, describing the passengers as being “[d]etained on board for two months in Vancouver harbour while their case was heard before the courts” and then being “ordered to leave” (291). These historical retellings of the Komagata Maru incident suggest that there are contradictory pressures at work: a desire to ascertain and record historical “truth,” as well as a reluctance to admit to embarrassing or discriminatory national policies. The reluctance to remember certain historical events involving minorities is evident also in the failure of these texts to recognize the Air India bombing. This aporia is, in fact, rather ironic, given the magnitude of the bombing, and the fact that before 9/11 it was the worst case of aviation terrorism in the world. Rather than using the Air India bombing as a point of reference in their discussions of terrorism, these contemporary texts refer instead to the bombing of the twin towers on September 11, 2001 in the United States.

The canonical Canadian history textbooks that I have examined thus far are in many ways very different from the textbooks taught in the Ontario school system. Given that the institution of the school constitutes a space where subjectivity is shaped, it seems likely that the histories prescribed and studied in Canadian schools contribute significantly to the shaping of the national imaginary, to the way Canadians perceive their national history. As Louis Althusser notes, schools are part of the ideological state apparatus: “the school...teaches ‘know-how,’ but in forms which ensure *subjection to the ruling ideology* or the mastery of its ‘practice’” (133 italics in the original). In the province of Ontario, Canadian history is mandatory in grades seven, eight, and ten. In

grade seven, the textbooks generally focus on early Canadian history from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century; in grade eight, the focus shifts to Canadian history from 1838 to 1914; and in grade ten, the textbooks tend to focus on the period after the First World War and extending up to the present-day. Thus, Canadian students are expected to have a composite and comprehensive understanding of the Canadian nation and its history by the time they finish the tenth grade.

The textbooks taught in Ontario high schools tend to engage not in a straightforward exclusion of events symbolizing racial exclusion, but in a rather more complex process of inclusion and exclusion, or of retention and disavowal. There is a tendency in these textbooks to construct troubling events as part of a bygone era that is distinct from the multicultural present, which is marked by racial harmony and rituals of reconciliation.¹² In Elspeth Deir and John Fielding's *Canada: The Story of Our Heritage* (2000), a textbook taught in grade seven, and in *Canada: The Story of a Developing Nation* (2000), written by the same authors and taught in grade eight, present-day Canada is described as "the most culturally diverse society in the history of the world" (*Heritage* 3), and students are told that Canada believes in redress and the "righting [of] past wrongs" (*Developing Nation* 347).¹³ Since *Developing Nation* concludes by representing

¹² Thus, in *Canada: The Story of a Developing Nation* (2000), for example, the text briefly acknowledges the oppression of Aboriginal peoples "before the 1920s" (346), but focuses largely on symbolic examples of the harmonious relationship between Natives and white Canadians like the signing of the Nisga'a treaty, or the participation of the RCMP in the Aboriginal canoe journey to raise money for an addiction recovery centre for Native peoples.

¹³ One example of Canada's benevolence offered by the grade seven text is of Canada's willingness to admit refugees from Kosovo. As the text explains, "[i]n 1999 there were thousands of refugees from...Kosovo" who "joined a long list of people who came to

Canada as a multicultural and tolerant space, events like the Komagata Maru incident, which it acknowledges, are framed as part of the past. The representation of the Komagata Maru event is also problematic because some of the most important details are omitted. For example, instead of recognizing that the passengers were British subjects who were entitled to land in Canada, a British dominion, the text simply suggests that “[m]any could speak English, and they understood English culture” (313). The text also deflects attention from the issue of race by emphasizing only that “European workers wanted to keep out Asians who would accept low wages and poor working conditions” (312). In so doing, the text comes dangerously close to implying that the rejection of the passengers aboard the ship was justifiable. Moreover, an image of Gurdit Singh and his fellow passengers is presented as part of the body of the text, but a description of the event is relegated to what is called a “snippet” in the margins of the text, and thus, it is easy to miss.

The celebration of multiculturalism and reconciliation is perhaps most apparent in the representative grade ten textbook that I have chosen, *Continuity and Change, Canada: A History of Canada Since 1914* (2007), by Don Bogle, Eugene D’Orazio, and Don Quinlan. While this text mentions that it was “difficult for Asians, Jews, and eastern Europeans to immigrate to Canada” before the Second World War (278), it insists that “[t]oday, it is generally believed that Canada is a richer society due to the presence of immigrants from all over the world” (280). In order to establish that the nation as it exists

Canada to escape persecution and to find a safe haven, or place of shelter and safety” (*Heritage* 393).

today is an inclusive space, this textbook seems to focus on the idea of progress by insisting on the *pastness* of wrongs committed against racialized minorities. Thus, while the text acknowledges the Komagata Maru incident as an example of the rejection of the “375 Sikhs from India [who] were turned away from Vancouver” (278), it focuses on “New Policies” which putatively allow minorities to enter Canada. In so doing, it shifts the focus from past exclusion to Canada’s present inclusivity. It reads:

By the 1970s, many Canadians felt the immigration policies needed to be changed...In 1976, the Canadian government announced a new immigration policy. Immigrants would be judged by a point system. Points were awarded for education, job skills, and knowledge of English and French. Many Asians, Africans, and Caribbean people now came to find a new life in Canada. By the end of the 1980s, over 60 000 boat people, primarily refugees from South Vietnam, had come to Canada. During the 1990s, Canada accepted displaced Romas, thousands of Kosovars, Somalians, Rwandans, and Chinese refugees.

(278-79)

The grade ten textbook seems to simultaneously acknowledge and deny the racism that underpins exclusionary policies. It admits, on the one hand therefore, that before World War Two, Canada had an explicitly racist policy and that “[n]on-whites were not welcomed” (279) in Canada; on the other hand, it describes Canada’s actions against those like the passengers of the Komagata Maru in very neutral terms, declaring that Canadians “did not believe” that immigrants such as Asians, Jews, and eastern Europeans “would ‘fit in’ with Canadian society” (278). The phrase “fit in” here makes the

exclusionary attitudes and actions of Canadians seem almost benign and harmless rather than violent.

The school textbooks tend to construct the nation as a narrative of linear progress in which the past is marked by violence and racism but the present appears to be harmonious and conciliatory. It is perhaps for this reason that these texts fail to mention the 1985 Air India bombing: this contemporary event has the potential to rupture the façade of multicultural harmony and instead to point to the failure of multiculturalism. Multiculturalism is meant to offer inclusion to all Canadians, and to dispel the immigrant subject's strong ties to her homeland by compelling her to invest in shallow and ephemeral forms of belonging, forms that include ethnic foods and music. Thus, for these textbooks to recognize the Air India bombing might be to suggest that official multiculturalism has failed; because in spite of the nation's attempt to encourage minority subjects to invest in cosmetic signifiers of difference, the bombing revealed that they were investing in the politics of the homeland (in this case, the politics generated by Hindus-Sikh communal tensions in India). Moreover, to recognize the Air India bombing would also mean that Canadian textbooks would be forced to acknowledge that Canada had initially failed to see the bombing as a Canadian event, and to acknowledge therefore that a kind of amnesia continues to underlie the nation. The narrative of progress and enlightenment that the textbooks set up would thus inevitably be undermined by the recognition of the Air India bombing and the complex ways in which it raises questions about multiculturalism, immigrant communities, and Canadian racism.

“Subversive” Remembering:

The absence or marginality of the 1914 Komagata Maru incident and the 1985 Air India bombing in official discourses seems to be part of a larger phenomenon in which the voices and perspectives of racialized groups in Canada tend to get overlooked. As Coleman argues, Canadian nationalism engages in a “determined disavowal” of “the history of genocide and cultural decimation of Indigenous peoples in Canada” by producing the “image of the peaceful settler” (8). Thus, even in Canadian universities, as Arun Mukherjee points out, the histories of racialized and minority groups are elided because “the master narratives are framed in terms of Canada’s two founding races, refigured as two founding peoples to suit these politically correct times” (72). “English Canadian literature courses,” she goes on to argue, “therefore, begin with Susanna Moodie’s *Roughing it in the Bush* and not with Native orature” (72). Although Mukherjee was writing in 1998, her point still seems to apply to Canadian literature courses taught at the University today. The relative occlusion of non-white writers and the privileging of “white” English Canadian writers partakes of a similar logic that applies in the ongoing attempts in official spheres to forget events like the Komagata Maru and Air India cases.

Interestingly, the relative invisibility accorded to racialized histories in official discourses is set against a striking proliferation of texts about the Komagata Maru incident and Air India bombing by writers, activists, journalists, filmmakers, and (in some cases) politicians. Thus, on the one hand, the Komagata Maru and Air India cases are characterized by an aporetic silence; and on the other, they are marked by a haunting presence, a tendency to resurface repeatedly and anxiously in the public sphere, in the form of memorials, films, poetry, literary fictions, trials, reports, media scandals,

inquiries, government reports, apologies, and so on. In “DissemiNation: Time, Narrative, and the Margins of the Modern Nation,” Homi Bhabha argues that the modern western nation is characterized by a struggle between hegemonic and counter-hegemonic forces to narrate the nation. Thus, Bhabha’s work is useful here. For Bhabha, nations are always bound up with narrative. Whereas the nation tends to project a phantasmatic account of national progress, a linear march forward across space and time, Bhabha suggests that the (subaltern) counter-narratives “disturb those ideological manoeuvres through which ‘imagined communities’ are given essential identities” (300). These counter-narratives rewrite the nation as fractured rather than cohesive, heterogeneous rather than homogeneous. Bhabha draws on but also critiques Anderson’s argument that the nation is characterized by simultaneity and synchronicity, and reads this temporality as a mere illusion, as subterfuge, concealing and containing the nation’s inner divisions and fractures. For Anderson, each person reading the newspaper at the same time *is* the nation. For Bhabha, “the space of the modern nation is never simply horizontal” (293); it is both synchronic and diachronic, and thus its linearity is always at risk of being ruptured by multiple counter-narratives.¹⁴ The struggle for narrative power, for Bhabha then, is essentially a struggle to write the history of the nation.¹⁵ In Canada, the very proliferation

¹⁴ Bhabha writes:

From that place of the ‘meanwhile,’ where cultural homogeneity and democratic anonymity make their claims on the national community, there emerges a more instantaneous and subaltern voice of the people, a minority discourse that speaks betwixt and between times and places. (309)

¹⁵ In India, the story of the nation was rewritten, as many have documented, when nationalist historiographers famously renamed what the British had called the Sepoy Mutiny as the Indian Uprising of 1857. More recently, leftist historians and activists, among others, have struggled to rewrite the (exclusionary) Indian nation that has been narrativized by the BJP; a nation in which religious minorities figure as outsiders in

of counter-hegemonic accounts of the Komagata Maru and Air India cases opens up a space for alternative narratives, narratives that push against the limits of the existing dominant national imaginary.

The Komagata Maru incident thus has been documented in detail in texts like Gurdit Singh's *Voyage of the Komagata Maru, or India's Slavery Abroad* (no publication date), an impassioned account of the trauma from the perspective of Gurdit Singh, the wealthy Sikh businessman who chartered the ship; in Sohan Singh Josh's *Tragedy of the Komagata Maru* (1975), a text published only in India, which explores the connections between the Komagata Maru incident and Indian anti-colonial nationalism during the period; in Hugh Johnston's *The Voyage of the Komagata Maru: The Sikh Challenge to Canada's Colour Bar* (1989), one of the most oft-cited historical accounts of the incident that tends to be regarded as thorough and fair-minded; and in Malwinjit Singh Waraich and Gurdev Singh Sidhu's *Komagata Maru, A Challenge to Colonialism: Key Documents* (2005), which offers a collection of some of the official documents emerging from both the Canadian and Indian side relating to the exclusion of the passengers aboard the ship.

Other texts that remember the Komagata Maru incident and link it to a larger historical context include Gurshan Basran S. and B. Singh Bolaria's *The Sikhs in*

relation to the dominant upper-class Hindu who is positioned as insider. In Canada, the struggle to narrate the nation is emblemized in the competition over nomenclature between the dominant white Canadian community and the Aboriginal community. Whereas the dominant group has imagined Canada as emerging from a struggle between what they have called the two "founding nations of Canada" – the French and the English – the Indigenous community has re-drawn the ideological boundaries of the nation, and re-written its history of origin by calling themselves the "First Nations," a title which reminds us (quite rightly) that the Indigenous people were the original inhabitants of the land, and that their presence in Canada preceded the arrival of the European settler subject.

Canada: Migration, Race, Class, and Gender (2003), which deals with the Komagata Maru incident as part of a broader history of Sikhs in Canada, and focuses on how official policies affected the migration patterns of Sikhs and other South Asian groups in the Canadian nation; Peter Ward's *White Canada Forever: Popular Attitudes and Public Policy Towards Orientals in British Columbia* (1978), which compares Canada's treatment of the passengers aboard the Komagata Maru to the treatment of other minority groups such as the Chinese and the Japanese during the early twentieth century; and Ian McKay's *Reasoning Otherwise: Leftists and the People's Enlightenment in Canada 1890-1920* (2008), an account which attempts to connect the Komagata Maru incident to the history of socialism in Canada and which reads the trauma in racialized terms: as a struggle between brown-skinned "Hindus" who wanted to enter Canada and "white" Canadians who sought to keep Canada white (353).

Similarly, the Air India bombing has been recorded in historical, journalistic and governmental texts such as Clark Blaise and Bharati Mukherjee's *The Sorrow and the Terror: The Haunting Legacy of the Air India Tragedy* (1988), a journalistic account of the bombing which focuses on the aspects of the trauma which make it a distinctively "Canadian" event, and Kim Bolan's *Loss of Faith: How the Air-India Bombers Got Away with Murder* (2005), which offers an account of the author's experiences as a journalist for the *Vancouver Sun* following the bombing and its links to Sikh extremism in Canada. In her book, Bolan makes an important claim that "[t]he Sikh community, for the most part, widely condemned the violence and worried about being linked to terrorism in the media" (81). There is also Salim Jiwa's *The Death of Air India Flight 182* (1986) and *Margin of Terror: A Reporter's Twenty-year Odyssey Covering the Tragedies of The Air*

India Bombing (2006), both co-written with Donald J. Hauka, which trace the history of Sikh terrorism in Canada before and after the bombing of Air India Flight 182; and Zuhair Kashmeri and Brian McAndrew's *Soft Target: India's Intelligence Service and Its Role in the Air India Disaster* (1989), a text written by two Canadian reporters which blames Indian intelligence for the bombing of Air India and suggests that Indian officials set out to frame and thus malign the Sikh community. The evidence presented in this text is largely speculative and therefore remains unconvincing. Finally, there is Bob Rae's governmental report "Lessons to be Learned" (2005), which offers a fairly thorough, chronological account of the Air India bombing and recommends that the government hold an inquiry into what happened.

Two Responses to the Komagata Maru Incident

From the list of specialized accounts of the Komagata Maru incident and Air India bombing, I want to focus on those that have been the most oft-cited including Gurdit Singh's *Voyage of the Komagata Maru*, or *India's Slavery Abroad* (no publication date), Johnston's *The Voyage of the Komagata Maru: The Sikh Challenge to Canada's Colour Bar* (1989) and Blaise and Mukherjee's *The Sorrow and the Terror: The Haunting Legacy of the Air India Tragedy* (1988) and consider how these texts might remember the trauma in different ways. Gurdit Singh's account was published in three sections in Calcutta and although it has no publication date, Johnston speculates that it was written in 1928, after Gurdit Singh was released from his five-year prison sentence in India. The difficulty of accessing this text and the relatively small number of published copies of it are themselves indications of the difficulty involved in retrieving aspects of the past. The publication histories, of both Gurdit Singh's monograph as well as Johnston's text, reflect

the complexity of the politics of remembering and forgetting, and suggest that institutions and industries have the potential to help or hinder the project of mapping the trauma onto the historical record. When I began this project, *Voyage of the Komagata Maru* was difficult to obtain. As primary archival material, I could only locate it at the Nehru Memorial Library and Museum in New Delhi, India, where, as I discovered, the book could not be taken out (most likely because only one copy of it existed) and could only be photocopied. In 2007, the book was published as a second edition in India, making it more widely accessible. Johnston's text was first published in 1979 by Oxford University Press, India in conjunction with Oxford University Press, Canada which, Johnston told me in an email, "took 1,000 copies which they distributed [in Canada] at an attractive price" (10 May 2011). The book, Johnston explains, "did not do much as a commercial title" in Canada. One possible reason for this, Johnston goes on to explain, is because it dealt with past wrongs that Canadians did not want to address. As he writes, "people don't like mea culpas, which is not the nature of the book, but probably what many assumed" (10 May 2011). Interestingly, Johnston reports that since 1989, UBC Press "brought out its edition, and they have kept it in print since then" (10 May 2011), the suggestion here being that in more recent years, there has been more interest in the 1914 event, and that the event has become memorialized in the public sphere, despite official attempts to forget it.

Gurdit Singh's account was written in part as a response to the British Raj's official Report of the Komagata Maru Committee of Inquiry published in Calcutta in 1914, which according to Gurdit Singh, was intended "to 'whitewash' the doings of the Canadian Authorities and the officials at Budge Budge" (1:127). At Budge Budge, near

Calcutta, the passengers aboard the Komagata Maru were forced to disembark from the ship and were met with gunfire by British troops who suspected that they were aligned with the Ghadar movement, a North American anti-colonial nationalist movement devoted to achieving Indian independence. To the extent that Gurdit Singh's text spills over into the more subjective realms of autobiography and political manifesto, it is not a conventional historical account of the past. The tone is angry rather than composed and careful, the language is ungrammatical, and there is evidence to suggest that it was not written by Gurdit Singh himself. For one thing, Gurdit Singh admits that he narrated the story in Gurmukhi "and some good friends gave it the present shape in English" (Foreword). Secondly, the style of writing shifts slightly from the beginning to the end, thereby rendering the text polyphonic and suggesting that it was written by more than one writer. Rife with grammatical errors, the English translation of Gurdit Singh's original text is evidently a poor one. There is also a kind of endless repetition of the often trivial information provided in the text: information such as the transcripts of letters, detailed descriptions of the squabbles that take place, a charter contract, interview transcripts, excerpts from the Canadian Immigration Act, a list of provisions, and so on. These apparent weaknesses – that is, the ungrammatical style, the inconsequential details, and the affect-laden tone – might actually be read as strengths, to the extent that they contribute to the idea that this is a "real" piece of history, that the disorderliness that breaks through the surface *is* the event as it was experienced.

Johnston relies rather heavily on Gurdit Singh's manuscript, citing his text repeatedly in his historical account. In fact, it might be argued that Johnston's retelling of the "facts" much later might not have been possible without the impassioned efforts of

Gurdit Singh. But unlike Gurdit Singh's text, Johnston's work, which draws on numerous and varied sources, labours to present itself as an objective and fair-minded account of the Komagata Maru incident. Johnston's use of a narrative (rather than analytical) framework seems to be in keeping with his aim of achieving neutrality: thus, he narrates the history of the Komagata Maru incident from an emotionally detached and temporally distant perspective, rarely offering scholarly analysis of the events he records. Drawing on a range of texts including government reports, Gurdit Singh's manuscript, newspaper articles from India, Canada, the United States, and Great Britain, and Ghadar literature which included poetry and pamphlets, Johnston puts together a chronological record of the event, beginning with the first arrival of Sikhs in Canada in 1904, moving to the turning away of the Komagata Maru from Vancouver in July of 1914, and finally describing the arrest and detention of Gurdit Singh in India some seven years after the voyage. His text also locates the Komagata Maru incident in a complex transnational matrix of power and politics, linking it to the Ghadar movement that was taking place in North America, to the racist policies developed by the Canadian government to keep Indians out of Canada, and to the British Empire and its failure to live up to its promise that imperial subjects were free to travel and settle anywhere in the Empire. Johnston's work has been praised as a thorough account of the Komagata Maru incident because of this scrupulous detail, with scholars like Peter Ward, in his 1981 review of Johnston's work, arguing that *The Voyage of the Komagata Maru* "is the fullest account of the episode published to date and the only one that links its Canadian and Indian phases" (675).

Thus, both Johnston and Gurdit Singh's texts are important, but for very different reasons. Whereas Johnston's text is significant because it strives to "tell history as it happened," to offer an account of the past that is close to the "truth," Gurdit Singh's account is valuable because of its messiness, a messiness which does not distract attention away from the trauma but rather revivifies it, a messiness, that is, which gives the effect of reality itself. In "The Prose of Counter-Insurgency," a text which is perhaps useful here, Guha suggests that an analysis of historical prose is ideologically revelatory, that what a historian chooses to remember and to forget renders her work not merely a recreation of the event that is being described but also an interpretation of that event, one that is underpinned by political agendas and motivations. For Guha, primary discourses written by bureaucrats and government officials have an "aura of impartiality" and neutrality, and secondary discourses, written by Indian nationalists, tend to construct the protagonists of the rebellion "not as peasants but as *'Insurgents,'* [and] not as Musalman but as *'fanatic'*" (13). Even what Guha calls tertiary discourses, written by Indian Marxists, focus on the peasant insurgencies but do so in a way that is not ideologically neutral and that obfuscates the agency of the peasant subject.

While Guha's analysis is not in itself the subject of my inquiry, his methodological approach to history is useful for understanding the importance of reading historical prose critically. Thus, when we focus on Johnston and Gurdit Singh's distinctive idioms, we notice that they yield very different effects. Johnston's prose style is similar to that of "official history," as it strives for objectivity and distance, and records the events in a chronological sequence, while Gurdit Singh's messy and often convoluted style confronts the linearity of conventional history and reflects Gurdit Singh's personal

experiences of suffering and loss. Moreover, whereas Johnston's account offers us the perspective of a contemporary white Canadian historian who figures as a secondary (rather than primary) witness to the trauma, Gurdit Singh's autobiographical and eye-witness account is told from the retrospective viewpoint of an older Sikh man who traveled aboard the Komagata Maru and experienced the turning away from Canadian shores first hand and for whom the trauma is a site that evokes tremendous emotion.¹⁶ Juxtaposing these two texts, texts which often battle against one another in their interpretations of the 1914 Komagata Maru incident, raises the question about how we read history, and how we are interpellated by different historical re-tellings of the past. Gurdit Singh for example addresses us directly as readers, asking us to take his side in his struggle for equality and justice, while Johnston allows us the comfortable distance of a spectator who observes the trauma as it unfolds without taking one side over another.

Gurdit Singh's text is, from its very outset, transparent in its intentions; it calls upon the reader to perpetuate the memory of the Komagata Maru incident and to demand justice and equality for all subjects of the British Empire. As Gurdit Singh writes:

¹⁶ James Clifford's work is useful here, although it pertains to a very different context. Clifford compares two Western museums – the University of British Columbia Museum of Anthropology, and the Royal British Columbia Museum – to two native-run cultural centres: the Kwagiulth Museum and Cultural Centre and the U'mista Cultural Centre. What he notices is that whereas objects in the Western museums are framed as "fine-art treasures," regalia in the native centres figure as much more than art objects: they also figure as sites of immense pain. Thus, next to the "Potlatch Collection" in the U'mista Cultural Centre, is a note written by the elders who recall having to give up these objects in 1922. Clifford notes that the collections tell the observer that the chiefs "were weeping, as if someone had died" (133). The collections go on to say that "this is our story," and that these objects now stand for a history of oppression and colonialism. Just as the art objects signify differently for the elders and for the white museum curator, the Komagata Maru incident appears very differently from the perspective of Johnston and Gurdit Singh.

I do feel and feel keenly that it is the intention of the Government to administer 'JUSTICE,' in its true sense...I only hope that both sides will realise their responsibilities and admit their mistakes and make a joint effort for an early realization of India's ideal so that Canada or any other country would not dare to insult peaceful Indians in the way they insulted the immigrants of S.S. KOMAGATAMARU. (1: n.p.)

Gurdit Singh's aim seems to be to set the historical record straight and to memorialize the trauma. In fact, he reveals that part of the trauma for him was not only the experience of rejection from both officials in India and in Canada, but also the failure of both sides to acknowledge that a wrong had been committed. For example, the British government in India, according to Gurdit Singh, tried to suppress what had happened. As he puts it, "they wished the Budge Budge tragedy to be forgotten and that truth might not see the light regarding this matter" (2:162). In response, he argues that "[t]o show the world of [sic] the most unjustifiable methods used by the Canadian authorities the following story will clearly bring to light the brutal iron hand which they used to send us back without food or water" (1:101). He tells us that his "heart now beats easy" because he has "done [his] duty to [his] brave comrades who fell at Budge Budge by exposing the methods by which they came to their early end" (2:199). For Gurdit Singh, it seems, telling the history of the Komagata Maru incident and the Budge Budge riots is a way to prevent such tragedies from occurring in the future. Unlike Gurdit Singh, Johnston's motives are never quite made explicit, although he too is clearly invested in remembering the Komagata Maru incident. Moreover, what seems to interest Johnston is the fact that the Komagata Maru incident remains a haunting presence in the South Asian Canadian

imaginary, noting in the concluding pages of his text that “the *Komagata Maru* has not been forgotten, that Mewa Singh’s picture still hangs prominently in the Vancouver Sikh temple” (136) and reporting that Mewa Singh, the Sikh man who killed William Hopkinson and was hanged by the Canadian state, is for the Sikh community, “a true hero and martyr” (130). Despite the different aims of Gurdit Singh and Johnston, both writers comment on the politics of remembering – whether implicitly or explicitly – and themselves partake of the process of perpetuating the memory of the event. Thus Gurdit Singh’s text confirms Johnston’s claim when it describes Mewa Singh as “one of India’s noble son’s [sic] the likes of whom it is hard to replace” (2:20).

Gurdit Singh’s account is particularly useful as a source of information about the specific quality of the trauma experienced by those attempting to immigrate, establishing, for instance, just how isolated the people aboard the ship were. The passengers, we are told, felt rejected by officials in both Canada and India. The British Raj, to whom they had been loyal, had turned against them. In his text, Gurdit Singh remembers the pain and suffering of the passengers aboard the *Komagata Maru* who were denied food and visitors: “The intention of the Canadian Authorities appeared to starve us. We were nothing less than prisoners and I remarked that at the time that you treat us nothing better than prisoners – it is the duty of the Government to feed us” (1:103), he recalls. Gurdit Singh’s dramatic rhetorical style, and his vehement insistence that he and his fellow passengers were treated like “prisoners” and “starved” by the Canadian government, has a paradoxical effect. Although Gurdit Singh’s insistence on excess might be read as undermining the reliability of his re-telling of the past and raising questions about his recording of the “facts,” his sometimes hyperbolic tone has the opposite effect: it

revivifies the trauma, and the feelings of shame and anger that the passengers may have felt.

Johnston's persistent neutrality seems to deflect some of the more political aspects of the trauma, aspects that Gurdit Singh dramatizes. For example, instead of engaging in explicit discussions about race, Johnston seems to veer away from such issues by frequently choosing to use more neutral sounding terms like "discrimination" and "prejudice" rather than "race" and "racism." Thus, when he describes the actions of the Canadian officials, he writes, for example, that "[i]n Hopkinson Indians encountered the long arm of the Indian government, but in Reid and Stevens they ran into local prejudice pure and simple" (19). When Johnston describes the anti-racial sentiments in Vancouver during the turn of the century, he fails to mention that Canada considered itself a "white man's country," a point that Ian McKay emphasizes in his account of the incident. Alluding to Johnston's ostensible reluctance to deal overtly with the racist ethos that characterized the period, one reviewer notes that "Johnston's sketch of anti-Asian prejudice in British Columbia is almost too brief to be useful and, by concentrating on the official record, he underestimates the intensity of anti-Indian feeling aroused in British Columbia by the *Komagata Maru*" (P. Roy 241-42). In his attempt to remain neutral and detached, Johnston seems to move away from a more explicit critique of the actions of officials, and from a discussion of the event as an instance of blatant racial injustice.

Johnston's attempts to avoid explicit references to ideas of "whiteness," and his desire to move away from discussions of injustice and inequality seem particularly striking when his text is juxtaposed with Gurdit Singh's determined efforts to construct the Komagata Maru incident in racial terms: that is, as a struggle between brown-skinned

Indians and white officials. Gurdit Singh, for example, uses the metaphor of “sucked oranges” (1:1), eaten and discarded, to describe the way Indians in the British territories outside India are treated and suggests that there is an “utter hollowness of the equality-cult of Western democracies,” where, he says, “[c]olour-prejudice is almost a disease” (1:5). Determined to expose the fact that both Canadians and British were guilty of racial discrimination, Gurdit Singh explains that in the colonies, a “badge of inferiority was imposed upon all coloured races” (1:7). He also describes the Komagata Maru incident in explicitly racial terms. For example, when the police officers aboard the *Sea Lion* are defeated by the passengers, Gurdit Singh dramatizes the victory and also understands it in racialized terms. He says, “The white race took it as an insult to be pelted with coals by black people” (1:106). He then points to the irony that while the British Empire is concerned about the small number of white Canadian officials aboard the *Sea Lion*, it remains indifferent to the plight of the passengers at Canada’s border. He says: “But now because a few white skinned men had a handful of coals pelted at them the whole white race glared at us with their furiousity [sic]” (1:106-107). Gurdit Singh’s powerful if unorthodox prose and his insistence on exposing racial injustice attest to his anger and frustration at the incident.

Whereas Gurdit Singh’s tone is accusatory and indignant (a tone that has the effect of recreating the affective dimension of the trauma), and Johnston’s dramatically different tone is bland and unemotional, there are moments where these texts converge. For example, both texts ask us to remember that in 1914 racism at the Canadian border was being masked by a performance of legality. In a rare admission of the existence of racism, Johnston exposes this pretext when he explains matter-of-factly that the legal

barriers enacted by white elites were mere rationalizations for racial discrimination (4) while Gurdit Singh explains that “[t]he Government of Canada wanted to make the whole thing appear like a farce to the outside world after having defrauded our rights and having debarred me from entering Canada” (1:55). Canadians, he explains, “could have said that they were not harsh to the Indians but [that they] could pay our liabilities for which we were dispossessed of the ship by the owners. (1:55). Canadians, both Johnston and Gurdit Singh seem to agree, were representing themselves not as racist, but rather as very judicious and sober, as belonging to a nation that went by the letter of the law. Thus, both recognize that Canadians were trying to operate within the boundaries of “white civility,” to use Coleman’s term, and that they were using the law to conceal their otherwise open racial hostility towards Indians.

In his text, Gurdit Singh responds to Canada’s performance of “white civility” by constructing Indians as moral subjects, and as innocent victims of Canadian and imperial racism. Thus, he represents the passengers as engaging in a moral (rather than militaristic) battle against the oppressor and he insists that whereas he and his fellow countrymen were operating within the law, the Canadians and the British were defying that law. He writes:

I do emphatically assert that I did not violate the regulations laid down by the Canadian Government to make a direct voyage to Canada and I was prepared to deposit, on behalf of my countrymen, whatever sums were required under the law but both the Indian Government and the Canadian Government stood in my way. In fact both the Governments violated and ignored the laws of their own creation. (1:17)

These interpretations may be seen as struggling against each other to remember the Komagata Maru incident in different ways. For example, when Gurdit Singh describes the confrontation between the *Sea Lion* and the Komagata Maru, or white officials and the passengers, he reports that the police “fired at the passengers without the slightest warning” and “leveled a hose with boiling water at them” (1:104). Johnston, on the other hand, suggests that the police never fired at the passengers and merely hosed them with cold water. Whereas Gurdit Singh insists that the police officers were “bullies” (1:104) and invites the reader to take the side of the passengers who are clearly marked as victims, Johnston insists on more ambiguity by representing the passengers as being much more aggressive and violent than Gurdit Singh suggests. Thus, Johnston notes that one passenger, Harnam Singh, even “fired four shots from the Komagata Maru” (77), although he didn’t strike anyone, while Gurdit makes no mention of any shots being fired from the Indian side. Gurdit Singh suggests that the passengers defended themselves with the only weapon they had aboard the ship – lumps of coal – while Johnston’s version of the event reports that the passengers were not only armed with coal but also with “fire bricks, and scrap metal which they had brought up from the hold” (77). Reading Gurdit Singh and Johnston’s interpretations of history alongside one another points to the complexity of the Komagata Maru incident; it also forces the reader to realize the difficulties and challenges faced by the historian, who must similarly choose between competing memories the past.

Johnston and Gurdit Singh’s accounts of the Budge Budge riots also differ in subtle but important ways from one another. For Gurdit Singh, what occurs at Budge Budge seems to be even more traumatic for the passengers than what happens at the

Canadian border. In fact, at one point in his text, Gurdit Singh suggests: it was so horrifying that “[w]hat happened at Budge Budge cannot be described” (2:34) and that the experience left him speechless. He writes: “[t]hough we were unarmed and like sheep in a pin [sic], yet the wolves in authority used most condemnable deception and cruelty in their dealings and bungled the whole affair” (2:35). Gurdit Singh’s affective tone, together with his use of imaginative detail, has the effect of drawing the reader into the narrative sympathetically so that she may relive the experience of the passengers.

Johnston, more neutrally, insists, that “[t]he officials were imperious, the passengers agitated and threatening” (99), and claims that gun shots came from both the passengers and the British officers,¹⁷ while Gurdit Singh claims that the passengers were unarmed and were operating within the law. Again, where Johnston suggests that the passengers were ideologically indoctrinated by Ghadar literature from the very beginning,¹⁸ Gurdit Singh makes no mention of the Ghadar movement at all. Gurdit Singh’s aim seems to be to remember the passengers as victims of imperial injustice, and to insist that while the passengers were operating within the law, the British had gone beyond it. Thus, when

¹⁷ Specifically, Johnston notes that “[s]ome of the shots came from the sergeants, now engulfed by the crowd and discharging their revolvers at such close quarters that one man, Badal Singh, was hit six times. But the rest came from the passengers” (102).

¹⁸ Johnston suggests that from the very beginning of the voyage, the passengers were tied to the Ghadar movement to the extent that they read Ghadar literature and were familiar with the cause. He notes that “whenever passengers were gathered together, poems from the *Ghadr* and from a revolutionary anthology, *Ghadr di Gunj*, were read, recited, explained, paraphrased, and elaborated upon. The British were vilified, and the day of revolution promised” (32). He also reports that in Yokohama on the return journey, Ghadar party members came aboard the ship distributing both literature and ammunition to the passengers.

Johnston and Gurdit Singh's texts are read together, they offer a more complex memory of the events that took place and the emotions that were experienced by those involved.

From Gurdit Singh's excessive detail and tedious descriptions, and from Johnston's (sometimes-problematic insistence) on neutrality, some key analytical points emerge about the significance of the Komagata Maru incident in the larger context of India's independence struggle. In his text, Johnston explains that India's immigration problem would only be solved if Indians worked out their independence at home. He writes:

Following Indian independence in 1947, the British Columbian legislature finally extended the franchise, and with that full citizenship was given to resident Indians in the province. It all went to prove Rahim and his friends right when they said that Indians could expect no justice overseas until they enjoyed self-rule at home. (136)

Gurdit Singh similarly makes a link between the outcome of the Komagata Maru incident and peace in the Empire. He suggests that "[w]hat is done with this shipload of my people will determine whether we shall have peace in all parts of the British Empire" (1:38). What Johnston is suggesting is that India would always have problems with Indians abroad as long as independence had not been achieved. This is precisely what Gurdit Singh implies: if Indians were having troubles abroad, it meant that change in India was required. One of the reasons Gurdit Singh and his fellow passengers were rejected thus had to do with their ambiguous status as British subjects but also as Indians. Gurdit Singh was not a representative of an independent nation. Both Johnston and Gurdit Singh seem to want to remember the Komagata Maru incident as part of a much

larger power configuration, and to encourage us to see it as symbolic of the struggle of Indians as colonial subjects and as evidence of the fact that Indian independence was necessary in order for Indians to be treated as equals abroad. Thus Johnston and Gurdit Singh memorialize the Komagata Maru incident not simply as a small event that occurred in Canada, but rather as something much larger, as part of a history of the Canadian nation and a history of the British Empire; and in so doing, they demonstrate the importance and far-reaching implications of the Komagata Maru incident.

A Response to the Air India Bombing

Clark Blaise and Bharati Mukherjee's *The Sorrow and the Terror: The Haunting Legacy of the Air India Tragedy* is a journalistic account of the Air India bombing that was first published in 1987 and then as a second edition in 1988. As the first full-length response to the trauma to be published in Canada, this text seems to have influenced some of the responses to the Air India bombing which followed. Divided into five sections, the text opens with a detailed description of the events leading up to the bombing and presents information about how one bomb was placed on board Air India Flight 182 while another, meant for a different Air India Flight, exploded prematurely in Japan; it then presents an account of the rescue operation that took place in Ireland, provides a catalogue of the gruesome injuries suffered by the victims, and offers testimonials from some of the relatives of the victims, as well as testimonials from suspected Sikh extremists. Finally, the text offers a critique of the policy of Canadian multiculturalism and suggests that this policy underpins terrorism that takes place in Canada. What is perhaps most striking about *The Sorrow and the Terror* is that it insists on memorializing the trauma as a Canadian event, and understanding the Air India

bombing not as an isolated incident but rather as a series of “failures” in Canada’s celebrated liberal democracy. Going beyond the basic claim that the bombing is a Canadian tragedy because both the victims and perpetrators were Canadian citizens, Blaise and Mukherjee suggest that the very core of the trauma is quintessentially Canadian, that the Air India bombing is a reflection and byproduct of the flaws inherent in official multiculturalism. As they write, “the Air India tragedy was predictable and characteristically ‘Canadian’ given the country’s faith in the cultural mosaic and its scorn for an integrated national identity” (174).

While Blaise and Mukherjee’s text is useful in that it insists at length that the bombing is a Canadian event, the text presents an argument that is based on a troubling reading of multiculturalism and diasporic alienation, and which thus undermines the persuasiveness of the text’s claim. Multiculturalism encourages a forgetting of the past, but Blaise and Mukherjee suggest the opposite: that Canadian multiculturalism privileges those who distance themselves culturally from the dominant white Canadian centre and whose identities remain non-assimilable. In its effort to reward diversity and difference, moreover, the Canadian nation, Blaise and Mukherjee contend, fails to recognize when ethnicity becomes a threat to the nation, or as they say, when “Punjabi becomes ‘Sikh’ and ‘Sikh’ becomes ‘Khalistani’” (199-200). For them, therefore, Canada’s policy is implicitly responsible for the spread of religious and ethnic fundamentalist movements like the Khalistan movement that was linked to the bombing of Air India Flight 182. Thus, they point out that when Sikhs arrived in Canada in the early 1970s, “there was no outstanding political division in Punjab” and thus that “their politics were developed entirely in Canada” (176). But Blaise and Mukherjee fail to understand that it is not

multiculturalism which engenders fundamentalism, but rather the displacement of the diasporic subject from the homeland and the feelings of alienation (often due to racism) which sometimes occur in the country of adoption that might be linked to the diasporic subject's investment in fundamentalism. Specifically, the diasporic subject invests in the homeland in order to mitigate feelings of unbelonging in the hostland, and while this investment can be a source of comfort, it can also be a source of potential danger. A violently phantasmatic investment in the homeland as an idyllic realm, often meant to compensate for the racism and inability to belong in Canada, can feed into and legitimize fundamentalist and nationalist projects aimed at preserving racial and ethnic "purity." As Gayatri Gopinath has argued, the diasporic subject's nostalgia for lost origins "adheres to precisely those same myths of purity and authenticity that seamlessly lend themselves to nationalist projects" (7). In fact, if multiculturalism were successful, (to the extent that it forces a forgetting of the past, of historical difference) it might evacuate that potential for fundamentalist discourses rather than foster it. The central problem underlying the argument made by Mukherjee and Blaise is that it is based on a reading of multiculturalism as a discourse that encourages remembering. If we are to understand multiculturalism in more complex terms – as a discourse that seems to be about remembering but is actually about forgetting – then we might argue that multiculturalism promotes assimilation rather than "resistant diversity."

Blaise and Mukherjee argue that Canada's complacent attitude in the aftermath of the bombing and its failure to recognize the trauma as a Canadian loss is part of the trauma itself. As they write, "The failure to acknowledge the victims of the crash as Canadians remains for most of the families the enduring political grief of Air India 182"

(203). Blaise and Mukherjee attempt to recreate the literal aspects of the trauma by offering detailed accounts of the injuries suffered by the victims who were aboard the plane. Thus, they tell us about the body of a young girl whose “head had split open from the bridge of the nose to the occiput, and [whose] brain had floated away” (60), and the body of a middle aged woman whose injuries were “consistent with both flail, which occurs when the body is subjected to the violent twists and turns of a free fall, and decompression, which causes all the oxygen to be sucked from the blood” (59). Refusing to spare the reader such grotesque details, Blaise and Mukherjee instead insist on exposing the reader to all the hardships and suffering experienced by the victims who died in the crash. In addition to these actual accounts of physical suffering endured by the victims, they also offer extensive accounts of Canada’s lack of concern for diasporic suffering. For example, they note Brian Mulroney’s phone call to the Indian Prime Minister in the aftermath of the bombing, a phone call that revealed that from the beginning Canada perceived the bombing as a foreign event. They also mention that even one year after the bombing, “the prime minister’s office was still referring to the disaster as a tragedy for the “Indo-Canadian community” (203). Explicitly critiquing Canadian forgetting and understanding this forgetting as contributing to the grief and trauma experienced by the bereaved, they cite one of the relatives of the victims: “Canada has left the *remembering* exclusively to temple societies and ethnic cultural clubs” (91 italics added for emphasis). Blaise and Mukherjee suggest that whereas the Irish and the Indians rushed to support the relatives, “the Canadian officials hung back, so far back that many relatives assumed they hadn’t come” (87), and that they had been abandoned by their adoptive country.

Once again, Blaise and Mukherjee link Canada's apathy, its failure to act in the wake of the trauma, to the nation's policy of multiculturalism which, they argue, positions racialized minorities as "not quite" Canadian, or as "visible minorities." Thus, in the initial aftermath of the tragedy, they suggest that Canada distanced itself from what happened by seeing the victims and perpetrators as "not quite Canadian" and the events as "theirs" rather than "ours" (174). For Blaise and Mukherjee, the failure of Canadians to recognize the trauma contributes to making it a characteristically Canadian event, for such a failure speaks to Canada's investment in its own constructed image of goodness. Thus, in a paradoxical way, Mukherjee and Blaise suggest that the failure to understand the trauma as Canadian is precisely what makes it uniquely Canadian.

One of the problems with *The Sorrow and the Terror* is that it repeatedly remembers Hindus and Sikhs in essentializing ways, and in so doing, it communalizes the memory of the trauma. For one thing, Blaise and Mukherjee seem to understand the bombing as having been perpetrated by "uneducated" Sikhs from British Columbia against innocent "model minority" Hindu subjects from Ontario. Attributing to the Punjabi Sikh community an essential characteristic, they argue that the Punjabi immigrants who arrived in British Columbia in 1967 as part of a cohort of immigrants, were "uneducated, ill-equipped and technologically unemployable" (175). For these (uprooted and unsettled) migrants, Blaise and Mukherjee go on to suggest, Khalistani politics offered a sense of belonging and identity. In their speculative depiction of a "Canadian terrorist," therefore, Blaise and Mukherjee suggest that "Khalistan makes him [the Punjabi Sikh immigrant] feel he belongs somewhere" (179), "[f]or the first time since he's been in Canada" (179). Thus Blaise and Mukherjee seem to feed into the

politics of Hindu-Sikh tensions as they demonize Sikhs and represent them as essentially uncivilized.

Important facts are forgotten from Blaise and Mukherjee's account of the trauma. For example, Blaise and Mukherjee rarely mention that Sikhs were among the victims who died in the explosion. Instead, they seem to want to establish the "Hindu" identity of the victims. For example, they suggest that Mr. Swaminathan, who lost his wife in the bombing, will "perform prescribed Hindu funerary rites for Mrs. Swaminathan's father" (99), and mention that "Hinduism allows Sam Swaminathan to stay in control of his grief" (99), or they describe Vijaya Thampi who died in the crash as "a good Hindu wife" (120), or they mention that a fourteen-year old girl who, before she died, wrote a letter to her friend and packed "her Hindu rosary of *tulsi* into her flight bag" (108). The relatives and the victims are thus presented as Hindus from Ontario, as a group that has tended to assimilate to Canadian culture. We are told, for example, that the children were truly bicultural," that they "switched with ease from Calvin Klein and Jordache to saris and *salwar-kameez* brought over by doting grandparents" (108). Blaise and Mukherjee further sensationalize the conflict between Hindus and Sikhs by speculating about the Sikh extremists and representing them in very sensational terms. For example, they write:

We picture these Singhs in their late twenties or early thirties, unemployed, unskilled, but consumed with a mission...One of the Singhs calls himself 'Manjit' for today. Manjit is more nervous than might be expected of a man packing for a vacation trip to his homeland. Much later today, he believes, the world will register his deed as a blow for the

honour, dignity and self-respect of his religion and the restoration of Sikh pride everywhere. He burns with *izzat*. (25)

The use of the phrase – “he burns with *izzat*” (25) – which means “he burns with honour and a desire for revenge” establishes the Sikh subject as a kind of irrational and violent figure. Thus, while Blaise and Mukherjee criticize the Canadian government for its failure to differentiate between Sikhs and Khalistanis (religious identity and religious-nationalist identity), their text itself often collapses the differences between them and, instead, tends to present all Sikhs as equally invested in fundamentalist politics. Gilbert Drolet’s review of *The Sorrow and the Terror* makes a similar point, suggesting that Mukherjee and Blaise “perhaps unwittingly perpetuate the increasingly accepted image of Sikhs as wild-eyed fanatics honoring *izzat*, the Punjabi code which includes blood-for-blood revenge” (168).

For Blaise and Mukherjee, the Air India bombing represents a clash between these two different immigrant groups who arrived in Canada under different policies of immigration. They claim, on the one hand, that because “unskilled” Punjabi Sikh immigrants failed to assimilate to Canadian culture, they turned, as a compensatory gesture, towards Khalistani politics. On the other hand, they also suggest that the victims of the bombing arrived later, after Canada had developed a point system “that favoured education and aptitude” (204). Thus, they write that “[a]lmost immediately, the East Indian community, which had been predominantly Sikh, working-class, and west coast-focused, became Hindu, professional, and Ontario-centred” (204). By mapping class, geographical, and religious distinctions onto the victims and perpetrators of the bombing, Blaise and Mukherjee not only “remember” communal tensions that were playing out in

India in the 1980s but also fuel them. Thus, while their attempts to map the trauma onto the Canadian imaginary are to some extent productive, their tendency to understand the trauma as a Hindu tragedy committed by Sikhs comes in the way of productive, inclusive remembering and thus contributes to a process of forgetting the complexity of the event, a forgetting that has the potential to divide the South Asian diasporic community.

Blaise and Mukherjee make an important link between the Air India bombing and other moments of historical trauma in the Canadian nation. They argue that at certain points, Canada's own liberal democracy has been replaced by authoritarian intervention. During the Air India trial, they note that an officer identifying himself as a CSIS agent, stood up and addressed the court from his seat, and in so doing, "was effectively able to suspend the trial, denying the defence its right of cross-examination, and declaring the judge 'functus,' or impotent, in his own courtroom" (201). The actions of this officer, they speculate, were not only meant to protect CSIS agents, but also "members of the Sikh community who would have been endangered by exposure" (201). This example, they suggest, is the most recent case in which Canada suspended its democratic ideals and slipped into an authoritarian discourse. Another example, they tell us, is the 1914 Komagata Maru incident, when Canada brought out the navy "to oust a boatload of would-be East Indian settlers in Vancouver" (201). The remembering of the Komagata Maru incident is important here: what Blaise and Mukherjee want us to recognize is that both these events have been forgotten and that both represent Canada's failure to live up to its promises of democracy and freedom.

Conclusion:

These historical forms of remembering and memorializing the trauma, together with various other texts like fictional and cinematic reconstructions of the broken passage, constitute a corpus of forgotten history which has countered and continues to complicate official histories. The more such texts surface in the public sphere, the more they might begin to appear in linear and canonical accounts of the nation such as school textbooks, the more likely it is then that the nation's self-perception may change. A number of activist members of the South Asian Canadian community have emphasized the importance of placing these events in the formal national archive. Thus, after putting pressure on the Canadian government for the recognition of the Komagata Maru incident, activists have forced the Government of Canada to agree to fund two projects "designed to educate Canadians on the Komagata Maru incident of 1914" ("Government of Canada Announces Funding for Two Projects"). The news was announced by Devinder Shory, a Member of Parliament for Calgary North-East in Brampton on February 26, 2010. Canadian publisher, Formac Lorimer Books, is also producing a children's book, to be written by a South Asian Canadian writer, on the Komagata Maru incident. The book will be part of a series of texts entitled *Righting Canada's Wrongs*. These books, the editor informed me in an email, "are aimed primarily at teens; high school and middle school-aged kids. They will be marketed to the schools across Canada" (Hickman). Simon Fraser University is putting together an interactive website on the Komagata Maru incident which will make public archival documents, historical accounts, and literary works that deal with the event. As the university reports:

The library project brings together documents from archives in Ottawa, Victoria and Vancouver; primary source materials such as papers, legal

documents and photos; and supplementary materials from the period, including interviews, poetry, novels and artwork from public and private collections. It will also include an interactive version of history professor Hugh Johnston's book, *The Voyage of the Komagata Maru*, and an online index to related personal papers, photos and reminiscences of the South Asian community. Texts will be available in both English and Punjabi. ("Library to Chronicle the Komagata Maru Episode")

The website is meant in part to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the Komagata Maru incident which will take place in 2014.

Members of the South Asian Canadian community have also struggled to have the Air India bombing recognized as a Canadian event, a struggle that seemed to have finally been won in 2010 when Canada published its report on the Air India inquiry and titled it *Air India Flight 182: A Canadian Tragedy*. On June 23, 2011, the Canadian government launched what has been called *The Kanishka Project* in memory of the Air India bombing. The project, one article reports, will fund such initiatives as "conferences, publications and major research projects – that will help Canada build the knowledge base needed to effectively counter terrorism" ("PM Marks National Day of Remembrance"). The fact that the project is titled after Air India Flight 182 suggests that Canada has been compelled to remember the bombing. At the launch of the project, Prime Minister Stephen Harper admitted that Canada had for a long time failed to recognize the bombing as a Canadian event, and, in a gesture of redress, said:

Worst of all, this state of denial continued for some time. But, over the years, the truth finally did come out, and we faced the harsh reality. This

atrocities were conceived in Canada, and its victims were mostly citizens of Canada. It was a national tragedy – our national tragedy – and one that required our national response. (“PM Marks the Air India Anniversary”)

Such projects and efforts to map diasporic traumas onto the nation’s public record are signs that the future of Canada might be genuinely more inclusive than the present.

Chapter Two: “Lost and Mislabeled for Ninety Years”: The Documentary Film and the Resistance to State Forgetting

Introduction:

Although the documentary film is based in “fact,” it inevitably incorporates elements of imaginative fiction. And yet, perhaps because of its distanced and detached perspective, because it encourages us to observe the trauma through a voyeuristic lens, there is a tendency on the part of the spectator to assume, as Aaron Kerner notes, that “the documentary offers us unfettered access to the historical referent” (177). Kerner suggests that this is precisely one of the problems linked to the documentary form: “that it is burdened with a supposed allegiance to objectivity, an expectation that it will provide a transparent window onto the past” (177). Rather than viewing the documentary as an “objective” account of the past, it might be more productively read as a text in which the boundaries of fact and fiction are often blurred, and at times become indistinguishable. In that sense, we might understand the documentary film the way Hayden White understands history: not as a natural discourse but rather as a kind of fiction in which the plotting of events imbues them with meaning and significance. As he writes:

[H]istories gain part of their explanatory effect by their success in making stories out of *mere* chronicles; and stories in turn are made out of chronicles by an operation which I have...called ‘emplotment.’ And by emplotment I mean simply the encodation of the facts contained in the chronicle as components of specific *kinds* of plot structures. (83)

White defines historical narratives as “verbal fictions, the contents of which are as much *invented as found* and the forms of which have more in common with their counterparts

in literature than they have with those in the sciences” (82 italics in the original). The categories of history and fiction, for White then, are not mutually exclusive but instead conflated; a conflation that he says “will offend some historians and disturb those literary theorists whose conception of literature presupposes a radical opposition of history to fact or of fact to fancy” (82).

In this chapter, I want to keep in mind White’s claim that the historical narrative is always bound up with fiction as I engage in an analysis of three documentary/historical films about the broken passage: Ali Kazimi’s *Continuous Journey* (2004), Shelley Saywell’s *Legacy of Terror: The Bombing of Air India* (1999) and Sturla Gunnarsson’s *Air India 182* (2008). Although I have grouped these texts together because they constitute the genre of documentary, I also want to emphasize that in each of these films, the boundaries of fiction and fact, of documentary and imaginative reconstruction, at times collapse into one another. For instance, in Kazimi’s *Continuous Journey*, the factual elements of the Komagata Maru incident are revived by the animation of a series of still archival images and newspaper reports. Similarly, both Saywell and Gunnarsson attempt to recreate the events leading up to and following the bombing of Air India Flight 182 by departing from a strictly documentary form and drawing on the conventions of dramatic reconstruction. Having noted the hybrid forms of these films, I also want to suggest that these texts, because they are documentaries, *intend* to provide the “facts,” even though they inevitably slip into the realm of imaginative reconstruction, and in that sense, they are distinct from the “imaginative” fictions and the “postmodern” texts that I shall examine in subsequent chapters whose primary intention is to fill out the historical record with imaginative detail. Moreover, because these documentary films

tend to be “fact-based,” because they offer us historical details about the event, they give us a sense of the gravity of the trauma, and allow us to realize that this really happened. As films, these texts represent the trauma using both moving images and narrative accounts of the past, and thus they have the advantage of rendering visually accessible two events of which very few images exist. What is important in an analysis of these documentary films then is precisely how they visualize the trauma, what aspects of the past they remember in the process of emplotment, and what in some cases they themselves have to say about the politics of remembering and forgetting.

Documentary Responses to the Broken Passage:

Ali Kazimi's Continuous Journey

Continuous Journey recounts the day-to-day suffering of the passengers aboard the ship from the moment of their arrival in Vancouver's Burrard Inlet to their departure sixty-one days later. The relentless insistence on the detail and the almost unbearable protractedness of the ship's quarantine in Vancouver, are, I suggest, deliberately emphasized. What seems to fuel Kazimi's desire to present an account of the past that is filled with historical information, information that might at times seem inconsequential to the larger narrative of exclusion, is the fact that the historical record seems to have been forgotten. Constructing the tragedy with as much specificity as possible, Kazimi includes archival material, rare footage of the ship, official letters, personal memoirs, and so on. The film points out that although there are home movies and news reels from the period, footage of white government officials playing golf, of wrestling matches taking place among white Canadians in Vancouver, or of people at the beach, there is a notable absence of information about the Komagata Maru incident and its 376 Indian passengers. This absence of information on the Komagata Maru incident and Kazimi's

endless search for forgotten pieces of the historical puzzle become part of the narrative itself.

Thus, in a self-reflexive gesture, Kazimi inserts himself into the documentary, capturing not only the struggles of the passengers aboard the Komagata Maru, but also his own efforts to document the history that has been erased from public records. In one scene, for example, Kazimi explains that although he knows the names of the passengers aboard the ship, he will never be able to match those names to the faces in the photographs. Closing in on one photograph, he asks, “Is this Nanak Singh or Bagga Singh, or is this Anwar Khan or Jawahar Lal? Is this Fakir Mohammed or Ramdas?”, questions to which the film suggests there are no answers. This scene captures the pathos of the historical investigator faced with a lack of materials and forced back into his or her memories and imagination. Kazimi’s response is reminiscent of a similar moment in Gayatri Spivak’s “Can the Subaltern Speak?” where she describes her own experience of searching through the archives for the names of the Hindu women who were victims of sati, or female self-immolation. She discovers that the names have been translated into exotic English compound terms, such as “Ray Queen, Sun-ray, Love’s Delight, Garland, Virtue Found, Echo, Soft Eye,” (305) and so on. She writes, “I attempted to reconstruct the names on that list and began to feel Harvey-Thompson’s arrogance. What, for instance, might ‘Comfort’ have been? Was it ‘Shanti?’...Or was it ‘Swasti?’” (306). Spivak’s frustration at the fact that the female subalterns’ very names have been written out of the narrative echoes Kazimi’s experience of searching through the archives and trying (unsuccessfully) to match the names of the passengers aboard the Komagata Maru with the faces in the photographs. One of the turning points in the narrative occurs when Kazimi finally discovers a trace of the “other” in the historical record: specifically, he finds some amateur black and white, distant hand-held footage of the Komagata Maru docked in the

Burrard Inlet, which, he emphasizes, had been until this very moment “mis-labeled and lost for ninety years.” As the ship moves across the screen, we hear a soundtrack with the lyrics: “Tell me / Which shore should I go to? / We strangers have / No country of our own.” These lyrics suggest that for the passengers who have no country of their own, and have been left in limbo, forgotten, Kazimi’s recovery is particularly significant: it symbolically grants them a place in the nation’s public record. To remember diasporic traumas, Kazimi seems to suggest, then, is to offer that group inclusion into the nation.¹⁹

Kazimi’s preoccupation with uncovering the forgotten details of the trauma manifests throughout the film, including in the film’s title. *Continuous Journey* refers to the order-in-council passed by the Laurier government in 1908 and amended in 1910 which stipulated in Article 38 that the Governor in Council

shall prohibit the landing in Canada or at any specific port of entry in Canada of any immigrant who had come to Canada otherwise than by *continuous journey* from the country of which he is a native or naturalized citizen, and upon a through ticket purchased in that country, or prepaid in Canada. (“1910 Immigration Act” 14)

The 1908 order-in-council – or the “continuous journey” regulation – was meant specifically to bar Indians from entering Canada. Radhika Mongia has noted that it was amended in 1910 after a Russian and a Frenchman were denied admission into Canada because they had come from Japan rather than from the country of their birth. Instead of stating that an immigrant

¹⁹ Whereas Aisha Hameed and Tamara Vukov read this scene through a dystopic lens, arguing that “[f]inding the ‘real’ footage does not mark a homecoming in the narrative in the film; it marks the impossibility of the place for the people on the boat” (104), I suggest that footage and the mournful lyrics that accompany it render the “broken passage” into a signifier of loss and trauma, but also of triumph; for the footage marks the success of Kazimi’s struggle to counter the nation’s forgetting.

“*may* be prohibited [landing]” as the 1908 policy did, the new policy stated that immigrants “*shall* be [prohibited landing]” (Mongia 540).²⁰ Although Kazimi never mentions the amendment to the order-in-council explicitly, he seems to be aware of it. Thus, in his on-screen interview in Kazimi’s film, historian Hugh Johnston notes that when the passengers aboard the Komagata Maru arrived in Canada in 1914, “the immigration officer *didn’t have to apply that* [the continuous journey policy] but *he had the power to apply that* and it was applied against people from India” (italics added for emphasis).

What becomes clear in the film is that Kazimi wants us to remember the exclusion of Gurdit Singh and his fellow passengers as linked to Canada’s determined efforts in the early twentieth century to maintain its hegemonic status of whiteness. In the film, it is York University professor Ena Dua who draws attention to this fact. Zooming in on Dua, the camera brings us face-to-face with her expert analysis of the incident. As Dua tells us:

It was very clear that politicians were talking about a white Canada policy. It

²⁰ The decision to amend the policy might be traced to a letter written by T.R.E. McInnes (a lawyer and an employee of the Government of Canada) that is addressed to Sir Wilfred Laurier on March 15, 1908. In the letter, McInnes writes:

I am asking Mr. Oliver to-day to instruct Dr. Munro that he has a discretionary power under this Regulation – that the immigrants mentioned in such Regulation *may* be prohibited – not *shall* be. My reason for this is because this afternoon a Russian and a Frenchman, both well educated men apparently, one an electrical engineer and the other a bank clerk, arriving here by steamer from Japan, and stating that they intended to become residents of Canada, were both refused admission, and would have been deported but for the fact that the American immigration officers said they would be glad to pass them into the United States. Mr. J.B. Harkin, being consulted in the matter by Dr. Munroe, said that the men were unquestioningly immigrants, and that the law must be carried out. I, of course, have no status to advise in such a matter, but I know that the Regulation was never intended to be enforced in this absurd manner. (n.p.)

was proclaimed everyday in newspapers. It was proclaimed in Parliament. John A. McDonald in one of his first speeches in Parliament got up and said ‘Canada is a white man’s country. We will create immigration policies to create a white man’s country.’

Following Dua’s explanation, the camera immediately segues to an image of an old cartoon from the period, which is notably set against an image of the Union Jack. The cartoon, which seems to illustrate white racism, depicts two gates: one which is open and over which is written “White Immigration” and the other which is firmly shut and over which is written “Oriental Exclusion.” By bringing together disparate images such as a cartoon pointing to exclusion, the British flag, and expert accounts about Canada’s investment in whiteness, Kazimi makes his point clear: that the Komagata Maru incident is a symbol of white racism, a point that seems to have been understood by critics such as Bradley Miller of the *National Post* who writes:

Kazimi’s film shows just how different B.C. was in those days. Now one of the most ethnically diverse places in the Western world, the province was then a hotbed for anti-Asian racism. The memory of the Komagata Maru reminds us of the sort of intolerance the Sikhs – and, by their turn, all Canadian immigrants – once endured in this country. (n.p.)²¹

²¹ It is worth noting, here, that as Miller praises the film for its representation of racism in Canada, he also strategically positions the Komagata Maru incident in the past, despite Kazimi’s ongoing attempts, as I shall show, to point out that the history of exclusion persists, even in the current era. Thus, the effect of the film to memorialize the trauma and encourage political change in the present, as I have argued before, depends on how it is being read and by whom.

What Kazimi tells us is that because the British Empire claimed that its subjects were all equally free to travel and settle anywhere in the Empire, Canada, as a British dominion, could not afford to undermine the Empire's promise of equality; thus, Canadian officials had to create a policy of exclusion in which the issues of race and nationality were concealed.

Deliberately framing the Komagata Maru incident as a site of racial exclusion, Kazimi challenges the forgetting of injustice in accounts like Eric W. Morse's "Some Aspects of the Komagata Maru Affair, 1914" published in 1936, and Robie L. Reid's "The Inside Story of the 'Komagata Maru,'" published in 1941, that Kazimi would have surely read, given the extent of his research. For instance, whereas Kazimi describes the Komagata Maru incident as a moment in which the "the histories of Canada and India *violently* collide" (italics added for emphasis), and suggests that Vancouver's harbour is for him a "crime scene" rather than a picturesque landscape, earlier accounts of the trauma deny the violent underpinnings of Canada's exclusionary acts. In his essay, Morse, for example, seems to suggest that the immigration policies were meant as much for the Canadian people as they were to protect "Orientals" from the damage they might further suffer if Asians were permitted into Canada. Reid also justifies the law, but does so in a different way, arguing that it "was made on the demands of Canadians" (3) and thus that it represents the interests of the people. Both Morse and Reid seem to be reproducing versions of the arguments made in 1908 when Canada's policies of exclusion were being formulated and debated. For example, in a Report of the Committee of the Privy Council dated 2nd March 1908, Rodolphe Boudreau, the clerk of the Privy Council wrote:

That experience has shown that immigrants of this class, having been accustomed to the conditions of a tropical climate, are wholly unsuited to

this country, that their inability to adapt themselves to surroundings so entirely different inevitably brings upon them much suffering and privation; also would result in a serious disturbance to industrial and economic conditions in portions of the Dominion, and especially in the Province of British Columbia...That an effective restriction of immigration from India is desirable, therefore not less in the interest of the East Indians themselves than in the interest of the Canadian people. (n.p.)

In the film, Kazimi draws attention to and subverts the claim that Indians are not suited to the cold and harsh climate of Canada when he explains in the film that this particular argument was used to justify the exclusion of Indians and the enactment of the continuous journey policy. As Kazimi offers this explanation, he zooms in on two images: the first is of white men clearing the snow from the streets in 1914 and the second is of Kazimi himself in the present-day shoveling the snow from his own driveway in Ontario. Together, these images seem to be saying that Kazimi, in the present-day, is as capable of dealing with the cold as white men were in 1914.

Kazimi, in his repeated efforts to set the record straight, reconsiders the conditions under which the ship and its passengers departed from Vancouver. He tells us that Canadian officials, in a final attempt to force the passengers to return to India, called in the navy and a militia force to line the shore, and acquired the help of Martin Burrell, the Minister of Agriculture. Burrell promised members of the Shore Committee – who were at this point the charterers of the ship – that he would write to the government and ask that “sympathetic consideration” be granted to all those who deserved it, but only if they allowed the ship to depart. In Kazimi’s retelling, he tells us that “Rahim took the bait,” a phrase which implies that

Rahim was tricked into accepting Burrell's offer. Thus, Kazimi seems to confront the claims made by (early) white historians such as Reid who sets out to defend the actions of Canadian officials, suggesting that members of the South Asian community were aware of precisely what was taking place. As Reid writes:

The delay in the acceptance of Mr. Burrell's offer, both by the East Indians on shore and on the ship, shows that they understood exactly what they were getting. At least to some extent it saved their face. They, with the *Rainbow* at their side, had to take what they could get. (21)

This episode, which represents the negotiations that were made between Burrell and the Shore Committee, might seem tedious and irrelevant, but for Kazimi, who is fixated on remembering detail, it is important. The episode dramatizes the issues of injustice and the suffering of racialized people, issues that Kazimi seems to understand as being at the very core of the story of Komagata Maru incident.

Kazimi draws on two particular aesthetic techniques to revivify the trauma, one of which is the animation of archival documents such as photographs and photocopies of images of the ship and of the historical figures involved in the trauma, a technique that Aisha Hameed and Tamara Vukov also note; the other is the overlapping of images from the past and the present. The first technique creates the illusion of movement, and thus appears to be part of Kazimi's attempt to compensate for the lack of archival material. For example, by animating the image of the ship so that it appears as though it is traversing the Pacific Ocean, Kazimi encourages us to forget that the image we are observing of the ship is just a black and white photograph. Similarly, when Kazimi makes the historical figures appear and disappear on the screen, or move across the screen, he endows the historical record with life and imaginative

detail. Perhaps the most captivating aspect of the film, Hameed and Vukov suggest, is when the camera zooms in on an old black and white image of Gurdit Singh and his nine-year old son, both of whom have blinking eyes. Here, “the distance between the viewer and the image is...collapsed in the intimacy of the affect generated by the blink,” they write (98).

The other aesthetic technique that Kazimi uses – that is, his use of overlapping images of the past and the present – also seems to work very well to stimulate memory in productive ways. By presenting images from 1914 of the Komagata Maru in Vancouver’s harbour and overlaying these images with present-day shots of the same harbour, for example, Kazimi collapses the distance between then and now, undermining the static linear view of history. Kazimi draws our attention to the fact that there are no clear-cut divisions between the past and the present and that history need not be understood as a chronological narrative of progress. In his film, Kazimi therefore refuses to present the Komagata Maru incident as an isolated event, relegated to some distant past, and instead insists that it is an event that has ongoing repercussions in the current era. Thus, in the film, we are told that even though the “continuous journey” regulation, which prevented the passengers aboard the Komagata Maru from entering Canada, has been abolished, it has manifested in a new contemporary incarnation: the Safe Third Country agreement. According to this policy, the narrator tells us that “those seeking refuge [in Canada] must come directly from their country of persecution. If they stop in the United States before entering Canada, they will be deported back to their country.” The camera focuses on protestors holding anti-war placards and signs demanding the end to racist immigration policies. Their struggles are thus portrayed as an extension of Gurdit Singh’s earlier efforts to enter Canada and to challenge the continuous journey policy. Again, in his effort to make connections between the past and the present, Kazimi repeatedly juxtaposes

images from the Komagata Maru in Vancouver's harbour in 1914 with present-day shots of the same harbour. Thus, Kazimi's insistence on overlaying earlier historical accounts with his own version of the past, together with his attempts to superimpose images of the past on the present, complicates the palimpsestic structure of Kazimi's retelling.

For Kazimi, exclusion refers, in material terms, to the barring of the passengers aboard the ship from Canada, but also, in symbolic terms, to the forgetting of this history, to its deliberate erasure from the nation's national narratives. The film opens and concludes by following South Asian Canadian writer and poet Sadhu Binning as he searches for the plaque near Stanley Park in Vancouver that commemorates the passengers of the Komagata Maru incident, and discovers that it has been blocked off due to construction. The sign that reads "Road Closed. Do Not Enter" becomes a reminder, first, that the passengers aboard the Komagata Maru were excluded from Canada in 1914 on the basis of their racial identity. Second, the sign drives home another point that Kazimi seems determined to make: that the histories of racialized subjects in Canada have been blocked off and forgotten from the national imaginary. Here both Sadhu Binning and we as viewers are literally unable to return to the memory of the Komagata Maru incident.

In the film, Kazimi suggests not only that we must remember the trauma, but also that we must see it as linked to a series of prior exclusions. Thus, Kazimi links the Komagata Maru incident to Canada's ill treatment of the Aboriginal peoples, to the injustice committed against the Chinese, who were forced to pay a head tax to enter Canada, and to the crimes committed against the Japanese, who submitted to an agreement with Canada to the effect that only four hundred Japanese would be permitted to enter Canada each year. Included in the film are images not only of South Asians but

also of other immigrant groups who had to struggle for equality. Kazimi points out that because the Chinese did not have “diplomatic weapons” like the Japanese, they could be openly excluded by head tax. For Kazimi, it seems, remembering prior traumas is not only a matter of ethical responsibility, it is also a matter of political pragmatism. The most effective way to challenge a “white Canada” is by remembering not only the traumas endured by members of the South Asian Canadian community, but also those events that preceded and followed the Komagata Maru incident.²² By framing the Komagata Maru as part of a historical continuum, Kazimi seems to be asking us to engage in a politics of solidarity; he also seems to be demanding that we rethink Canada’s claims of multicultural harmony; that we remember the nation differently, that we remember it as a series of ongoing and interconnected exclusions.

One of the strengths of Kazimi’s film is that he memorializes the Komagata Maru incident in an inclusive way. Thus, while Kazimi addresses the fact that people have called the Komagata Maru incident “a Sikh story,” he also tells us that for Canadians in 1914, “Indians are all Hindus, regardless of their religion.” The passengers of the Komagata Maru, Kazimi points out, were discriminated against not because they were Sikh but rather because they were from British India. Second, Kazimi explains that although he is a Muslim, the story of the Komagata Maru helps him to understand how he, as a South Asian Canadian, fits into Canada. Kazimi explains that when the Komagata

²² Kazimi’s attempts to advocate a coalition politics are reminiscent of Fanon’s insistence on a politics of solidarity in his book, *Black Skin, White Masks*, in which he states that the black man must recognize that “an anti-Semite is inevitably anti-Negro” (122). Fanon quotes his professor who says, “Whenever you hear anyone abuse the Jews, pay attention, because he is talking about you” (122). What this means is that in order for the black man to overcome oppression, he must recognize that racism is linked to anti-Semitism, and that these seemingly distinct forms of oppression must be fought collectively.

Maru incident took place at the turn of the century, the South Asian Canadian community in North America was united across religious lines. Jack Uppal, whose grand-father was one of the members of the Shore Committee in 1914, explains in the film that

[t]he Gurdwara was open to everyone and anyone. It was abundantly clear that anybody of Muslim origin, or Hindu origin or even Christianity, people could go there any time. The community was so small, it wasn't just like a person being from a different religious group or not. As long as he was from the subcontinent of India we felt like we were one family.

Kazimi recognizes that such an inclusive community existed during his schooldays in India but has now been dismantled. His film incorporates footage from his childhood growing up in Delhi, which includes images of his friends and family laughing and smiling. The footage presents what appears to be an idyllic time marked by innocence, a time prior to the outbreak of communal violence in India. In the film, Kazimi says, "I thought this dream defined my whole generation. I have watched this ideal disintegrate." Just as Kazimi is fighting for a nation that remembers, the passengers of the Komagata Maru, we learn, were struggling for "a world that [could not] be found / a new land, a new sky," as the lyrics of Kazimi's soundtrack tell us. For Kazimi, the Komagata Maru incident represents the possibility overcoming such obstacles in the present, but only, he suggests, if the trauma is remembered and the struggles of the victims cherished.

*Shelley Saywell's Legacy of Terror: The Bombing of Air India Flight 182*²³

When *Legacy of Terror: The Bombing of Air India Flight 182* was produced in 1999, very little was still known by the public about the bombing of Air India. The only

²³ I would like to thank Dr. Teresa Hubel for discussing this film with me and alerting me to the ideological underpinnings of dance as it is represented in Saywell's work.

person who had been charged in connection with the bombing was Inderjit Singh Reyat. In 1991, he was sentenced to ten years in prison for taking part in the making of the bomb that was meant for an Air India plane but exploded instead at Narita Airport, killing two baggage handlers. The official Air India trial would not begin until 2001, and the inquiry, until 2006. Like most documentaries, *Legacy of Terror* seems to be invested in the recovery of hard “facts,” and in the excavation of details about the bombing, and its use of voice-over narration contributes to the process of rendering the trauma “objective.” The film moves between two distinct yet intertwined storylines, one of which is an affect-laden narrative that captures the experiences of the victims (among them some whose children died in the crash), and focuses particular attention on the experiences of two mothers: Lata Pada and Sarojini Laurence. In the film, a clear narrative trajectory unfolds: the mothers remember details about their loved ones, how they learned about their deaths, and in the process, they find ways to cope with the loss of their children. The other narrative is a more imaginative reconstruction of the events before and after the bombing. Saywell shows us how Sikh militants made the bomb, how they smuggled it into the aircraft, and how Canadian officials (RCMP and CSIS) mishandled the investigation leading up to and following the trauma. This narrative is documented largely by South Asian Canadian journalist Salim Jiwa, who offers an ongoing commentary about Sikh extremism throughout the film.

Throughout the film, Saywell is critical of the Canadian nation’s failure to remember the Air India bombing. In one of the film’s early scenes, the black and white footage of the wreckage floating beneath the Atlantic Ocean is accompanied by a voice-over narration which tells us that the bombing of Air India Flight 182 “was a Canadian

tragedy that was barely acknowledged, a massive crime that is still unresolved.” Similar statements are repeated as the narrative unfolds. For example, Pada, one of the members of the bereaved says that “[i]t wasn’t really embedded in the Canadian consciousness that this was a Canadian tragedy.” Salim Jiwa argues that the trauma was overlooked because “[i]t happened to predominantly brown people; it happened to those hyphenated Canadians, the Indo-Canadians; it happened miles away near Ireland.” As Jiwa goes on to explain in his interview on screen:

Many of the officers who were white had never ever before delved into a totally alien culture, never delved into a crime of such magnitude that was committed because of religious passion...The RCMP were not only ill-equipped to deal with a religious crime, but ill-equipped to handle the extraction of information from these people. It took them months to even start to learn the names. You had M Singh and J Singh and G Singh and somebody Singh. And I met with these cops and I saw that their heads were basically swimming.

Jiwa, as the expert witness of Saywell’s film, seems to be suggesting that the Canadian nation should have understood and remembered the histories of diasporic communities.

In an attempt perhaps to dramatize the nation’s indifference to diasporic communities and their traumas, Saywell places emphasis on individual and personal memories of the bombing. Thus, while Saywell critiques the state for its failure to help the victims through their grief, its failure to remember, she – in a compensatory manner – opens up a space for individual memory, for personal testimonials by family members, home videos, and photographs of the victims. Thus, Raja Saranji tells us that “[d]ay and

night, the memory [of the victims] is still there. They have not gone from us.”

Dramatizing Saranji’s unwillingness to forget, the camera zooms in on a prayer room in the Saranji household where the memory of his daughter, Lita, and her friends, Kritika and Shyamala, have been preserved in photographs. In another scene, we are presented with Lata Pada and Sarojini Laurence who sit together and over a cup of tea try to recollect details about the trauma such as the clothes that their daughters were wearing the day they left for the airport. In her interview, Pada explains how she revisits the memory of her family: “And I’ve almost always thought of it like a Pandora’s box, all these little memories that I keep tucked away in this box and sometimes it’s just pulling them out one by one when you need to, just sit and savor it by yourself,” she says.

Saywell’s film cherishes individual memories by repeatedly emphasizing the fact that the families of the victims must remember in order to heal their wounds. To the extent that these personal memories draw attention to the fact that the state has forgotten the trauma, they are important; but they also have a significant disadvantage: they risk taking us into the realm of the personal and away from the realm of the political. Thus, between Saywell’s explicit urgings that the state should remember and the very intimate details of the individuals that she brings to the surface, is an *aporia*, an unbridgeable gap. This gap represents Saywell’s failure perhaps to consider the aspirations of the diasporic community for whom remembering is important not only to the process of healing (as it is for the individual) but also as a matter of political necessity.

Another problem with Saywell’s film is that she separates the victims and the perpetrators in a simplistic way. As one watches the film, one realizes that rather than offering us a reconstruction that reconciles religious divisions, Saywell solidifies binary

structures by constructing the tragedy as a morality play with the Hindus as “good” victims and the Sikhs as “bad” perpetrators of injustice. Thus, while Saywell’s film recovers some of the most important historical details of the incident (how many adults and children were killed in the explosion, who was involved in constructing the bomb, what kind of “mistakes” were made by Canadian officials), she engages in her own kind of forgetting by constructing a narrative that is too simple and too straightforward to be understood as representing the messiness of history as it actually happened. Playing out the communal tensions lodged in Indian and South Asian diasporic communities in the wake of the bombing, Saywell’s film fails to contribute to the project of memorializing the trauma in the interests of the new, more inclusive nation, and instead might be read as potentially reproducing some of the tensions that brought about the bombing in the first place.

Saywell sets up the victims as “Hindu” by subtly pointing to the fact that they participate in Hindu religious rituals and high art forms such as Bharata Natyam (which is framed as a spiritual Hindu dance). These “Hindu” victims are constructed as sympathetic, in part because they embody cosmetic difference, a kind of difference that would be approved of by the Canadian multicultural state. Thus, in the film, we are told that Kritika and Shyamala Laurence, two young girls who died in the bombing, were ideal hybrid figures whose “dual heritage had formed them,” who “easily straddled two worlds” and who enjoyed classical Indian music as much as Led Zeppelin. Similarly, Brinda, her mother tells us, could occupy a fluid subject position between the cultures of India and Canada: She “could slip right into being totally Indian and very mainstream Canadian,” Pada says. Saywell wants us to remember the victims of the trauma as good

subjects, a goodness that is demonstrated in part by their ability to assimilate to the dominant white Canadian culture and to selectively remember only those aspects of the past – dance, music, food – that can be incorporated into the nation’s multicultural framework. Thus, Saywell repeatedly emphasizes that many of the victims were dancers, and performed Bharata Natyam or classical Indian dance. Incorporating the footage of the Laurence sisters performing dance (footage that was captured by Saywell herself in 1983 and aired on national television), Saywell seems to suggest the victims had a healthy relationship to the diasporic homeland and to their country of adoption, to India and to Canada. They could perform Indianness through dance, but also attend high school prom in Toronto or listen to rock music. Thus, rather than encouraging a remembering of difference that is analytical and historically embedded, Saywell risks encouraging a remembering that is cosmetic and shallow.

To further complicate matters, if the “Hindu” dancers are represented as model minority subjects who have engaged in a forgetting (or superficial remembering) of the past, the Sikhs in the film are framed according to the opposite logic: as anti-national subjects whose insistence on remembering the violence linked to the homeland threatens to rupture the Canadian (and Indian) nation. In the film, Jiwa captures the potential danger linked to remembering:

Many of our citizens come from areas where there is turmoil. Some of them come from areas like Bosnia, where ethnic conflicts are happening. And in those cases where we find people who have abandoned their countries of origin and come to Canada for sanctuary, perhaps for a better life, we find a sort of a dichotomy. We find a dual loyalty in a sense. On

the one hand, a desire to settle down in Canada and be part of the Canadian fabric and yet holding this little part of their heart for the homeland and events that are happening in the homeland. *And that is what happened with the Sikh militants.*

Repeatedly pitting the “Hindu” victims against the “Sikh” perpetrators, Saywell contributes to the communalization of memory. Thus, whereas the dancers are framed as docile and feminine subjects, the Sikhs are framed as symbols of aggression and hyper masculinity. Whereas the movement of the dancers is calculated and precise, that of the Sikhs is excessive and perverse. The dancers can easily pass as Canadian, while the Sikhs, with their turbans and beards, are visibly marked as non-assimilable. In one scene, Saywell zooms in on a large group of Sikh men burning flags in the streets and shouting for freedom in the name of Khalistan. Juxtaposed against the dainty and culturally approved footage of the young female dancers, the behaviour of the Sikh men is coded as barbaric and monstrous. Notably absent from the film is any mention that there were Sikhs among the victims who were killed in the Air India bombing. In Saywell’s explanation of the Khalistan movement, she also fails to attend adequately to the history of Sikh extremism in India and in Canada. For instance, Saywell suggests that the Indian government’s “crackdown on Sikh separatists was escalating into civil war.” To call the communal conflict that ensued after “Operation Blue Star” a “civil war” is to omit the fact that Sikhs in particular were being massacred in North India in 1984.

Saywell’s use of imaginative elements such as the soundtrack and lighting work to solidify the communal tensions that her film inscribes. For instance, the scenes that depict the victims tend to be brightly lit. At the outset, the footage of Shyamala and

Kritika performing Bharata Natyam is set to soothing Celtic music by female Canadian songwriter Loreena McKennitt. The music, together with the imagery, suggests that we are meant to feel sympathy for the victims. In sharp contrast, the ominous music that sometimes plays in the scenes in which actors re-enact the plotting of the bomb by Sikh extremists renders such scenes suspenseful and cues us as spectators to feel nervous. The problem with Saywell's use of imaginative elements is that they take her too far from the classic documentary style, which according to John Parris Springer and Gary D. Rhodes includes "films about *real* people, places, and events" (4), and makes use of "historically specific devices such as the authoritative voiceover narration found in newsreels; ...the use of on-camera interviews; forms of evidence such as archival photographs, diagrams, maps, and charts" (4). Thus, while Saywell revives the trauma, she also sensationalizes it, so much so that her film appears less as a documentary and more as anti-Sikh propaganda.

The imagined narrative structure of the film, which oscillates between scenes of Hindu victims and Sikh terrorists, between Ontario and British Columbia, and between female and male, upper class and lower class reinforces the fixity of these categories. In the film, upper-class Hindus of Ontario are presented as sympathetic subjects because they engage in high art, while working-class Sikhs of British Columbia are presented as unruly others who must be managed and policed. Rather than undermine the communal divisions between Hindus and Sikhs, Saywell reinforces them and thus represents the trauma in a way that divides the community. Having said this, it is important to note that Saywell attempts, at times, to undermine this binary between Hindu and Sikh that her film sets up, but even her attempts are problematic. For example, she draws attention to

members of the Sikh community who condemn terrorist activity and who themselves are victims of it. One example is the Sikh journalist Tara-Singh Hayer, who publicly denounces extremist violence within his own community.²⁴ But the film suggests that exceptions cannot be sustained. Thus, the film reveals that shortly after Hayer spoke out against Sikh extremism, he was killed. Despite these brief attempts in the film to undercut the strict division between Hindu and Sikh, Saywell tends to structure the South Asian Canadian community in binaric terms.

Although Saywell does present some non-Hindu victims like the Laurence sisters, who are both Hindu and Christian, and the Madon family in British Columbia who belongs to the Parsi community, her film overlooks these nuances and tends to present the victims of Air India as upper-class and caste Hindus. In fact, Natasha Madon, whose father was among the passengers on the plane, is aligned with the victims because she too performs dance. When the film introduces Natasha, she is practicing ballet in a studio. Anne Gaston argues that

Bharata Natyam appears to occupy the same niche in Indian society that ballet occupies in the West. Both are considered the pinnacle of classical

²⁴ While Saywell recuperates Hayer as a heroic figure, it is important to note that others have suggested that Hayer's politics were much more ambiguous than Saywell's film seems to suggest. Salim Jiwa, for example, notes in *Margin of Terror* that

Hayer had supported, nurtured and glorified violence for so long. He had written a book on Sikh rebel Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, calling him the greatest Sikh of the twentieth century, he had endorsed the sword attack on the Indian consulate in Vancouver, [and] he had called the killers of Mrs. Gandhi martyrs. (250)

Similarly, Blaise and Mukherjee note that the newspaper edited by Hayer, the *Indo-Canadian Times*, was "a pro-Khalistani Punjabi-language paper" (169). That these messy details remain absent from Saywell's text further confirms that her film presents a simplified version of the Air India bombing.

dance within their respective cultures and regarded as suitable
accomplishments for the daughters of the educated middle classes. (61)

Through dance, Natasha, like the other members of the bereaved in Saywell's film, is thus figured as an upper-class model minority subject. Saywell draws on and reifies a multicultural paradigm in which Hindus figure as ideal subjects who contribute positively to the nation.²⁵

At the end of *Legacy of Terror*, Saywell seems to abandon the political aspects of the bombing altogether and to focus only on individual closure. Her film focuses on the South Asian community commemorating the dead at the site of the tragedy, along the coast of the Atlantic in Cork, Ireland. Although the film returns to the same place that it began, it suggests that time has passed. *Legacy of Terror* thus presents a teleological

²⁵ Saywell's effort to use high culture to construct the victims as sympathetic subjects, it should be noted, is only successful because of a forgetting of the historical record. Bharata Natyam actually achieves its status by effacing the histories of devadasis or temple dancers and prostitutes with which this dance was once associated. Devadasis were part of an artisan class of women who "dedicated themselves to the deities of the temples and other ritual objects" (Srinivasan 1869). They were generally well respected by members of society until the second half of the nineteenth century when a public campaign influenced by Christian morality and religion was created by the newly developing class of Indian elite (both Brahmin and British) to abolish the institution of the devadasis. The campaign known as anti-nautch ended in 1947 when Indian officials enacted the *Madras Prevention of Dedication of Devadasis Act*, making the practice of devadasi dance illegal. According to Srinivasan, among others, at the same time as this movement to outlaw the devadasi dance was taking place, there arose another reform movement headed by a few nationalist critics and artists, known as the revivalists, who sought to sanitize and purify the dance. As part of the movement to cleanse the devadasi art form, revivalists renamed it Bharata Natyam, or the dance of Bharat (India), and reinvented it as an upper-class Hindu art form, supposedly representative of ancient India. Srinivasan argues that "the modifications introduced into the content of the dance-style were not so much of its 'purification' (as the revivalists liked to see it) but its re-birth into a more 'proper' class" (1875). Thus, Saywell's construction of the victims as good upper-class subjects is rooted in a dangerous and divisive Hindu nationalist ideology.

narrative of progress, even as it appears cyclical. To emphasize the passing of time, the film begins with Sarojini Laurence's refusal to accept her daughter's death, and ends with her final acceptance of the trauma. For example, Sarojini says of her daughters at the beginning of the film: "I just didn't believe they were dead" while her response is very different by the end of the film. With a sigh of relief, she states, "Now I have accepted the fact. I am very much at peace." Similarly, Pada suggests at the commemoration ceremony represented at the end of the film that the burden of grief has been lifted: "The day seemed like a cleansing. And then the clouds parted," she says. The camera zooms in on the parting clouds and, in so doing, confirms Pada's statement of hope for the future. Although this closure might model for the viewer how the individual might overcome the trauma, it has a depoliticizing effect in the film for two reasons: first, it leaves the past hermetically sealed in the past, imagining it as separate from a newly-healed present. Second, Saywell's focus on the people who have died, and her demand for us (as viewers) to mourn for them places emphasis on the depoliticized element of self-hood and the individual, taking us away from the field of politics and encouraging us to forget that which is always complex and more quotidian. Thus, while she admirably takes the state to task for failing to remember, her own depiction replicates the failures of the state by focusing attention on the depoliticized elements of the trauma, on the intimate details rather than on elements that might feed into national memory.

Gunnarsson's Air India 182

Gunnarsson's retelling of the 1985 Air India bombing is accomplished by drawing on a range of sources: news footage, intelligence reports, and perhaps most importantly, a series of interviews with people who were involved in different capacities

with the incident. Like Saywell's documentary, there are two parts to Gunnarsson's film: the testimonials and the dramatic reconstruction of the trauma. The testimonials are given by real people who were involved in the trauma such as officials who were investigating Sikh terrorism in 1985, rescuers who pulled the bodies from the Atlantic Ocean, airport staff members who were working on the day of the explosion, and relatives of the victims who recall their final exchanges with their loved ones before they boarded the ill-fated aircraft. Unlike Saywell, Gunnarsson, in his attention to detail, resists the temptation to fall back on ontological essentialisms by remembering the trauma as a conflict between Hindus and Sikhs or victims and perpetrators, and instead makes a conscious effort to show that among the passengers aboard Air India Flight 182 were members of the Sikh community. In fact, in *Air India 182*, the first person to be interviewed is a Sikh man named Mandip Grewal whose father was on the plane. What Grewal remembers from the day he dropped his father at the airport is meeting Hardial Singh Johal, a member of the Babbar Khalsa, a Sikh extremist group which was pursuing a separate state for Sikhs. He says, "At that time, something didn't seem right...I remember him [Johal]. I remember meeting him. When we asked him what he was doing, as it was quite early in the morning, he didn't really have an answer." In the dramatic reconstruction, Gunnarsson presents two Sikh men meeting in the airport, one with a turban and the other without.

Gunnarsson's reconstruction constitutes an inclusive remembering of the past. Thus, the first interview, together with the dramatic rendering of that interview, establishes not only that there were Sikhs among the passengers aboard the plane, but also that the Sikh community is not homogeneous. In the film, we also learn about

another man who is recognizably Sikh who lost his wife aboard the plane. He addresses the difficulty he had as a Sikh in the immediate aftermath of the bombing. He says, “They [the relatives] were looking at me saying, ‘The Sikhs did it,’ and I was wearing a turban. It was quite a trying moment...I had to tell them, ‘I lost my wife too.’” Using accounts like these, Gunnarsson explores not only the difficulty of dealing with the loss of lives, but also the politics of Hindu-Sikh communal conflict, conflict that was heightened in the wake of the bombing.

Gunnarsson refuses to overlook the heterogeneity among the passengers aboard the plane. In one of the opening shots, the camera moves from an exterior image of the sky to the interior of the plane. Among the South Asian passengers, we are shown members of the dominant white Canadian community, and a Sikh who is the co-pilot of the plane. We are also presented with people of different ages including young children, teenagers, and adults. That there were among the mostly Hindu passengers also Sikhs is a fact almost always neglected in representations of the Air India bombing. By representing the passengers as a diverse group, Gunnarsson refuses to categorize the tragedy in strictly religious or racial terms. Moreover, while Gunnarsson frames the Air India bombing as an event linked to Canada and to India, he also registers the emotions of other groups, including the Irish. Thus, in the film, we not only hear from RCMP and CSIS agents, but also from Irish Air Traffic Controller Mike Quinn who first heard the plane disappear from the radar, or the Irish nurses (such as Shaila Wall who worked at the Cork County Hospital) who were involved in helping the bereaved to identify the bodies of their loved ones. By recording the voices of so many different people, Gunnarsson seems to repeatedly point to the enormity of the trauma and the pathos of it.

Gunnarsson offers us details about the tragedy in order to dramatize the human aspects of it. Thus, we learn in the film such details as the fact that one woman, Eisha Marjara, remembers that she was able to identify her sister not by the clothes she wore, but rather by the particular way in which she wore her eyeliner; or we learn that another woman who had been working at the ticket counter had reassured a young girl that she was dressed very nicely for her first trip to India; or that one man had teased a little girl at the airport about the box of chocolates she was carrying to India. In the dramatic reconstruction, we are presented with an image of the man teasing a young girl as she clutches her box of chocolates and runs towards the gate with it in her hands. These memories are infused with genuine feelings of pain, suffering, and regret. Gunnarsson even captures the fact that Inderjit Singh Reyat, the only man who was ever convicted of the bombing, was a terrorist but also a “family man.” In the film, CSIS agent Ray Kobzey explains, “Going through the investigation, he [Inderjit Singh Reyat] remained...he still remained a very nice, cordial – believe it or not – likable person. But at the same time, admitting to you that he did get the dynamite.” Thus, in one dramatic scene, Gunnarsson represents Reyat in his suburban home in Duncan, British Columbia, where his yard is littered with toys belonging to his children. The testimonials recounted by the families of the victims and those involved in the trauma are important because they memorialize personal information about the trauma and details that might not be available in official accounts. By offering us seemingly trivial details, what Gunnarsson seems to be saying is that those involved (both victims and perpetrators) were real people and therefore that the bombing should be remembered as a human tragedy.

As Gunnarsson captures the conversations of the Sikh terrorists, we hear them repeatedly asking one another “if the story has been written.” For them, the “story” is a code for whether or not the bomb has gone on the plane. In his film, Gunnarsson is using narrative to write a different story, one about the loss of lives. Whereas the story for the Sikh extremists ends with the bombing of the plane, for Gunnarsson, the story of loss and trauma is ongoing, and must be mapped onto the nation’s public record. What makes Gunnarsson’s story memorable is that it confirms that the documentary always relies on fictional constructs. As I have said, Gunnarsson uses testimonials and dramatic reconstruction to revive the trauma. Thus, when Renee Saklikar recalls the last time her mother would say goodbye to her sister at the airport, we see it enacted on screen. The use of actors suggests that Gunnarsson’s film is a hybrid, combining fact and fiction, documentary and drama. In his discussion of historical documentary films, Paul Ward explores a selection of historical films that draw on the techniques of reconstruction. His conclusion, although derived from a different set of films, is relevant. What he suggests is that departure from the strict boundaries of the conventional documentary might be read paradoxically as an indication of the historical documentary’s very commitment to history, to counteracting a forgetting of the past. He writes:

What they [these historical documentary films] have in common is, as Walter Benjamin intimates, that they ‘seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger.’ ...[T]here is a strong sense that in all these films that there is a need to intervene and redress an imbalance; to tell ‘the true story,’ so to speak. What we therefore get is a kind of polemical ‘living history’ that falls outside of what most people would commonly,

straightforwardly define as ‘documentary.’ But it is this marginality that gives these films their added political potency. They are ‘about’ these events depicted, but they are also ‘about’ the way that those events have been *mis*-represented in the past, how they have been hidden, shunned or covered over. (50)

For Gunnarsson, a certain fidelity to the facts is important, but so is reconstructing parts of the past, first, because of what Ward alludes to: that the filmmaker must revivify those histories that have been hidden and covered over. Second, the imaginative reconstructions convey affect and emotion, and without those, memory is not stimulated. As we watch the film, we are moved in particular by the scenes in the film such as the young boy saying goodbye to his father at the airport, or the scene in which the mother is crying over the death of her child. The roles played by the actors in the film appear to be unscripted.

Whereas Saywell departs too far from “fact,” it is clear that Gunnarsson understands the importance of balancing between fact and fiction. Thus, it has been reported that when Gunnarsson was asked twice to make a dramatic film about the Air India bombing, he refused, saying:

I didn’t feel comfortable with the dramatic approach because nobody knew what the real story was, and the fiction paled in comparison to my sense of what the reality was...I wanted to find a way into the story that was truthful and that I could live with. There are certain things I think you can fictionalize and it’s OK [sic] because it’s entertainment, but when you

have a tragedy of this dimension, you carry a huge responsibility when you deal with it. (qtd in Goodman)

Gunnarsson wants to give the effect of reality, but he also wants to revive the past and animate an otherwise forgotten history. Thus, the strength of Gunnarsson's film is that he doesn't try to generate affect in excess of the facts: rather, he dramatizes the memory of the relatives but doesn't go beyond that memory.

Gunnarsson not only engages in remembering the trauma but also offers a complicated message about the politics of remembering and forgetting: that the state *should* "remember" the histories of its racialized subjects. Two testimonials in the film in particular point to this message. One of these testimonials is given by the former premier of BC and MP Ujjal Dosanjh, who expresses his concern about Canada's ignorance of immigrant histories:

I felt and others felt that the government of the day, the political establishment of the day, and even the law enforcement establishment, not the people on the ground but the actual establishment, the leadership did not feel that there was a problem. Here were some brown guys, some with turbans, some without turbans, killing each other or hurting each other, or making fiery speeches about something that was 15000 miles away. It didn't affect anybody else in the society. It doesn't matter.

As Dosanjh conveys his testimonial, the camera presents a scene in which Sikh militants have gathered at the Vancouver Art Gallery to rally support for a separate state for Sikhs. The testimonial, together with the image on screen, drives home the point that the state should have taken Sikh extremism seriously, and that it should have understood precisely

what Sikhs in Canada were aggressively remembering about “their” homeland: India’s raid of the Golden Temple in Amritsar and the subsequent riots that took place in India.

The second testimonial worth noting is by retired RCMP officer Doug Henderson, who expresses a similar concern as that of Dosanjh. With a tone of regret, Henderson says:

Canadian police agencies, we were in our infancy as far as terrorism investigations. Police officers at the time, I mean, yes, Canada has our great mosaic today. Back in 1985, and I don’t think the police are any different, an East Indian, we didn’t know the difference between what is Punjabi, what is Sikh, what is Hindu. Khalistan? What is that? Where is India?

Since Henderson’s testimonials are given considerable space in the film, Gunnarsson seems to suggest that his perspective is to be taken seriously. Thus while Gunnarsson is critical of the Sikh militants whom the film suggests are remembering *too much* of the homeland (and who have committed the bombing in the name of violence and retribution), he also seems to be suggesting that the state has perhaps *not remembered enough*, that as such it has failed to grasp the seriousness of extremist politics in Canada. The tone of Gunnarsson’s film – like that of Henderson – is apologetic: Gunnarsson wants to convey that in the future, Canada must remember its racialized subjects and their histories.

Gunnarsson’s critique of the Canadian state’s belief that it was justified in *not knowing* the cultures and histories of its immigrants and racialized communities is similar to Spivak’s critique of what she calls the “sanctioned ignorance” of members of the

dominant community. In order to explain how sanctioned ignorance is inseparable from colonial domination, Spivak offers the example of a young white male student in her class who says, “I am only a bourgeois white male, I can’t speak” about the Third World (“Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Sneja Gunew” 197). She tells us that the young boy “is not only allowed to not-know about the Third World, but he is made to feel good about his ignorance,” and then explains that “to say ‘I won’t criticize’ is salving your conscience, and allowing you not to do any homework” (198); it is allowing for inaction.

For Spivak, the white male should take the risk of knowing the Third World subject:

From this position, then, I say you will of course not speak in the same way about the Third World material, but if you make it your task not only to learn what is going on there through language, through specific programmes of study, but also at the same time through a *historical* critique of your position as the investigating person, then you will see that you have earned the right to criticize, and you will be heard...In one way you take a risk to criticize, of criticizing something which is Other – something which you used to dominate. I say that you have to take a certain risk...On the other hand, if you criticize having earned the right to do so, then you are indeed taking a risk and you will probably be made welcome, and can hope to be judged with respect. (198)

Gunnarsson seems to be making a similar point: that Canadians should take the responsibility for and the risk of knowing “others” who belong to Canada. Canada’s policy of multiculturalism feeds into sanctioned ignorance because it allows Canada to

play the benevolent host to different cultures, but also suggests that those cultures should not interfere with the status quo or make too many demands. Thus, by critiquing Canada's failure to investigate the prior histories of Indians, Gunnarsson is challenging (rather than reproducing as Saywell does) the kind of forgetting that is legitimized by official multiculturalism. What Gunnarsson is saying is that as racialized subjects become Canadian so too should their histories become part of the public record.

Gunnarsson's concern with Canada's forgetting manifests in both literal and metaphorical ways in the film. For instance, the film's reference to the surveillance tapes of Talwinder Singh Parmar and his associates that were erased by Canadian intelligence might be read as referring literally to the fact that the conversations between Sikh extremists were forgotten and their memory erased. However, it might also be understood in symbolic terms: as a sign that the memory of immigrant communities has been lost. In the place of the forgotten tapes and the lost voices that they had recorded, Gunnarsson offers a dramatic reconstruction of Sikh extremist violence and the plotting of the bombing. In the film, actors play the roles of Sikh extremists such as Talwinder Singh Parmar and Inderjit Singh Reyat. The erasing of the tapes, the idea that memory is lost, seems to be what drives Gunnarsson (like Kazimi) to reconstruct the history in all its complexity, and to present a detailed and comprehensive retelling of the past. In this attempt, I would add, Gunnarsson is successful: his film pulls together some of the most important details about the trauma including the transnational implications of what happened and the fact that the victims were from all religious groups; such details, Gunnarsson suggests, must be etched in our memories.

Conclusion:

All three documentary films that I have examined in this chapter offer us important information about the Komagata Maru incident and the Air India bombing. Kazimi's film and Gunnarsson's documentary perhaps most productively counteract the nation's forgetting, in part because both these films address and challenge dominant discourses about the broken passage. Kazimi challenges some of the early accounts of the Komagata Maru incident by insisting on the racial underpinnings of exclusion; he also reminds us of the importance of remembering the traumas endured by diasporic communities, and doing so without losing sight of prior traumas like the injustices committed against the First Nations people. For Kazimi, diasporic inclusion in the nation depends on remembering the traumas of exclusion. For instance, in the film, he notes that it is only when the Komagata Maru incident and other wrongs are remembered that the British will be overthrown and South Asian inclusion into the Canadian nation will be made possible. Thus, we are told that on the eve of Indian independence, "South Asians in Canada get the right to vote" and that "[a]fter years of struggle, on April 2, 1947, they become full Canadian citizens." Gunnarsson labours to challenge the stereotype of the violent Sikh immigrant by pointing to the very fact that Sikhs were among the victims in the Air India bombing; his film also suggests that the state needs to remember the histories of the diasporic community, that they need to become part of the nation itself. Saywell's film, because it reproduces some of the stereotypes of Hindus and Sikhs, and reinscribes the assimilationist logic underpinning multiculturalism, comes in the way of a productive memorializing of the trauma, even though it lays out some important facts about the Air India bombing. Saywell's forgetting of the fact that Sikhs were also victims of the trauma, for example, means that she departs from the historical record and contributes to the communalization of memory. All three films draw on fictional elements and thus depart from

the documentary genre proper, and in so doing, attempt to arouse affect and to fill out the historical record with imaginative detail. Saywell, because she moves too far into the realm of fiction, comes close to producing propaganda; while Gunnarsson and Kazimi find ways to present the “facts” while also “imaginatively” reconstructing the trauma, which as I shall suggest in the next chapter, is important to the process of memorializing the trauma and bringing it to life.

Chapter Three: Remembering, Forgetting, and Working Through: Imaginative Fictions and the Broken Passage

Introduction:

In *Worrying the Nation: Imagining a National Literature in English Canada*, Jonathan Kertzer argues that “the nation owes its very ‘life’ to literature, and to all parts of the arts of cultural persuasion, because they articulate a national life by telling its story” (12). Similarly, in her discussion of Canadian nationalism and canon-formation, Sarah M. Corse suggests that literature has long been understood as playing a role in the process of nation-making: “national literatures help to create ideas in new nations, to affirm identities in nations under attack, and to reinterpret and revise national identities in the face of conflict and change” (214), she writes. Thus, if we trace the dominant themes and concerns in popular Canadian literary fictions, we may be able to better understand the way the Canadian nation has been imagined. Literary fictions emerging from the late 1800s and early 1900s, for example, tended to narrativize the nation as inward looking and idyllic. Texts like D.C. Scott’s *In the Village of Viger* (1896), Stephen Leacock’s *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town* (1912), and Frederick Philip Grove’s *Settlers of the Marsh* (1925) seemed to be suggesting that Canada was a little place, looking out at the danger that lay beyond its borders. Canada was constructed in these narratives as homogeneous rather than cosmopolitan, as cautious rather than daring. Aboriginal people and racialized minority subjects were framed as outsiders and as menacing others, as those who lived beyond the “comforting” space of the nation.

The shape of the nation as it was imagined in literary fictions seemed to change in the early 1950s. It was during this period that Canadians appeared to have realized that

literature could play a significant role in the process of consolidating a national consciousness, that it had the political potential to redefine the borders of the nation. Thus, as Lynette Hunter explains, in addition to the emphasis that was placed on Canadian studies, support was also given “to Canadian publishers and writers [which has since] enabled a number of texts to enter the English-language canon which [was] conventionally...fixed on British writers” (7). The idea seemed to be that if Canadian literature acquired more currency in the public realm, if it was canonized and taught at school and at the university, it might contribute to the process of establishing a distinct “Canadian culture,” one that would differentiate the Canadian nation from its American neighbour and from the former British Empire. Thus, in 1951, Vincent Massey was appointed to a committee to advise the Canadian government about matters related to the arts and humanities. In response to its findings that Canada needed a uniquely Canadian identity – findings that were published in what came to be called the Massey Report – the Canada Council was formed in 1957 to help fund projects in the humanities. Writers such as Margaret Atwood, Northrop Frye, and John Moss convinced Canadians that central to their identities was the notion that they “suffered from a garrison mentality because of their intimidating physical environment” (A. Mukherjee 72). Canadians, according to this argument, “developed a victim complex, aiming only for survival rather than grandiose achievements unlike their neighbours in the South” (72). Thus, the Canadian nation *became* “the garrison mentality,” and Canada’s history of genocide committed against Native people, and its history of racial injustice were notably written out of the national memory. This is not to suggest that all writers and critics subscribed to this construction of Canada, but rather that the idea of Canada as a “cold” suffering

nation, as victim rather than victimizer, became dominant and naturalized. Interestingly, from the late 1970s onward, the nation was once again re-imagined, especially by non-white writers, this time as a much more fractured and much more heterogeneous space. South Asian Canadian literature as a field of study began to emerge in the mid 1980s with the publication of such anthologies as *A Meeting of Streams: South Asian Canadian Literature* (1985). This anthology brings together a selection of essays by South Asian Canadian scholars such as Arun Mukherjee, Uma Parameswaran, M.G. Vassanji and Surjeet Kalsey. In 1992, *The Geography of Voice*, an anthology of South Asian Canadian writing, set out to define South Asians and their literary projects:

South Asians in Canada usually find that the cold, forbidding Canadian climate is outmatched by the icy, hostile social environment where they feel themselves doubly marginalized: first because they are immigrants and second because they belong to racial, often linguistic, and usually religious minorities. Mainstream Canadians may be openly antagonistic, judging South Asians as simply too different, simply the “wrong” kind of immigrant; or the racism and bigotry may be more subtle. Whatever the face of intolerance, the effects are comparable and nobody should be shocked that the alienation of the immigrant and the bitter stings of racism and religious bigotry, painful daily realities for South Asian Canadian writers, are important factors in shaping their lives, politics and art.

(McGifford viii)

The documentary and fictional texts that I examine in this dissertation emerge mostly from this contemporary period. In 1988, Bharati Mukherjee wrote “The

Management of Grief,” a short story that deals with the responses by the state and the diasporic community to the Air India bombing, and in 2006, Anita Rau Badami wrote *Can You Hear the Nightbird Call?*, a novel that dramatizes the hidden histories of the Komagata Maru incident and the Air India bombing, histories that the nation would prefer to forget in its efforts to construct itself as a coherent and homogeneous space.²⁶

In this chapter, I shall focus on three imaginative fictions and consider how they partake of the process of remembering the Komagata Maru incident and the Air India bombing and what they suggest about that process: Mukherjee’s short story, “The Management of Grief” (1988), Eisha Marjara’s film *Desperately Seeking Helen* (1999), and Badami’s *Can You Hear the Nightbird Call?* (2006). These texts combine documentary, historical and realist elements. Because they endow the trauma with imaginative detail and document the experiences of ordinary people whose lives are affected by the traumatic event, these texts are distinct from documentary films which tend to focus more attention on the hard facts and “postmodern” texts which are playful and tend to privilege the extraordinary over the ordinary.

The power of these imaginative texts lies in the fact that they offer us ordinary characters with whom we can identify and thus they encourage us to *feel* for those involved and to experience the trauma, even though we never actually lived through it. These texts ask us to remember the trauma and to enact as they do the process of working

²⁶ Other texts by non-white writers that emerged from this period, but that are beyond the scope of this dissertation, include Rohinton Mistry’s collection of short stories *Tales from Firozsha Baag* (1987) which offers fictional accounts of India, and which presents Canada from the perspective of an immigrant subject. M.G. Vassanji’s *No New Land* (1991) deals with the treatment of racialized Canadians in Toronto under the supposedly benevolent policy of multiculturalism.

through loss. “Working through” is a term I borrow from psychoanalysis and trauma studies which refers to a seemingly straightforward, albeit multi-step, process of returning to the site of the wound, coming to terms with what happened, and finally letting go. For Freud, and subsequently for historians such as Dominick LaCapra and Saul Friedlander, working through tends to be understood as a healthy process: the subject resuscitates the past not to dwell on it, but to let it go; she remembers the trauma, that is, precisely in order to forget it. The aim of working through trauma, then, is to establish a clear distinction between the traumatic past and the healthy present, to ensure that these temporal realms remain discrete rather than overlapping. As LaCapra argues, “in working through, one is able to distinguish between past and present and to recognize something as having happened to one (or one’s people) back then which is related to, but not identical with, here and now” (66). “Working-through” is thus a complicated form of remembering *and* forgetting that is necessary for healing. Mukherjee’s short story enacts the process of working through by dramatizing Hindu-Sikh tensions only to resolve and forget them; Badami’s text suggests that the diasporic subject must work through the tensions of the homeland in order to adapt to the hostland; and finally, Marjara herself must remember and recover the memory of her mother in order to put the past to rest.²⁷

Imaginative Fictions and the Broken Passage:

Bharati Mukherjee’s “The Management of Grief”

Published in 1988 as part of a collection of short stories titled *The Middleman and Other Stories*, Mukherjee’s “The Management of Grief” constitutes the first literary

²⁷ I use the term “working through” in a psychoanalytic sense to describe Marjara’s personal attempts to deal with the loss of her mother, but I also use the term in a structural sense to describe how Mukherjee’s short story and Badami’s novel “work through” prior ruptures.

response in Canada to the 1985 bombing of Air India Flight 182. To the extent that Mukherjee recuperates the affective responses of ordinary people whose loved ones died in the explosion, she preserves the memory of the Air India bombing and contributes to the project of publicly inscribing that memory onto the public record. Mukherjee seems to draw in part on research she conducted with Clark Blaise and published in *The Sorrow and the Terror*. But whereas *The Sorrow and the Terror* is framed as a journalistic response to the Air India bombing, one in which Mukherjee and Blaise interview the bereaved and record their responses, the tenor and the ideological perspective of Mukherjee's short story is very different. This difference suggests perhaps that Mukherjee is revising her earlier thesis based on new information about the bombing that had surfaced in the year between her publication of *The Sorrow and the Terror* (1987) and "The Management of Grief" (1988). It also suggests perhaps that whereas imaginative fictions themselves encourage a kind of working through of the trauma, journalistic accounts, with the immediacy involved in reporting the event, are more rigid and lend themselves therefore to binaric responses to trauma.

Told from the perspective of a member of the bereaved, here a woman named Mrs. Shaila Bhave, whose two sons and husband have died in the crash, Mukherjee's story imaginatively reconstructs the experience of loss and grief in the immediate wake of the trauma. Mukherjee traces Shaila's journey from her home in Toronto, where she first learns the news of the explosion, to Ireland, where members of the bereaved travel to identify the bodies of their loved ones, then to India, and back again to Toronto. Like many other members of the bereaved, Shaila is so overwhelmed by feelings of sadness and anger not only because of the loss of lives but also because of the seemingly uncaring

responses of officials in Canada and India, and the realization that the politics of the homeland seem to have made their way into the diasporic country of adoption. It seems unfair, Shaila thinks to herself, that “[w]e who stayed out of politics and came halfway around the world to avoid religious and political feuding have been the first in the New World to die from it” (196).

The impersonal attitude of the Canadian multicultural state, its attempt to “manage” minorities and their emotions, both by adhering to bureaucratic procedures and by attempting to understand them through the lens of new age psychology, are endlessly critiqued in the story. Thus I argue that rather than accepting Mukherjee’s title at face value, as critics have done (Zaman, Bowen),²⁸ we should read it as a sardonic reference to the disciplinary technologies used by the Canadian multicultural state to placate the bereaved and to ensure that their affective responses to trauma are kept under control, that their feelings of pain and even aggression are deflected and dispersed rather than encouraged. Against the state’s tendency to control grief and encourage a forgetting of the past, Mukherjee seems to be saying that diasporic remembering can be a form of resistance to official forgetting, but only if that remembering is based on inclusiveness rather than on divisions and disjunctures that have the potential to divide the South Asian Canadian community.

Mukherjee’s story opens in Toronto in the home of Mrs. Shaila Bhave where members of the South Asian Canadian community have gathered to mourn their losses. This scene is crucial. Mukherjee is allowing us to imagine how families were dealing with loss in the immediate wake of the trauma. There is an unnamed woman who deals

²⁸ Bowen, for example, suggests that while “grief is transcultural; the management of grief is not” (50).

with the tragedy by telling repeatedly the story of how she came to learn the news. Another woman, Kusum, whose husband and young daughter have died in the explosion, questions her faith in god, while her older daughter, Pam, projects onto her mother her own feelings of regret for having survived the tragedy because of her refusal to join her family on their trip to India. She says, “You think I don’t know what Mummy’s thinking. *Why her?* that’s what. That’s sick! Mummy wishes my little sister were alive and I were dead” (182). Shaila, the narrator of the story has perhaps the most unexpected response to the trauma: she cannot weep. In spite of all the commotion that surrounds Shaila (there are two radios going, the television is on, members of the Indo-Canadian Society have filled Shaila’s house, the phone is ringing, and reporters have arrived at the door), Shaila is trapped by an unbearable sense of calmness, of tranquility, a feeling, she explains, that is “[n]ot peace, just a deadening quiet” (180). Shaila feels excruciating pain and sadness, but she isn’t able to articulate those feelings. Such information about the diasporic community’s affective responses to loss, it is worth noting, was largely unavailable in the mainstream media in the days following the bombing; for rather than focusing on the affective responses of *the people*, mainstream media sources such as *The Times of India*, *The Toronto Star*, and *The Globe and Mail* were focusing more attention on asking what had happened, especially since the “black box” was not immediately found after the explosion. Questions were raised about how the plane exploded, how airline security measures had failed, and how Sikh extremism might have been linked to what had happened.²⁹

²⁹ Thus, for example, *The Times of India* presents an article titled “All 326 killed in an A-I Place Crash” (Malik) which documents such matters as the wreckage that was found in the wake of the bombing, the fact that the plane failed to send a distress signal before it

While excavating aspects of the trauma that may not otherwise be available appears to be one of Mukherjee's aims, it is not her only objective. For one thing, Mukherjee wants us to see that the South Asian community was divided in the immediate aftermath of the trauma. Thus, we are told that the young boys have been muttering "Sikh Bomb, Sikh Bomb" in response to which the adult men "bow their heads in agreement" (180). As I shall show, this divisiveness is by the end of the story addressed and more importantly worked through and dissolved. Second, Mukherjee wants us to recognize that the trauma did not have a significant impact on anyone but members of the South Asian Canadian diasporic community. Thus, absent from the opening scene of diasporic grief are members of the dominant white Canadian community. The forgetting of the trauma by members of the dominant community is made explicit when one of the men in Shaila's house complains that the preacher on television carries on like nothing has happened, and Shaila thinks to herself, it's because "we're not that important" (180).

Through the fictionalized character of Shaila, Mukherjee manages to record the disappointment felt by the bereaved because Canadians had failed to see the trauma as a Canadian loss. Since we, as readers, are meant to identify with Shaila and to experience

disappeared from the radar; it also speculates about the possibility that the explosion was the result of a bomb. Other articles in *The Times of India* include one titled "Government Conveys Fears of Khalistanis" which suggests that "[t]he Air-India plane disaster has confirmed India's fears that the activities of the 'Khalistan' extremists were being sustained from Canada, the United States and Britain" (25 June 1985); and another article titled "Alert at City Airports" (25 June 1985) which informs the public that security measures at international and domestic airports have been increased. In *The Toronto Star* on June 24, 1985, one newspaper account similarly focuses on the security measures that had to be changed due to the Air India bombing ("Foil the Airport Bombers"), while another article in *The Globe and Mail* titled "CP Air Bags Weren't Checked" considers the External Affairs Minister Joe Clark's assertion that the Air India explosion was a "terrorist bombing" (24 June 1985) and then goes on to document how the baggage containing the bomb may have ended up on the aircraft.

her grief, we are also encouraged to work through the tragedy as she does and to find ways of coming to terms with loss. In the story, the Canadian multicultural state is embodied in the figure of Judith Templeton, a young girl appointed by the provincial government to “reach out” to the bereaved, or the “relatives” as they are called. “Multiculturalism?” asks Shaila when Templeton arrives at her house. “[P]artially,” Templeton responds, but insists that she does much more. The seemingly sarcastic tone with which Shaila poses the question suggests that we should be suspicious of the role that the multicultural state plays in helping victims with their grief. In the story, Templeton is the face of official multiculturalism: she is polite, neat, and well turned out. Her mandate is almost entirely bureaucratic. As she explains to Shaila, “We want to help but our hands are tied in so many ways. We have to distribute money to some people, and there are legal documents – these things can be done” (183). What Templeton is concerned with are the strictly bureaucratic matters; she is not concerned with affect. Thus, when Shaila points out to Templeton that mistakes were made, Templeton deflects any responsibility and says, “Police matters are not in my hands” (183). The critique Mukherjee seems to be making is that the Canadian multicultural state doesn’t really care about the bereaved who have lost their families in the bombing. What the state wants is to close off the past and make certain that it is forgotten.³⁰

³⁰ In *The Sorrow and the Terror*, Blaise and Mukherjee interview Mr Bedi, one of the bereaved, who makes a similar point about the bureaucratic attitude of the state towards the families of the Air India victims. He says:

‘So I say to these politicians, do you think the Indian community is so poor that we need your hundred dollars? Let me remind you that the Indian community has done very well even though you people don’t recognize us as Canadians but only as ‘immigrants.’ We don’t need their money and their bureaucratic support system. We need to be treated in a

Mukherjee's insistence on critiquing the Canadian multicultural state is perhaps to be expected. Mukherjee herself is well known for having left Canada in the 1980s and for migrating to the United States, a nation she describes as being much more hospitable and much more welcoming towards its racial others. In an interview, she describes her experience of racial abjection in Toronto in the 1970s:

There was a pattern of discrimination. I was refused service in stores. I would have to board a bus last when I had been the first person in line. I was followed by detectives in department stores who assumed I was a shoplifter or treated like a prostitute in hotels. ("An Interview with Bharati Mukherjee" 652)

Comparing her experience in Canada to her move to the United States, Mukherjee says:

Being in the U.S. was a tremendous relief after Canada...In the U.S. I wasn't continuously forced to deal with my physical appearance. I would wear Western clothes and blend in with people on a New York street. America, with its melting pot theory of immigration, has a healthier attitude toward Indian immigrants than Canada. (652)

Although Mukherjee fails to account for the different patterns of migration to Canada and the United States, to account specifically for the fact that those who had migrated from India to the United States, unlike those who migrated to Canada, were largely professionals who were thus perceived as "model minority" subjects, what is important here, for the purposes of my argument, is Mukherjee's anger at the Canadian system. This anger comes through in Mukherjee's short story which effectively critiques

caring way. We need to be made to feel that we are first-class citizens.' (92)

Canada's policy of multiculturalism and suggests that it fails to offer a "real" sense of inclusion into the nation to members of the South Asian Canadian community.

In "The Management of Grief," Mukherjee shows us that another way in which the Canadian multicultural state tries to "manage" the emotions of the bereaved is by understanding them through the lens of new age psychology. Templeton, for example, explains to Shaila that she has created charts to track the progress of the families and a list of those who have accepted the trauma. "Acceptance means you speak of your family in the past tense and you make active plans for moving ahead with your life" (192), she says. Her research, she tells Shaila, has been drawn from textbooks on managing grief which outline four stages that the bereaved must pass through: rejection, depression, acceptance, and reconstruction. Although Shaila responds to Templeton politely, telling her that she "has done impressive work" (192), she is actually suspicious of Templeton's uncritical use of new age psychology and its system of categorizing grief. For one thing, Shaila is aware that Templeton sees her as "one of the few whose grief has not sprung bizarre obsessions" (192) and has likely grouped her among those that have "accepted" the tragedy, has got it wrong. Shaila has not relinquished ties to the past. She continues to be visited by visions of her family. Thus, she thinks to herself, "How do I tell Judith Templeton that my family surrounds me, and that like creatures in epics, they've changed shapes?...I cannot tell her my days, even my nights, are thrilling" (192). The state's use of new age psychology alerts us to the irony that even in death (since the bereaved are mourning the death of their loved ones), there are heterogeneities that the multicultural state wants to homogenize, that it wants to forget. The state, it seems, cannot afford to allow racialized others to be too different from the dominant community because such

differences might become difficult to control. It must overwrite those heterogeneities so that racialized others occupy a difference that is manageable, a difference that can be incorporated into the multicultural framework of the nation.

The nation's attempts to homogenize and forget diasporic grief are made particularly clear when Shaila accompanies Templeton to the house of an elderly Sikh couple whose sons have died in the bombing. This couple is among those whose grief Templeton has categorized as unhealthy and pathological. They have been visited twice by Templeton and a translator, we are told,

with offers of money for air fare to Ireland, with bank forms, power-of-attorney forms, but they have refused to sign, or leave their tiny apartment...They have told Judith that their sons will provide. They are good boys, and they have always earned and looked after their parents. (192-93)

Templeton's insensitivity towards the Sikh couple and towards the Indian victims of the tragedy more generally, is perhaps signified most clearly when she says to Shaila, "You see what I'm up against? I'm sure they're lovely people, but their stubbornness and ignorance are driving me crazy" (195). Here, the language used by Templeton positions South Asians as "other," and reveals that beneath the polite façade of the multicultural state is impatience. Templeton, instead of dealing with the grief of the victims with sympathy and understanding, is dealing with it as a job. Thus, when the old Sikh lady goes to make her a cup of tea, Templeton says to Shaila, "I think my bladder will go first on a job like this" (195). Her affectless statement reflects the lack of investment of the

multicultural state. For Templeton, Shaila is as a model subject precisely because her grief is easy to deal with; unlike the others, she does not openly cling to the past.

What is interesting is that Shaila, who had been reluctant to visit the elderly Sikh couple's home, feels tremendous sympathy for them. Thus, when Templeton had asked Shaila to accompany her on her visit to the couple's home, Shaila had initially said, "They are Sikh. They will not open up to a Hindu woman" (193). By registering the feelings of anger many members of the bereaved felt towards the Sikh community in the wake of the bombing, only to dispel their suspicions, Mukherjee is doing something important: she is "working through" communal tensions and then forgetting them. In the process, she is also suggesting that a productive remembering of the Air India bombing can unite the community against official forgetting. Thus, while Mukherjee tells us that Shaila, who knew that "Sikh bombs" were responsible for the death of her family, would "stiffen...at the sight of beards and turbans" (193), she also points to the important connection that Shaila makes with the Sikh couple, a connection that renders them as part of a community of shared grief. Thus, whereas Templeton reads the couple's refusal to sign papers as an indication of their stubborn inflexibility, Shaila understands it as a sign of strength, a sign that they have not yet given up hope. As a parent who lost her sons, Shaila feels connected to the Sikh couple. She is angry with the state which seems to be saying to the bereaved – sign the papers, finish things off – and wants to explain to Templeton that the elderly couple's actions are justifiable, that she understands them because "*In our culture, it is a parent's duty to hope*" (195). Mukherjee uses this episode not only to represent the conflict between the state and its desire to close off the past and the Indian parent who refuses to lose hope, but also to suggest that one way to resist the

state's forgetting is to form a community based on a shared sense of loss, based on a shared memory.

Here, the work of sociologist Kai Erikson is useful. Erikson argues that the trauma need not be read only as causing the individual to retreat into herself, to feel numb and alienated from others. Trauma, rather, he tells us, "has both centripetal and centrifugal tendencies. It draws one away from the centre of group space while at the same time drawing one back" (186). Individuals can be united by the shared experience of a traumatic event, and the shared feelings of alienation that accompany that event. As he explains, a trauma that is "shared can serve as a source of communality in the same way that common languages and common backgrounds can" (186). He elaborates, "There is spiritual kinship there, a sense of identity, even when feelings of affection are deadened and the ability to care numbed" (186). The collective often becomes united around a traumatic event, a shared experience. In Mukherjee's story, this collective includes both Hindu and Sikh members of the diaspora.

Although Mukherjee's aim seems to be directed primarily at critiquing Canadian multiculturalism, she is also critical of the way in which grief is "managed" in India. There, the widowers, for example, are forced to move on and forget about the past by re-marrying. These men, we are told, call Shaila and say, "Save me...My parents are arranging a marriage for me" (190). Shaila interprets these new marriages as potential failures. As she says, "The new wives will be young widows with children, destitute but of good family. They will make loving wives, but the men will shun them" (190). In India, Shaila feels trapped between the two established modes of managing grief set up by her grandmother who "shaved her head with rusty razor blades when she was

widowed at sixteen” (189) and her parents who rebelled against such Vedic rituals and traditions. Shaila says, “At thirty-six, I am too old to start over and too young to give up. Like my husband’s spirit, I flutter between worlds” (189).

Mukherjee draws attention to India’s failure to respond adequately to the bombing and its victims perhaps most noticeably when Shaila and Kusum arrive at the airport in Bombay. The “man in uniform” (188) sitting at the customs office seems to be a representative Indian official. To Kusum and Shaila, he is not only rude and unsympathetic, he is also repulsive. As Shaila observes, “He has large boils on his face...that swell and glow with sweat” (188). We are told that the officer refuses to let Kusum clear customs and instead forces her to stay with her coffins while his boss takes his tea break. Shaila, who is upset and understands that Kusum does not want to let her coffins out of her sight, screams at the officer. “You bastard!...You think we’re smuggling contraband in those coffins!” (189). The custom’s officer does not seem to care that Kusum and Shaila have suffered a major trauma. Deborah Bowen reads this episode as an indication that “[s]hared ethnicity is in itself no guarantee of the presence of ‘the right human touch.’” (52). While Bowen offers one way to read the episode, we might also understand it as encoding a political critique about national forgetting: here, Mukherjee seems to be saying that the Air India bombing never figured as an important tragedy in the Indian imaginary, just as it never figured as significant to Canadians. Interestingly, Mukherjee presents the Irish very sympathetically. Rather than attempting to manage grief, the Irish cry with the relatives, offer them flowers on the street, and genuinely seem to feel for their loss; they are not shy. Unlike the Canadians and the Indians who appear affectless and unsympathetic, the Irish – themselves also historically

victims of colonialism – are represented as actually understanding loss and as feeling for the victims.

What Mukherjee's story seems to be saying is that remembering is important, but that we need a form of remembering that is neither pathological nor divisive. In this story, Mukherjee thus celebrates the community that is joined together not by religious connections but rather by shared feelings of grief and trauma. At the end of the story, we are given an account of the members of this community who have moved in different directions, but who remain tied to one another by virtue of the fact that they have experienced the same kind of loss. The narrator, we are told, has visions of her family, and the final one, in which her family tells her to go and be brave, seems to give her some closure, and a sense of catharsis at the end of the story. Her friend, Kusum, gives up her life in Canada and moves to an ashram in India. Pam, we are told, ends up in Vancouver where she works in a department store, teaching "Indian and Oriental girls" (196) how to put on make-up. Dr. Ranganathan gives up his house and his job in Canada and accepts an academic position in Texas "where no one knows his story and he has vowed not to tell it" (196). The scene replicates the opening of the novel, but with a notable difference: the "Sikh bombs" have been forgotten and the community is no longer divided along religious lines. Implicitly included in this community of "relatives" therefore is the Sikh couple with whom Shaila found a strong connection.

Anita Rau Badami's Can You Hear the Nightbird Call?

It is significant that the 1914 Komagata Maru incident and the 1985 Air India bombing frame the larger ruptures that are at the centre of Badami's *Can You Hear the Nightbird Call?*: the 1947 Partition of India and Pakistan and the 1984 raid of the Golden

Temple in Amritsar and the subsequent Delhi riots. Badami seems to be telling us that the two traumatically interrupted journeys that occurred in the liminal space between the borders of India and Canada – the Komagata Maru incident and the Air India bombing – must be remembered. For a writer like Badami, who migrated from India to Canada in 1991 and is herself a member of the South Asian Canadian diasporic community, the broken passages of the Komagata Maru incident and the Air India disaster are important because they raise questions about the place of South Asians within the Canadian national imaginary. As Badami states in the interview I conducted with her, “the Komagata Maru incident was the beginning, the first unredressed slight for South Asians in Canada. Then, there was the Air India disaster, which highlighted that some people can belong in the nation and some people can’t” (5 Jan. 2009). For Badami, it is Canada’s failure to take seriously the Air India bombing that compels her to ask: “how long do you have to stay in a country to belong?” (5 Jan. 2009). Badami insists that we see the bombing of Air India not as an isolated event and but rather as part of an interconnected history that can be traced back to 1914.

Thus, *Can You Hear the Nightbird Call?* opens with an account of the Komagata Maru incident that conjures up an image of the ship’s passengers in limbo, suspended between two nations on either side of the Pacific Ocean. Among the passengers aboard the Komagata Maru is a Sikh, Harjot Singh; who, the novel tells us, is in 1928, still unable to forget his experience of racial abjection at the Canadian border. Harjot Singh, for example, continues to think about “his treatment at the hands of goras who ruled the country,” and to wonder why “he and the other passengers on the Komagata Maru, every one of them British citizens, had been refused entry to Canada and the ship turned back”

(13). Although we are introduced to Harjot Singh some years after he has returned safely to his home in Punjab, his daughter Sharanjeet (the little girl who grows into Bibi-ji, one of the central protagonists of the novel) observes that her father's journey had left him (psychically) stuck between India (the place where he now lives) and Vancouver, "the green and blue city...which he had once seen from the deck of the ship – a place that had turned him away from its shores as if he were a pariah dog" (10). The familial connections (Harjot Singh's daughter Sharanjeet adopts a son Jasbeer who becomes associated with the bombing of Air India) serve to reinforce the connections between the two ruptured journeys in the novel.

Badami's description of the Air India bombing, and especially of its affective consequences, seems to deliberately echo those associated with the Komagata Maru incident. Thus, through her descriptions of both events, Badami is drawing a connection between them, and between the past and the present. For Badami the image of the plane exploding in mid air is the ultimate physical manifestation of rupture. Like the passengers of the Komagata Maru ship, the victims aboard the plane are left in a state of limbo, or as the narrator puts it, "literally between two worlds" (392). Among the passengers killed in the explosion is the character of Leela Bhat, a woman who seems to embody liminality: Leela is an Anglo-Indian (born of a German mother and an Indian father) and upon her migration to Canada, she becomes a diasporic subject (who is psychically caught between India and Canada). In the novel, we are told that her grandmother would say, Leela was like the mythical king, Trishanku: she was a "dangling person" with "a foot here and a foot there and a great gap in between" (392).

The stateless condition of Leela and her fellow passengers aboard Air India is

rendered even more acute – in symbolic terms – after what the novel calls “Prime Minister Mulroney’s gaffe” when he called “India’s prime minister, Rajiv Gandhi, to offer his condolences when it was a planeload of mostly Canadian citizens who had died” (396-97). The novel establishes that in death, the victims of the Air India bombing continue to straddle the border zone. In Badami’s novel, the fraught voyages of the Komagata Maru ship and the Air India plane render the India-Canada, homeland-hostland border a linking-point between nation-states: a linking-point that is paradoxically marked by rupture.

The story of the interrupted journey of the Komagata Maru ship and the Air India plane, or what I call “the broken passage,” functions as a governing trope in Badami’s work. It is worth repeating that in this dissertation, I use the broken passage as a heuristic device. I argue that it aids in the understanding of the predicament of South Asian diasporic subjects who are constantly negotiating their subject positions in relation to the two national powers between which they feel perpetually caught: India and Canada. In the novel, Badami describes the diasporic subjects in Canada as “doing the splits between two cultures” (58), and as constantly trying to find balance amidst their dual identities. After moving to Canada, Leela, for example, comes to understand herself as “a Minority lumped together with an assortment of other minorities” (137). They were “[a]ll in-between people” (137), she observes. This is not to suggest that all diasporic subjects in Badami’s novel are locked in a state of unbelonging. Many characters, (especially the women characters) as I shall discuss later, find ways to establish roots in Canada, even as they engage in recollections of the homeland. However, events like the Komagata Maru incident and the Air India bombing remind racialized diasporic subjects (and the reader)

of the fact that they are tied to both here and there, but also of the possibility that they can be excluded from both spheres.

For Badami, the idea of interconnectedness between home and diaspora, past and present, is captured metaphorically in a striking passage fairly early in the novel. The little girl Preethi is gazing at the night-scene below her from the window of her plane:

‘Amma,’ she said,... ‘what does node mean?’

‘It means where two or three things cross,’ said Leela. She examined the book curiously. ‘What are you reading?’

‘About Indra’s Net,’ Preethi said. ‘Do you know this story, Amma?’

‘No, I don’t.’ Leela stroked the child’s soft hair. ‘Why don’t you read it to me?’

‘Indra, the god of heaven flung a net over the world,’ read Preethi. ‘Its shinning strands criss-crossed the world from end to end. At each node of this net there hung a gem, so arranged that if you looked at one you saw all the others reflected in it. As each gem reflected the other one, so was every human affected by the miseries and joys of every other human, every other living thing on the planet...’

Preethi stopped reading and looked out the window. Far below, from the pitch darkness, a long string of brilliant lights stretched like gems into infinity. The plane was crossing the India-Pakistan border....

‘Amma, look, look!’ she whispered excitedly. ‘It’s Indra’s Net!’ (105-06)

This passage is worth dwelling on for more than one reason. First, it is set in a plane and this has proleptic significance: the Air India bombing becomes one of the most

important events in the novel, and the danger associated with flight is memorably evoked in the penultimate chapter of the book. Second, the child and her mother are moving between the homeland (India) and the diasporic space (Canada) and this liminality, as I have suggested, is important to Badami, who is interested in the pull of the homeland and the hostland for the diasporic subject. Thirdly, the scene moves us between the child's innocent vision and the adult's more disillusioned perspective. Finally, the scene is constructed around the image of Indra's net. The myth invokes an alluring image of an interconnected universe; at the same time, however, it alludes to the possible danger of rupture that accompanies the discourse of connectivity. As the novel tells us, "When one gem was touched, hundreds of others shimmered or danced in response, and a tear in the net made the whole world tremble" (106).

Preethi identifies the "long string of brilliant lights" (106) as the material incarnation of the metaphor of Indra's net. Her innocent perspective is set against the mother's more pessimistic one. Leela recognizes that beneath the seemingly aesthetic image of shimmering lights lies a history of violent rupture. As we are told, the floodlights below mirrored "the line that had been drawn on the maps of London and Delhi little more than two decades ago to mark the beginning of a pair of nations – [India and Pakistan] – at war with each other from birth" (106). Whereas Leela withholds her bleak insight to protect her daughter's innocence, Badami refuses to shield her reader from the brutal realities of the past. Rather she insists on exposing the site of rupture: the India-Pakistan border is a space that marks the death of millions who were killed during the tragedy of Partition, and functions in the novel's retelling as a crucial site of "vigilance" (106), demarcating the included from the excluded.

In the introduction to *Partitioned Lives: Narratives of Home, Displacement and Resettlement*, Anjali Gera Roy and Nandi Bhatia offer a particularly vivid description of Partition and its effects:

Partition involved the forced migration of about 12 million people who moved across borders to their newly identified homes in India and East and West Pakistan, cost approximately one million lives in riots and resulted in the abduction of nearly 75,000 women. Descriptions of violence by survivors are well known by now: images of trains filled with corpses as they arrive on both sides of the border, mutilated bodies, forcible parading of women and men on streets, tattooing of women's bodies with symbols of the other religions, forced religious conversions, separation of family members and abandonment of homes. Partition is remembered as a time of great uncertainty, humiliation, anger, sadness, and trauma but also one of survival and triumph about having recovered and bounced back from tremendous personal and material loss. (x)

In the novel, Badami's narrator explains that the Partition of India and Pakistan was not the result of a well thought-out plan but of an arbitrary bureaucratic decision made by an Englishman, Sir Cyril Radcliffe. Radcliffe, we are told, "had been appointed in the days before independence to head a commission that would create two nations in the subcontinent – India, with a Hindu majority, and Pakistan, for Muslims" (51). Badami's emphasis on the importance of Partition seems to confirm but also extend the claim made by Gyanendra Pandey who argues that

Partition was, for the majority of the people living in what are now the divided territories of northern India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh, *the* event of the twentieth century – equivalent in terms of trauma and consequences to World War I (the ‘Great War’) for Britain and World War II for France and Japan. (6 italics in the original)

For Badami, the line arbitrarily drawn on the map not only tears the Indian subcontinent apart, it also inaugurates the historical trauma of rupture with transnational and trans-historical consequences. Thus, Partition figures as *the* event in the novel which affects the lives of ordinary people, of “Midnight’s children” and the generations that follow in places such as India, where the trauma began, but also in diasporic spaces like Canada. In the novel, the 1947 Partition resonates in the tragedies that precede and follow it, both in India and in diasporic space, and ultimately culminates in the 1985 bombing of Air India. For example, Partition gets replayed in different ways, one of which is an episode that takes place during the 1984 Hindu-Sikh riots in Delhi. In order to protect her daughter from the men that have come to terrorize them, Nimmo hides the child in a steel cupboard just as her mother had hidden her in a barrel of corn during Partition. Here, the repetition of events seems to suggest that Nimmo’s experience in 1984 cannot be understood without first understanding the earlier trauma of Partition. For Badami, the Komagata Maru incident anticipates Indian independence and Partition because it compels Indians to reexamine their loyalty to the British Empire; while the Air India bombing looks back to the 1947 trauma when communal conflict between religious groups erupted. Though the plot of the novel unfolds in chronological order, it is also in many ways cyclical, its structure replicating the interconnectedness of Indra’s net. What

Badami wants us to remember then is that the Komagata Maru and Air India cases are linked to larger transnational networks of power which, perhaps more importantly, have consequences in the quotidian lives of people. Thus, for example we are told that in 1965, when war breaks out between India and Pakistan, The Delhi Junction is transformed into a microcosmic representation of the nation, rife with religious and communal tensions. Inside the restaurant, the narrator notes, “seating maps altered;” the Pakistani Muslim men, “Hafez and Alibhai moved defensively over to a separate table across the room from the Indian group” (67). Instead of a syncretic space, the restaurant is increasingly marked with borders and boundaries: “[t]he linoleum floor between them turned into the Line of Control – an unseen barrier of barbed wire stretched across it, hot lights blazing warnings as soldiers stood guard with guns cocked” (67). The hostile re-demarcation of the restaurant space parodies the imagery of Indra’s web.

It is not surprising then that throughout the novel, Badami seems to be warning us against carrying memories of militant conflicts in India to the diasporic space (Canada). In her representation of the pathetic figure of Harjot Singh, Badami suggests that the remembering of the Komagata Maru’s failed voyage constitutes a dangerous form of nostalgia which is used to justify a lifetime of passive withdrawal from work and community. Some forms of remembering are less useful than others, she insists. Thus Badami is careful to warn us of the dangers of engaging in unchecked and often-phantasmatic recollections of the past. Whenever her characters begin to invest in the violent struggles of the homeland, and bring these struggles with them to the diasporic space, Badami seems to intervene and make her authorial voice heard, even though she often does so using the voices of her characters. Thus, for example, when Colonel

Samuel Hunt, an old British Indian army officer now living in Canada, angrily criticizes Canada for allowing the entry of non-white immigrants, “riff-raff thugs who come with no passports, no visas, no papers” (124-125), Majumdar playfully reminds him that because his wife came on the first boat to Canada, “she is one of those boat people” (125). Majumdar’s teasing remark works to undermine Hunt’s racist discourse and to suggest that there is no space for his rigid British values in the “new” country. Badami’s insistence that certain memories are better forgotten is exemplified perhaps most clearly when Leela explains that she will not shop at Mrs. Wu’s grocery store in Vancouver because she is angry with the Chinese for having invaded India. In response, Bibi-ji aggressively intervenes, lambasting her friend for carrying “irrational angers” (136) in her heart: “Forgetfulness was good, said Bibi-ji. A bad memory was necessary for a person wishing to settle in, to become one of the crowd, to become an *invisible* minority. This was the first lesson she imparted to her new friend” (136-37). Bibi-ji’s intervention captures what seems to be the message of Badami’s novel: that the endless cycle of revenge and retaliation is counter-productive, that it will only lead to more violence and more bloodshed; and thus what is necessary is a forgetting (or selective remembering) of the past. This is not to suggest that Badami’s novel is advocating the same kind of forgetting that is encouraged by official multiculturalism. Within the framework of multiculturalism, the diasporic subject must forget all forms of memory except those that are shallow and superficial. What Badami is suggesting is something rather different: she is suggesting that the violence and purist discourses of the homeland must be worked through in order for the diasporic subject to maintain a healthy relationship both to the past and the present. Thus, whereas her novel is suggesting that we must remember in

order to forget, to be cured of the past and to move forward, multiculturalism is encouraging us to overlook the past in its entirety.

Bibi-ji and her husband Pa-ji, who are at the heart of the novel, are represented as having successfully worked through the past: thus they are able to maintain balanced lives, opening their home to their neighbours and the new immigrants who pass through, while also working on improving their own condition. While Bibi-ji recommends a kind of healthy, selective forgetting (forget Chinese aggressions, forget the violence of Partition), Pa-ji seems to be involved in a pattern of behaviour that also hinges on a similar ideological agenda. Specifically, Pa-ji is actively involved not in the preservation of past memories but rather in “the invention of tradition.” Thus we are told that he has various photographs in his room which he claims are photographs of his heroic ancestors:

On one wall of his office were pictures of Gandhi and Nehru and lithographic prints of the ten gurus of Sikhism. There was an enormous, gaudy painting of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, who had created a united Punjab for the first time in history, in royal regalia. On another wall were a dozen framed photographs of people who Pa-ji claimed, to all those visiting or passing through the house, as his relatives. (200)

Of course, as Pa-ji reveals to Bibi-ji, these photographs are all fakes:

‘And now I will tell you a secret,’ Pa-ji had said... ‘These people are strangers. I don’t know even one of them....’ ‘Not even that one?’ Bibi-ji looked at her husband with round eyes and pointed to a particularly impressive photograph of a young man in the uniform of the British Sikh Regiment...Pa-ji had laughed. ‘Not even that one,’ he had said. ‘I found

him in a junk shop in Steveston.’ Three others had been retrieved from a shop in Petticoat Lane in London when Pa-ji was returning to India in search of a bride. Six had been purchased for a ridiculously low sum of money from an old man in an Amritsari gully, right beside the walls of the Golden Temple. (201-02)

The detail with which Badami describes Pa-ji’s invented history suggests that she is sympathetic to his invented version of the past. Badami also seems to be suggesting, as historian Eric Hobsbawm does, that if all traditions are invented, it is pointless to invest in a single tradition. As Hobsbawm writes, even those traditions “which appear or claim to be old are often quite recent in origin and sometimes invented” (1) and, “insofar as there is such reference to a historical past,” he goes on to say, “the peculiarity of ‘invented’ traditions is that the continuity with it is largely factitious” (2). In the novel, both Bibi-ji and Pa-ji, as peacemakers and negotiators, are arguably Badami’s most sympathetic characters. While Pa-ji cheerfully invents his past, Bibi-ji welcomes all kinds of Indians to Canada, not just Sikhs. Thus, we are told that while Pa-ji wanted to call their restaurant *Apna*, “a Punjabi word meaning Ours,” Bibi-ji “felt that they needed to have a broader appeal, so they settled on The Delhi Junction Café” (59). In the novel, The Delhi Junction becomes a symbol of national unity and diversity. As the narrator says, “The Delhi Junction had become a ritual, a necessity, a habit for many of the city’s growing population of desis who stopped by for a quick meal or afternoon tea” (59). It is a place that comes to represent the kind of remembering and forgetting Badami implicitly encourages: remembering the nation as an inclusive space and forgetting the violence and hostilities that can rupture the community.

Against Bibi-ji and Pa-ji's style of inclusive and productive remembering is the very aggressive "remembering" of Sikh militants, exemplified above all in the figure of Dr. Randhawa, who preaches vengeance and retaliation. In one of his speeches to the local Sikh community in Vancouver, Dr. Randhawa says that the "Sikhs have been betrayed" (253) first by the British and then by the Indians. In response to this betrayal, he calls for violence and retribution. As he says, "We demand, at the point of our swords, that the government of India return our Punjab to us... We demand Khalistan, a land for the Sikhs, the pure and the brave... We demand a return of all that has been taken from us with the past hundred years" (253). Randhawa reveals to his audience a map of the nation for Sikhs that he plans to carve out of India. The map stands as proof that Randhawa is, like Pa-ji, also inventing history, but in this case, his "invented tradition" is carefully critiqued by Badami's authorial voice which emerges in a conversation between Pa-ji and Bibi-ji. When Pa-ji asks Bibi-ji what she thought of Randhawa's speech, she immediately dismisses the Sikh militant as an "idiot" (257). When Bibi-ji goes on to say, "Why should we concern ourselves with such matters? We are Canadians now. Also I don't like the idea of more partitions and separations, more fiddling with borders" (257), we as readers are exposed once again to the central message of Badami's novel: that racialized minorities should work through and look ahead towards the "new" country rather than engaging in often dangerous recollections of an imagined past.

While Randhawa fails to convert Bib-ji and Pa-ji into Sikh militants, he finds success with their foster son Jasbeer who is captivated by his vitriolic diatribe. However, at the end of the novel, when Jasbeer realizes that it is through actions such as his that the Air India bombing has taken place, he is filled with immense regret. He writes to Preethi:

“I had become a monster. I didn’t bother to hide behind a disguise. I went around the villages of Punjab, banging on doors, holding out a cloth bag...These people were giving me their last pennies because they were terrified of me” (397 italics in the original). The conclusion of his letter captures his remorse particularly well: *“Preethi, I read about the Air India flight in the papers, I saw your mother’s name. I am so sorry”* (398 italics in the original). Thus the narrative repeatedly drives home the message that however heroic the militants may sound, however painful the memories of Partition are, citizens of the new country must forget much of these narratives. Even Partition, so central to the memories of Indians, is framed as having ominous significance if the wrong lessons are drawn from it.

To further complicate the politics of remembering and forgetting, Badami describes and dramatizes different types of nostalgia. Many of her characters indulge in a kind of dreamy, unproductive reliving of the past, some of it harmless, but much of it, Badami suggests, actually feeding into alienation and withdrawal. In studies of diaspora, nostalgia tends to be understood as an affective response to the lost homeland that is cultivated from the distant locale of the hostland. In an effort to theorize diasporic nostalgia, Stuart Hall writes, “the diasporic experience of displacement gives rise so profoundly to a certain imaginary plenitude, recreating the endless desire to return to ‘lost origins,’ to be once again with the mother, to go back to the beginning” (“Cultural Identity” 245). The diasporic subject is thus typically represented as longing for a past that no longer exists, for a place that was once familiar but can now only be retrieved through memory.

Badami's novel has the effect of complicating this understanding of diasporic nostalgia: what Badami reminds us is that the homesick diasporic subject – often criticized for her backward-looking gaze – was once ironically a Third World subject who longed to go abroad. From this perspective, nostalgia need not be understood only as a longing for the 'lost homeland' but also as the opposite: a longing for a home abroad that is constructed not from actual memories and lived experience, but rather from narratives recounted by others. Harjot Singh, as I have mentioned, imagines the city of Vancouver as a site of economic prosperity. Lying on his cot in a small village in Punjab, Harjot spends his time dreaming of the life he could have had in Canada had he been permitted to disembark from the Komagata Maru. "If they had allowed me to get off the Komagata Maru, you and your mother and your sister would now be living like queens" (11), Harjot says to his daughter, Sharanjeet. Sharanjeet inherits her father's desire to go "Abroad." Thus, when Kushwant Singh (later renamed Pa-ji) arrives from Canada to India to propose to her sister, Kanwar, Sharanjeet intervenes and asserts, "Canada, with its lavender soap and chocolate was her fate" (27 italics in the original). It is Sharanjeet rather than her sister, we are told, "who longed for Abroad" (27). By writing "Abroad" as though it were the name of a place, Badami emphasizes the way her characters romanticize the West, without knowing specific details about it.

What Badami's novel alerts us to is the possibility of reading nostalgia as a feeling driven by lack (in the Lacanian sense), a feeling that compels the subject to create what Salman Rushdie calls the "imaginary homeland" which paradoxically acquires the texture of reality, even though it is constructed only in the imagination. At home in India, therefore, Badami's characters seem to dream about going "Abroad;" and "Abroad" in

Canada, they seem to long for the comforts of home. In fact, in the novel, members of the South Asian Canadian community are represented as investing tremendous affective energy in the homeland, so much so that many of them seem to actually experience the homeland as more real than their country of adoption, both because of the homeland's status as originary and because of the diasporic subject's embeddedness in mundane acts of connection with 'home,' ie. Bibi-ji stays connected with the homeland by writing letters to her niece, Nimmo; Pa-ji names his house the Taj Mahal and spends his time writing the history of Sikhs; and Leela renames the streets and the mountains in Vancouver after those in India. In the novel, one passage in particular captures the way this idealized past excites the affective energies of members of the diasporic community. As the narrator says:

A taut rope tied them [members of the South Asian Canadian community] all to 'home' whether India or Pakistan. They saw their distant homes as if through a telescope, every small wound or scar or flare back there exaggerated, exciting their imaginations and their emotions, bringing tears to their eyes. They were like obsessed stargazers, whose distance from the thing they observed made it all the brighter, all the more important. (65)

Although diasporic nostalgia for the lost homeland has a dream-like, harmless quality here, Badami seems to suggest that looking forward rather than backward is more productive. Moreover, she suggests that even this seemingly harmless nostalgia can feed into religious and ethnic absolutisms. Thus, in one passage, a direct reference is made to the way the diasporic subject often compensates for feelings of homesickness and loss by investing (not only in psychic terms, but also in material ways) in the production of

fundamentalist and terrorist groups in the homeland. The reference is made at the Golden Temple by a woman who says to Bibi-ji: “It is people like you sitting in foreign countries, far away from everything, nice and safe, who create trouble. You are the ones who give money to these terrorists, and we are the ones who suffer!” (326). In the novel, Badami suggests that because Jasbeer fails repeatedly to fit into Canadian society (and is constantly getting into trouble at school), he finds a space of belonging among the Sikh fundamentalists who offer him the promise of authenticity and purity that he feels is lacking in the hostland. Nostalgia in the novel is constructed not as a simple backward glance towards an idealized and unattainable past, but also as a form of desire that changes shape as the subject occupies different geographical locations. When nostalgia becomes linked to the discourse of violence, Badami seems to suggest that fundamentalism then becomes a possibility.

While memories of Partition and the events around the storming of the Golden Temple figure as dangerously divisive, and nostalgia for an unattainable world of lost perfection is critiqued as pointless, Badami’s novel does cautiously celebrate some of the more domestic and everyday memories of many of the female protagonists, but only because these memories suggest that the women have moved beyond discourses of violence and rupture. This suggests that there is a gendered element in the selective remembering that Badami recommends. For one thing, the women tend to invest in more benign forms of memory—remembering smells, sounds, foods, and so on. Bibi-ji, for example, fondly remembers the smell of lavender soap that captured her senses when she was a child growing up in India, and Leela insists that Vancouver “smells just like Cubbon Park [in Bangalore] after the rains” (107). Nimmo, interestingly, refuses

altogether to invest in the discourse of homeland, insisting instead on looking forward rather than back. When her husband Satpal expresses anger about the political situation in Punjab, Nimmo responds in a manner that suggests that she does not share his concerns for the “imagined homeland.” She says, “And you are a Delhi-wallah, why are you concerned with matters in Punjab? You have never lived there” (220).

Rather than responding to violence in the homeland by reproducing it in the hostland, the women in Badami’s novel respond to the discourse of violence and rupture happening “there” by working in the wake of the tragedy to rebuild and reconnect the bonds of community “here.” Gurpreet, for example, has to attend to all the urgent and practical matters necessary for everyday survival, while her husband Harjot lies uselessly on his cot, consumed by a longing for Canada. When Harjot finally leaves his cot and disappears, Gurpreet responds quickly and pragmatically, spreading a rumour that her husband had joined a group of revolutionaries and was traveling about the country. That way, he is “a hero if he was alive, a martyr if he had died” (14), she reasons. Bibi-ji similarly has to compensate for her husband’s excessive nostalgia, in this case, his investment in generosity and hospitality, qualities that she sees as characteristic of the old country. When Pa-ji invites newcomers from India to stay at his house for free, Bibi-ji therefore intervenes to challenge what she sees as her husband’s overly indulgent and unnecessary hospitality towards strangers.

While the men in the novel like Dr. Randhawa or Jasbeer seem to engage more in the kind of nostalgia that feeds into extremist discourses, the women, whom Badami seems to approve of, often try to break away from the rigid structures of religious and ethnic absolutisms, even as they remember the past. For instance, Bibi-ji attempts to

transform The Delhi Junction restaurant into a space that has signifiers of both the past and the present, signifiers that challenge religious and national frameworks. Deliberately choosing items for the restaurant's menu that "will not offend any religious group" (61) and decorating the restaurant with signifiers of various nation-states, Bibi-ji tries to unite her customers, and, temporarily, she succeeds. In spite of the communal tensions in India, the novel tells us that "Indians and the Pakistanis ...sat hunched around the same table," (65) fed and pacified by Bibi-ji's endless supply of samosas and chai.

What Badami's novel seems to suggest is similar to what Mukherjee's short story is saying: that certain forms of memory are useful for the production of a new nation based on remembering, while other forms have the potential to generate further ruptures and ongoing violence. Badami's focus on the everyday, on the lives of ordinary people and their relationship to the traumatic event is what drives her point home. From many of the women in her text, we are meant to learn that engaging in recollections of the past in "everyday" and prosaic ways can be healthy, if it means that we have worked through the past. The most obvious lesson comes perhaps from Jasbeer, who returns to his home in India in the final pages of the book as a reformed terrorist. From his example, we are meant to see that a violent investment in discourses of nationalism and homeland is dangerous and that genuine feelings of home and belonging can be acquired but only if there is a careful balance between the past and the present, remembering and forgetting.

Eisha Marjara's Desperately Seeking Helen

Eisha Marjara both directs and acts as the lead protagonist in *Desperately Seeking Helen*, a film that brings together home movies, Hindi cinema, musical montages, documentary interviews, and still photography. The film is dedicated to the memory of

Marjara's mother, Devinder Marjara, her sister, Seema Marjara, and to "those who lost their lives on Air India Flight 182 in 1985." Marjara's film is very different from the fictions I have examined thus far. The film refuses to deal with the bombing in explicit ways, and rarely remembers any "factual" details about the trauma. In the film, the bombing has an unexpected effect: it seems to push Marjara towards a search for her roots, which takes a bizarre form of a search for the Bollywood vamp Helen who was first introduced to her during her childhood. As Marjara says in the film, "I was six, maybe seven when I first set my eyes upon her on that screen. Her name was Helen." At this point, the film cuts to a musical montage featuring the provocatively dressed Helen who dances and sings playfully to a crowd of Indian men dressed in suits and women dressed conservatively in dresses or ethnic clothing. In the background, we hear Marjara's voice again: "Mommy, Mommy, when I grow up, I want go to Bombay and become a movie star just like Helen." Marjara, whose family migrated from India to Canada in 1971, grew up in Trois Rivieres, a small town in rural Quebec where her father, we are told, was the only turbaned man around. In the film, we follow thirty-year-old Marjara in the present-day as she tries desperately to find the elusive Indian film star that had captured her attention when she was a child. The search takes her to India, a place she last visited to dispose of the ashes of her mother and sister. Haunted by the figure of Helen, Marjara chases her in Bombay shops, on the streets, and in the market, only to realize that the woman she is following is not the Bollywood vamp at all but a ghostly image that Marjara herself conjures up. During the course of her journey, Marjara comes into contact with numerous film stars including Padma Khanna and

Madhumati, who played vampish roles like Helen, and Bollywood heroines of an earlier era like Hema Malini. Helen, however, is never to be found.

In a film that deals at least obliquely with the serious issues of loss and trauma attached to the Air India bombing, Marjara's quest for Helen might appear frivolous and out of place, but I argue that it is not. Rather, I suggest that the search for the Bollywood film star might be read as part of a multilayered and complex plot about working through and coming to terms with loss, a plot that is intertwined with Marjara's teenage struggle with anorexia to which the film repeatedly refers, with her childhood experience as a racialized subject in a predominantly white Canadian town, and with the horrific and sudden death of her mother with whom Marjara had a conflicted relationship. The crash figures in the film as a moment of clarity. It forces Marjara to realize that her eating disorder was linked, on the one hand, to the feelings of inadequacy and inferiority brought on by the privileging of slim white women in Canada, and on the other, to the shame she attached to her mother's inability to assimilate to the dominant culture. The quest for closure after her mother's death thus becomes conflated with the quest for the film star Helen who symbolizes for Marjara the kind of chosen and confident liminality that she herself as a South Asian Canadian diasporic subject struggles to inhabit.

Marjara is as a child captivated by Helen, but she is also tremendously enamored of the slim, white Barbie dolls that she plays with, and the heroic female superheroes such as Charlie's Angels and Wonder Woman that she watches regularly on television. The film seems to suggest that the presence of these thin, white women on television constructs Marjara as dissatisfied with her own appearance. Thus, in the black and white dramatic reenactments of Marjara's childhood, we see Marjara complaining about the

long braid that her mother forces her to wear that distinguishes her from the blond-haired heroines that she aspires to emulate; or measuring her waist size in the mirror and wondering how Wonder Woman “ever fit into a tiny costume;” or rejecting her mother’s food in favour of what she calls the “Beverly Hills Grapefruit diet.” In the film, one of the most powerful images is a black and white photograph that depicts Marjara as a child sitting together with a friend and a playing with a blond-haired Barbie; the image suggests that though we can’t see it, a kind of psychic damage is at work, as the children are taught that the slim white body is acceptable and their plump non-white bodies unacceptable and abject.

Marjara’s mother as a plump, hard-working Punjabi woman is set against the white superheroes and is ridiculed. For Marjara, her mother appears to her as anything but heroic: she gave up her job as a schoolteacher when she got married and moved to Canada, where she became a housewife, and spent her time doing mundane tasks like cleaning the house and making chapattis. As a child, Marjara perceives her mother’s nurturing gestures as oppressive and controlling. Thus, she complains when her mother bans her from watching television and forces her to do her homework, or when her mother intervenes in her attempt to diet and compels her to eat her ethnic cooking. For Marjara, the ethnic food made by her mother figures as humiliating. It is enigmatic: as Marjara says, “mom’s cooking wasn’t the stuff you found in calorie cookbooks.” In *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body*, Susan Bordo suggests that for an anorectic, the mother is often perceived as threatening and as too overwhelming. Thus, she writes, anorexia is often understood as

a species of unconscious feminist protest, involving anger at the limitations of the traditional female role, rejection of values associated with it, and fierce rebellion against allowing their futures to develop in the same direction as their mothers' lives. (156)

Bordo goes on to suggest that in a typical anorexic family configuration, the mothers tend to be “submissive to their husbands but very controlling of their children. Practically all had had promising careers which they had given up to take care of their husbands and families full-time, a task they take very seriously” (156). Anorexia becomes a way for the child to reject the mother's influence. Bordo's argument is useful, but in Marjara's case, the politics of gender are complicated by the politics of race. Marjara's mother is perceived not only as overwhelming and oppressively nurturing, but also as embarrassingly unable to conform to the prevailing aesthetic and social norms established by white Canadian society. The film repeatedly emphasizes that Marjara's mother, like the food she cooks, doesn't fit into Canadian society. Thus we are told several times in the film that Marjara's mother had “one foot in Canada and one foot in India,” and that she never found a balance between the two spheres. The image of her mother slipping across the snowy landscape of Quebec becomes a metaphor for her disabling liminality. Although her mother tries to adapt to Canadian society, white racism makes it impossible for her to fully integrate. Thus when she finally gets a job as a schoolteacher, we are told that she is very soon replaced by a white woman with a “proper accent.” Marjara calls her mother the “Indian lady who taught English in a French school and spoke both languages differently.” The way she describes her mother as the “Indian lady” has a distancing effect: it is clear that Marjara wants to distinguish

herself from her mother whom she sees as a failure. Thus, rather than taking pride in her mother's ability to learn French and English, to get a job, however temporarily, Marjara internalizes white Canada's perceptions of her mother as the inferior and subordinate other. For Marjara, her mother's failure to assimilate to the dominant culture becomes a source of humiliation. In comparison to the thin white superheroes on television, her mother is dull, domestic, and perhaps most importantly, far too overweight to meet Canada's aesthetic ideal. Anorexia becomes a way for Marjara to literally distance herself from her mother. Thus, in one scene, she remembers that when she went to her cousin's wedding, she bore no resemblance to her family. She says, "I didn't even look like one of the family. No certainly, I didn't look like my mother." Indeed, whereas Marjara appears emaciated in her mother's sari, her mother stands next to her appearing voluptuous and full-bodied.

Marjara is at the point of death when the plane crashes. In fact, we are told that Marjara only escapes the fate of her mother and sister because her struggle with anorexia forces her to stay back in Canada instead of joining them on their ill-fated trip to India. As Marjara herself says, "Summer came and my mother and little sister were ready to leave for India. Discharge meant I could leave with them. But I fell a few pounds short of my goal weight so they left without me and I stayed behind." During the course of the film, we are presented with grotesque images of Marjara's emaciated body. In one scene, Marjara, who has been hospitalized, is forced to look critically at her own image. At this point, she seems unable to understand the problems that underlie her anorexia, and thus instead of gazing at her reflection sympathetically, she looks at herself with disappointment. "I don't like my face," she says to the doctor. It is important that the

news of the trauma follows this particular scene. It suggests that Marjara has reached what is perhaps her lowest point.

The plane figures as a site of clarity, for the shock of the trauma forces Marjara to re-member and reconsider her ideas about beauty and loss. Going to India in search of Helen is a way for her to complete the journey her mother was unable to do, and to recover her mother's memory. It is a way to work through her identity and to search for rootedness. When she arrives in India, she says to herself, "Okay Eisha, you're in India now. Act like you know where you're going, what you're doing, and especially *who you are.*" Bollywood becomes the source of healing and it offers Marjara a way to renegotiate her relationship as a South Asian Canadian to both India and the West. One musical montage in particular seems to suggest that Bollywood gives Marjara a new aesthetic and a new perspective about ideals of beauty and slimness in the West. This particular montage is from the 1977 film *Darling Darling* starring Zeenat Aman and Dev Anand. The song satirizes Western ideas of diet and beauty, and makes a distinction between the West and India, which in the famous song sequence which gives the film its name, is associated with consumption and natural beauty. In the song, the Westernized Anand is playfully trying to tell Aman, who figures as more traditionally Indian, to eat at the dining table. When she asks about the food and tells him that she is hungry, he responds, "Silly girl. Don't you know? You'll get fat. Modern folks don't go dining. They go dieting!" The sequence playfully laughs at Western ideas of slimness and beauty. By turning to *Darling Darling*, Marjara draws attention to the way Bollywood in the 1970s was negotiating between Western values and Indian ones in a kind of confident, playful and satirical way. It is important that this negotiation is happening in

India; the film is amused by Western diets, but it also admires them. This kind of relationship to the West is attractive to Marjara, whose negotiation with the West thus far has been terrifying and has led to her anorexia; it has brought her close to death. Bollywood, however, manages to successfully negotiate between East and West.

Helen becomes a literal symbol of that negotiation: she's attractive because she is liminal, because she effortlessly embodies both Eastern and Western values. Helen is of mixed origin: she is half English and half Indo-Burmese. Thus, her appearance distinguishes her from the "Indian" heroine. As Geetanjali Gangoli notes, Helen's "mixed' parentage...helped her to 'look' the part," and thus she "often played the Anglo-Indian woman in the 1950s and the 60s" (149). Whereas Marjara's mother, we are told, struggles to find a stable relationship to the homeland and the hostland, India and Canada, Helen is balanced. She is capable of effortlessly occupying the border zone between East and West. Thus, in the film, Helen is presented as a figure that is comfortable with her sense of self, who has the ability to slip seamlessly into roles without losing her own identity in the process. As Marjara says of Helen: "Being everyone else's fantasy came to her naturally. In the over seven hundred movies she's performed, she was never the same woman. Yet, you always knew she was Helen. The star never forgot who she was and where she belonged." Whereas Helen occupies the border zone with a sense of ease and effortlessness, Marjara herself struggles with her sense of identity. As she herself admits in the film, Helen's ability to belong was "not something that came naturally to me." Marjara is unable to conform to the kind of femininity that her mother advocates, nor is she capable of conforming to the white beauty ideal in Canada. The images of her Barbie dolls, for example, remind her that she

is not white. For her, then, Helen represents something in between, something accessible. In the film, Helen represents a kind of intermediary figure between her Indian mother and the white superheroes.

As the Westernized vamp, Helen, we are told, is distinguished from the quintessentially “Indian” heroine who marries the hero at the end of the film. What Marjara seems to like is that Helen is full-figured like her mother but sexually aggressive like the Western superhero. In one of the earliest musical montages in the film, we see Helen dancing in a crowded restaurant. In the scene, which comes from the 1969 Hindi film *Talash*, Helen stands out not only because her provocative dress exposes her full figure, but also because she moves around the room playfully and she dances, sings, and teases the men. When she asks one man teasingly if she can sit next to him, he smiles excitedly while his wife, dressed conservatively in a sari, frowns and turns away disapprovingly. Like Helen, Marjara is more comfortable off centre; she doesn’t want to occupy the role of the heroine like her mother who was married off when she was twenty years old. As Marjara says in the film, “The thing to know about the vamp is that she’s usually an outsider. She’s that foreign looking woman the hero thinks twice about before taking home to mother.” For Marjara, Helen represents the wholeness of childhood fantasy, but also India. She is understood as a “grown up lady who never grew out of being a kid,” as someone who always had fun. By setting Helen up as an intermediary figure, Marjara finds a way to deal with her mother’s death and to resolve the conflicted relationship she had with her mother. To be Helen is to be a figure who can be Canadian and have control over her life, but also be Indian, and appear voluptuous. Thus, the search

for Helen is essentially a search for a healthy memory of her mother, a memory that can be worked through and put to rest.

Conclusion:

The imaginative fictions that I have explored in this chapter are significant because they partake of the process of memorializing the trauma and do so by imaginatively filling out details of the historical record. These texts also comment on the process of memorializing trauma and moving toward a future marked by a new, more inclusive nation for racialized subjects. Both Mukherjee and Badami work through past violence and divisions in order to arrive at a diasporic community based on unity rather than friction, one that productively remembers the past. Marjara finds a way to reconcile her fraught relationship with her mother and to preserve her memory. These texts render the trauma memorable because they focus not only on the traumatic events, but also on ordinary people whose day-to-day lives are structured around the Komagata Maru incident and the Air India bombing. It is through the lens of the imagined everyday that the trauma becomes enshrined in our memories, and thus that it can become part of the nation.

Chapter Four: Postmodern Forgetfulness and the Broken Passages of the Komagata Maru and Air India Cases

Introduction:

Although postmodernism is difficult to pin down, perhaps the most oft-cited definition of postmodernism comes from *The Postmodern Condition* (1979) in which Jean-Francois Lyotard argues that the postmodern condition of the modern world is characterized by the dissolution of grand narratives of progress and the demise of a stable, unified subject. “Simplifying to the extreme,” Lyotard writes, “I define postmodernism as incredulity toward metanarratives” (xxiv). Extending the postmodern condition into the realm of aesthetics, we can identify postmodern fictions by their suspicion of hegemonic and totalizing narratives, a suspicion that manifests stylistically in the form of fragmentation, self-reflexivity, and deliberate playfulness. The postmodern narrative resists the kind of coherent linearity and closure that is typical of a modernist aesthetic and instead insists on dissonance and openness. Linda Hutcheon, in a study of postmodern Canadian literature, argues that postmodernism “cannot but be political at least in the sense that its representations – its images and stories – are anything but neutral” (*Postmodernism* 3). For Hutcheon, one of the primary concerns of postmodernism

is to de-naturalize some of the dominant features of our way of life; to point out that those entities that we unthinkingly experience as ‘natural’ (they might even include capitalism, patriarchy, liberal humanism) are in fact ‘cultural;’ made by us, not given to us. (2)

Hutcheon's tendency to celebrate postmodernism as an inherently political aesthetic practice has been challenged by feminist critics who have suggested that postmodernism might deflect and undermine their political agendas, a fact Hutcheon herself acknowledges. For example, Sylvia Walby argues that "[p]ost-modernism in social theory has fragmented the concepts of sex, 'race,' and class, denying the pertinence of overarching theories of patriarchy, racism, and capitalism" (32).

Rather than dismissing postmodernism as politically unproductive or celebrating its radical potential, I suggest that the effects of a postmodern aesthetic depend on the context in which it is used. To memorialize events like the 1914 Komagata Maru incident and the 1985 Air India bombing, I argue that postmodernism is politically inadequate. These events, which have been subject to a kind of forgetting, are now only precariously embedded in the national imaginary. Thus postmodernism, because it encourages a playful and comic remembering of the past, runs the risk of reinforcing the assumption that these events need not be taken seriously. The texts that I examine include the brief treatment of the Air India bombing in Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* (1987) and the more sustained playful representations of the broken passage in Sharon Pollock's play *The Komagata Maru Incident* (1976) and Srinivas Krishna's film *Masala* (1993). Because these texts depart too far from the historical record and move into the realm of theatricality and playfulness, they memorialize the trauma in a way that deflects (and indeed forgets) some of the most important political aspects of trauma such as the agency of those involved in the Komagata Maru incident, or the seriousness of histories of exclusion and racism underlying the Air India bombing. Thus I want to articulate my own dissatisfaction with the political possibilities afforded by postmodern reconstructions

of the broken passage, and to suggest that we should be aware of the way these particular texts engage in a forgetting of the Komagata Maru incident and the Air India bombing, even as they remember these events.

Salman Rushdie's The Satanic Verses

When Iran's Ayatollah Khomeini issued a *fatwa* in 1989 against Rushdie for his publication of *The Satanic Verses*, he also symbolically sent a message to the world that a work of fiction is ideologically embedded in the real world, that it has political consequences, and that it is never "just a book." The publication of Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* gave rise to what was perhaps one of the most emotionally charged global controversies around a work of fiction in the modern era. "The Rushdie Affair" as it was called, fuelled worldwide discussions about a writer's responsibilities, freedom of speech, and the relationship between Islam and the West. From these discussions, it became clear that an all too familiar binarism was resurfacing: Islam was being constructed as backward-looking and archaic while the West was being represented as modern and progressive. As one critic notes, "the Rushdie Affair" seemed to have anticipated what Samuel Huntington would in 1993 call a "clash of civilizations" between Islam and the West (Dawson 123). What angered (moderate and fundamentalist) Muslim populations as well as many intellectuals around the world was not only the Orientalist content of the novel, but also the seemingly irreverent style in which Islam was being portrayed. In the first part of this chapter, I want to extend the debate about Rushdie's postmodern aesthetic practices and consider not so much Rushdie's representation of Islam (which has been sufficiently critiqued), but an aspect of the novel which has tended to be

neglected: the brief yet very crucial remembering of the 1985 bombing of Air India Flight 182.

At the very outset of Rushdie's novel, we are presented with two Indian men – Gibreel Farishta and Saladin Chamcha – falling towards the English Channel from an Air India plane that has exploded in mid air. This is a deliberate reference to the historical bombing of Air India Flight 182 which took place between the borders of India and Canada in 1985. The plane, we are told, has been hijacked for one hundred and eleven days by four Sikh separatists – three men and one woman – all from Canada. In the novel, Rushdie renames the plane carrying the doomed victims: the historical plane was called Emperor *Kanishka* while in Rushdie's fiction it becomes *Bostan*, named after one of the gardens in Paradise. In a typically postmodern fashion, seemingly disparate narratives are brought together. The explosion thus is not only represented as a signifier of the fall from divine grace, but it is also the “big bang” (4), the sign of the beginning of time, and the beginning of life. It is playfully narrated as an extraordinary event but also as a mundane act of migration; as the narrator explains, it was “[j]ust two brown men, falling hard, nothing new about that...climbed too high, got above themselves, flew too close to the sun” (6). I would argue that Rushdie's deliberate playfulness and insistence on intertextuality results in an emptying out of history, a loss of political edge and a diminution of a potentially radical subjectivity. Attention is constantly being shifted away from the bombing of Air India Flight 182 as Rushdie overlays the historical event with countless other narratives. Thus, memory and the historical record seem to be displaced by this endless play of signifiers. Rather than challenging state forgetting, Rushdie's reconstruction of the Air India bombing has the potential to feed into it.

Rushdie not only obscures the boundaries between fantasy and reality in his representation of the Air India bombing, but also sensationalizes the motives and actions of the terrorists. Departing from the historical account of the Air India bombing in which all the perpetrators were men, Rushdie draws our attention to the ahistorical figure of Tavleen, the female terrorist. In one particularly striking passage, Tavleen removes her clothes in a kind of striptease and stands naked before her captors, revealing “the grenades like extra breasts nestling in her cleavage” (82). The passage is worth quoting in its entirety for the shocking way it transforms the act of terrorism into a thrilling spectacle and for the way it sexualizes the figure of the female terrorist. Rushdie writes:

In order to prove to her captives, and also to her fellow-captors, that the idea of failure, or surrender would never weaken her resolve, she [Tavleen] emerged from her momentary retreat in the first-class cocktail lounge to stand before them like a stewardess demonstrating safety procedures. But instead of putting on a lifejacket and holding up blow-tube whistle etcetera, she quickly lifted the loose black djellabah that was her only garment and stood before them stark naked, so that they could all see the arsenal of her body, the grenades like extra breasts nestling in her cleavage, the gelignite taped to her thighs, just the way it had been in Chamcha’s dream. (82)

Although critics such as D.C.R.A. Goonetilleke have suggested that the figure of Tavleen reveals “terrorism...as frightening and perverse” (74), I argue that Rushdie is doing something much more complex. For one thing, we are told that Tavleen is a Sikh, but the way Rushdie depicts her conjures up an image that is popular in Western

hegemonic constructions of Islamic terrorism: that of a *Muslim* woman whose veil conceals a body armed with monstrous energies. In the Western imaginary, this image powerfully undermines the notion of the woman as the nurturing mother. Here, the body of Tavleen, like the stereotypical Muslim suicide bomber, becomes a kind of deadly weapon, one that has the potential to destroy all the male captors aboard the plane. Rushdie's insistence on obscuring the boundaries between Sikh terrorism (a realm dominated by men) and Islamic terrorism (a realm in which Muslim women are often portrayed as active participants) is problematic not only because it distorts and sensationalizes the act of Sikh terrorism and renders it much more spectacular and shocking, but also because it comes in the way of memorializing the trauma. Rushdie unhinges the Air India bombing from its historical context and maps it onto an entirely different political sphere, namely that of Islamic terrorism. Through the representation of Tavleen, the act of terrorism becomes part of a fantasy of sexual domination. Tavleen is simultaneously the object of desire and a threateningly emasculating female figure not only for her male captors but also for the reader. Rushdie's insistence on sexualizing the terrorist seems to work to undermine the horrific consequences of terrorism as well as misrepresent the motives of the terrorist. The Air India bombing becomes a source of entertainment, sexual titillation, and comic relief rather than a site for the possibility for future change. Rushdie's postmodern aesthetics, his insistence on intertextuality and playfulness, thus seem to run counter to the project of mapping the trauma onto the nation's historical record. Instead of participating in the process of memorializing the broken passage, Rushdie encourages us to engage in an active forgetting of the past.

What seems to be important to Rushdie is not the Air India bombing but rather the metaphor of liminality that it evokes. Thus, as I have argued, the opening episode deflects attention away from the actual bombing of Flight 182 and focuses on the two men as they come tumbling down towards England as though, we are told, they were “babies entering the birth canal” (5). As critics (Nasta, Goonetilleke, Dawson) have suggested, Gibreel Farishta and Saladin Chamcha are twin characters who respond to the process of migration in opposing ways; whereas the latter embraces a hybrid identity, the former attempts to assimilate fully into dominant British culture. As the two men fall, they engage in a singing competition with one another, and what they sing reflects their individual responses to migration. Gibreel therefore sings Indian *ghazals* and a popular Hindi song about the adaptability of Indians to other cultures, while Saladin Chamcha tries to outdo him with his rendition of the British national anthem.

The Air India bombing is thus used to dramatize the process of migration that leaves the migrant subject in an in-between sphere, a place from which he is forced to ask: “Who am I?” Consequently, the liminality that Rushdie wants us to remember is problematic: it is a liminality of creative possibility, suitable to a narrative of dynamic immigrant energies. This kind of in-betweenness obfuscates the liminality of the Air India bombing that I have chosen to read, a liminality that it is bleak and that conjures up an image of people dying in space, unclaimed by the two nations they have cherished. By attaching playfulness and creative possibility to the transitional identities of diasporic subjects, Rushdie plays down and deliberately forgets the tragic dimensions of the Air India disaster. Rushdie’s response to the Air India bombing is disappointingly apolitical. The explosion seems to mark the end of fantasies about home and belonging. What we

get instead, the narrator says, is “the debris of the soul, broken memories, sloughed-off selves, severed mother-tongues, violated privacies, untranslatable jokes, extinguished futures, lost loves, the forgotten meaning of hollow, booming words, land, belonging, home” exploding at once (4-5). Rushdie uses the bombing as a symbol for the productive border zone occupied by migrant subjectivities and while he does so effectively, he ignores the material consequences of the Air India bombing, the actual experiences of trauma, and the (arguably) more serious liminality that is associated with death.

Rushdie’s failure to take seriously the Air India bombing as a political concern is perhaps an indication of Rushdie’s contempt for Canada. Canada seems to be represented as an unknown political space, and thus the Air India bombing is playfully displaced. Rushdie’s sympathies seem to lie not with the victims of the bombing of Air India but rather with the experiences of racialized migrants like Gibreel and Saladin in modern-day Britain. After landing on British soil, Saladin for example is apprehended by the British police and brutalized. The scene in which Saladin is attacked is horrific and is a clear example of racism in postcolonial Britain. Thus Saladin’s pleas and his attempt to explain to the officers that he is British and not an illegal immigrant are met with laughter and more police brutality. As the narrative unfolds, Rushdie dramatizes the processes of racialization that construct the non-white other as ugly, grotesque, and unclean by transforming Saladin Chamcha into a goat. While Rushdie’s use of the postmodern form enables him to effectively critique the oppression against racialized others in Britain, it also encourages him to present in an apolitical manner other issues like the bombing of Air India 182. Rushdie is indeed a political writer, as many critics have argued, but in the process of trying to critique racism in Britain, he represents the Air India bombing as

comic, trivial, and grotesque, rather than as an event which, properly remembered and commemorated, might serve as the basis for challenging the nation's forgetting and inaugurating political change.

Sharon Pollock's The Komagata Maru Incident

While Rushdie's novel is cruelly playful, Pollock's *The Komagata Maru Incident* has a much more serious register. A one-act play of about seventy-five minutes, *The Komagata Maru Incident* was first brought to stage in 1976 at the Vancouver Playhouse. In the play, Pollock returns to the site of the Komagata Maru detained at Canada's Western seaboard and dramatizes the confrontation that took place between the passengers aboard the ship who wanted to land and the Canadian authorities who sought to thwart their every effort, issuing deportation orders, limiting their supply of food and water, and eventually intimidating them with the possibility of gunfire. As one of the first literary responses to the Komagata Maru incident in Canada, Pollock's play, one reviewer observed, had broken "brave new ground" (Wyman). In her prefatory note to the written text, Pollock clearly expresses her desire to counteract the nation's tendency to write out past wrongs from the public record. She writes: "As a Canadian, I feel that much of our history has been misrepresented or even hidden from us." Refusing to see the Komagata Maru case as an isolated incident, relegated to Canada's past, Pollock elaborates: "Until we recognize our past, we cannot change our future" (Playwright's Note). Pollock seems to recognize the importance of placing diasporic trauma on the historical map of the nation, and of remembering the trauma in order to alter the shape of the nation for the future. However, as I shall show, Pollock's play ultimately departs too far from historical fact, and in so doing, it encourages a kind of remembering based on sympathy and pity

that might be understood as problematic; for this kind of remembering runs the risk of reinscribing the very power asymmetries between white and non-white, Canadian and other, that Pollock, at the same time, tries to undermine.

When *The Komagata Maru Incident* was first written and produced in 1976, racist attacks against the South Asian Canadian community had resurfaced in British Columbia. More importantly, it was these attacks that brought to surface earlier memories of the Komagata Maru incident which had been suppressed, if not completely silenced, in Canada's national narratives. Members of the South Asian community responded to the physical attacks against their homes and shops in Vancouver in 1973 by forming a small private protection agency: the East Indian Citizens' Defense Committee. Yet, as John R. Wood explains, violence did not decline; rather, "in 1974 and 1975, more racial incidents occurred, not only in Vancouver but in its surrounding municipalities" (553). Within the Sikh community itself (which was the largest South Asian group in British Columbia), tensions also arose, as "moderate" and "traditionalist" groups competed for control over the management of the Khalsa Diwan Society on Ross Street in Vancouver. Media coverage of these tensions used exclusionary rhetoric that was reminiscent of the Komagata Maru affair. *The Globe and Mail* headline, for example, read: "Obey the law or leave B.C., Sikhs are told" (24 Feb. 1973).

What Pollock seems to remember in her play, therefore, is not only Canada's ill treatment of the Indians aboard the Komagata Maru in 1914, but also the ongoing violence committed against members of the South Asian diasporic community. In her play, we, as spectators, are constructed in a double temporal dimension: we are meant to inhabit the contemporary moment with its enduring racism against the South Asian

diaspora, particularly the Sikh community in British Columbia, while also returning back in time to 1914, a place from which the Komagata Maru incident is rendered temporally immediate. The character of T.S., who acts as the embodied Master of Ceremonies, addresses us directly. Dressed in a suit, a top hat and gloves, carrying a cane, and accompanied by circus music, T.S. takes on the role of the ringmaster. He invites us, as spectators, to take our seats and watch as he unveils the Komagata Maru:

Hurry! Hurry! Hurry! Right this way, ladies and gentlemen! First chance to view the Komagata Maru! At this very moment steaming towards picturesque Vancouver Harbour. Yes sireee! The Komagata Maru! A first-class –let the buyer beware – Japanese steamer, 329.2 feet in length, 2,926 gross tonnage! Captained by one Yomamoto, remember that name. And Japanese crew, carrying a cargo of coal! And 346 Sikhs, count em! Plus 30 East Indians, religious affiliation unknown! Add em all together and what do you get? That is correct, sir! Give the man a cigar! Three hundred and seventy-six is the answer! Three hundred and seventy-six Asians, to be precise, and all of them bound for Oh Canada, We stand on guard for thee! (1-2)

The metaphor of the circus is meant to interpellate us as the 1914 spectators who lined the shore to watch as Canadian officials came face-to-face with the passengers aboard the Komagata Maru. As members of Pollock’s audience, we are asked to assume responsibility then and now for our part in the construction and ongoing formation of a “white Canada.” We are forced to consider, writes Robert Nunn, “the predominance of caucasians in [our] own composition.” After all, Pollock’s play, he argues, demonstrates

that “the predominance of ‘the White Race’ in our country...didn’t just happen; choices were made and continue to be made to maintain it” (56).

To the extent that Pollock’s circus trope denaturalizes the idea of a “white Canada” and reminds us that what we are watching is a construction like the play itself, it is a recognizably postmodern feature of *The Komagata Maru Incident*; it draws attention to the fact that the play is deliberately self-reflexive. However, there are also several aspects of the play that depart from the elements –playfulness, irony, parody, self-reflexivity – associated with postmodernism and instead conform to the conventions of the realist text, which purports to be mimetic, and to represent one version of reality as the only version. In their most conventional form, realist texts, Marina MacKay argues, offer “a serious treatment of the everyday lives of the ordinary, un-aristocratic masses” and inscribe “those ordinary lives in their very specific social and historical context” (12). Commenting on the style of Pollock’s text, Sherrill Grace and Gabriele Helms note, “The play is a fascinating hybrid form: *a realist story* is dramatized in a *highly presentational style* that draws upon the conventions and aims of documentary art” (86 italics added for emphasis). Pollock’s play, that is to say, combines realism and postmodernism, or representation and presentation and it does so, on the one hand, by playfully representing the Komagata Maru incident as a circus, and dramatizing the fact that this is a play within a play, and on the other hand, by offering accounts of a mother and her child struggling to come to Canada, and an Anglo-Indian official trying to come to terms with his identity. Such accounts are meant to be understood as “real,” and as historically accurate. Pollock’s realist representation of the figure of Hopkinson, the head of Canadian

Intelligence and a member of the Department of Immigration, is particularly worth noting.

As viewers, we are drawn in by William Hopkinson's personal struggle over his mixed race identity. Secondly, there is also the unnamed woman and her unseen child who are affect-laden figures and whose struggle is meant to move us; these figures take the place of the historical passengers aboard the ship, most of whom were Sikh men and former members of the British Army. As the play unfolds, we get a realist account of the woman and her struggle to unite her five-year-old son with his uncle in Canada. The more we learn about the woman and listen in on her conversations with her son, the more she appears to be a three-dimensional figure. What Pollock seems to insist on is that we feel sympathy for the woman and her child, and in that sense, the playwright is drawing on classical conventions of the 19th century realist novel which also sought to use mimetic representations of day-to-day life to arouse sympathy in the reader, and encourage her to identify with the characters in the text.

Pollock's unique brand of postmodernism/realism might be read as somewhat problematic for a few reasons: first, in her representation of Hopkinson, Pollock sets up as sympathetic a man who would normally be understood as betraying the Indian cause, and in so doing, she undermines the subversive potential of the play. Similarly, by replacing the heterogeneous collective of Indians aboard the Komagata Maru with vulnerable figures like the mother and her child, Pollock, as I shall show, undercuts the political agency of the largely male group of historical passengers.

Although Pollock is memorializing the trauma rather than dispersing and defusing memory the way Rushdie does, what she seems to be doing in her representation of

Hopkinson, the head of Canadian intelligence, is perhaps even more dangerous.

Hopkinson was an important player in the Komagata Maru incident. Historians such as Hugh Johnston have speculated that he was born of an Indian mother and a British father. Born in India in 1880, Hopkinson moved to Canada in 1908 when he was hired by the Canadian government to work as an immigration agent and interpreter (Johnston, *Voyage* 1). Hopkinson supplied intelligence not only to the Canadian government but also to the British Raj and the American government, and thus he was paid by all three. As Johnston notes, Hopkinson “drew an annual salary from the Canadian government, a stipend and expenses from the Indian office, and a retainer from the American immigration service” (1). Hopkinson, who was clearly aligned with the dominant community, was thus understood by members of the South Asian Canadian community as being responsible in part for the turning away of the passengers aboard the Komagata Maru ship and thus many expressed their approval of Mewa Singh’s actions when he killed Hopkinson in the aftermath of the Komagata Maru incident.

In Pollock’s play, Hopkinson is depicted as a victim. What we learn as the play unfolds is that Hopkinson’s racist attitude towards the South Asian migrants (represented on the stage through the metaphor of the mother and her child) who have arrived to Canada aboard the Komagata Maru is the result of his failure to come to terms with his own identity as an Anglo-Indian. Despite Hopkinson’s attempts to conceal his Indian heritage and to draw attention to his father’s British identity, Evy, one of the two prostitutes in the play, exposes his hybrid identity: “Billy’s mother’s brown!” (50), she proclaims. By drawing attention to Hopkinson’s internal crisis, Pollock seems to suggest that Hopkinson’s racism can be diagnosed as a symptom of having suffered a personal

trauma rather than as part of a systemic problem. Hopkinson might be the perpetrator of racial violence, the play suggests, but he too is a victim: “You’re stupid, Bill...You think that you use Georg, you think that you use Bella Singh, you think that you use me, but you’re the one that’s being used...they’re using you and Billy Boy’s too dumb to know” (50), says Evy. Pollock is asking us to read Hopkinson’s ill treatment of the “mother” aboard the Komagata Maru ship as a rejection of his own Indian mother. Thus, while it is gratifying to read Pollock’s critique of the Canadian state, it is also troubling that Pollock seems to explain away the violence that was carried out against the passengers aboard the Komagata Maru.

Pollock also displaces the political agency of the historical passengers aboard the Komagata Maru by replacing them with one woman who is both a mother and a widow and who, the stage directions indicate, is imprisoned in an “open grill-like frame” that imparts “both the impression of a cage, and the superstructure of a ship” (“Production Note”). In *A White Man’s Country: An Exercise in Canadian Prejudice* (1975), a historical retelling of the Komagata Maru incident that Anne Nothof, among others, has suggested may have inspired Pollock’s play, the historian Ted Ferguson mentions only two wives on the Komagata Maru. Pollock’s imprisoned woman, therefore, is the playwright’s invention. The metaphor of the imprisoned woman serves to visually erase the presence of the men aboard the ship and, in so doing, it neutralizes the threat of masculinity and its associations with power and strength and instead links the Komagata Maru incident with purportedly feminine qualities of weakness and vulnerability. What Pollock’s play draws attention to is a story that is about a mother and son arriving “home,” a journey that is ultimately rendered impossible. In one of the many

conversations with her son, the woman reveals that the child's "father was a soldier, he died fighting for the King, so [they] come to live with [his] uncle" (20). Pollock's woman and her son, by association, are also coded as loyal British subjects, devoted to the crown. The effect of Pollock's construction works to undermine racist discourses that dramatically represent the arrival of the passengers as an "Asian invasion", a phrase that T.S., or The State, uses several times in the play, but it also has a potential disadvantage: it runs the risk of repressing the multiple and conflicting political and economic motives of the actual passengers aboard the Komagata Maru. Thus, Pollock's play is marked by notable contradictions: it wants to uncover the past, and to critique Canadian racism, but it also wants to cover over some of the more troubling aspects of that past such as the agency of the passengers.

Among the passengers aboard the ship, a sense of agency was articulated most vehemently by Gurdit Singh, a historical figure that is absent from Pollock's play. Although Gurdit Singh insists in his book that the purpose of the voyage of the Komagata Maru was "purely commercial and economic and [was] in no way political" (1:41), in a seemingly conflicting and unmistakably political statement, he also claims that his aim was to "test of the sincerity of the Government of Canada" (1:16). The woman in Pollock's play seems to be incapable of this kind of resistance. In fact, upon her arrival in Canada, she, unlike the historical figure of Gurdit Singh, is completely oblivious to difficulties that she will have to face. As she sails towards Canada, for example, her attention to the beauty of the landscape attests to her naiveté. Speaking of the land ahead, she tells her son confidently that Canada is where his uncle lives and "that is where we'll live" (5). Pollock is careful to present the woman as a benign and harmless figure rather

than a threatening one. Thus, when the woman does express agency, Pollock makes sure that hers is a stereotypically feminine agency: that is, she is roused to action as a mother who wants to protect her child rather than as an immigrant defending her rights. In one scene, for example, she says to her fellow passengers: “Do you think . . . you can steal food from my child? If you steal again, I will come when you sleep and I’ll kill you!” (19). By replacing the heterogeneous and troubling group of Indians stranded aboard the ship with a helpless woman and her child, Pollock seems to be taming the political potential of the actual group. Instead of an unpleasant collectivity, one that might threaten the Canadian nation, what we are asked to remember in Pollock’s play are two vulnerable figures who attract sympathy and arouse pathos.

Sympathy in Pollock’s play gets attached not to the homeless immigrant but rather to the concerned liberal Canadian spectator. In *Rule of Sympathy: Sentiment, Race and Power 1750-1850* (2002), Amit Rai suggests that sympathy hinges, on the one hand, on the process of identification, on an erasure of differences between self and other. “To sympathize with another, one must identify with that other” (xviii), he writes. However, Rai argues that “sympathy . . . needs an object of pathos, and in abolitionist discourse [for example] the spectacle of the slave’s suffering body, or the lamentable state of her mind would be that horrid but ideal subject” (xi). Thus sympathy naturalizes the binary between a more powerful and superior sympathetic agent and an abject and helpless sufferer, even as it purports to bridge the gap between them. As Rai writes:

[S]ympathy both appropriates and makes proper all forms of otherness: the other’s body embodied in pity; the savagery of the racialized other both renarrativized and normalized in the story of social affections; . . . through

sympathy the subject comes to know the mode of sociality proper to the moral order; sympathy renders the other an object of identification, and so the other seems to be knowable, accessible, and so appropriable. (59)

For Rai, sympathy can be read not as a harmless feeling that we get that encourages us to act as moral subjects, but rather as a mode of power that might be used to discipline and control the other.

Rai's critique of sentiment makes clear that the staging of sympathy itself might engender a different and essentialized construction of the other: the other is one who is suffering and needs to be saved, but there is also a self-congratulatory dimension attaching to the subject who feels sympathy. For the woman in Pollock's play, the price of acceptance seems to be contingent upon the benevolence of the onlookers first and foremost rather than on her legal rights as a British subject. In the play's economy of sympathy, therefore, the role of the audience members also seems to be transformed. It is the responsibility of the spectators to extend sympathy, or to feel for the woman in captivity. In this way, the audience members seem to be placed in the position of the benevolent subject. In a sense, what Pollock does is interpellate the spectator into a classic multicultural paradigm in which the white subject is reassured of his or her benevolence towards the other, of his or her goodwill, without actually being moved to act. By involving the audience members in this way, Pollock reaffirms Canada's celebrated multicultural imaginary, that is, a realm of citizens who are sympathetic and tolerant in their treatment of others. The audience becomes the potential deliverer of the gift of sympathy. While Heidi Holder has argued that Pollock's spectators are placed in an "uncomfortable position" (114) from which they are compelled to accept

responsibility for their part in the scene that is being staged before them, I contend that the kind of responsibility that the play demands, ie. fellow-feeling, might actually render the spectators comfortable, secured by their power to extend the gift of sympathy to the other. My point is not to dismiss Pollock's text entirely. It does to a certain extent draw us in in a way that Rushdie's text seems incapable of doing. But the problem, as I see it, is with the way Pollock selectively memorializes the trauma: by doing away with the subversive potential of its memory, and by reinscribing the self-celebrating multicultural notion that Canadians are benevolent, that they always feel for the other.

Within the play itself, there is a particular episode in which Pollock stages fellow-feeling for the audience. Specifically, we watch as Evy feels for a Sikh man the way we are meant to feel for the passengers aboard the ship. Taking centre stage, Evy describes for her listeners – Hopkinson, Georg, and Sophie and indirectly the audience – the beating of a Sikh man by a group of white men standing in the employment line. She explains that “they knocked him down ... they were kicking and then pushing and shoving to get in a blow” (24). While this episode unearths the experiences of the Sikh man, it simultaneously renders these experiences distant, as it is Evy who recounts the story of the beating rather than the Sikh man himself. Arun Mukherjee argues that “as readers, we must examine and remain aware of the difference between “a voice for,” and “a voice of” (141), as they offer two very different perspectives. In Pollock's play, the “voice of” the Sikh man remains unheard; the audience never gets to listen to his story directly. The beating itself is not staged; rather the story is told from Evy's retrospective position. She explains to her listeners that though she smiled at the man, “the tram pulled away” and the attack continued. “[I]t was gone,” she says, “as if I'd imagined it” (16).

The statement “as if I’d imagined it” renders the beating almost unreal and relegates it to the past. It was, as Evy states, as though “it had never been” (16). In an anachronistic gesture, Pollock somewhat problematically relegates the “other” to the forgotten past, or to a state of absence rather than bringing him back to present centre stage. Like the woman aboard the ship who becomes an object of pity, so too does the Sikh man become an object of Evy’s sympathetic gaze. In Rai’s terms, the Sikh man who is helpless and alone is the ideal object of pity. The story of the Sikh man, then, I argue, is less about the violence against the other than about Evy’s trauma of witnessing this violence. In other words, Pollock seems to shift the affect from the victim to the white subject witnessing the trauma. Pollock’s play thus dramatizes the problems that arise when one is asked to remember the other as an object of pity (as Pollock asks her audience to do in the play), but also encouraged to sympathize with the other in the interests of a type of coalition politics. The multiple ideological forces that seem to be at work in Pollock’s play – the attempts to address the barring of the Komagata Maru from Canada, to critique the nation’s actions, and to draw attention to the issues of class and gender as they relate to the broken passage – seem to contradict one another. What Pollock’s play ends up calling for, therefore, are the familiar feelings of guilt and sympathy that are associated with liberal multiculturalism. Having said that, the play remains a valuable resource, one that offers a complex and ambiguous retelling of the Komagata Maru incident and that has played a role in the process of memorializing the trauma, influencing such artists and writers as Ajmer Rode and Jarnail Singh whose painting exhibit draws on aspects of Pollock’s play.

Srinivas Krishna’s Masala

Srinivas Krishna's *Masala* is a postmodern experimental film set in Toronto, five years after the bombing of Air India Flight 182. It brings together three intertwined narratives that deal with the issues of diaspora and belonging. One narrative deals with the upper middle-class family composed of Lalu Bhai Solanki, his wife Bibi Solanki, and their teenage son Anil. Lalu Bhai, who believes that he might profit from the Khalistan movement, agrees to allow a Sikh taxi driver to store what he thinks are weapons in his shop. In actuality, Lalu Bhai discovers that what is being kept in the shop are not weapons but rather toilet paper printed with Sikh history that will be shipped to the Punjab. The second storyline deals with the Tikoo family: Harry Tikoo, his mother Shanti, his two daughters, Shashi and Rita, and young son Babu. While Shanti spends her time communicating with Lord Krishna through the television, and Rita dreams of taking flying lessons, Harry acquires a valuable historical Canadian stamp, which he refuses to give up to the Canadian government, and demands that it be included in his personal stamp collection. The third narrative is about Krishna, the protagonist of the film, who is played by Srinivas Krishna himself. Emerging at the outset of the film after having undergone detox for his heroine addiction, Krishna is the only surviving member of his family: his mother, father, and younger brother, we learn, have all been killed in the deadly explosion.

The Air India bombing is at once everywhere in Krishna's film and yet nowhere at the same time, and therefore simultaneously remembered and forgotten. Like Freud's uncanny, it seems to haunt the film as a kind of absent presence. Thus, images of planes are represented almost obsessively throughout Krishna's film. There are images of toy planes, fantastical planes, real planes, exploding planes, and so on. In addition to these

images, the film also repeatedly presents sounds of planes as part of its soundtrack.

Commenting on Krishna's obsessive return to the trope of the plane, Jigna Desai writes:

Though *Masala* does not directly identify the exploding plane as Air India Flight 182, the reference to this postcolonial diasporic event is clear. Thus planes evoke mobility (space) but also memory and history (time). As a constant reminder, airplanes materialize throughout *Masala*, appearing in at least five additional scenes; most often they fly overhead as various characters grapple with diasporic displacement and are reminded of their loss. (120)

The film's obsession with the trope of the broken passage seems to suggest that Krishna wants us to remember it. Thus, an allusion to the bombing appears even before the opening credits. The camera zooms in on a young South Asian boy who is traveling with his parents aboard an aircraft. When the young boy asks his mother, "Mom, why isn't Krishna coming to India with us?" it is implied that Krishna (the character) is the missing member of the family. The camera then shifts to the exterior of the plane and offers a long shot of its catastrophic explosion in midair. This explosion is Krishna's retelling of the bombing of Air India Flight 182. What is interesting is that this particular sequence begins with a serious tone and ends in a fantastical and playful manner, one that seems to push against the boundaries of realism and instead to revel in artifice. The image of debris (saris, luggage, and various garments) falling from a starry black sky is colourful and surreal; it echoes Rushdie's literary representation of the explosion which is also imaginative and playful rather than serious and solemn. The problem with this scene is not so much that Krishna is situating the trauma outside the boundaries of historical

verisimilitude, but rather that he is rendering the tragedy so fantastical that we are encouraged to consider the possibility that it never happened in the first place, that what we are seeing is merely theatre. The postmodern form of the film thus seems to encourage a kind of forgetting of the trauma. What we get in the film is a surreal and comical representation of the Air India bombing; and this representation encourages us to consume the tragedy as a theatrical spectacle.

In an interview with Cameron Bailey, Krishna (the director) explains why he invokes the Air India bombing in the film:

This film is about home. The Air India plane six years ago had exploded over the Atlantic, I knew people on that plane. I want to say that this was really a momentous, horrible event in the history of Indians who live outside of India. I don't know how much it really meant to Indians who live in India, but to Indians who live outside of India it was a turning point, or crossing a point of no return. And you see it cropping up in so many places, from Salman Rushdie to my film...And Bharati Mukherjee wrote a short story about it...So I thought, *there really is no going home*. And you realize it's not the home that you left. And you, having left, are not the same person. So the home that you thought was home only exists in memory. (Krishna, *Cineaction* 43 italics added for emphasis)

Krishna thus seems to be doing on screen what Rushdie has done in his novel:

appropriating the Air India bombing as a metaphor. The Air India bombing, for me, does not represent the inability of diasporic subjects to return home, but rather the very real fact that those who died in the explosion were denied a home, and denied a sense of

belonging to Canada. In the wake of the bombing, that is, Canada refused to accept the victims as Canadian subjects and India seemed to deny responsibility for the event. In my thesis, the bombing therefore represents, in material terms, the site of trauma and loss, and in metaphorical terms, the possibility that South Asian Canadians may once again be rejected from both nations: India and Canada. To say that the bombing is a mere allusion, a reminder that the homeland is no longer available to diasporic subjects, is to engage in a kind of forgetting of the more political aspects of the tragedy. Thus, what I am suggesting is that we need to remember the concrete aspects of trauma, even as we use the broken passage as a metaphor.

The recurring reference to planes holds the film together and thus promises so much in terms of countering the nation's forgetting; yet *Masala* never delivers on that promise. Stylistically, the film insists on obscuring the boundaries between Hollywood and Bollywood, realism and camp. In fact, the film calls attention to its own generic ambivalence in one of the opening scenes aboard the plane. The camera zooms in on a television screen on Flight 182 that depicts Balarama, the Lord Krishna's brother, telling the deity that "this is not a comedy but a tragedy." What this statement reminds us is that we are watching a film that refuses to position itself within a fixed generic rubric, and in its place, presents both realistic images of the Air India plane's explosion followed by surreal and campy ones. Camp (a postmodern aesthetic) is defined by Susan Sontag in her famous essay "Notes on Camp" as "the love of the unnatural: of artifice and exaggeration" (275). Camp, for Sontag, "converts the serious into the frivolous" (278); it is playful and theatrical. Moreover, Sontag points out that camp is an apolitical genre. As she writes:

To emphasize style is to slight content, or to introduce an attitude which is neutral with respect to content. It goes without saying that the Camp sensibility is disengaged, depoliticized – or at least apolitical. (277)

While Desai acknowledges those critics such as Sontag who argue that camp can be understood as an apolitical aesthetic form, she suggests that in Krishna's film, the use of camp has a subversive effect, and works as "a productive antidote to nostalgia that reverently remembers without representing homeland and homeland culture as sites of authenticity, origin and loss" (107). But Desai fails to consider how the use of camp affects Krishna's remembering of the bombing. While Krishna's aesthetic practices may indeed enable his political critique of diasporic nostalgia – an issue I will discuss later – they undermine the seriousness of the trauma and present it as an event that can be approached with laughter. Thus, within the context of the film, the Air India bombing seems to be completely emptied of any political significance. If we are meant to feel for Krishna the character who has lost his family in the deadly crash, the postmodern aesthetics of the film discourage us from making any affective connection with the characters and leave us instead feeling disengaged from what is occurring on screen. If the broken passage is meant to represent the elusiveness of the lost homeland for diasporic subjects, as Krishna the director claims, then even this remains unclear. Rather, what Krishna seems to be encouraging is a forgetting of the trauma, even as he seems to be asking us to remember it.

Kay Koppendrayner has perhaps quite rightly said that even though there are images of the explosion presented throughout the film, *Masala* "is not about the

bombing” (103 italics added for emphasis); for the film, she elaborates, refuses to give us any information about

who was involved [in the Air India bombing], or about its associations with terrorist activities and agitations for a Sikh state, or about the bungled investigation that followed. It makes no accusations or counter-accusations about what caused the event or who was responsible. (103)

All we get in the film are fragmentary hints about the bombing. For example, the film consistently encourages us to assume that the bombing was committed by dangerous Sikh terrorists, only to dissolve those assumptions in a tasteless joke about Sikhs seeking to make their history more widely known by writing their history on toilet paper that is to be shipped to India. The film deliberately refuses to give us any details about the bombing. In another scene, a news reporter on the television says in a playful manner that five years after the tragedy, “we still don’t know whether the midair explosion...was the result of a bomb, human error, or simply, in the words of one bereaved father, the will of god.” The film thus makes it difficult for us to coherently retrieve the trauma and memorialize it as an event that occurred in Canada’s past.

Krishna’s technique seems much closer to that of Rushdie than to that of Pollock. As I have suggested, Pollock’s recourse to sympathy, despite its problems, is meant to encourage white subjects to remember the other, albeit as an object of pity. While this technique has its limitations (ie. it contributes to the empowerment of the white spectator over the racialized subject), it might be potentially more effective to map the trauma onto the historical record than Krishna’s (and Rushdie’s) technique. What Pollock is doing, after all, is encouraging a kind of remembering of the trauma, however problematic that

remembering might be. Krishna's parodic representation of the bombing, on the other hand, comes in the way of memorializing the trauma because it encourages us to see the tragedy as artifice, as purely theatrical. As viewers, what we are given is a series of jokes. These jokes offended many people in the South Asian Canadian community when the film was first screened in Vancouver. As Yasmin Jiwani writes:

[I]t was a *masala* that we were not prepared for. It was a *masala* that in the end, did to us symbolically what British colonialism had done to our ancestral land – it violated us, made a mockery of our sense of being, and betrayed us to the wider society. For it was a *masala* that combined the ingredients of an internalized racism mixed with a postmodernist discourse of identity, sexuality and race, all of which were re-cast in the ahistorical plane of Krishna's vision of himself and his reality. (11)

Whereas Jiwani dismisses *Masala* in its entirety, I suggest that Krishna's postmodern technique is ineffective when it comes to memorializing the actual trauma, the suffering and the pathos, but it does offer a critique of Canadian multiculturalism that is worth taking seriously. *Masala*, for example, represents the Minister of Multiculturalism as a white man whose slicked-back blonde hair, pale skin, and blue eyes serve to dramatize the fact that official multiculturalism was a policy established and maintained by the white hegemonic class. In one scene, the Minister of Multiculturalism and his wife (who is noticeably dressed in an Indian sari) visit the home of the wealthy sari merchant, Lallu Bhai Solanki and his wife, Bibi. Standing before a crowd of mostly South Asians, the Minister officially announces that there will be an opening of a new Hindu Temple in Toronto in ten days and that this temple, he reminds the audience "is a

testimony of our great country; a home large enough for all faiths, all communities, and all individuals.” The political message of the film is that the Canadian state engages in a selective memorializing of only superficial signifiers of difference (ethnic food, clothing, festivals), and in so doing, it indirectly partakes of a process of forgetting difference. Multiculturalism is a way to muffle the issues of racial injustice, even as it purports to address these issues. Thus, when Krishna, a rebel figure and a threatening representation of otherness, arrives at the Solanki house in the middle of the party, he ruptures the façade of multicultural harmony and suggests that South Asians are only granted a place in the nation if they assimilate to the demands of official multiculturalism. As the minister reminds Sashi, the daughter of Harry Tikkoo, in a later scene, “You [South Asians] can come to Canada, set up an immigrant woman’s collective, build your temples, have your processions, keep your identity as long as you play by the rules.”

One particular character in *Masala*, the postal worker Harry Tikkoo, draws attention to the fact that the multicultural nation deliberately engages in a forgetting of issues of serious political significance. Exasperated, he says to Sashi, “A planeload of people gets blown up and nobody seems to care.” It becomes clear from what follows that Tikkoo is referring to the state’s tendency to deny the Air India tragedy a place in Canada’s national narratives. He elaborates, “I get beaten up on the street and nobody seems to care,” referring to the racist attack he suffered some years ago at the hands of white teenagers. What Tikkoo points out is that official multiculturalism fails to recognize him in a meaningful way. Tikkoo only gains notice by the state when he acquires a historic Canadian postage stamp from 1867, the year of Canadian Confederation or independence. “I hold this stamp in my hand,” he says, “and everybody

cares.” Whereas Christopher Gittings argues that “Tikkoo’s appropriation of the stamp temporarily gives him something official multiculturalism does not, meaningful recognition” (250), I argue for the need to consider Tikkoo’s acquisition of the stamp in more complex terms. The recognition that Tikkoo receives from the state when he holds the stamp does not reflect the classic politics of recognition. That is, whereas multiculturalism claims to recognize the cultural “identity” of the other, Tikkoo here is acknowledged not for his status as a South Asian Canadian but rather for his proprietary holding of a Canadian artifact. The kind of recognition that Tikkoo receives from the government official who demands that he return the stamp, therefore, does not amount to inclusion within the nation-state. Claiming the stamp, for Tikkoo, becomes a substitute for other forms of recognition; it allows Tikkoo to feel like he has been noticed, but he is not granted a space within the nation until he donates the stamp to the ministry.

Krishna (the director) concludes the film with very little hope. As Jiwani says, “if we subscribe to Krishna’s vision of the world, external change is impossible, the system just goes on” (13). In the final scene, the character of Krishna attempts to protect his younger cousin Babu from the racist white teenagers who have been attacking him. Krishna and the leader of the white gang pull out their switchblades until Krishna finally decides to walk away. With his back turned, the leader of the white gang runs towards him and stabs him in the back, leaving Krishna to die. Although the entire community surrounds Krishna, the camera only lingers upon his sacrificial act briefly before it turns to yet another multicultural celebration: the opening of the National Museum of Philately. Krishna’s death is thus quickly forgotten. Even Rita Tikkoo, who had a romantic investment in Krishna, says to her sister, “No one seems to miss him [Krishna] and I

can't seem to feel anything.” Her statement captures the fact that Krishna's death has been forgotten and that members of the South Asian Canadian community have been interpellated into the paradigm of official multiculturalism. Harry Tikkoo, who has donated his stamp to the museum and agreed to be the honorary curator, is transformed from an aggressively subversive figure who might disrupt official multiculturalism to an ideal model minority subject. The Minister of Multiculturalism together with members of the South Asian community open the museum and celebrate the false sense of harmony in which members of the diasporic community are co-opted. Krishna's death is quickly forgotten as Grandmother Tikkoo prepares a “multicultural culinary treat” for the festivities.

While Krishna seems to make the point that multiculturalism offers only a false promise of inclusion to racialized minorities, there is a problem with the way he makes this critique. His film hinges on the use of stereotypes, on stock characters (like the Minister of Multiculturalism) to defamiliarize what is otherwise considered real, to show us that what we believed was true is actually only a construction. But what the film seems to suggest in the process of producing these stereotypes is problematic: that nothing should be taken seriously, not even the political message of the film. Vijay Mishra succinctly points to this problem:

Srinivas Krishna's *Masala* can read diasporas only as postmodern parodies of homelands, as comic sites where homeland essentialisms can only reproduce tragic-comic lives... The trouble with such a defence is that, in the end, racism becomes a metaracism (because the form's counter realist narrative problematizes all truth conditions) and unless we are

given a parallel discourse that metaracism is racism pure and simple, the film may well end up endorsing an extremely dangerous ideology. (44)

A reading of *Masala* seems to suggest that satirizing or critiquing an institution such as multiculturalism is much easier than remembering the horror, the sense of loss, and the tragic intensity of an incident like the Air India bombing.

Conclusion:

Although Pollock's play attempts to recreate the trauma of the Komagata Maru incident, it places its audience in a position of superiority to the other, a position from which she can feel sympathy or pity for the other. Thus, rather than leveling out the playing field, Pollock's text solidifies the very structures that underlie the causes of these tragedies in the first place. *Masala's* postmodern aesthetic has the opposite effect: it seems to suggest that the memorializing of the events of the past that signify loss and a disabling liminality to diasporic populations is pointless. As with so many postmodern texts, political agency is dispersed in playfulness, the disruption of narrative, and tasteless jokes. Whatever the political message of *Masala*, therefore, I conclude that it is undermined by the postmodern and fragmentary remembering of trauma, a remembering that inevitably hinges on forgetting.

Chapter Five: Strategic Remembering: Official Apologies and Public Inquiries

Introduction:

Canada's responses to the 1914 Komagata Maru incident and the 1985 Air India bombing reveal that the state is also deeply invested in the politics of remembering and forgetting. Specifically, it serves the interests of the state to close off the past and forget events like the broken passages of the Komagata Maru and Air India cases because these events threaten to rupture the nation's claims of multicultural harmony and inclusion. In this chapter, I want to explore state responses to the 1914 Komagata Maru incident and the 1985 Air India bombing, especially those that emerge in the form of official apologies and public inquiries and their reports. On June 23, 2010, Prime Minister Stephen Harper apologized to the families of the victims of the Air India bombing for the institutional failings that took place in the aftermath of the bombing.³¹ In an age marked by the proliferation of official apologies, Harper's expression of regret is merely the latest in a series of such acts of formal atonement in Canada. In 1990, Mulroney offered another admission of wrongdoing, this time to the Italian-Canadians who had been interned under the *War Measures Act* (James, "Wrestling" 142). In 2006, Harper issued an apology for the Chinese head tax. In 2008, he offered two more official apologies. The first was to the Aboriginal community for the abuse they experienced in residential schools. The second, which will be the focus of the first part of this chapter, was to the South Asian Canadian community for the 1914 Komagata Maru incident.

³¹ Since the apology for the Air India bombing was issued as I was concluding this dissertation, I will address it in the conclusion rather than in the body of this chapter.

Whereas the *apology* is an unstable performance of redress which can be strategically used by minority groups to map their histories onto the nation's public record, I shall argue that the *inquiry* tends to work much more in the interests of the state because it constantly deflects action by inundating its audience/reader with often irrelevant detail. Although an account of the "facts" is important to the process of memorializing the trauma, so too is the production of affect. The inquiry's analytic mode, however, displaces affect and floods the reader with such an excessive amount of inconsequential detail that he or she is paradoxically encouraged to forget rather than to remember what happened. At the same time, the inquiry constructs the state as a party that is doing the necessary work of remembering the past and dealing with the trauma. In 1914, an inquiry into the Komagata Maru incident was held in Canada. In 2006, the Canadian state held an inquiry into the Air India bombing and in 2010, it made an official attempt in its report to compensate for its failure to acknowledge the bombing as a Canadian event. While the 1914 inquiry arguably reveals a certain hostility or indifference to minority subjects, the contemporary inquiry is much more careful to present itself as impartial and fair. Having said that, both the past and present-day inquiries can be read as state performances that seek to block off the past and engage in an ongoing forgetting of what happened. In this chapter, I read these performances of redress such as Harper's apology for the Komagata Maru incident or the inquiry into the Air India bombing in the same way that I read the fictional responses to the broken passage in previous chapters: as texts, since, in both cases, certain actions are being performed through narrative. Before turning to a close reading of the apologies and then

inquiries, I want to draw upon theoretical ideas about performativity as articulated by J.L. Austin.

State Performances of Apology:³²

Theory of Performativity

J.L. Austin argues that apologies can be understood as belonging to a unique class of speech acts called performatives, or utterances that make something happen. Distinct from what Austin calls “constatives” or statements that can be deemed true or false, performatives, for Austin, “do not ‘describe’ or ‘report’ or constate anything at all” (5); rather they enact what they promise in the very process of enunciation. For example, to say, “I pronounce you man and wife” refers to the act of marrying someone, or to say, “I name this ship the Queen Elizabeth” refers to the act of naming the ship. To apologize is to say, “I’m sorry,” and in saying that the apology is performed and rendered complete. For this reason, apologies are often associated with closure. The apologizer seems to want to forget yesterday and instead get moving towards tomorrow. The apology made by the state to one of its minority groups thus may be read as a stealthy way in which the state attempts to engage in a forgetting of the past, while it maintains the façade of remembering diasporic traumas. Thus, Harper’s apology for the Komagata Maru incident, which I will discuss in detail, seems to have aroused rather than allayed the anger of members of the South Asian Canadian community.

³² This section has been published in “The Apology and its Aftermath: National Atonement or the Management of Minorities?” *Postcolonial Text*. 6.1 (2011): 1-18. Web.

The qualities of sincerity and authenticity that we might attribute to the personal apology might be difficult to discern in a national apology such as Harper's apology to the South Asian Canadian community for the Komagata Maru incident. First, such an apology is made by a collective body that may not have any connection with the original perpetrators of the crime; and second, the apology may be issued to a community that is similarly distanced from the actual victims who experienced the harm firsthand. As Rajeswari Sundar Rajan has quite rightly noted, therefore, "it would be a fallacy to read the collective psyche in terms identical to the individual, as well as...a sentimental reduction to view it entirely in terms of affect" (165). The formal apology might be productively understood through a Foucauldian lens: as a mechanism used by the state to manage its supposedly unruly minority subjects. However, the intentions of the state and the actual outcome of the apology are often at odds with one another. Between the performance of the apology and its reception, there exists a space of possibility for intervention. Thus, even if official apologies are meant to be strategies of containment, they offer considerable opportunities for minority resistance. The very structure of the apology renders it a site of possibility; for, as it closes off the past, it also opens up a door to the future, or as it engages in forgetting, it also unwittingly encourages remembering.

Austin recognized that performative utterances – "I promise, I apologize, I do" – are highly unstable and slippery speech acts. In *How to Do Things With Words*, he argues that whereas the success of a constative statement depends on its truth-value, the felicitousness of a performative hinges upon the "appropriateness" of the context in which it is uttered. As Austin writes:

for naming the ship, it is essential that I should be the person appointed to name her, for (Christian) marrying, it is essential that I should not be already married with a wife living, sane and undivorced, and so on: for a bet to have been made, it is generally necessary for the offer of the bet to have been acted by the taker (who must have done something, such as to say, 'Done') and it is hardly a gift if I *say* 'I give it to you' but never hand it over. (9 italics in original)

Since Austin argues that performatives, unlike constatives, must conform to established conventions and ritual procedures, these speech acts run a relatively higher risk of failing to carry out what they promise. The state uses the official apology to placate its constituent minorities, but in so doing, it also opens up a space for minority resistance. Thus, apologies have the potential to, on the one hand, reinscribe state power by blocking off the past and, on the other hand, to undermine state power by excavating past wrongs that the state would prefer to forget. However, this potential to undermine state power is not only very small, it is also very vulnerable to hegemonic recuperation, as we may see from the following analysis of some of the more important critiques of the logic of the apology.

Critiques of Apologies

While critics have granted a certain subversive potential to official apologies, they have tended to focus attention on how state-rituals of atonement are constitutive of state-power. For example, Sundar Rajan argues that in official apologies, those admitting to guilt not only "continue to occupy, and to speak from, a position of power" (162), they also treat wrongs as isolated events in the past, and thus ignore their ongoing implications in the present. This is not to suggest that Sundar Rajan is altogether dismissive of official

apologies. Rather, she suggests that apologies have the potential to set the historical record straight and to open up the possibility for minority communities to make demands for compensation. Sundar Rajan's contention is that even though apologies are empty rhetorical gestures, "the only thing worse than an apology...is no apology" (168). For Haydie Gooder and Jane M. Jacobs, the formal apology is also a highly problematic speech act and might be read as a gesture performed not so much for the benefit of the victim as for the apologizer himself. For the latter, the apology is an opportunity to be relieved of feelings of guilt for having committed a wrong and thus to be repositioned as a moral subject. As Gooder and Jacobs state, "the apology is as much an act of narcissistic will and desire as of humility and humanity" (244). The apology, they elaborate, "is an utterance that awaits a response of forgiveness," and this forgiveness, more importantly, "works to eradicate the consequences of the offence and restore some form of social harmony" (244).

Like Sundar Rajan and Gooder and Jacobs, Michel-Rolph Trouillot examines the structural problems underlying official apologies and arrives at a fairly pessimistic conclusion. He contends that the success of an apology depends on forging a link between past perpetrators and victims, and the present-day collectivities that are meant to represent them. And yet, it is this very linking between past and present that paradoxically marks the contemporary collectivities as insincere and inauthentic to those on either side of the transaction. Trouillot concludes that official apologies are therefore intended to be "abortive ritual," that is, rituals "whose very conditions of emergence deny the possibility of transformation" (171).

Although these critics in their analyses of official apologies seem to arrive at slightly different conclusions, what they have in common is a tendency to interpret acts of redress with varying amounts of suspicion. Using a “hermeneutics of suspicion” as critical practice, as we well know, is neither uncommon nor surprising in academic circles. With the overwhelming influence of post-structuralist theorists like Foucault, academics, especially in the humanities, have tended to invest in the exposure of the workings of power, especially as they occur at national and global levels. As an academic, I too feel the pressure to approach official apologies with a degree of skepticism. And yet, as a South Asian Canadian, I want to align myself with those minority constituencies who actually *want* an apology and who, against critical tendencies, see in it an opportunity rather than a loss.

I would like to emphasize here that the opinions of “activists” have been as important to me as the opinions of “academics.” While writing this chapter, I contacted South Asian Canadian activist Jasbir Sandhu, a person who has been intimately involved in negotiations with the Canadian government over the issue of redress. I presented the argument to him that apologies are instruments of state-power. He was surprised that such an argument should even be made; he and his fellow activists, he told me, had been lobbying for an apology for the Komagata Maru incident from the Canadian government for ten years. When I asked him why the apology was important to him, he replied, “It’s not about money. What we want is an apology in Parliament. It’s the right thing to do. It’s not about the Canadian government getting down on its knees; it’s simply about recognizing that this happened” (15 May 2009). Elaborating on the significance of the apology for the Komagata Maru case, Sandhu said:

This is a serious issue. The Komagata Maru incident was done on racial lines. The people on the ship were sent back because they were Indians. It hurts me. This was how we were treated. We are a lot more tolerant today. In order that we remain a tolerant society, we need to make sure that we don't forget our past, that we recognize it, and that we recognize it in a respectful way. (15 May 2009)

For Sandhu, the apology is important for pragmatic reasons: First, it establishes the original wrong as part of the historical record, and second, it symbolically grants inclusion into the nation to a community that would otherwise feel excluded. While Sandhu's claims are not by themselves an argument for state apologies, I would like to suggest that his position is fairly representative and that to dismiss it as a form of political naïveté smacks of academic condescension. My aim is therefore to take seriously the aspirations of minorities like Sandhu to whom apologies *do* matter, while also keeping in mind the critiques made by academics. I suggest that we recognize, as many scholars have done, the ways that apologies contribute to hegemonic systems of power; however, I also believe that with enough conviction, we can “blast open the continuum of history” (262) as Walter Benjamin proposes, and find within apologies a sign of Messianic hope, redemption, and possibility.

Harper's Apology for the Komagata Maru Incident

As I have already suggested, while official apologies may well be intended to effect closure upon the past, they might also open up historical wrongs and summon them to memory. Stephen Harper's apology to the South Asian Canadian community, for example, brought back to the collective memory the Komagata Maru incident, an event

that might otherwise have been forgotten. The apology was issued on August 3, 2008 at an annual Punjabi festival in Surrey, British Columbia's Bear Creek Park. Standing in front of a predominantly South Asian audience, Harper declared that on behalf of the Canadian nation, he was sorry for the Komagata Maru event. Harper's speech act draws attention to the two-part structure that is common to all apologies. The first part, "I'm sorry, let's get over the past and move on together" serves to hermetically seal the past, and to proleptically project a new era of reconciliation. The second, and perhaps more interesting part, reveals the paradox at the heart of many apologies: that the naming of the trauma threatens to undo what the first part seeks to do. The apology thus rests on an ambivalent and tenuous logic: it has the potential to resuscitate memories of the past, even as it attempts to suppress and forget them. Since neither the transcript nor the video recording of Harper's apology has been made available to the public, I have included a written transcript of the footage in the appendix of this thesis.

In the footage, the camera pans over the spectators – some 8,000 Canadian citizens, most of South Asian origin – who had gathered in Surrey, British Columbia's Bear Creek Park. Here, Harper would deliver a speech as part of the *Gadri Babian da Mela*, a Punjabi festival held annually to commemorate the Ghadar rebellion. The informal park setting and the festive song and dance numbers performed on stage during the early portion of the event seem, interestingly, to deflect attention away from the political subtext that underpins the festival as well as, and perhaps more importantly, from the "dark chapter" of Canada's history that is to be addressed by the Prime Minister.

The atmosphere of the event is festive and celebratory rather than subdued and serious. The artistic and cultural performances function as entertainment and seem to fail

to move the spectators who appear to this viewer to be passive and somewhat apathetic. Harper himself sits backstage and watches the performances approvingly – an approval indicated by an occasional nod of the head – yet with a slightly bored expression on his face. His presence may be understood as legitimizing the incorporation of South Asians in the nation and as presenting the state as a benevolent host who is willing to politely accept the racialized other but not to engage with that other in any profound or meaningful way. The message of the event thus seems to reinforce that of official multiculturalism: that the nation is not really concerned with the particularity of group history. What the nation promises is to tolerate difference but only to the extent that it remains shallow and cosmetic and, essentially, at the level of ethnic cuisines, dance, and music. The musical and artistic performances at the festival might seem to those in power to be acceptable and even commendable, while the refusal of the activists to accept the apology (a development I will discuss in more detail later) might be read as intolerable and potentially very dangerous. In this setting, there seems to be pressure on members of the South Asian Canadian community to “behave,” to politely accept the apology. The government in fact sees the South Asian community as guests of the nation.

What is particularly interesting about the event is that there is an endless deferral of the actual apology. For one thing, the lead-up to Harper’s speech is extended and drawn out. The spectators are prompted to expect the apology, first by Parliamentary Secretary, Jim Abbot, who announces the commencement of the formal component of the program, and then by the Minister of Multiculturalism, Jason Kenney, who recounts for the audience “the tragic story of the Komagata Maru” and outlines some of the initiatives already taken by the Prime Minister to redress the wrongs of the past. In fact, Harper

himself reveals in his speech that the lead-up to the apology began two years prior, when he was first invited to attend the festival. Initially addressing the spectators with Hindi, Urdu, Punjabi, English, and French salutations, Harper makes certain that his speech remains within the boundaries of political correctness. His performance can be read as a sanitized and controlled one: a performance that is deliberately devoid of affect and spontaneity.

The most peculiar and perhaps most notable aspect of the Prime Minister's performance is that it is impossible to discern at what point he actually issues the apology. Harper seems to move fluidly from a prolonged anticipation of the apology to a cathartic post-apology. Rather than opening with an admission of wrongdoing, Harper, in a strikingly multicultural gesture, diverts the spectators' attention away from politics and redirects it towards "[t]he vibrant dance and musical traditions, exquisite art and timeless literature," which he claims have "become an integral part of our own [Canada's] cultural diversity." Harper goes on to praise the South Asian Canadian community for their contributions to the nation, for their help, as he states, in "mak[ing] our country [Canada] even stronger for the generations yet to come." Then, at the very moment when it seems as though the apology will be delivered, the moment immediately following Harper's statement, "Today, on behalf of the Government of Canada," the audience encounters a silence—Harper pauses, turns away from the microphone, and takes a slow and seemingly deliberate drink of water. The crowd, meanwhile, begins to applaud, which indicates perhaps that the people are reading Harper's moment of pause and silence, his moment of drinking water, as an action, a performative: that is, as taking the place of the apology itself. Thus, when Harper finally returns to the microphone and utters the long

awaited speech act, “Today, on behalf of the Government of Canada, I am officially conveying as Prime Minister, that apology,” it is as though the apology has already been made. The opportunity to react to Harper’s delivery (and retraction), or making (and unmaking) of the apology seems to have slipped by without notice. Instead of being permitted to reflect upon Harper’s apology, the spectators are briskly ushered into a relieved post-apology period during which Harper conveys his appreciation to the people who demanded the apology, implicitly indicating to them that they have now received what they had asked for. The message of Harper’s concluding remarks seems to be that the nation, having made the apology, has done its part to right the historical wrongs committed against minority constituencies and will now move on to more important matters.

As Harper walks off the stage, another kind of performance begins. Stepping up to the podium, members of the South Asian Canadian community vehemently denounce (rather than cordially accept) the apology, insisting that it should have been made in Parliament rather than in a park. “We do not accept this apology at all. We were ashamed in 1914 by the government and today the government again has ashamed us [sic]” (Trumpener), shouts one activist as he aggressively waves his fist in the air. His proclamation is followed by that of another activist, Jaswinder Toor, who, addressing the audience and the (now absent) Prime Minister, loudly declares: “Prime Minister, we clearly told your representatives yesterday that this apology will only be accepted if it will be done in Parliament” (Trumpener). These performances by the activists, unlike the prior performances of the state, are impassioned and unscripted rather than detached and pragmatic; they are thus of a very different kind, much more in the realm of strong

feeling and affect. This is interesting in part because it marks a sharp break with the festive and multicultural ethos and a turn towards a new kind of politics that is much more disruptive and potentially violent. Rather than reading this disruptive energy as part of an “inferior” performance, I read it as both necessary and productive, that is, as rupturing the bland surface of multiculturalism and pushing the nation towards a more inclusive and more tolerant synthesis.

The portion of the event that follows Harper’s departure is, for obvious reasons, not assimilable to multiculturalism: the activists are shouting, gesticulating wildly, departing from the podium, and shifting repeatedly between English and Punjabi. In fact, I argue that if multiculturalism is meant to appease minority demands for recognition by effecting closure upon past wrongs while stealthily seeming to evoke and remember them, then what happens after Harper leaves can be understood as the (productive) failure of multiculturalism. I am suggesting, in other words, that there is a clear demarcation between the earlier portion of the festival and the concluding one, where the former is marked by multicultural harmony and the latter by active protest, by a struggle of the people against the state. The activists’ protests might be understood on the surface as simply demands for a more formal apology from the nation, that is, an apology delivered from the House of Commons, the very space where the original policy – the Continuous Journey clause, which kept the passengers aboard the ship out of Canada – was conceived; but, I believe that they can and should be read also in more complex terms. To deliver an apology in Parliament means to officially document and record that apology, to permanently inscribe it in the nation’s historical record. Thus, what the activists are implicitly demanding is that the state remember precisely what it wishes to forget, that it

break away from the economy of forgetting that characterizes official multiculturalism, and, in doing so, that it grant the South Asian Canadian diaspora a more meaningful recognition, and essentially, a more meaningful inclusion in the nation.

Perhaps even more interesting than the protests made by activists is the state's response to them. After members of the South Asian Canadian community rejected Harper's apology, for example, the Minister of Multiculturalism, Jason Kenney, made an announcement that revealed some anxiety on the part of the state at the prospect of having to repeat the apology. He declared, "The apology has been given and it won't be repeated" ("Harper Apologizes"). The first part of this statement—"the apology has been given"—is an attempt to effect closure upon the past, and the second part—"it won't be repeated"—indicates an awareness that, in repeating the apology, the state might lose power. As Nicholas Tavuchis notes, "[w]hen we apologize... we stand naked" (18) and we become vulnerable. The state's reluctance to make the apology permanently accessible to the public, therefore, can be read as an anxious attempt to erase Harper's speech act from the nation's memory and thus to close the wounds of the past that it unwittingly opened. Interestingly, rather than accepting the government's refusal to repeat the apology, more than 4,600 Canadians (many of South Asian origin) signed a petition after Harper's performance demanding that an apology for the Komagata Maru incident be made in Parliament. New Democratic Party Leader, the late Jack Layton presented this petition in the House of Commons on April 13, 2010 and stated that the South Asian Canadian community deserved an apology for the Komagata Maru incident, an "unhealed scar in the Sikh community" ("Jack Layton Presents Petition"). Layton's

demand attests to the failure of Harper's speech act to close off the past and instead demonstrates how apologies can open up a space for further demands and discussion.³³

That the state is aware of the dangerous potential of the apology is confirmed by my own difficulty in getting hold of the manuscript or record of the apology. The footage of the apology that I have been describing thus far was given to me by the activist I mentioned earlier—Jasbir Sandhu—and it was very difficult to obtain. This is partly explicable by the fact that the apology for the Komagata Maru case, unlike other official apologies, has not been made available on the Government of Canada's official website. Having discovered this absence during the course of my research, I made several attempts—all of which were failures—to gain access to the transcript of the apology from the Prime Minister's Office (PMO). First, I sent an email to the PMO with my request for the apology. When I didn't receive a reply, I telephoned the office. On the phone, I was

³³ The date on which Layton made the demand, as he himself points out, is significant: it is the Sikh New Year, or Vaisaiki. In his address to Parliament, Layton states, "What better gift to give the community on Vaisakhi than the apology and acknowledgement that they deserve. The Komagata Maru has been an unhealed scar in the Sikh community and in our history" ("Jack Layton Presents Petition"). Although Layton acknowledges that historically, there were Sikhs, Hindus and Muslim aboard the Komagata Maru, it might be argued that Layton is unintentionally contributing to the project of those who want to claim the Komagata Maru incident as a Sikh event rather than an Indian event by making the announcement on the Sikh New Year.

One of the issues that is worth addressing, therefore, is the question of who gets the apology. As Sundar Rajan notes, often the apology made by the state never actually reaches the victims. For example, in state-to-state apologies, she argues, "the apology does not reach the 'proper' victims because the new nation-state now intercedes as its official recipient, blocking its passage to them and deflecting its affective and material impact" (164). In the case of the Komagata Maru incident, to whom the government makes the apology is important. If the apology is made to the Sikh community, for example, it has the potential to further communalize the South Asian diaspora; if it is issued to the South Asian community, it has the potential to unite the diaspora. The apology thus has the potential to be very significant: it can divide the South Asian Canadian community or unite them.

repeatedly transferred from one person to the next, until someone finally informed me that the written transcript of the apology was available on Harper's website. It was not. The next time I called the PMO, I threatened to file a Freedom of Information Act. It was only at this point that my query was taken seriously. Deputy Press Secretary Andrew MacDougall emailed me personally and asked me exactly what I needed. After a series of exchanges with MacDougall, I was informed that Harper's apology would not be made available to me and that I should search for it elsewhere. The email that I received reads as follows:

I don't have a final version of the speech... What generally happens is the Prime Minister will make final edits to the speech once it's left our office's hands. If the speech is to be posted on the PM website after the event we generally get the delivered version back (i.e. with final PM tweaks). We didn't in this case as the speech was not put online. I can't release the incomplete speech to you. (18 April 2009)

The government's refusal to make a transcript of the apology accessible on the Internet, a space where it may be returned to over and over again, is significant. It speaks, perhaps, to an implicit awareness on the part of the state that the repetition of the apology is counterproductive, that instead of effecting closure, the tragedy will be reopened, and, more importantly, that this reopening can have unpredictable consequences; indeed, it might incite rather than defuse tensions and conflicts. The reluctance to make a transcript of the apology available to the public may be read as the state's attempt to counteract the unpredictability that is immanent in the structure of apologies, the logic here being that if a record of the apology is unavailable, there is no evidence that the act of atonement was

made in the first place. We need to remember here Benjamin's famous words: "every image of the past that is not recognized by the present as one of its own concerns threatens to disappear irretrievably" (255).

State apologies therefore need not be read as static and stable speech acts but rather as open-ended rhetorical structures that contain within them the potential for resistance, for diasporic communities to subvert the nation's forgetting. I locate this potential for resistance in the very moment that immediately follows the state's confession of wrongdoing but precedes, as Sundar Rajan points out, the victim's "feelings of bleakness at the emptiness of the rhetorical strategy" (166) and the confessor's sense of moral superiority for having purged his sins. It is, to cite Homi Bhabha, in this "interstitial" or "in-between" moment where the encounter between state and victim is fraught with unpredictability and tension that the possibilities of reversing the trajectories of power become most viable.

After the state's performance of the apology, the victim may respond by accepting the offer of regret, a response that the state certainly desires. However, the victim might also respond in a variety of other, and perhaps more interesting, ways: she may reject the apology; she may partially accept it; and she may demand an expression of the state's remorse in a more concrete form, such as monetary compensation. As Sundar Rajan suggests, the state's admission of wrongdoing can provide the victim "with the grounds for demanding restitution and compensation—which may be viewed as a form of consequential 'punishment'" (166). To put it differently, what Sundar Rajan points to is the fact that the apology can be read not as a closing of the memory of past wrongs, but rather, as the first step in a series of demands for further compensatory actions. The range

of possible responses that might follow the apology means that the power dynamic between wrongdoer and victim is a precarious one.

We can read the apology as Matt James does: as a species or microcosm of official multiculturalism (“Campaigns” 224). Like multiculturalism, the apology made by the state to one of its minority constituencies as it exists is a form of “official” forgetting, even though it appears to work in the opposite way: as a form of remembering. Thus, what can be said about multiculturalism also applies to official apologies. Harper’s apology for the Komagata Maru incident, for example, is involved in a paradoxical operation. Reading his apology at face value, Harper is “remembering” the incident, drawing attention to it, and placing it on the map of the national imaginary. But he is simultaneously relegating it to the past. As he states:

We cannot change the events of the past. We cannot undo the misdeeds committed against those long deceased. But we can bring Canadians together in the present to unite our country and to set us on a course to accomplish greater things in the future.

The rhetoric is clearly one of “let us forget the past and move on.” Harper’s public performance of redress reveals that national unity in Canada is constituted through a foreclosure of past wrongs, or, to use the Prime Minister’s words, through the forgetting of “misdeeds committed against those long deceased.” Harper’s proclamation strategically reifies the nation’s teleological narrative of progress in which events like the Komagata Maru incident are rendered merely as ghostly figments of a distant past, distinct from the newly-imagined multicultural present. His statement of regret thus distinguishes the past from the present, and in so doing, reinscribes a linear understanding

of Canadian history. The new image of the Canadian nation is characterized by civility and multicultural harmony.

When the trauma is a political and highly controversial event like the Komagata Maru and Air India cases, it can not only unite the community around the shared sense of loss, but also mobilize that community towards political action. The value of collective rememberings of the Air India and Komagata Maru incident lies in the fact that they have the potential to transform the composition and texture of the nation by forcing the nation to record and remember these traumatic events. The apology has the potential either to close off the past and encourage a forgetting of the trauma, on the one hand, and on the other hand, to open up the wounds of the past and memorialize them in the present. In this way, the apology can be read as a site of nation-making, a site that represents, in microcosmic form, the struggle between the diasporic community which hopes to remember the trauma and the dominant community which wants to forget the past. Whereas the state is suggesting both through its policy of multiculturalism and through its official apologies to minority communities that we must forget the past, the activists who contest these related discourses, who want past wrongs to be righted and inscribed in the public record, are suggesting that what is necessary is an endless remembering rather than a forgetting and closing off of the past. Traumatic events like the Air India bombing and the Komagata Maru case thus must be written in the public record within a generation; otherwise they can disappear and be said to have never happened.³⁴

³⁴ In this context, a very interesting commentary is made by holocaust historian, Saul Friedlander. In his essay, "Trauma, Transference, and 'Working Through,'" Friedlander worries about the collective loss of memory, in this case, of the memory of *Shoah*. He writes:

Official Inquiries:

Official inquiries are similar to official apologies, but, from the perspective of the state, they also seem to have a definite advantage: since the inquiry is framed as a neutral and empirical investigation, one that is meant to recover the facts of the trauma, it can be endlessly prolonged and can lead to further inquiries, committees, reports, investigations, and so on. The inquiry controls how we might discuss the trauma, what we can “officially” remember about it, and what we must forget. Whereas the apology involves an admission of wrongdoing on the part of the state, the inquiry works to deflect blame or, in some cases, even to construct the victim of the trauma as the wrongdoer, as the party that deserves blame. Thus, official inquiries tend very often to engage in a forgetting of the past, even as they purport to centre on the issues of truth, objectivity,

At the individual level, a redemptive closure (comforting and healing in effect), desirable as it would be, seems largely impossible. At the collective level, however, regardless of the present salience of these events, there can hardly be any doubt that the passage of time will erase the “excess.” Such erasure will, most probably, characterize the work of the majority of historians as well, perhaps because of what has been aptly called the “de-sublimation” of the discipline. Thus, if we make allowance for some sort of ritualized form of commemoration, already in place, we may foresee, in the public domain, a tendency towards closure without resolution, but closure nonetheless. (54)

What Friedlander is suggesting is that at the collective level, there is a tendency to forget the excess, to dismiss it. Moreover, the idea that the collective will forget the holocaust is worrying for him. Specifically, what he states is “a tendency towards closure without resolution” is troubling. Friedlander sees this as a “bleak forecast” (54). In this way, he is very much like Benjamin who also worries about collective forgetting, and who argues that “[t]he true picture of the past flits by” and thus “every image of the past that is not recognized by the present as one of its own concerns threatens to disappear irretrievably” (255). My argument is that past traumas – like the histories of racial exclusion (the Komagata Maru incident) or of terrorism (the Air India bombing) – not only need to be worked through at the individual level, but also call for another response: one that does not remember and then cover over the past, but rather one that keeps the past open.

disclosure, and fact finding. These investigative procedures enable the state, on the one hand, to represent itself as working in the interests of the minority group to bring to surface the facts and arrive at “fair” and “just” conclusions, and on the other hand, to manage minority subjects and their histories by controlling precisely what is remembered and what is forgotten. Examining acts of redress in the context of the Air India bombing, Angela Failler makes a similar claim, arguing that

these sites invoke memory in limited, strategic ways to construct a particular version of the past, of the relationship between the present and the past, and of who or what matters in the relationship. More specifically...[the] remembrance practices enacted here reveal a problematic desire to *forget* a racist colonial history and its lingering patterns in Canada, so that the loss and losses of South Asian Canadians in relation to the bombing attacks matter less than the project of maintaining a blameless nation-state. (151 italics in the original)

Because the inquiry uses an analytic mode and focuses on the pragmatic task of “fact finding,” it very often fails to address the relationship between the state and the diasporic community. Framing itself as a neutral report of the facts, the inquiry tends to discourage any kind of political action.

The 1914 Komagata Maru Inquiry Report

The inquiry report on the Komagata Maru incident was published in 1914 after Gurdit Singh and his fellow passengers were turned away from Vancouver and forced to return to India. Officially titled the “Commission to Investigate Hindu Claims Following Refusal of Immigration Officials to Allow over 300 Hindus Aboard the S.S. Komagata

Maru to Land at Vancouver,” the report has in recent years been posted on a Government of Canada website devoted to archiving commission reports.³⁵ In addition to this particular report, the website includes, for example, a copy of the 1977 Commission report on Indian Claims, a copy of the 1996 Royal Commission on Aboriginal People, and more importantly, for my purposes, the 2010 report of the Commission of Inquiry into the Investigation of the Bombing of Air India Flight 182. The Komagata Maru inquiry report was written by H.C. Clogstoun, a retired Indian Civil Service officer who lived in Duncan, British Columbia (Johnston, *Voyage* 133). It was meant to serve as proof that the government was following up and acknowledging a promise made by Martin Burrell to the Shore Committee: that if the ship were to depart from Vancouver, the Indians ashore who had helped the passengers would be accorded “sympathetic consideration” from the Government of Canada. The inquiry into the Komagata Maru incident might be read as a strategic performance of state redress intended to consolidate the nation’s image of benevolence and fairness. Such a performance might have been particularly important in the wake of the Komagata Maru incident which had fueled anti-colonial nationalist sentiment in Canada, especially among the more radical members of the South Asian diasporic community who read the Komagata Maru incident as an act of injustice committed against Indian subjects of the British Empire.³⁶

³⁵ When I first began this project, the inquiry report was very difficult to access and was only available in the form of microfiche. At present, however, it is available on a Government of Canada website. The electronic archiving of the report attests perhaps to the power of technology to render information more easily accessible.

³⁶ An inquiry into the Budge Budge incident was also held in India. It too sought to deflect any accusations that the British Raj acted unjustly towards the passengers aboard the Komagata Maru. Since Sikhs were soldiers in the British army, and the Komagata Maru incident took place only months prior to the outbreak of the First World War, it was

The inquiry report is divided into two sections. The first section lays out and explores the claim made by the Shore Committee that it was owed money from the government, and the second section includes a series of documents, which are presumably meant to corroborate the conclusions arrived at.³⁷ Although the Komagata Maru inquiry report is fairly short, it labours over many seemingly irrelevant details linked to the issue of coal aboard the ship and the money collected by the Shore Committee from members of the local South Asian community for the Komagata Maru fund. These details work to confirm the ostensible truth-value of the inquiry report. What we are meant to think is that the report is offering an objective account of the past. In keeping with its effort to present the state as ideologically neutral and as invested only in objective truths and material “facts,” the inquiry report cites statements not only by official members of the Immigration department but also by members of the Shore Committee. In so doing, the report is suggesting that the government will arrive at an objective conclusion, one which takes into account the viewpoints of all those who were involved in the Komagata Maru incident. It declares that its intentions are to uncover the “*true* motives of the Indian Committee’s expenditures in connection with the Komagata Maru and their claims for reimbursement” (7 italics added for emphasis). The emphasis on “truth” is common to official inquiries and commissions, which tend to be framed as “documenting” the past and as providing answers about what really happened. The analytic mode of the inquiry is often reinforced both by its language and its structure: in

crucial for the British Raj to maintain good relations with the Sikhs both in India and abroad.

³⁷ It should be noted that most of the documents in the second part of the inquiry report are illegible due to the print quality of the document.

the case of the Komagata Maru inquiry, for example, Clogstoun documents the facts as a neutral observer and very rarely inserts himself into the narrative.

What is interesting is that the inquiry report is not interested in the present-day questions of race and identity. Instead, it focuses attention on the Indian Shore Committee's demand for reimbursement from the Canadian government. The argument made by the Shore Committee was that it had raised money from the Indian community in British Columbia to carry out a strictly commercial transaction. However, Canadian officials, the Committee claimed, had come in the way and prevented this transaction from taking place. As the report indicates:

That action of the local Indian Committee in taking over the unexpired charter of the Komagata Maru was solely a commercial transaction, for the failure of which Government was responsible and therefore liable for the sum of \$14,791.95 raised amongst themselves and from subscriptions paid by Hindus residing in British Columbia. (8)

Unlike the contemporary apology for the Komagata Maru incident which acknowledges that the enactment of the continuous journey clause was an act of racism, and that the rejection of the passengers was a symbolic act of injustice, the 1914 inquiry report refuses to address the charge of racism. Instead, it repeats the argument made by many officials that the turning away of the passengers was a legal act. In fact, the report stealthily shifts the blame from the Canadian government to members of the Indian community.³⁸ Thus it

³⁸ As I pointed out in Chapter one, a similar discussion about the law surfaces in Gurdit Singh's account of the trauma. In that case, Gurdit Singh insists that the opposite was true: that the passengers aboard the ship were operating within a legal framework, while Canadian officials had deliberately transgressed the boundaries of legality. Today, the debate between officials and minority communities seems to have shifted beyond the

tells us that the orders-in-council made immigration to Canada “difficult, if not forbidden” (1); thus those who attempted to land and were barred from Canada were not victims of injustice but rather perpetrators who were acting in defiance of the law.

In the Komagata Maru inquiry, Clogstoun lays out the claims made by the Indian Committee and sets out, first, to prove that the government made numerous attempts to assist the charterers to carry out their commercial venture. Second, the report suggests that the commercial venture was a failure precisely because the actual aim of the Shore Committee was to help the passengers to land and not to unload the coal from the ship. Once again, blame gets attached here not to the Canadian government but rather to the members of the Indian Shore Committee who are constructed as having deliberately attempted to defy the law. The report labours to prove that the Shore Committee rejected every effort made on the part of Canadian officials to make possible the commercial venture. “Every facility was offered to the owners of the cargo, both as to inspection and interviews with probable purchasers” (9), it reads. It also lays out in great detail the process by which the incoming cargo would have been unloaded had this been the actual intention of the Shore Committee, and cites as further proof a letter written by the Department of Solicitors from 3 July 1914, which says: “[t]here should be no trouble in loading the vessel where she lies in the stream” (12). Again and again, the report attempts to expose the commercial intentions of the Shore Committee as fraudulent, as a mere subterfuge meant to conceal the fact that what the charterers really sought was to

issue of legality. By apologizing for the Komagata Maru incident, Canadian officials seem to be acknowledging that whether or not the journey of the passengers was legal, the law itself – the continuous journey policy – was discriminatory and sought to exclude racialized others from the “white” nation.

get the passengers of the ship landed in Canada. In an attempt to expose the motives of Shore Committee, the report goes on to note that members of the Indian Committee had very little knowledge of the venture that they claimed to be pursuing. Offering the example of one member of the Shore Committee, the report declares:

This was a responsible member of the Committee and helped to keep accounts – or was supposed to – but he did not know how much coal was there, what the cost of unloading it in the stream would be, nor the name of the Company. (15)

The report not only positions the Canadian state as the “innocent” party in the Komagata Maru affair, it also enables the state to defend its policy of exclusion. Thus, in one passage, the report makes a note of the grounds upon which Canadian officials sought to turn the passengers away, and subtly condones the actions of local officials.³⁹ The report also critiques members of the South Asian community who have accepted the argument that there is “free emigration to Canada [for] British subjects” and argues that “reasonings [sic] to the contrary, if mentioned, are cleverly distorted as unjust and oppressive”(19) by members of the radical South Asian Canadian community. In this way, it represents those who believe that their rights as British subjects allow them to

³⁹ The report suggests that constant demands were made by the Shore Committee to “secure the release of the Indian passengers from the steamer” (7). It then suggests that these demands were successfully met by the local authorities on a number of grounds, amongst which were the following:

That such permission would be construed as weakness on the part of the Government; That in view of local feeling strong opposition would be offered by the white population; That protracted legal proceedings might result in the laws being discredited; That it was difficult and dangerous, apart from the expense involved, to keep so large a number of men in detention for an indefinite period. (7)

settle anywhere in the Empire as intolerant, as unwilling to consider the complexities of the law and Canada's position on immigration. Rather than framing the nation's policies as discriminatory, the report thus subtly constructs members of the South Asian community as reactionary and as single-minded. Therefore the report recommends that the Shore Committee should not be reimbursed for the money it spent on the ship. More importantly, this means that the inquiry controls how the past is remembered; and in this case, it allows the Canadian state to defend its unwillingness to act.

From its very outset, the inquiry report attempts to malign Gurdit Singh and to represent him as having exploited members of his own community. The report tells us that the passengers aboard the ship were "*induced*" by Gurdit Singh's fabricated claims to board the ship, and implies that these passengers may not have otherwise embarked on the journey. It says specifically that Gurdit Singh,

by pretending to be a man of great influence with the Government induced these Indians to take passage in the ship which he claimed to have chartered for Vancouver; adding that he obtained permission from Government to convey them to that port where they would be permitted to land, but that this would be their last opportunity for so doing, as further immigration into Canada would then be stopped (1 italics added for emphasis).

Just as the report attempts to denigrate Gurdit Singh by casting him as an "unscrupulous" and "dishonest" businessman, it also labours to construct the Gadharites as unruly others, as "people [who] find seditious utterances, and often action, highly profitable in satisfying their vanity, consequent love of notoriety, and their pockets" (4).

In this inquiry report, there seems to be a concerted effort to represent the radical segments of the South Asian community as chiefly concerned with their own profit-making rather than as concerned for the well being of their fellow countrymen. Openly blaming the hunger suffered by the passengers and their unsanitary conditions aboard the ship on Gurdit Singh himself, the report reads:

The supply of food was insufficient and of bad quality: complaints were roughly dealt with; and it is probably that but for good weather and consequent absence of delay, the passengers would have been brought to Vancouver in a very pitiable condition owing to want of food and medical comforts, to say nothing of insanitary conditions. (2)

The report thus stealthily presents the state as innocent and irreproachable, while it frames Gurdit Singh and the Ghadar supporters as the perpetrators of the crime.

The report casts members of the South Asian community as either seditious subjects or as ignorant and abject others. Thus Gurdit Singh and members of the Shore Committee including Hussein Rahim and Bhag Singh are presented as cunning and dishonest, while those who follow them, including the passengers aboard the ship, are represented as simple and naïve. For example, the report suggests that the feelings of discontent among the Indian community in Canada were due to the “efforts of seditious mongers” (29). It argues that those members of society who contributed to the Shore Committee’s Komagata Maru fund did so in part because they were “dominated by and in fear of seditious members of society” (26), and in part because “they [had] no one else to whom they [could] go for advice and assistance” (29). The report suggests that the subscribers, as they are called, were exploited by the Shore Committee, whose accounts

indicate “that more money is with the committee than has been accounted for” (22). The “clever and scheming rebel figure” and the “ignorant and exploited other” are familiar Orientalist stereotypes. These stereotypes, as they figure in the inquiry report, are important to note for a number of reasons: first, they reflect the dominant racist sentiment towards non-white others. Second, they reveal that the report is not only working to close off the past and encourage forgetting, but also that it is attempting to undermine the solidarity among Indians in Canada by sowing the seeds of division among them.

Johnston alludes to this agenda in his very brief analysis of the report when he writes that Clogstoun “had suggested that the government give legal aid to anyone going to court to record contributions to the Komagata Maru fund. The idea was to drive a wedge between the revolutionaries and the rest of the Indian community” (*Voyage* 133). Third, within this economy, the dominion emerges as the civilized body that must intervene in the problems brought to Canada by the diasporic community, and must act benevolently in order to “save” those who are exploited by their own people. Thus, while the inquiry frames itself as a neutral body that attempts to find the facts, it actually engages in the opposite process: it actively works to divide the South Asian community and to reinscribe the hierarchy between the superior benevolent state and the Indian who is exploited by members of his own community and is in need of help.

The Air India Bombing Inquiry

In order to understand the Air India inquiry (officially called “The Commission of Inquiry into the Investigation of the Bombing of Air India Flight 182”) as a performance of redress, it is important to first understand the historical circumstances from which it emerged. On May 1, 2006, Prime Minister Harper announced that a public inquiry into

the bombing of Flight 182 would be held in Ottawa and he appointed Justice John C. Major, a retired judge, to act as the Commissioner of the inquiry. Harper's announcement came as a response to the demands made by the relatives of the victims who were particularly angered when the only two suspects on trial for the bombing – Malik and Bagri – were acquitted in 2005. The inquiry, it was believed, would address some of the unanswered questions that still surrounded the Air India bombing. As Lata Pada states in her testimonial, "For me, the inquiry is about accountability, a public acknowledgement of the past wrongs that have plagued the Air India bombing" ("Hearing Transcripts" 25 Sept. 2006). Bob Rae, the Independent Advisor to the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, was called upon to assess whether outstanding questions still remained and to produce a public report of the situation. In this report, Rae argued in favour of an inquiry:

What we need to know more about is how Canada assessed the threat, how its intelligence and police forces managed the investigation and how its airport safety regulations did or did not work. Twenty years later, these questions are still worth asking. (2)

The inquiry began on June 21, 2006 in Ottawa and lasted for a duration of 18 months.

The inquiry seems to have a curative function; it is meant to redress the wounds of the past and offer the victims of the trauma a feeling of catharsis. As John C. Major notes in his opening statement, the inquiry into the Air India bombing will

help us to determine how we can assure families who have spent more than twenty years seeking answers that the Canadian system has been or

can be fixed. The Air India tragedy or its like must never happen again.
("Opening Statement")

The inquiry is a state performance of redress that intends to close off the past and to encourage Canadians to look towards the future. To quote Major again:

It is not possible to undo what happened in 1985. We can, however, attempt to understand how this happened and to recommend safeguards and systemic changes to prevent future threats to our national security and intrusions into the lives of so many innocent people. ("Opening Statement")

What Major seems to be saying is similar to what Harper was saying during his apology to the South Asian Canadian community for the Komagata Maru incident: "let's forget yesterday and move on." As Major puts it, "it is not possible to undo what happened in 1985." Thus, he suggests that looking back in time is unproductive while looking towards the future and to the changes that can be made in order to prevent another tragedy is much more useful. In this case, the inquiry is being used strategically by the state to close off the past, even as it opens it up.

The inquiry, as I have suggested, is framed as a neutral and empirical investigation; it is a bureaucratic procedure. It does not constitute an admission of wrongdoing on the part of the state as the apology does. Failler, who has written about the Air India inquiry, argues that it is a strategic form of state remembering that insists on "the harnessing of 'objective truths' in order to "ensure that an incident like the Air India bombing will never happen again" (157). Thus the Commission's "Terms of Reference" outline a number of the pragmatic goals of the inquiry which include collecting facts

related to the way Canadian officials handled the Air India case, considering whether there were problems between government agencies working on the case, and evaluating Canada's legal framework, its response to terrorist organizations and Canada's policies regarding aviation security ("Terms of Reference"). These goals suggest that the inquiry is more concerned with verifying the empirical truth than with taking a stand on what happened and making an admission of guilt. What the inquiry promises is only to make pragmatic bureaucratic changes; it does not consider changes to the relationship between the state and the diasporic community.

Sociology professor Sherene Razack was asked to write a report about the Air India bombing for the inquiry, and in this report, she discusses the role that systemic racism played in the pre and post-bombing responses of Canadian officials. However, this report was violently critiqued during the inquiry and was never included with the official documents posted on the Commission's official webpage. The fact that I had to acquire an unofficial copy of the report from Razack herself suggests that her argument was dismissed rather than taken seriously. In the report, Razack defines systemic racism as a set of "policies and practices that appear neutral on the surface...[that] can have the effect of disadvantaging certain racial or ethnic groups" (3). Razack outlines two myths that she argues have been cemented in our national consciousness and have served to maintain the hegemonic status of the white Canadian population while relegating racialized others to the status of second-class citizens. The first is the myth that projects the white settler-invader subject as the bearer of civilization, the Indigenous people as archaic and part of a pre-historic past, and non-white subjects as late arrivals to the nation. Part of this myth, Razack suggests, thus involves an active forgetting of the role

played by non-white subjects in the process of nation-formation. The second myth, Razack points out, is that Canada is a peaceful nation and thus its involvement in traumas like the Air India bombing is unimaginable. Razack concludes that

[w]ith little to disturb the dominant frames...those professionals involved in the pre-bombing threat assessment and the post-bombing response would have relied on their own knowledge of the world, a world in which Indo-Canadians are little known and where they are often seen as foreigners whose culture is an inferior one. (8)

Instead of accepting Razack's claim, the inquiry allowed federal lawyer Barney Brucker to challenge it and thus to protect and reify the nation's self-image as a benevolent "multicultural" state from the charge that racism underpins the nation's consciousness. Thus, during the cross-examination, Brucker accused Razack of falsely characterizing the Canadian response to the bombing and suggested that her research was inadequate and therefore not to be taken seriously. As he states:

You've done this on several occasions in this report, you have taken one statement out of a transcript, one sentence here, one sentence there and portrayed it in a sense which is quite devoid from the context in which the statement appears in the document itself. ("Hearing Transcripts" 14 Feb. 2008)

Commenting on the exchange between Razack and Brucker, Failler suggests that "Brucker maintains the government's defense that its mistakes had nothing to do with systemic racism but were strictly the result of nondiscriminatory human error, cultural and linguistic differences, or a general unpreparedness for terrorist attacks" (160). To the

extent that the inquiry opens up a space for the nation to defend and restore its image of multicultural harmony and civility, I argue that it seems to work in the favour of the state rather than the minority community. By making bureaucratic changes, the state appears to be “doing something” about the Air India bombing without actually addressing the underlying problems of racism and exclusion that Razack addresses in her report. Thus, the inquiry seems to close off the possibility to remember anything that might actually alter the relationship between the state and its racialized subjects. Instead, it secures the position of the white hegemonic group and serves to placate minority subjects who are promised (superficial) changes to the system.

The Official Air India Report

The official report on the inquiry was published in Ottawa on June 17, 2010. The title of the report – *Air India Flight 182: A Canadian Tragedy* – is significant: it attests to the fact that the Canadian nation has to some extent been forced to take seriously the critique made by members of the minority community that the Air India bombing was never treated as a Canadian tragedy. The Air India report is thus very different from the Komagata Maru inquiry in which the state sets out to deflect blame and to represent the passengers and the Shore Committee as having committed the act of wrongdoing. The report accepts responsibility for the failure of Canada to see the bombing as Canadian:

The Commission concludes that both the Government and the Canadian public were slow to recognize the bombing of Flight 182 as a Canadian issue. The reaction was no doubt associated with the fact that the supposed motive of the bombing was tied to alleged grievances rooted in India and Indian politics. Nevertheless, the fact that the plot was

hatched and executed in Canada and that the majority of the victims were Canadian citizens did not seem to have made a sufficient impression to weave this event into our shared national experience. (1:39)

The report also suggests that an apology should be made to the families of the victims, for it argues that “there is a great deal to apologize for” (1:39). It acknowledges that the families “were poorly treated by their Government” and that “[f]or the longest period of time the Government seemed dedicated to self justification and denial of fault that led it to cast a blind eye and a deaf ear to the suffering and the needs of the families” (1:38).

Having noted potentially productive aspects of the report, I would like to argue that in many other ways, this report can be read as an extension of the inquiry itself. In the report, there is an acknowledgement that Canada was slow to respond to the bombing and that the nation failed to register the fact that the victims and the perpetrators were Canadian citizens; however, the report actively denies the link between the nation’s failure to respond in a timely fashion to the crisis and its exclusionary attitude towards non-white Canadians. It reads as follows:

The Commission finds that the term ‘racism’ is not helpful for purposes of understanding the Government response. ‘Racism’ carries with it so many connotations of bigotry and intolerance that even the most careful definition that purports to focus on effects rather than on intent ends up generating a great deal more heat than light. (1: 38)

Thus, much like the inquiry, the report makes a space for the Canadian government to “do its part” but also to sustain its hegemonic status and to deflect further queries. While

the report admits that Canada could have done much more, that it had mishandled the bombing and the threat of Sikh extremism, it suggests that Canada's actions in the aftermath of the bombing were linked largely to the fact that "the bombing was tied to alleged grievances rooted in India and Indian politics" (1:38).

The inquiry report also works to deflect political action; for its excessive investment in "facts" has the effect of encouraging the reader to "give up" and to forget the trauma. The report is divided into five volumes: The first volume offers an "overview" of the inquiry and its mandate. Volume two is divided into two parts. The first part is a pre-bombing assessment and the second part is a post-bombing investigation. Volume three is titled, "The Relationship Between Intelligence and Evidence and the Challenges of Terrorism Prosecutions." Volume four deals with the issue of aviation security, and finally, Volume five addresses "terrorist financing." In spite of the reader's guide that accompanies the five volumes, the inquiry report is convoluted and very difficult to read because of its length and the enormous amount of irrelevant detail that it offers. For example, in Volume two, we are given detailed information about what was known about the threat of a bombing, about the blast that took place in Duncan, BC prior to the bombing, about various meetings that had taken place between Sikh extremists and so on. The inquiry has so many pages and so much detail that instead of clarifying what happened during the Air India bombing and its aftermath, it complicates the matter. The report claims to be an attempt to map the trauma onto the public record, to memorialize it:

Important new facts came to light during the hearings and the documentary review conducted by the Commission. The Commission viewed it as an

important part of its mandate to establish the official public record of this event and the Report attempts to do so in a comprehensive fashion. (1:21)

And yet, the extensive amount of detail encourages a kind of forgetting of what actually happened. What is also fascinating about the report is that it doesn't include any of the personal testimonies by the families of the victims that were presented during the actual inquiry. In its effort to be objective and appear scientific, it writes out all the affective elements like the testimonials. These elements, as I have suggested, are crucial for memorializing the trauma.

Conclusion:

As I was concluding this chapter, Prime Minister Harper issued an apology for what he said were the “institutional failings of 25 years ago and the treatment of the victims’ families thereafter” (qtd. in Shepard). Thus, I would like to conclude with a brief analysis of this apology, which was made on the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Air India bombing, and which might be read perhaps as a sign that the nation might be changing, that it might be becoming more inclusive, even though it may not want to. At the apology, Harper said that “Canadians, who sadly did not at first accept that this outrage was made in Canada, accept it now” (qtd. in Shepard), and acknowledged that the tragedy was “conceived in Canada, executed in Canada, by Canadian citizens, and its victims were themselves mostly citizens of our country” (qtd. in Shepard). What is interesting about this apology is that while Harper acknowledges Canada’s mishandling of the Air India bombing, he presents Canada’s failure to see the Air India bombing as a Canadian event as an isolated case rather than part of a larger problem in Canada: the tendency to imagine non-white subjects as occupying a position peripheral to, if not

wholly outside, the nation. Thus, we can read this apology, on the one hand, as an attempt made by the Canadian state to ward off further accusations that the victims of the Air India bombing were not treated as Canadian citizens because of their status as non-white subjects and to present the state as benevolent, as caring for the families of the victims. On the other hand, however, we can also read the apology as potentially opening up a space for further discussion about the Air India bombing and about Canada's dealings with the event. That is to say, the apology can be read as potentially closing off the past, but also perhaps, as opening up that past for discussion by altering the existing historical record and the nation itself.

Harper's apology, to a certain extent, not only permanently inscribed the Air India bombing into Canada's history, it also allowed the families of the victims to experience catharsis. For example, Shelley Kaushik, whose grandfather died in the bombing, felt that Harper's apology was meaningful and necessary. As she puts it:

For years, the Canadian government did not think of it as a Canadian tragedy because the people were of Indian heritage. It means a lot to hear the Prime Minister accept responsibility and apologize for the greatest mass murder in Canadian history. (qtd. in Shepard)

Similarly, Lata Pada agrees that the apology was timely and welcome:

I came here when the memorial opened (in 2007). I never thought I'd come back to this place to hear an open public apology of the wrongdoing, that the government had not taken the threat seriously, much less hear an apology from the prime minister. It is a very important moment in our (Canadian) history, especially for families. (qtd. in Shepard)

By forcing the Canadian government to finally acknowledge that the 1985 Air India bombing was a Canadian event, the families of the victims have permanently altered the history of the Canadian nation. They have made it impossible for Canada to continue to deny responsibility for the bombing, and instead, have compelled the nation to acknowledge the Air India bombing as a Canadian trauma.

As I have suggested, official apologies and inquiries seem to function as tools for nation-making. Both these performances of redress are intended to block off historical memories of traumatic events like the 1914 Komagata Maru incident and the 1985 Air India bombing, events that can disrupt and challenge the nation's image of civility. The apology (much more than the inquiry) can also offer an opportunity for minorities to challenge hegemonic constructions of the nation. The struggle between the state and the activists' demands for an apology is ultimately a struggle about how the nation should be imagined. The South Asian Canadian community sees the apology as an opportunity to map its hidden histories onto the public record, and to force the nation to memorialize past wrongs. Thus, in the aftermath of the apology for the Komagata Maru incident, it becomes difficult for Canadians to understand the turning away of the passengers aboard the Komagata Maru ship as *anything but* an act of straightforward racism. Once the grand narrative of the nation is re-written, the future is inevitably affected because notions of rights and justice are based on specific understandings of the past. Apologies are significant because they rewrite the past, and thus they proleptically shape justice and rights in the future. If the minority community seizes the opportunity, the apology can potentially feed into a productive remembering of the past, and then it can lead to history being rewritten and reparations being made. Thus, apologies, like the ones made by

Harper for the 1914 Komagata Maru incident and the Air India bombing, have the potential to contribute in both material and symbolic ways to the formation of a different kind of nation: less cohesive, perhaps, but also less brutal, and less indifferent to the aspirations of minorities.

Epilogue: The Emergence of a New Canadian Nation

Despite the power of dominant narratives to reinscribe the notion of a “white Canada,” there are signs that the obscured stories of minorities and their exclusions – stories such as the 1914 Komagata Maru incident and the 1985 Air India bombing – are increasingly emerging in the collective consciousness. For instance, during the 2011 Canadian federal election, officials in Canada not only seemed to recognize the Komagata Maru incident as part of Canada’s history, they also seemed to be fighting over it. Sikh Member of Parliament Tim Uppal of the Conservative Party used an image from Ali Kazimi’s documentary film *Continuous Journey* in a television commercial, which quickly became a site of controversy. The commercial, Kazimi himself reports, depicts “a unique photo-montage based on two archival photographs documenting the infamous Komagata Maru incident of 1914” (“Conservatives Break Filmmaker’s Copyright” 1 April 2011): on screen, there is an image of Uppal watching Kazimi’s documentary, and then a photo of Prime Minister Stephen Harper standing in front of the Golden Temple in Amritsar, India. When Kazimi accused the Conservative Party of copyright infringement, the commercial was taken off the air. According to one report, Kazimi explained:

I do not want my film or publicity images for it to be associated in any manner with this campaign. In addition to the copyright infringement, it is inappropriate to use images of this infamous incident to romanticize the early South Asian experience in Canada. (qtd. in Singh 6 April 2011)

Whatever the intentions of the conservative party, the commercial they produced (and indeed the media attention that the Komagata Maru incident received after Kazimi's official accusations were made) is significant: it attests to the fact that the once forgotten broken passage of the Komagata Maru incident is in the current era part of the Canadian national imaginary. It seems that rather than receding from public memory, and rather than being written out of the national narrative, the Komagata Maru incident is now being appropriated by different groups for different political purposes. Thus, in response to the Conservative Party and its attempt to use the Komagata Maru case to garner votes from members of the South Asian Canadian community, members of the New Democratic Party accused the conservatives of "having done nothing to address the tragedy" (Crawford) and promised that they would apologize in the House of Commons for the 1914 event, should they be elected.

The fact that narrative fragments about the Komagata Maru and Air India cases continue to surface in the public domain suggests that Canada has been compelled to remember the broken passage. My thesis has attempted to trace these fragments which, isolated from one another, appear insignificant, but which collectively represent the emergence of a new Canadian nation based on remembering rather than forgetting. The ongoing proliferation of narratives about the broken passage suggests that the dominant readings cannot sustain their power, that they are always in the process of being dismantled by multiple counter-narratives. These counter-narratives would include most recently the publication of Tarik Malik's 2010 novel *Chanting Denied Shores: The Komagata Maru Narratives*, an art exhibit called the "Komagata Maru Stories" held in British Columbia in the summer of 2011, and most recently the publication of Kazimi's

Undesirables: White Canada and the Komagata Maru (2011). In addition to these narratives, there are a few forthcoming texts about the broken passage: Deepa Mehta's feature film *The Exclusion*, which is about the Komagata Maru incident, and Malik's sequel to his first novel, which is tentatively titled *Meet me in the Garden of Madness*. In order to conclude this thesis, I would like to briefly examine some of these new works and consider the way they are changing our collective sense of the nation.

Malik's *Chanting Denied Shores* explores the 1914 turning away of the passengers aboard the Komagata Maru at the Burrard Inlet and focuses on Bashir, a Muslim school teacher who finds a way to enter Canada, and the historical figure of William Hopkinson, who has been hired by the British Empire and by Canadian officials to spy on the Indian community, and who is eventually killed by Mewa Singh. What makes *Chanting Denied Shores* a particularly important novel is not only that it shores up a historical moment that the nation would rather suppress, but also that it excavates details about the Komagata Maru incident that have not been recorded elsewhere. In the novel, the account of Bashir and three other men who are barred from Canada on the Komagata Maru and who find an alternate route to Vancouver through Mexico, is based on actual historical accounts that Malik discovered in the process of writing the novel.

As he explains in an interview:

In unraveling the complex narratives of the Komagata Maru, I stumbled upon the fascinating revelation that five of the expelled passengers onboard the ship's return voyage to India were able to jump ship in Yokohama and then sail for Mexico. From there they traveled to San Francisco and reached as far north as Calgary. In order to avoid arrest,

they then walked the railway tracks from Calgary to eventually reach Vancouver barely ahead of the onset of winter. (“Tarik Malik on Chanting Denied Shores”)

The account of Bashir and his fellow passengers who find a way to enter Canada, even after they are turned away by Canadian authorities attests to their resilience; it also suggests, more importantly, that the trope the broken passage can be remembered not only as a site of loss and devastation, of denial and exclusion, as I have been reading it thus far, but also as a trope representing possibility, hope, and determination. What the novel alerts us to is that we need not read the broken passage as a monolithic trope, one that signifies the impermeability of national borders. We may also read this trope as a signifier of the permeability of national borders, as signifying at once a sense of loss and of possibility and revolutionary hope. The work of Walter Benjamin, which has inspired much of this thesis, seems to be applicable here. As I have argued, Benjamin acknowledges the importance of capturing those moments of hope and possibility that emerge only fleetingly within hegemonic history:

To articulate the past historically does not mean to recognize ‘the way it really was’ (Ranke). It means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger. Historical materialism wishes to retain that image of the past which unexpectedly appears to man singled out by history at a moment of danger. The danger affects both the content of the tradition and its receivers. The same threat hangs over both: that of becoming a tool of the ruling classes. In every era the attempt must be made anew to

wrest tradition away from the conformism that is about to overpower it.
(255)

Malik's novel does exactly what Benjamin suggests: it "wrest[s] tradition away from the conformism that is about to overpower it" (255) by seizing hold of a fragment of history that threatens to be usurped and thus forgotten by the hegemonic discourses. For the men in the novel who find their way into Canada using an alternative route, the story of the Komagata Maru incident becomes not only about impenetrable barriers, but also about breaking down those barriers, about resilience and agency. Thus, we are told by Bashir that when "the rocky gravel and scrub gave way to orchards and then pastures where summer wheat stood waiting for harvest...we [the men] knew that we had achieved the impossible" (207). The achievement of the impossible renders the broken passage into a sign of the capacity of diasporic subjects to achieve success and to challenge white racism rather than to allow it to defeat them.

The art exhibit titled the "Komagata Maru Stories" that was held in British Columbia, first in Surrey and then in Abbotsford during the months of July and August 2011, is another very recent manifestation of the emergence of a changing nation.⁴⁰ The exhibit features paintings by South Asian Canadian painter Jarnail Singh, and a narrative account of the trauma by South Asian Canadian writer Ajmer Rode. Together, the paintings and the narrative accompaniment, offer on one wall a chronological account of the Komagata Maru incident from the departure of the ship from Hong Kong, to the struggles of the passengers who remained locked in Vancouver's harbour for two months, fighting for their rights as British subjects to settle in Canada, and finally to the forced

⁴⁰ Images from the exhibit can be found in the appendix of this thesis.

return of the passengers to India. On another wall, there stands alone a large portrait of Gurdit Singh. It is perhaps significant that Gurdit Singh's portrait not only appears on a separate wall but that it is also the largest of all the images: it situates Gurdit Singh as a heroic figure. Juxtaposed against an ethereal sky-blue background, the figure of Gurdit Singh, who sports a long white beard and a white turban, appears formidable and even god-like.

The exhibit captures not the history of the event in its entirety; rather, like all the narratives I have examined in this dissertation thus far, it constitutes a fragment of the past. Thus, when viewed in the context of a constellation of narratives about the broken passage, it might be understood as playing a valuable role in the process of challenging hegemonic forgetting and of rendering the trauma "more real" and more significant by insisting that in 1914, the barring of the passengers from Canada *did* indeed take place. The exhibit is particularly significant, in part because only a few black and white archival images of the ship and its passengers exist to date. Thus, by visually imagining the Komagata Maru incident, the exhibit offers a new way to remember the trauma, one that complements the films, novels, poetry, plays, government reports, and so on.

The "Komagata Maru Stories" remembers the incident not only as a Sikh history, but also as part of a larger Indian history and a Canadian history. In one painting, for example, the exhibit offers an image of the men aboard the ship as they arrive in Vancouver. What is significant about this image is that among the Sikh men, who are identifiable by their beards and turbans, there is an image of a Muslim man in a fez hat, and a clean-shaven Hindu man sporting a Gandhi cap. The image of the men aboard the ship reflects the cosmopolitan Indian nation, and constructs the Komagata Maru incident

as a shared struggle between Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs against oppression and injustice. In another image, similarly, three men from the Shore Committee are discussing the voyage, and one of these men, who appears to be Hussein Rahim, is wearing a kind of turban that identifies him not as a Sikh but rather as a Hindu. Thus, the exhibit is careful to frame the Komagata Maru incident in a way that might contribute to a productive remembering of the past, one that memorializes the diversity of the men aboard the ship.

The exhibit seems to suggest that for members of the South Asian Canadian community, one of the ways of coming to terms with the experience of loss and exclusion is by memorializing the ideas of community and collective struggle. Thus, one image presents an account of members of the South Asian community ashore offering food and supplies to the starving passengers aboard the ship. The image is composed of dark shades of blues and grays, which suggests that the men had been forced to deliver rations at night, and thus to conceal from Canadian officials their efforts to help their fellow countrymen. Rode's narrative accompaniment adds another dimension to the image. Rode imagines a letter written by Gurdit Singh to the Governor General of Canada. In the letter, Gurdit Singh expresses his concern that the passengers are starving. He writes, "The food situation worsened on Komagata Maru. SIMPLY NO FOOD. Some passengers will die if the situation continues." The phrase – "SIMPLY NO FOOD" – written in block letters emphasizes the suffering of the passengers. The letter, juxtaposed with the painting, suggests therefore that the Shore Committee and the passengers aboard the ship had been forced to form an alliance against white oppression. Another image depicts the Indians ashore gathered at the Gurdwara to help raise funds for the passengers. The location – the gurdwara – which has historically been a site of

community gatherings, reinforces the notion of community and solidarity. Yet another image depicts three Indian men ashore discussing the struggle of the passengers. The narrative that accompanies the image reads, “We are determined to keep the passengers here. If they are turned away because they are Indians, how can we hope to get respect for ourselves in this country, our new home?” The exhibit represents the broken passage as a site of struggle and suffering, but also as a site of potential healing. More importantly, it does so by documenting the suffering and alienation experienced by the men aboard the ship but also by drawing attention to a kind of compensatory narrative: thus, against the experience of exclusion, it presents examples of collaborative struggle and resistance.

The exhibit not only partakes of the process of memorializing the trauma by representing fragments of it to the public, it also explicitly suggests that remembering the past is a matter of necessity. Thus, the very first “image” in the gallery reminds the viewer that to forget the past runs the risk of repeating it. It reads as follows:

[U]nless we realize the injustice done to the Komagata Maru passengers, unless we acknowledge our past mistakes, unless we purge racism and *casteism* from our conscience and social conduct, the phantom of the Komagata Maru will continue to haunt us.

The reference to caste injustice alerts us to another dimension of the trauma. As Rode himself informed me, many of the men aboard the ship were high caste and wealthy, and some of them practiced untouchability and caste prejudice.⁴¹ The images in the gallery,

⁴¹ Rode’s information is derived from his personal experience. Rode was a child when some of the passengers aboard the Komagata Maru returned to his village in Punjab.

many of which depict the passengers wearing suits, vests, and ties, seem to confirm Rode's statement: that the men may have enjoyed a certain amount of privilege, even though most of them were illiterate farmers. What the exhibit offers is a complex understanding of the Komagata Maru incident, one that refuses to be reduced to a binaric struggle between "white Canadians" and "brown-skinned Hindus," "perpetrators" and "victims." It also seems to suggest that the passengers aboard the ship cannot be cast as "abject victims" or celebrated as "revolutionary heroes." While the exhibit points to the ambiguities and complexities of the trauma, it makes clear that the barring of the passengers was an act of racial injustice, and that the passengers had suffered tremendous hardship at Canada's border. The image of the mother and her starving child in one painting attests to this suffering. "[L]ook at this child, hungry, thirsty, sick. Not a pinch of water, not a bit of bread," the narrative tells us.⁴² The exhibit repeatedly emphasizes the suffering of the passengers aboard the ship and the fact that they were excluded from Canada on the basis of race. Thus, in one narrative account, we are told that H.H. Stevens was "rabidly against any Indians landing on Canadian shores." We are also told that in one of his speeches in Vancouver, he said that he "intend[s] to stand up absolutely on all occasions on this one great principle – of a white country and a white British Columbia." What the exhibit suggests is that just as it is necessary to critique the men aboard the ship for any acts of injustice they might have perpetrated, so too is it crucial to critique the Canadian state for its sanctioned racism. The "Komagata Maru Stories,"

⁴² Although the image of the mother and her child (and the narrative that accompanies it) is reminiscent of Pollock's play, this image does not have the same political ramification. Whereas Pollock's play empties out some of the political significance of the event by replacing the men aboard the ship with one woman and her child, the exhibit presents a much more complex portrait of the past in which there are men aboard the ship (who are both victims and perpetrators of violence) and the suffering woman and her child.

therefore, suggests that in order to productively memorialize the trauma, it is necessary to recover its complexities, to see the wound as a site of multiple and shifting struggles.

Kazimi's *Undesirables: White Canada and the Komagata Maru* (2011), an illustrated history of the 1914 incident, constitutes yet another sign that the further away we move from the broken passage in temporal terms, the more it surfaces in the public sphere and impinges on the nation that would rather forget. Kazimi's book, which draws significantly on the material from his documentary film *Continuous Journey*, might be read as an extension of his earlier project. The juxtaposition of the photos, together with Kazimi's narrative, shocks us into remembering that Canada was built upon racist immigration policies and the deliberate exclusion of racialized subjects. In the book, Kazimi presents us, for example, with images of the exclusion of the Komagata Maru's passengers, but also with images that draw attention to the fact that while Canada excluded racialized others, it celebrated the arrival of white subjects. Thus, one image is of an advertisement, presumably from the late 1800s, that reads: "Free Farms for the Million: Dominion of Canada." Below is an image of a Canadian landscape with large plots of land. The land, the poster says, is "Given to every Male Adult of 18 years and over, in the great fertile best of Manitoba, Canadian North-West, and British Columbia" (*Undesirables* 44). Another image is of "The Canadian Emigration office" in London 1911. Here, Kazimi tells us that "[t]he Canadian government launched an aggressive campaign to recruit British immigrants" (45). By juxtaposing such advertisements with an image of Chinese immigrant men who came to Canada during the gold rushes, Kazimi forces us to remember that the dominance of whiteness in Canada was deliberately created. That Kazimi points out that the image of the Chinese men is a "rare early

photograph” (45) suggests that such images and the stories that they tell have been elided from the nation’s consciousness, while the arrival of British immigrants has been well documented and remembered.

By bringing to surface images that have been buried and forgotten, images that draw attention to the oppression of racialized groups in Canada, Kazimi is challenging Canada’s claims of “goodness.” One of the most haunting images in the book, for me, is a picture of a group of white settlers in Saskatoon standing behind an Aboriginal man. The photograph is obviously staged: the white settlers are staring at the camera while the Aboriginal man sits on the dirt road before them. Wrapped in a dirty blanket, the Aboriginal man’s eyes are slightly closed, and his hair disheveled. The black and white image draws attention to the way Aboriginal people were treated as curious spectacles and regularly dehumanized by the white settler subject. In a number of ways, the image encapsulates the politics of remembering and forgetting. The image itself has been forgotten. As Kazimi tells us, “[n]o details are available about this image from 1905.” Thus, to see this image is, first, to *remember* Canada’s history of genocide against the First Nations people. Second, this image alerts us to the history of inequality upon which the nation rests. What Kazimi wants us to see in this image is that whereas white men were given free land, the Aboriginal people to whom the land actually belonged were being treated as inhuman and subject to unspeakable atrocities. In the text, Kazimi explains that

Canada’s aboriginal peoples were kept strictly on the margins. Residential schools that sought to ‘civilize’ aboriginal children, legal restrictions on traditional aboriginal practices, externally applied rules that defined who

was an Indian, and the encroachment on and confiscation of traditional lands were deliberate policies designed to destroy aboriginal culture and ways of living. (70)

Just as I have tried in this dissertation to draw attention to the continuity between the 1914 Komagata Maru incident and the 1985 Air India bombing, Kazimi too wants us to remember that these two events are linked. Thus, he explains that when the Air India disaster occurred, a friend said to him, “I’m sorry, Ali.” Kazimi tells us that in response, he “exploded in fury, screaming at no one in particular: ‘They were Canadians, they were Canadians!’” (5). Kazimi goes on to explain that the nation did not seem to *feel* for the Air India victims and their families. He writes:

It would take twenty-five years and another Canadian prime minister to acknowledge that most of them ‘were our fellow citizens.’ At the time, there was no national sense of mourning. For many Canadians, these were East Indians flying on an Indian aircraft, blown up by Sikh separatists motivated by events in India. Many Canadians felt little connection to the victims of the surviving families. I recognized the painful limbo inhabited by many Canadians of Indian origin. They had given up their Indian citizenship to legally become Canadians, yet in their darkest hour their adopted country had disowned them. (5-6)

For Kazimi, the rejection of the passengers is a form of exclusion, but so is the forgetting of events like the Air India bombing. What Kazimi suggests then is that the nation continues to operate on the assumption that Canada is essentially “white” and its others are outsiders, if not “undesirables.”

While Kazimi draws attention to the ongoing history of racial violence in Canada, his book attests to the possibility that the nation is changing. Funded by the Community Historical Recognition Program of Citizenship and Immigration Canada, Kazimi's book confirms that the Canadian state has been forced (to a certain extent) to take events like the Komagata Maru incident seriously. Like the activists who used the apology to map their history onto the public record, Kazimi, in this book, seems to be using Canada's redress efforts strategically to draw attention to the forgotten history of the Komagata Maru incident and its connections to the politics of race in Canada. Kazimi thus concludes with a suggestion that the future of Canada might look very different, that it might be more inclusive. He writes:

Gurdit Singh died on July 23, 1953 – almost thirty-nine years to the day from the date the *Komagata Maru* became the first ship bearing migrants to be turned away from Canadian shores. Half a century later, in 2006, Gurdit Singh's great-grandson Tejpal Singh Sandhu, arrived in Canada with his wife and infant. (145)

Narratives like the "Komagata Maru Stories," *Chanting Denied Shores*, and *Undesirables*, along with the others that I have referred to throughout this dissertation are foundational for imagining the nation anew. It was Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* that first opened up the possibility for thinking about the modern nation as a space that could shift and change; for Anderson, as I have argued, suggested that the nation was an affective and symbolic space rather than a strictly geographical one. Anderson's work has thus been foundational to my dissertation and deserves to be revisited briefly here. For Anderson,

the nation arouses within its members a deep emotional attachment because these members can imagine themselves as belonging to a much larger and more coherent community of people who are united by a set of shared memories. As Anderson writes:

[T]he nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship.

Ultimately, it is this fraternity that makes it possible, over the past two centuries, for so many millions of people, not so much to kill, as willingly to die for such limited imaginings. (7)

If we accept the claim that the modern nation is a psychic and fluid space, an idea rather than an artifact, and that this idea is based on shared imaginings and collective memory, then it becomes possible to imagine a new nation as coming into being if that nation is imagined differently.

What is crucial to nation-formation is narration, as Homi Bhabha quite rightly reminds us; for the nation is always constituted, contested, and defined in and through narrative. In his introduction to *Culture and Imperialism*, Edward Said argues that narrative is crucial to the formation of Empire and to the process of decolonization:

Readers of this books will quickly discover that narrative is crucial to my argument here, my basic point being that stories are at the heart of what explorers and novelists say about strange regions of the world; they also become the method colonized people use to assert their own identity and the existence of their own history. (xii)

In Canada, the dominant community has long sought to narrativize the nation as a benevolent multicultural space, and it has done so by engaging in a process of forgetting its history of colonial violence and racialized oppression. This kind of forgetting – a

forgetting of the histories involving racialized communities – means that Canada is remembered perhaps paradoxically as a monocultural nation, as a “white nation,” and that its racialized subjects, or “visible minorities,” “ethnics” and “new immigrants” as they are often labeled, are framed as the multicultural “guests” of that nation. In *White Civility: The Literary Project of English Canada*, Daniel Coleman argues that whiteness will continue to occupy a hegemonic position of privilege until “we begin to carry out the historical work that traces its genealogy” and until we “combat the national injunction to *forget* elements of our racial history” (7-8 italics added for emphasis). Part of the aim of this project, therefore, has been to engage in a process of tracing and documenting the history of racism that underpins the nation by recuperating two broken passages – the 1914 Komagata Maru incident and the 1985 Air India bombing – that signify the exclusion of racialized minority subjects from the nation. What I have argued is that if we map the memories of the Komagata Maru and Air India cases onto the public record where they may be returned to over and over again, we might force the nation to actually embrace its minority subjects and offer them a real sense of inclusion.

My project has in many ways been a very personal one. One of my earliest memories of racism is associated with an incident that took place in middle school when a classmate of mine who was both white and male asked me if “I didn’t sometimes just wish I were white.” What was particularly striking about this question was not only the earnest way in which he posed it, as if to imply that he genuinely believed that I might be happier if I were a member of the dominant white Canadian community rather than a member of a racialized diasporic group, but also the brief moment of hesitation in my own mind before I replied angrily that I was perfectly happy the way I was. This moment

of hesitation, of uncertainty, now saddens me because of what it confirms: that because of the way the nation has been narrativized – as a story about the peaceful settlement of the white settler subject and later about his benevolent inclusion of the nation’s “multicultural” others – whiteness occupies the position of the phantasmatic ideal in Canada, of the privileged norm, and as such, racialized minority subjects are rendered abject while members of the dominant community are protected and their power reinscribed. Thus, if I had grown up hearing a different set of stories, ones that exposed hidden histories of injustice, I might have perhaps responded to my classmate’s question about my desire for whiteness with much more certainty and without being interpellated, even momentarily, as the subordinate and inferior other to the dominant community. Thus, I conclude that while there are signs that the nation might be changing, there is still much progress to be made; for until counter-hegemonic narratives make their way into the education system and become canonized, until the broken passages and broken promises of racialized communities become part of the national ethos, the hegemonic version of the nation will persist.

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Appendix

Transcript of Prime Minister Stephen Harper's Official Apology for the 1914 *Komagata Maru Incident*⁴³

Location: Surrey, British Columbia, Bear Creek Park

Event: *Gadri Babian da Mela*

Opening: A bhangra performance by the Surrey India Arts Club.

Nina Grewal (MP): I would like to thank the Surrey India Arts Club for such a wonderful performance. Let's give them a big hand. They also went to Ottawa and had a wonderful performance during the *Vaisakhi* celebrations that I hosted in Ottawa. They also went to Ottawa and had a wonderful performance during the *Vaisakhi* celebrations that I hosted in April. I know that the Prime Minister is a big fan of the bhangra.

Jim Abbot (Parliamentary Secretary): It's now time to start our formal program for this afternoon. In 2006, the Prime Minister gave me the privilege of consulting with Indo-Canadians in Vancouver and Toronto on the issue of the *Komagata Maru*. As you are all well aware, this is a dark moment in our great nation's history. I have listened to how the events of 1914 have affected the Indo-Canadian community and how we as a government could best respond to this issue. At around the same time I put together my findings, a young man here with us today was appointed to cabinet. Jason Kenney is no stranger to this topic; he has been a vocal member of our government and cabinet when this issue has come up for debate. Without him, today's announcement would not be possible.

⁴³I have omitted the few sentences in French that were translations of the speeches in English.

Nina Grewal (MP): Ladies and Gentlemen, Our first speaker has been the voice of newcomers and cultural communities since our party took government. He is both a friend of our [sic] and an advocate for the Indo-Canadian community. It is both an honour and a privilege to introduce my friend, Secretary of State for Multiculturalism and Canadian Identity, the Honourable Jason Kenney.

Jason Kenney (Minister of Multiculturalism): Thank you Nina. Thank you Jim. *Sat Sri Akaal, Nameste, As-Salāmu Alaykum, Bonne après-midi.* Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen. Are you having a great time today? Are you enjoying the show? I would like to acknowledge all of the special guests joining us today and all of you ladies and gentlemen and boys and girls for this beautiful celebration of the rich and ancient culture of Punjab. The Mohan Singh Foundation threw this *mela* and activities throughout the year both here in Canada, India, and elsewhere, brings to life the best of Punjabi culture in the memory of that great poet, Professor Mohan Singh who also brought people together regardless of divisions or differences in faith and other backgrounds. He is somebody who believed in pluralism and that is the secret to our success in Canada. The Punjabi community in this country, indeed in this part of Canada, is over a hundred years old. Canadians of Punjabi origin are not new to Canada; they have made a critical part of our cultural mosaic for over a century. So I thank all of you for bringing this rich culture to Canada as part of our diversity which is one of our unique strengths. It's a pleasure for me today to be here to introduce our nation's leader, the Prime Minister, the Right Honourable Stephen Harper. You know that he has now been Prime Minister for two and a half years, and in that time he has worked hard to deliver results for all Canadians, including new Canadians by doing such things as cutting in half our right of landing fee,

increasing funding for immigrant settlement organizations, providing and creating a national agency for foreign credential recognition. But he has also recognized important historic events. It was on this stage two years ago that he was the first Prime Minister in Canadian history to acknowledge the historic injustice and tragic nature of the events that occurred in Vancouver harbor and Burrard Inlet in the spring and summer of 1914. You all know the tragic story of the *Komagata Maru* when some 370 immigrants from, principally from Punjab of Sikh, Muslim and Hindu faiths came to this country as British subjects and after a sad period of waiting in the port of Vancouver, were turned back because of the continuous journey policy. The Prime Minister acknowledged this event on this stage two years ago. He undertook to consult with all Canadians, particularly those of South Asian origin about how best to address the issue. He charged Parliamentary Secretary Abbot to do that and I am pleased that we have since announced funding through the Community Historic and National Historic Recognition programmes to acknowledge, commemorate, and educate future generations about that sad event. And so, I am proud to be a member of Prime Minister Harper's government; I am proud of the leadership, the strong leadership he is providing for our country here at home and on the world stage. And so ladies and gentlemen, will you please join with me in welcoming here to the podium Canada's leader, the Right Honourable, the Prime Minister, Stephen Harper.

Stephen Harper (Prime Minister): Good Afternoon, *Bonne après-midi, Sat Sri Akaal, Nameste, As-Salāmu Alaykum*. Thank you Jason for that introduction. Greetings to my colleagues, Nina Grewal, Jim Abbot, and Russ Heaper, and fellow Canadians. I'd like to begin today by thanking the president of the Mohan Singh Memorial Foundation, Sahib

Thind, for inviting me once again to this spectacular showcase of Punjabi culture. The vibrant dance and musical traditions, exquisite art and timeless literature being celebrated here today are the fruits of a millennial old civilization whose influence spans the globe. Canada now shares this rich cultural legacy; it has become an integral part of our own cultural diversity. [French Translation] Today over one million Canadians are of South Asian descent. These hard working men and women passionately devoted to their families and communities are helping make our country even stronger for the generations yet to come, our country that affords opportunity to all, regardless of their background, our country that offers sanctuary to victims of violence and persecution, our country of freedom and democracy, of prosperity and peace, second to none in the world. As Canadians we have before us, and before our children and grandchildren, a future of literally unlimited possibility. A lot of that promise stems from the confidence, the ideas, and the energies brought here by successive waves of newcomers drawn to our shores by the promise of a new and better life. Canada is renowned the world over for its welcoming embrace of immigrants. But like all countries, our record isn't perfect. We haven't always lived up to our own ideals. One such failure, as has been mentioned, was the detention and turning away of the *Komagata Maru* in 1914, an event that caused much hardship for its passengers, 376 subjects of the British crown from Punjab, and which for many of them ended in terrible tragedy. Two years ago, I stood before you and made a commitment and since then, we have acted on that. [French Translation]. This May the Government of Canada secured passage of the unanimous motion in the House of Commons recognizing the *Komagata Maru* tragedy and apologizing to those who were directly affected. Today, on behalf of the Government of Canada. [Harper pauses to drink

water]. Today, on behalf of the Government of Canada, I am officially conveying as Prime Minister that apology. Now friends, many Canadians have worked long and hard to secure recognition for this historic event. I'd like to thank from this community, the Professor Mohan Singh Foundation, the Khalsa Diwan Society, the *Komagata Maru* Descendants Association, and Community Leader, Tarlok Sablok, for their persistent and passionate dedication to this issue over the years. I also wish to acknowledge, I also wish to acknowledge my own colleagues, Nina and Gurmant Grewal, Parliamentary Secretary Jim Abbot, and Minister Jason Kenney for the work they have done to help all Canadians come to terms with this sad chapter in our history. We cannot change the events of the past; we cannot undo the misdeeds committed against those long deceased. But we can bring Canadians together in the present to unite our country, and to set us on a course to accomplish greater things in the future. In closing, I'd like to once again thank the organizers of this event for inviting me to once again be part of this tremendous festival. One of the most rewarding things about being Prime Minister is being able to travel across our great country and to meet the hardworking men and women of all faiths and cultures who are making Canada such a success. We should all be proud of our country and of each other and work together to build an even stronger Canada for all of us. Please enjoy the rest of the festivities. Thank you. *Merci Beaucoup*. God bless our land.

An Interview with South Asian Canadian Novelist Anita Rau Badami

AS: Although the Komagata Maru incident only has a peripheral role in *Can You Hear the Nightbird Call?*, the issues it raises about displacement and unbelonging seem to underpin much of the narrative. How do you see the role of the Komagata Maru case in your novel? What is the function of this liminality of the Komagata Maru incident? Is it connected in some way to the other tragic events in the text: Partition, the 1984 riots, and the Air India bombing?

ARB: It's the starting point, a jumping off point for this underpinning theme of home where one belongs, where one wants to belong. It is also the start of this notion of journey, loss, and disappointment. At the end of it, there is the pot of gold. That seems to be the story of most immigrant lives. For me, that particular incident needed to be there as the opening of the idea of a journey unfinished. For each of the characters, the journey was incomplete. Nimmo's family life was destroyed, whether it was Leela's life and her story which ended so abruptly, or Bibi-ji's idea that if she went away, she would be able to realize a dream of her own.

The Komagata Maru incident was the incident that underlined the fact that certain people were allowed into this country and certain people were not. There was a rule that was cooked up that there had to be a direct passage, without any stops along the way. That made it impossible for people from the east to come here directly. It was a way of keeping out people of colour. The Air India disaster, the majority of the passengers were of Indian origin. Brian Mulroney offered his condolences to India. There was an enormous feeling of disenfranchisement. The Canadian passengers were not granted recognition that they were Canadian citizens. The Komagata Maru incident was the

beginning, the first unredressed slight and then there was the Air India disaster that highlighted that some people can belong and some people can't. How long do you have to stay in a country to belong? What if the immigrant himself or herself refuses to belong?

AS: You seem to be particularly interested in writing about women's experiences of trauma. Can you tell me more about that?

ARB: The Komagata Maru incident started as a short story. An entire village full of women and children, and the men had gone away to Hong Kong and Canada. A lot of villages in the Punjab did that in that time; they barely got any living from the land. It was normal for men to go away and send money back. But the business of going away was a huge challenge. How do you go away? I had this mythological town that would feel like a myth. There were only woman. Men disappearing. In effect, the Komagata Maru was something like that. When the ship did come back, it landed at Budge Budge, and men were shot at by the British. They weren't allowed to get off because they were considered anti-British. Some ran away. It was the women who were left behind. What did they feel? The concept of an ocean wide journey was beyond their imaginations. Imagine then when you had sailed for months, when these women never left their homes. The farthest they went was to the village well. I thought about how these women might feel; would they just be resigned to the fact that their men had just vanished. It was sort of the story of Penelope in *The Odyssey*. In almost all myths, the man goes off on the adventure, while the woman has to stay back. Think about the Ramayana. Rama, Sita, and Laxman are exiled. Sita sees a golden deer. Rama says, "I'll go get it." Before they leave in search of the deer, Laxman draws circle and says to Sita, "don't set foot outside;

it is to protect you.” When she goes out, she is abducted. So, there’s a sense that when you leave the boundaries, you will encounter trouble.

Similar to the 1984 riots. The photographs I had seen were always of women holding onto their children and crying. Women are left behind. So, whether a man has gone away on this voyage or whether he is killed, it’s the woman’s story that interests me. It’s also very ordinary women. I’m not talking about upper middle-class, educated women. These women are resourceful and brave.

AS: Would you call it a feminist text?

ARB: I’m deeply suspicious of that term.

AS: When Leela is *en route* from Canada to India aboard Flight 182, she says that she finally feels an equal sense of belonging, both in Vancouver and in Bangalore.

The dramatic irony here is that the reader is aware of what is about to happen:

Leela will be killed in the bomb blast. From your perspective, what is the irony in this situation meant to express?

ARB: Well, I think that the irony is quite simply that the moment Leela comes to the realization or is reconciled with the fact that she is always going to have to belong to two places, is the moment tragic events leave her nowhere, because neither country acknowledges her as a citizen.

AS: Are you suggesting that belonging is an impossibility?

ARB: Yes, it is for Leela because her whole life, all she wanted to do was belong. In India, her mother’s eyes didn’t let her belong; in Canada, her skin colour didn’t let her belong. People saw in her whatever they thought was foreign. In the West, eyes of different colour didn’t matter, but her skin was important. In India, the colour of her eyes

was something everyone remarked upon. That's the physical aspect of belonging. In Canada, she has managed to find a place for herself; she feels that she will always be excluded somewhere. She had internalized that feeling of non-belonging until she realizes that it is she who needs to make a space for herself. She thinks that's what she has to do.

AS: The women in the text are unaware of the dangers that await them. They cannot, as your title suggests, “hear the nightbird call.” Rather, the women seem to be trapped by fate. One potential effect of emphasizing fatality is that it runs the risk of obfuscating female agency and empowerment. How do you reconcile these seemingly contradictory discourses?

ARB: Bibi-ji is not dependent on fate. For Nimmo, the issue isn't about fate; if she doesn't watch out, her family will disappear. Leela is the one who is trapped by fate. Her story implies that because she is the link between Nimmo and Bibi-ji. I think fate is something I have stuck in there as the author but it is possibly only Leela that believes that fate has some kind of agency in her life and the lives of those around her.

AS: Why did you choose to conclude the novel with the figure of Jasbeer?

ARB: It is unclear who exactly it is; it is only implied that it is Jasbeer. The book begins with a journey that wasn't completed. The Komagata Maru incident: Bibi-ji's father's journey. This is part of my desire for some kind of closed circle, even though none of the events achieved any kind of closure. There is a desire to leave some things open, so we don't know exactly who it is at the end of the novel.

AS: The myth of Indra's net raises the question of connectivity. According to the myth, “when one gem is touched, hundreds of others shimmered...and a tear in the net made the whole world tremble.” Whereas the myth suggests that connectivity is

positive, the events in the novel, at times, suggest otherwise. The bombing of Air India Flight 182 at the end of the novel, in which the politics of homeland and hostland, India and Canada, overlap, for example, results in the death of almost 400 people. How do you reconcile the myth of Indra's net with the examples of connectedness (both positive and negative) in the novel?

ARB: The myth of Indra's net – it is negative. Someone wanting to tear something so beautiful, such a beauty connects us all. If someone rips it apart, it's going to break so many connections. It's going to create ugliness. The myth refers to any kind of violence. It was other events. It's a Buddhist myth. I've always loved this myth. I think that when you look at what is going on in this planet, there are these wars going on everywhere. When you look at the papers, there is no context; it's like these things have just sprung up. We keep going through this again and again. We never seem to learn from these mistakes. Violence is breeding more violence. Terrorism. Everything is connected. I don't know if you remember 20 years ago, Muslims blowing up things, but the paper represents them as having violence in their veins. The whole business of connectedness and how easily that connection can be ripped apart and turned into something ugly.

AS: Was the cyclical nature of the narrative a deliberate narratorial choice? What does that cyclical quality suggest? (Same qualities affect women across generations; or is it a point about female solidarity; or is the repetition a consequence of trauma?). How does this relate to your own witnessing of a traumatic event?

ARB: The cyclical quality suggests that it is the story of the lives of most immigrants. That shuffling back and forth seems to be part of immigrant lives. These people, the generation that I write about in this book, especially Leela. Bibi-ji has managed to sever

those links to some extent. There are a lot of immigrants from the Indian subcontinent that simply cannot let go. I'm not trying to suggest a kind of female solidarity. I don't think about these things that might be buried in the subconscious. I always think that history comes full circle. It is not just a full circle; it's like a slinky, I think that's the structure of history. It keeps going in this endless gyre. It keeps repeating. It's not even a circle, because a circle implies closure. This is repetitive. We never learn from it. That's partly what is happening in this book.

AS: Your novel is dedicated to the man on the bridge and the victims of Air India. Could you talk about your witnessing of this traumatic event? How do you see it as related to the Air India bombing? Was the writing of this novel part of a kind of personal healing?

ARB: We were in this bus coming down from a hill town called Dehra Dun to Delhi. It was the day after Indira Gandhi's assassination. We knew there was likely to be some kind of trouble, but we didn't know what. This [assassination] was never something that happened in our lifetime. There was a general refusal to acknowledge that there might be some kind of trouble. A Sikh family entered the bus and they were asked to get off in case there was trouble. The family didn't get on the bus. The bus started and there were little towns. Every one of those towns was absolutely silent. I've never come across that kind of silence. It was 8 or 9 o'clock at night. Typically, at that time, India is packed. The bus was being stopped at regular intervals by thugs with crowbars. These guys would get on and look for Sikhs. There was a *sadhu* (mendicant) and he had his hair loosely knotted on his head. He wasn't a Sikh but he was kicked off the bus. Before Delhi, in Modinagar, we saw this man who had been burned being tossed over this bridge

into a dry streambed by thugs. We couldn't do anything. The whole bus watched this. Everyone was paralyzed. No one could do anything. I don't know if we could have done anything. The mood was ghastly. We landed in the Delhi station. That place was deserted. The city was like a warzone. Police everywhere. Punjab was under curfew so no vegetables were coming into Delhi.

I would remember this incident. I couldn't write about it. I couldn't write about it in prose. I simply didn't know how to deal with it. Then I came to Canada and heard about the Air India disaster. My neighbour in Chennai happened to be on the Air India plane, so I was associated with two events in the book. The wife of the neighbour committed suicide. I heard about the Air India disaster but it hadn't registered as much as the Delhi riots until I came to Vancouver. All the connections started appearing in my head. And since the trouble in the Punjab, the original cause was the disputes over land and water, the whole idea of belonging and being removed from your land and your home resonated with the immigrant life and the connections that immigrants retained with the home country. They had never visited the home country but they are still there emotionally. They carry this baggage of all kinds of feelings.

It is in a sense a trauma narrative. Nimmo's story began as a trauma narrative with her displacement from her village. The fact that she lost her entire family. Trauma started her story. And that's how her story ended. I read these testimonies (people's union for civil rights, Delhi riots, three days in the life of a nation), and one thing I found was that a lot of these Sikhs who had been hurt by the post Indira-Gandhi riots were people who had lost people during Partition. The country that they had decided to choose as their home was treating them like outsiders. They were being made to feel again like

they didn't belong. People who died in Air India were not being accepted as Canadians. So there was a parallel between India and Canada. There are echoes in these stories. Except for Bibi-ji who is one of those characters who insists on a space for herself. It is only when she loses her husband that she becomes political. In some ways she is political because she comes to Canada and realizes her father's dream. But then her life is carved by the pursuit of money. She uses her money to get what she wants. She acquires a child. She gets what she wants and she uses Nimmo's financial needs to foster her own ends. But, I don't think it is uncommon.

I interviewed a woman [Eisha Marjara] in Montreal. Eisha was one of three daughters and her father was a Professor of literature in a remote Quebec town. He was one of four people of Indian origin in that little town. The mother used to be a high school teacher in Punjab. She arrived in Canada a bit after her husband and no one would give her a job. She had three daughters and wanted a son. She adopted a nephew and brought him here when he was 14 years old. He hated Canada and ended up joining a Sikh fundamentalist group. According to this woman, the young man might have been involved in the airline bombing, in which his aunt [Eisha's mother] ended up dying.

An Interview with South Asian Canadian Dancer Lata Pada

AS: How did you respond to the trauma?

LP: When I heard about the plane crash, I had been waiting in Mumbai, India for my family to join me for our summer vacation. My response was one of total shock, of total paralysis. One minute, I was excitedly awaiting their arrival and next minute, I am given the horrifying news that the flight had crashed over the Atlantic Ocean, off the coast of Ireland. At first we had no idea what had caused the plane to break apart, what had brought the plane down. One always suspects it to be a mechanical failure; in 1985, the possibility of an act of aviation terrorism was so far removed from one's consciousness. The first whispering of the Kanishka flight being brought down by a bomb was a few days later when we had traveled to Cork to witness the impact of this heinous disaster and to identify our loved ones. My reactions were of immense shock and disbelief. I can't even describe it. I was completely frozen both mentally and physically: zombie-like. Amidst all this grieving, amidst the trauma, there was this extra layer of having to deal with the reality of the death of our loved ones being caused by a human act of evil. Obviously the RCMP and CSIS had known that it was an immanent threat; news began to filter that it was a bomb, but at that point, for me, it was about personal loss, the gnawing guilt that I was not on the plane with them. Why did it have to be so complete? Rage, guilt, disbelief. The communal grieving of the families of the victims seemed to help the individual grieving; it seemed to somewhat deaden one's own grief.

Meanwhile in Canada, there was a growing understanding of what had caused the tragedy. This was a heinous plan executed by Canadians on Canadian soil against Canadians. There was the revelation of the Narita bombing, the subsequent arrest of

Inderjit Singh Reyat and a gradual unraveling of this complex act of terrorism. But in those early days, the word terrorism was a phenomenon that Canada was not familiar with; the Kanishka explosion was continually referred to as a ‘bombing’.

For me, it was inconceivable that I would continue to live in Canada. I felt a strong sense of betrayal about how the Air India bombing was not seen as a Canadian tragedy. Instinctively, I made plans to move back to India. The move, I hoped would shield me from the immediacy of this tragedy. I cocooned myself into my own dance, I returned to this art form clinging to it like my only lifeline. Imperceptibly, I grew stronger, more accepting of my loss and the betrayal of the Canadian government. Five years of complete immersion in my dance in India was a deep process of catharsis. I returned to Canada in 1990 more objective and determined to right the many wrongs and to add my voice to the Air India victims family group, pressing for answers – for justice.

Our efforts to demand accountability were thwarted; there was an incredible amount of stonewalling on the part of successive governments. We were denied a voice; we were denied representation. The criminal investigation was developing at an agonizingly slow pace, any efforts to press for an inquiry into the bombing fell on deaf ears. Finally the mockery of a criminal trial was completed in 2005 and we all know that the trial was a total travesty of justice. The two main accused were acquitted and the sense of loss and of being abandoned was once again overwhelming.

Undaunted, we continued our push for a public inquiry and finally it was held under the jurisdiction of Commissioner John Major. Referring to it as a “cascade of errors,” Justice Major’s inquiry painstakingly went over every aspect of the tragedy; it was evident how we had been failed by the very agencies and systems that are supposed

to protect and serve all Canadians. Undoubtedly, the inquiry served to educate and remind all Canadians how unprepared the nation is to confront homegrown terrorism, how public agencies need to overhaul practices, protocol and legislation to ensure that they are not vulnerable to similar weaknesses in the system. Certainly, the inquiry is not going to reverse what has happened, but I have a sense of satisfaction that we did not give up. We were strategic in pushing for the inquiry, which could potentially serve as a major flashpoint in Canada's preparedness for terrorism. The inquiry report has made strong and valuable recommendations about several themes: the relationship between law enforcement, aviation security, terrorist financing, immigration, the criminal justice system. These are vital and strategic; I hope that we, the victims' families will be given a voice in ensuring that all these recommendations are carried forward.

Was racism a factor that allowed this tragedy to occur? That has been a question that has been asked of me several times. Racism is such an ugly word; I have always been loath to use it. This was the first time since I arrived in Canada in 1964 that I even pondered this matter. I never had reason to feel, thus far, or to experience racism in any form, to feel discriminated or marginalized in any way. But the Air India tragedy begged the question: would the Canadian government have behaved so apathetically had this been an Air Canada or Canadian Pacific airline carrying a planeload of 'mainstream' passengers of European backgrounds? Would they have been so slow to react, would the justice system have served the victims differently, would the victims' families have been treated with scant respect? An important question that I have reflected upon: why did it take the terrible incident of the World Trade Centre bombing many years later for

Canadians to comprehend the devastation of 329 human lives in Canada's earlier incidence of aviation terrorism in 1985.

AS: In my thesis, I have suggested that whereas the individual needs to forget the trauma and move on, it is very important for the collective to remember the trauma, to map it onto the nation's public record, and to engage with it on a political level.

How do you feel about this?

LP: I would agree. It was certainly a process that led from the personal to the collective. In a way, it's also been related to my autobiographical piece *Revealed by Fire*. That work was a seminal work for me. It allowed me to completely re-engage with the whole issue first through an inner personal and spiritual process of personal recovery and only then through the broader context of terrorism. Coincidentally, Malik and Bagri were arrested in November 2000 as I was working on that production. I felt that it was a work that would provide some answers to my own inner questioning. I was hoping that there would be some cathartic value out of doing this work. The work really became, at the metaphorical level, a "test of fire." I don't know if you're familiar with the myth, the archetype Sita, in the great epic story the Ramayana: Sita emerges from the fire, stronger, purer, and with a clearer sense of her identity. For me, this work became that "test of fire" both artistically and personally. Artistically, it was agonizing to return to that place of vulnerability. How was I able to face the peeling away of those many layers, going back to the first moments of trauma; and artistically, it was not easy to tell this work on the stage, particularly in terms of classical Indian dance, because everything is done at a metaphorical level. That was my own departure from tradition. The same myths that you dance out on the stage, I merged into those archetypes. *Revealed by Fire* has made a

strong statement, ranging from the personal to the political. To find a way of having relevance for a larger community. Personally, I came through the entire process very much stronger. Initially, I had felt fractured, and I had no idea that it was going to give me strength. There is an interesting line in the playtext: “The only way is through the fire.” You have to subject yourself to ordeal; that was the only way through that process of intense cathartic change. Artistically, the work was celebrated as a great success; it broke the paradigm for Indian dance in Canada; it was sold out for four days; the media was really strong about this work. It has been called the Best Work of 2000, and it became one of the ten best in the decade, a strong validation of the production.

Personally, I was at a new place at that time. The only way was through the fire. The media around it moved me into the domain of public attention. In terms of the tragedy, all along there were things going on. It was not a part of the nation’s consciousness.

Malik and Bagri got arrested, then a couple of months later, I was performing: it brought back the story into the public mind. I kind of became iconic; it became iconic. I never referred to the act of terrorism. *Revealed by Fire* had as part of its soundscore excerpts from news reports. The production was centrally about the transformative power of myth, ritual and dance.

AS: In “The Management of Grief,” Bharati Mukherjee seems to suggest that grief is a very individualized process that cannot be homogenized. Do you agree with this perspective?

LP: I think that in an incident like the Air India tragedy, there is always the notion of individual grief intersecting with the collective grief. When you are a victim in that situation, you keep going back and forth between those two places. In the sense that the

definition of grief cannot be homogenized, everybody deals with grief in a particular way. If that's what Bharati Mukherjee meant, then I would agree with her. When grief is part of a larger community, I think it's a delicate parallel process of how you deal with individual loss, and how you gain comfort from the collective. And sometimes you get overwhelmed; you begin to see the magnitude of the collective and somehow, it makes one more accepting.

AS: In many works of fiction, I've noticed a tendency to "circle" the trauma rather than remembering it directly. Does that resonate with your experience?

LP: I think I returned to the trauma very directly in my work *Revealed by Fire*. I am so grateful to my collaborators, Cylla von Tiedemann, Judith Rudakoff, Timothy Sullivan, R.A. Ramamani for having believed in the relevance and power of this story. In a way, I was circling the grief for a while till I found the strength to be able to return to the actual trauma. My older daughter who was 18 called a friend on mine in California the day she was leaving. She left a message on my friend's voicemail. My friend heard of this tragedy from a direct phone call, comes home and finds my daughter's message; and she then made a recording onto a tape and gave it to me. For sixteen years, I couldn't bring myself to listen to it. I handed it to my music composer Timothy Sullivan [when I was making *Revealed by Fire*], to see if it had a place in the sound design of the work. He incorporated it and for me, it was a direct and painful acknowledgment of the reality and enormity of my loss. Cylla von Tiedemann, photographer and visual designer asked me to pull out family photos. That also marked a return to a place that I had shut out for a long time. It forced me to confront myself, my solitude, the possibility of new beginnings. The dramaturge, Judith Rudakoff, who wrote the play script included snatches of my

reflections, taking me back to my first day in Canada, my life as a mother, my life as a wife, my own questioning of society and of life, the whole issue of being a widow, womanhood, identity, who are you; it forced me back into that space that I had circled around.

Section 2: Art and trauma

AS: As a dancer, did your art help as a form of healing?

LP: Dance for me had an incredible transformative impact. When I returned to India after the tragedy, I went back to train with my teacher. In a way, it seemed to be the most natural thing to do. I was already in India...and performing, instinctively it was the only thing to go back to. I yearned for solace, comfort, something to hold on to; I needed to get back to my dance. The sheer physicality of it allowed me to become completely spent, exhausted. Dance gave me the tools to deal with my own questioning; dance became a pathway to a spiritual awakening. Those five years had unknowingly healed me. I returned to Canada in 1990 to teach and start a dance company. I had no models in mind. The company has just celebrated its 20th anniversary in 2010. What I'd been able to do in those five intensive years [in India], and seeing the organization grow since then, seeing the organization reach a place of national profile, I think has all been a very remarkable validation that dance and the arts are very important tools for agents of change. Everyday, I push my conviction that the arts are not dispensable frills in society; they are completely vital because the arts help us tell our nation's stories, be it through literature, dance, theatre or music. I am of the firm belief that artists are courageous people, unafraid to confront the truth. I think they have to be given the credit for shifting mindsets.

AS: How do you feel about the fictional treatments of the Air India bombing? Have you read Bharati Mukherjee’s “The Management of Grief,” Anita Rau Badami’s *Can You Hear the Nightbird Call?*, or Salman Rushdie’s *The Satanic Verses*? How would you compare these texts?

LP: I haven’t read Bharati Mukherjee’s short story. Anita Rau’s book was a very sensitive and evocative reference to the theme of the Air India bombing. I am afraid I haven’t read Salman Rushdie’s *The Satanic Verses*.

AS: You have offered testimonies in both documentaries on the Air India bombing. (Shelley Saywell’s *Legacy of Terror* and Sturla Gunnarsson’s *Air India 182*). How do you feel about these films? Did you like them?

LP: I feel they were important and courageous documentaries; extremely well made. Shelley Saywell was the first one to create the saga of the Air India tragedy; it was comprehensive, incorporating the narratives of so many family members. I think she was very sensitive about the portrayal of the loss of the families and dealt with the way the families were dealing with the grief in a dignified manner. Sturla’s documentary was very intelligently crafted. His use of archival footage and the re-staging of the conspiracy, the human drama of the victims and their families, were intricately woven.

AS: Do you see these literary works as helping to memorialize the trauma, or do you think they get overlooked?

LP: I think both these films were incredibly important in reconstructing the narrative and for reiterating the magnitude of the tragedy. By the time these films were made and released, the Air India bombing had faded from most people’s memories. The country had moved on. Particularly Gunnarsson, where he was able to fictionalize the young

people on the flight; it was a poignant reminder of the loss of potential of so many young, talented Canadians. The films served to set the record straight, some of the events surrounding it, the way they characterized the plot, and what were the reasons behind it, the fundamentalism that was growing, where things went wrong between RCMP and CSIS. I think there is nothing like seeing it on television; the visual impact of seeing trauma unfold on TV has a strong visceral impact.

Section 3: The Politics of Loss

AS: Do you think there should be guilt attached to the way Canadians treated Indians in the wake of the bombing?

LP: Remember it's been twenty-six years since the bombing, and we're dealing with a new generation of Canadians whose history is so far removed from the events of 1985; a whole generation away. I think it's been an important moment in Canadian history for people to reflect on many things such as the threat of global terrorism, the possibility of terrorism in Canada, of issues of embracing those who have made Canada their home as fellow Canadians and not as outsiders. Hopefully, the issues surrounding the inequities we faced has changed the way people see themselves as Canadians. And hopefully for people who are visible minorities, it has reiterated the fact that they have a role to play for reasserting their identity as Canadians, and for non multi-ethnic Canadians, it has shifted the way they perceive visible minorities. It has probably aggravated many stereotypes and the perception that immigrants bring their problems to Canada. For me in a global sense, Air India was a strong reminder that a global community looked on Canada as being soft on terrorism. How could Canada be so inept and incompetent in not preventing the tragedy that they had so much information about. The apathy of the

government to the rising fundamentalism in Canada was inexcusable. It should have been a warning to be taken seriously. Essentially, the tragedy had its roots in another country but the danger of ignoring the politics behind the extremism led Canada to pay a very heavy price. That was the perception. I certainly agree that immigrants should not be bringing their political ideologies with them and fuelling their rabid ideas here in Canada. Instead, in choosing to make Canada their home, they should really address how they can integrate and contribute to the collective good of their immediate communities and the nation as a whole.

AS: Many Indians felt very hurt that the victims were not treated as Canadians, that this was not imagined as a Canadian loss. Did you feel personally devalued by what happened, by, for example, Prime Minister Brian Mulroney's offer of condolence to the Indian Prime Minister? Did you feel devalued by the Indian nation?

LP: Certainly, the insensitive behaviour of the then Prime Minister in making the condolence call to India's Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi will always be a glaring example of the bombing as being seen as an Indian tragedy. It took many years of our protests and comments in the media so that the perception started shifting. I didn't feel devalued by the Indian nation. The Justice Kirpal Inquiry, held in India that was the very first inquiry; it took almost two decades for the Canadian inquiry to be held.

AS: What if it had been declared a Canadian tragedy from the outset? Do you think some Indians would have said that Canadians are not respecting our difference as Indians?

LP: I don't think so. We all along kept feeling that there were over 80 children, there were 280 Canadians, we just happened to be from a different immigrant community. It's hard to remember twenty-five years later what it would have been like. I can't speculate.

AS: Canada seems to have made some attempts to redress its failure to take the Air India bombing seriously in the wake of the tragedy. For example, there was an inquiry into the bombing. How do you feel about these attempts to redress past wrongs? Are they helping to move the nation towards more inclusion?

LP: Well, at the beginning, I would have said, "too little too late." We all know that the inquiry, when finally called, was given its resources to make sure that this was complete. It was comprehensive, and it addressed all the terms of reference, as well as finally giving the families the opportunity to be represented and to acknowledge that they were important and central to the inquiry. Justice Major deserves enormous credit. He did not treat any areas of the inquiry perfunctorily. His recommendations were thorough and forceful. I hope this will change the shape of the nation. It would have been a second tragedy if this inquiry report did not recommend important changes in government policies and legislations which have far reaching implications for all Canadians.

AS: The Air India bombing has often been linked to the 1914 Komagata Maru incident. In fact, I make this very connection in my thesis. Do you see any similarity between these events?

LP: I've never thought of them as being similar because, for one thing, they are completely different in the fact that the Komagata Maru incident was one of exclusion, of people who were not Canadians arriving on Canadian soil and wishing to make Canada their home, whereas the Air India case was about a nation turning its back on its own

people. I think the Komagata Maru incident was one that was related more to the issue of immigration and exclusion, whereas Air India got caught up in this web of terrorism. I think it was like putting the country under a microscope, in terms of law enforcement, the legal system, the judicial system, readiness and preparedness for terrorism, aviation. But certainly, there is a broad thematic link and that is about the notion of the “other.” And let’s face it: the Komagata Maru was followed by the treatment of the Chinese labourers and the imposition of the head tax, the treatment of Japanese interns, a series of events that have left a black mark on Canada’s history. Each of these events underscores the lack of recognizing that Canada is a nation that was built on the backs of its many immigrant communities.

AS: Some have argued that the Air India bombing has been understood as a Hindu tragedy committed by Sikhs. How do you feel about this representation of the trauma? Do you see it as more complicated? Do you feel that it is feeding into further polarization of Hindus and Sikhs?

LP: I have never seen it that way. For me the Air India bombing was caused by certain individuals, fuelled by misguided fanaticism and ideologies. While one should not hold a community responsible for the acts of those who carried out this heinous crime, there is no doubt, that in the months leading up to the bombing there was such a strong culture of fear in the Sikh community in British Columbia, witnesses were silenced and/or killed. This prevented even moderate individuals from speaking out. One knows that there were several people of Sikh background on the Air India flight as were people of many other faiths on the flight.

Paintings by Jarnail Singh from the “Komagata Maru Stories” Exhibit, Surrey BC.



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Education

- 2012 PhD English, University of Western Ontario, London, Ontario
2003-2004 MA English, York University, Toronto, Ontario
1999-2003 BA English (Distinction), McGill University, Montreal, Quebec

Awards and Research Grants

- 2011 Western Graduate Thesis Research Award, University of Western Ontario
2009-2010 Ontario Graduate Scholarship
2009 McIntosh Prize Competition, University of Western Ontario
2008-2009 Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC)
2008-2009 Ontario Graduate Scholarship (declined in favour of SSHRC)
2008-2009 Shastri Indo-Canadian Graduate Research Fellowship
2009 Western Graduate Thesis Research Award, University of Western Ontario
2008 Mary Routledge Fellowship, University of Western Ontario
2007 Mary Routledge Fellowship, University of Western Ontario
2007 Lynne Lionel Scott Fellowship, University of Western Ontario
2005-2006 Ontario Graduate Scholarship
2002 Dean's Honour List, McGill University

Publications

- "The Apology and its Aftermath: National Atonement or the Management of Minorities?" *Postcolonial Text*. 6.1 (2011): 1-18. Web.
Review of *Midnight's Diaspora: Critical Encounters with Salman Rushdie*. *Postcolonial Text*. 5.2 (2009): 1-3. Web.
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