CHAPTER 1

HOME AND NATION IN SOUTH ASIAN ATLANTIC LITERATURE

Introduction

Issues of home and nation are a well-recognised aspect of postcolonial debates, and they continue to be key ideas, both politically and culturally, to South Asian writers in the United States and Britain. Such writers examine home in order to raise provocative questions about changing societies and the place of ethnic South Asians within them. Home thus serves as an important synecdoche for wider social and national concerns, and it is used both to affirm and to call into question the status of Britain and America as sites of permanent settlement. Many writers examining concepts of home and nation are still first- or second-generation. Generally, they came of age in the 1960s and 1970s, when questions of American or British identity – personalised through the idea of home – were particularly pressing, thanks to the US ‘ethnic revival’, the impact of postcolonial immigration on British society, and the growth of identity politics on both sides of the Atlantic. Thus writers may lack the distance from such issues which might be enjoyed by authors born at a later stage. Some writers even display a kind of proselytising zeal about emigration: part of a broader justification, perhaps, for leaving the ancestral homeland in favour of the US or UK.

Madan Sarup has shown the extent to which the word ‘home’ is built into the English language. It is polysemic and, for Malashri Lal and Sukrita Paul Kumar, ‘a term of reference . . . resonant with indeterminacy’. As Sara Ahmed notes, it is ‘where one usually lives . . . where one’s family lives or . . . [it is] one’s native country’. And indeed, transatlantic South Asian writers deconstruct home in a linguistic and philosophical sense.
For instance, in Chitra Divakaruni’s ‘The intelligence of wild things’ (from her South Asian American short fiction collection, *The Unknown Errors of Our Lives* [2001]), the unnamed narrator reflects on ‘home. I turn the sound over on my tongue, trying to figure out the various tenses in which such a word might exist’, while *Fault Lines* (1993), the memoir of the South Asian American writer Meena Alexander, distinguishes between its author’s floating status as ‘a woman cracked by multiple migrations’ and her

\[nudu . . . the Malayalam word for home . . . homeland . . . my mother’s home . . . and . . . appa’s home . . . together compose my nadu, the dark soil of self. I was taught that what I am is bound up always with a particular ancestral site . . . How tight the bonds are.\]

Despite this clear sense of ancestral origins, naturalised through the rooted imagery of ‘dark soil’ and the word for ‘homeland’ in Alexander’s mother tongue, her autobiography is typical of South Asian Atlantic writing in its problematising of such connections and the ways in which it is haunted by a state of ‘unhousedness’ (129): that is, a sense of psychological homelessness, despite the emotional and imaginative power suggested by the associations of the word ‘home’.

South Asian writers in the US return more insistently to the subcontinent, and especially to India, than their British Asian counterparts. Arguably this is because more of them are first-generation, and South Asian houses and homelands thus remain part of living memory. This tendency to draw inspiration from the motherland may also owe something to the American literary traditions which have influenced such writers: especially Asian American literature, which is often concerned with the ancestral homeland; and American immigrant writing more generally, a canon which outstrips anything comparable in the UK and expresses the very different ethno-cultural formation of the United States. For some critics, the continuing emphasis by US-based writers on South Asia is also part of a cultural contingency plan, since Americanness is still largely associated with whiteness and racism continues to impact in multiple ways on Americans of colour. Thus Rajini Srikanth argues that

Asian Americans . . . never know when their membership in the United States will be called into question . . . The mainstream media’s disregard of the abuse and racially motivated attacks suffered by many South Asians in the months following the September 11, 2001, attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon . . . confirm for Asian Americans their perpetual foreignness in the American imagination and consciousness . . . This awareness of one’s shaky
place within the US body politic is reason enough for many Asian Americans
to feel justified in retaining economic ties with ancestral homelands . . . pre-
serving memories of past . . . heritages in countries other than the United
States.11

The recognition of such transnationalism within diasporic communities
– and, more specifically, the distinction between ‘America as . . . nation
[and] . . . places elsewhere as . . . historical, ethnic, or spiritual homeland’12 – has become a critical commonplace.13 Indeed many of these texts
present transnational identity as a given. In her South Asian American
campus novel Love, Stars, and All That (1994), for example, Kirin Narayan
writes that ‘people of that [bourgeois] class and those [independence-
era] generations were interconnected across India. Now these ties were
spreading across the globe, encircling others as they went’.14 But later,
the novel explicitly highlights issues of home through the half-rhetorical,
half-open questions posed by the character Firoze, who asks: ‘why is it
that some of us go back to live in India and some of us stay on in the US?’
(196). His ongoing battle with these questions is underpinned by a parallel
struggle with the South Asian diaspora’s roots in colonial subjugation
and with the cultural syncretism – a source of both confusion and liberation – which has developed as a result of migration. Postcolonial hybrid-
ity has directly shaped Firoze’s own identity formation and that of any
number of fictional figures in transatlantic South Asian literature. The
handling of home across this œuvre therefore relies on a tension between
its status as a live issue worthy of debate and, at other times, as a matter
which demands little or no discussion: a clichéd subject some characters
may even wish to avoid. But how can home be, paradoxically, both an
issue and not an issue within South Asian Atlantic writing? How can we
account for the enduring significance of specifically national identities to
many of these apparently transnational writers? How does the treatment
of home overlap and differ in these texts and how do they operate trans-
atlantically? Do writers perpetuate or challenge traditional ideas of home?
And are home and nation more important to British Asian or to South
Asian American writers? I will return to these questions throughout this
chapter.

Critics of South Asian diasporic writing certainly agree on the centrality of home within this body of work,15 and many of them examine
questions of immigration, diaspora, transnationalism, identity, and biculturalism. But there is room for fresh research. Specifically, more attention
needs to be paid to the material nature of home.16 Alison Blunt and Robyn
Dowling note that ‘home is a place, a site in which we live. But, more than
this, home is . . . an idea . . . imaginary . . . home is much more than house or household.17 Within these works, however, home is often experienced in down-to-earth fashion at the explicitly spatial level of physical environment and quotidian dwelling. As Sanjukta Dasgupta has put it, ‘the desire for locating a home in the world and the home as domestic space [in Bengali American women’s writing] seem[s] to be intricately enmeshed as cultures, identities, heredity and environment are negotiated’.18 Life in Britain and the US becomes a series of such material negotiations, whereby alien weather must be survived, and domestic territory claimed. Processes of settlement, reverse colonisation, and postcolonial critique are figured through climate, map-making, horticulture, homeowning, and the rise of regional affiliations. This is a necessarily selective list and while I return to another important material element – food – in Chapter 4, there is no space here to discuss, for instance, education or the external workplace.

Although scholarly work on specific British Asian localities has appeared in recent years,19 it has rarely been carried out from a literary perspective, while critics of South Asian American writing have seldom discussed US regionalism. In other words, whereas commentators acknowledge the complexity of South Asian feeling towards the new nation, few explore workaday negotiations of America or the UK, especially those produced by less canonical writers, such as Manzu Islam and Suhayl Saadi in Britain or Sameer Parekh and Vineeta Vijayaraghavan in the US; and even fewer examine the transatlantic comparisons inscribed by South Asian American and British Asian writers.

Seeking to fill these gaps in existing scholarship, this chapter will explore and rethink the inherent tensions of home as material and ideological space across a range of representative works, set in Britain or the United States rather than South Asia. It will examine texts which interrogate the idea of home in particularly suggestive ways as well as those which make overtly transatlantic comparisons. The chapter will explore such themes as the sojourner-turned-settler, the drive towards property-ownership, and the formation of new regional and national identities. It will consider how authors trace the evolution of particular communities in local and ethnic terms, while discussing such recurring tropes as the relationship between gender and domesticity, and the public and private claiming of territory. This chapter will offer close textual readings in order to illuminate parallels between individual prose works – which include novels, short fiction, and life-writing – while identifying key differences, thus intervening in existing postcolonial scholarship and offering a new contribution to transatlantic literary studies.
In order to contextualise the idea of home within this body of writing, I will begin by looking briefly at its treatment by an earlier generation of South Asian authors in the UK, who examine the postwar period in which (usually male) migrants came to Britain, rather than the United States. As we saw in the Introduction, this was because the UK represented a more obvious destination for postcolonial South Asians before 1965. Such men started out, in Naila Kabeer’s words, ‘as “sojourners” rather than “settlers”, hoping to return as rich men of high status’. Texts such as Zulfikar Ghose’s *Confessions of a Native-Alien* (1965), V. S. Naipaul’s *The Mimic Men* (1967), Kamala Markandaya’s *The Nowhere Man* (1972), and Abdullah Hussein’s *Émigré Journeys* (2000) were all written during—or relate to—a postwar era which Sukhdev Sandhu has described as ‘that tough but liberating prelude to mass immigration from the Subcontinent’. The literary drive to frame questions of home through the lives of ‘sojourners-turned-settlers’ arguably arises from a political desire to chronicle and commemorate this traditionally hidden past: a subculture overlooked in mainstream postwar British fiction. Following a similar counter-historical impulse, Nadeem Aslam’s novel *Maps for Lost Lovers* (2004) incorporates forty years of migrant history in the UK, and the evolution of white attitudes to South Asian immigrants, into its account of contemporary British Asian communities.

As Bruce King has noted, the issue of living spaces is particularly important in postwar British Asian works. Indeed, texts discussing this early period of immigration often draw on a wider British tradition of the boarding-house as *topos* in 1950s and 1960s fiction and cinema. Amir, the protagonist of Hussein’s novel, *Émigré Journeys*, remembers every last detail of his cramped, clandestine lodgings in mid-twentieth-century Birmingham. His testimonial account of this environment evokes a house which ‘resembled a cave’ and dated back to the time of Queen Victoria . . . Decay had worked itself deep into the walls covered with great big patches where chunks of plaster had fallen off. The damp had made the mortar bulge out in the shape of half-melons . . . Rumour was that the house had been on the council’s condemned list for ten years. But it was still on its feet and in use.

Rather like Srinivas’s stylised, at times semi-personified, house in Markandaya’s novel *The Nowhere Man*, Amir’s home has become more than just a place to sleep at night: it has a life of its own, and its degraded
physical condition serves as a metaphor for the ways in which his community of ‘brothers . . . in trouble’ (145) – Pakistani men living in the UK without their loved ones – occupy the margins, suffering ostracism as they seek to find a place within British society, ‘unseen and unheard’, their ‘very existence on . . . earth . . . denied by other men’ (2). Despite the existential nihilism Hussein suggests here, his characters survive life in the penumbral house because, at this sojourner stage, they are consumed by their ‘ultimate goal’: ‘to get out of that time and space . . . out of the country, and go home’ (106–7).26 Later, when tragic circumstances force its inhabitants to disperse, the empty house becomes semi-haunted. It thus anticipates that of the murdered couple, Chanda and Jugnu, in Maps for Lost Lovers, whose erstwhile dwelling goes ‘through a destiny of its own, shut up, abandoned to dust and insects’.27 Both Maps and Meera Syal’s British Asian novel Anita and Me (1996) make reference to the postwar migrant boarding-house tradition; and in Maps, Aslam suggests that, just as migration from Pakistan to Britain is itself ongoing – rather than a discrete historical phenomenon safely located in the past – so the insanitary, crowded situation of the communal immigrant house still exists in present-day Britain. Rather than simply memorialising an increasingly distant past, he deliberately records a subcultural present.

The first-person narrative of Naipaul’s novel The Mimic Men is preoccupied with postwar questions of home, or rather escape: it is as much about the journeys which propel the bid to find a home as it is about arrival at actual destinations and the decision to remain in one place. Hence, finding an answer to the conundrum of home is the quest which drives the protagonist, Ralph Singh. Indeed, there is a clear slippage between his sense of migrant statelessness and the inability of any built environment to fulfil his needs, whether this is on Isabella, the fictionalised Caribbean island where he grew up, or in Britain, where he makes several attempts to start a new life. Despite his relative privilege, Ralph is never far from domestic squalor in postwar London. Like Sam Selvon – who works such details as leaking roofs, which parsimonious landlords refuse to mend, into his classic novel of early African-Caribbean migration, The Lonely Londoners (1956)28 – Naipaul is unsparing in his attention to the material deficiencies of London living spaces. Thus Ralph refers to his experience of the city as ‘anguish’ and recalls every claustrophobic detail of postwar domesticity:

the mean rooms . . . shut door . . . tight window . . . tarnished ceiling . . . over-used curtains . . . rigged shilling-in-the-slot gas and electric meters . . . dreary journeys through terraces of brick, the life reduced to insipidity.29
Immigrant negotiations of postwar Britain are inscribed for posterity through the equivocal stance of *Mimic Men* and *Émigré Journeys*, which pays tribute to the pioneering mentality behind South Asian migration, while refusing to forget the gritty realities of adapting to different national and domestic norms. The ‘sojourner’, rather than ‘settler’, part of the equation thus remains more important at a stage when domestic settings and Britain-as-nation are navigated and inhabited, rather than claimed. Indeed, where the first generation does believe it has put down roots – as, for example, Srinivas does in *Nowhere Man* – the consequences are dangerous, even fatal. Erstwhile sojourners and their children are presented as laying real claim to British homes only years later.

*New Immigrant Homes in the US*

As distinct from this British Asian insistence on the downbeat nature of immigrant living conditions, South Asian American writers veer from optimism at the brightness of American modernity, reinscribing the nation’s popular status as a ‘land of opportunity’, to a sense of greater ambivalence at the potential for loneliness and for cultural and political alienation embodied by this vast country. In its explorations of the ‘enigma of arrival’ (in Naipaul’s phrase), South Asian American writing therefore reveals, on the one hand, a palpable excitement at what the US has to offer. This exuberance can be read within the wider context of America’s national mythology as the *ne plus ultra* for immigrants, which may also explain why such attitudes are missing from British Asian narratives of arrival. The US is, for the most part, defined positively within these ‘coming-to-America’ texts, especially by what it is not in relation to South Asian countries. A land of safe, well-made cars in Vineeta Vijayaraghavan’s novel *Motherland* (2001), it is also (in its 1980s incarnation) a country, for Gita and Ajay in Narayan’s *Love, Stars, and All That*, of:


It is thus a revelation for the first generation to discover what Bapsi Sidhwa calls ‘the enchantments of the First World’ in her novel *An American Brat* (1994). Her protagonist, Feroza, responds to the ready friendliness and openness of Americans, and repeatedly revels in the freedom she can enjoy as a young Pakistani woman in late 1970s America, rather than within
Lahore’s tight-knit Parsi circle. Recalling another South Asian American writer, Bharati Mukherjee, Sidhwa also suggests the sexual liberation the US can offer South Asian immigrant women, as her narrative underlines the erotic frisson between its Pakistani- and US-born characters in a land of ‘extraordinary sexual possibilities’ (116).

Feroza’s uncle, Manek – entirely won over by what he calls ‘a free and competitive economy in a true democracy’ (124) – praises the ‘self-sufficient, industrious, and independent way of American life’ (119); and although Sidhwa generally avoids too celebratory a tone, her novel closes with a long paean to America’s virtues, which may reflect her own decision to settle there. Certainly this is the option Feroza and Manek choose. America ultimately triumphs in *American Brat*, and Sidhwa’s title is revealing in this regard, since it aligns the novel with a long tradition in US culture of reflecting national identity in titular form. Sidhwa could thus be claiming a kind of representative American status for her South Asian diasporic narrative (a less common trend within British Asian cultural production), much as Piyush Dinker Pandya’s *American Desi* (2001), Anurag Mehta’s *American Chai* (2002), and Varun Khanna’s *American Blend* (2006) do in cinematic terms. More than any of these films, however, *American Brat* asks wider national questions (to which I will return shortly) as it reworks classic American immigrant narratives.

In *Unknown Errors of Our Lives*, many of Chitra Divakaruni’s newly arrived characters confound the stereotype of immigrants obsessed with the mother country. They have escaped India for a host of reasons, often related to familial or public trauma (especially communal violence), believing that America will offer greater opportunities for privacy, safety, and personal development. In ‘The lives of strangers’, Leela’s parents are Non-Resident Indians or NRIs – although ‘Non-Returning Indians’ might be more apt – who find other

people . . . noisy and messy . . . Which was why, early in their lives, they had escaped India to take up research positions in America . . . they never discussed their homeland, a country they seemed to have shed as easily as a lizard drops its tail. (59, 61)

And, as Lilia puts it in Jhumpa Lahiri’s short story ‘When Mr Pirzada came to dine’ (*Interpreter of Maladies* [1999]): ‘[In America] I would never have to eat rationed food, or obey curfews, or watch riots from my rooftop, or hide neighbours in water tanks to prevent them from being shot, as . . . [my mother] and . . . father had.’

At other times, new immigrant critiques are harsher, particularly
where American suburbia is concerned. In ‘Blooming season for cacti’, Mira is downcast to note that her brother’s home in Texas is ‘a two-bedroom semidetached exactly like a hundred others’ (169). Indeed, India may present harsh and messy situations in *Unknown Errors*, but at least it possesses vitality, unlike the sterility of the US suburbs. In ‘Lives of strangers’, Leela dreads her return to America, where her ‘life waits to claim her, unchanged, impervious, smelling like floor polish’ (88), while in ‘Unknown errors of our lives’, Ruchira is drawn to Biren, precisely because he appears to come from ‘a galaxy far, far away from the blandness of auto-malls and AMC cinemas’ (217). In Kavita Daswani’s novel *For Matrimonial Purposes* (2003), Anju notices, on first arriving in New Jersey, that this is the ‘suburban . . . America . . . where big white men . . . drank beer . . . while their blonde wives . . . made potato salad in the kitchen’ (88) a combined attack on US suburbia and white American patriarchy.

The homogeneity of US suburbia also induces a profound sense of loneliness. Thus Mrs Dutta in Divakaruni’s ‘Mrs Dutta writes a letter’ perceives America to be ‘a country where you might stare out the window for hours and not see one living soul’ (*Unknown Errors*, 20). This in turn recalls Ganeshan Kaka in *Love, Stars, and All That*, who claims that America ‘is bloody hell, everyone in his box’ (194); and R. K. Narayan, who similarly remarks that Indian families in America are ‘boxed up in their homes securely behind locked doors’. This is in fact a broader idea within South Asian Atlantic writing – as demonstrated by the self-contained Vasi family, equally ‘boxed up’ in their 1980s Cardiff home in Nikita Lalwani’s British Asian novel *Gifted* (2007) – and it is used to reveal the cultural chasm between living conditions in the subcontinent and adoptive Western homes. Mrs Dutta’s experience of the US is thus contrasted with the vibrant sounds of Calcutta, just as it is for another homesick Bengali, Mrs Sen, stranded in New England in Lahiri’s story ‘Mrs Sen’s’ (*Interpreter of Maladies*), who ‘cannot . . . sleep in so much silence’, challenging the idea that slumber relies on noiselessness. In *American Brat*, Feroza’s mother, Zareen, finds the lack of noise in residential Denver ‘eerie’ and misses Lahore’s ‘mosque stereos [and] . . . the insufferable racket of the rickshaws’ (282). In other words, however noisy or crowded South Asian urban settings may be, new arrivals prefer them to America’s silence and vast, empty space, both physical and emotional.

These writers do not romanticise South Asian countries, however, since life there is often depicted as tough, deeply sectarian, and relentlessly political. Indeed, their characters seize exciting opportunities to claim the putatively ‘virgin’ land of America. Yet, for all its purported freedoms, the US is quite often figured through carceral language, as the image of
‘boxes’, deployed by R. K. and Kirin Narayan, demonstrates. This tension between an abstract freedom and suburban/domestic claustrophobia recalls the bleakness – if not the austerity – of postwar British dwellings. It can also be connected to Rosemary Marangoly George’s idea of home as paradoxical haven and prison. She observes that the constituents of home are often binary and oppositional: ‘homes are . . . places of violence and nurturing . . . to escape to and . . . escape from . . . Home is the desired place that is fought for and established as the exclusive domain of a few. It is not a neutral place.’ \(^{39}\) The imagery of domestic imprisonment also hints at a more generalised aspect of some South Asian diasporic communities, which, according to Monika Fludernik, are ‘represented [in literature] as both a nurturing and . . . strangling home’. \(^{40}\)

In other words, writers display a clear ambivalence about the United States, constructing an ethnographic critique which highlights the nation’s deficiencies in relation to South Asia. Sometimes this takes a relatively mild form: for instance, when Divakaruni draws attention to America’s relative lack of history in comparison with India in ‘The blooming season for cacti’. \(^{41}\) Or in Lahiri’s novel *The Namesake* (2003), when Ashoke and Ashima, a new immigrant couple, gently reverse outsiders’ clichés about India by applying them to late 1960s New England. Thus ‘a . . . black cat is permitted to sit as it pleases on the shelves’ of a local convenience store in Cambridge, Massachusetts, \(^{42}\) inverting the idea that it is India rather than the US where animals – cows and monkeys, for instance – roam freely. And it comes as a shock to Ashima, before her move to suburbia, to discover ‘dog urine and excrement’ on the street and ‘roaches in the bathroom’ (30) of Cambridge, rather than in the supposedly less sanitary environs of Calcutta, \(^{43}\) her home town.

A more violent strain of anti-American feeling informs parts of *American Brat*, where Feroza notes the serious poverty of late 1970s New York and perceives that this is

> an alien filth, a compost reeking of vomit and alcoholic belches . . . neglected old age and sickness . . . drugged exhalations and the malodorous ferment of other substances she could not decipher . . . It seemed to her they personified the callous heart of the rich country that allowed such savage neglect to occur. (81)\(^{44}\)

Meticulously – scientifically even – Sidhwa takes us through every step of Feroza’s regionalised American journey, illustrating her feelings of excitement, vulnerability, and isolation. Employing an elegant, drily humorous prose style, which is both compassionate and mocking, Sidhwa offers
a wide-ranging ethnographic assessment of the United States, rightly identified by Carmen Faymonville as a ‘parodying [of] the dichotomy of the colonialist attitude of the Third World as “uncivilised” and a laughable “civilised” West’.\textsuperscript{45} Besides poverty and social inequality, Sidhwa’s targets include racial injustice; the American state’s non-interference in the lives of its citizens; and the ubiquitous nature of political apathy: namely, America’s pre-9/11 inability to see the effects of its foreign policy and the oversimplification, by many Americans, of complex political situations overseas. Starkly contrasted with this luxury of apolitical sensibility is Sidhwa’s notion that in South Asia, everyone’s daily lives are affected by politics – and sometimes to devastating effect – a point which another Pakistani-born writer, Mohsin Hamid, makes in his more recent, post-9/11 novel, \textit{The Reluctant Fundamentalist} (2007).\textsuperscript{46} In \textit{American Brat}, Sidhwa depicts American visitors to Pakistan as selfish and insensitive and, at these politically charged moments, her own voice intervenes powerfully to remark upon the late 1970s international climate she evokes. Although her tone can appear didactic at such points, her anger is generally measured, as she draws attention to events affecting millions of people yet largely ignored by the US and other Western nations.

\textit{Reluctant Fundamentalist} takes such critique several steps further as it deals with the messy repercussions of 9/11 for South Asians. Subjecting US foreign policy to even greater transnational scrutiny than Sidhwa does, Hamid’s novel suggests the impossibility for many South Asian Americans of remaining free from the impact of international events. Significantly, it is during a trip to Chile – with its history of American political intervention – that Changez, Hamid’s protagonist, experiences his life-changing disillusionment with the United States. \textit{Reluctant Fundamentalist} might also be classed as ‘return-of-the-native’ fiction (of the kind discussed in Chapter 2), since Changez narrates his tale of American life from Pakistan. But whereas such works often portray immigrants making temporary return visits and then going back to the material comforts of North America, \textit{Reluctant Fundamentalist} reverses this. As opposed to its ‘coming-to-America’ precursors, this is arguably the most well-known, recent example of a ‘leaving America’ narrative,\textsuperscript{47} which implies that an external position is best for critiquing the US. Hamid thus challenges popular theoretical notions of transnationalism which celebrate mobility and liminality as utopian possibilities, because his novel implies that such movement is costly: politically, morally, emotionally, and psychologically.\textsuperscript{48}

Changez’s rejection of the US – in what Hamid has claimed is not an ‘anti-American’ novel\textsuperscript{49} – is particularly stark. After all, he occu-
pies a privileged, ‘model minority’ position in America as a Princeton
graduate in a highly paid job. The securing of the American Dream is
therefore not at issue and his decision to leave the US is also not based,
as one might expect, on the post-9/11 failure of Americans to accept the
Muslim immigrants in their midst. Rather, Changez’s response is fuelled
by his own morally charged, highly politicised questions about the US.
Reluctant Fundamentalist may be situated, then, in relation to earlier South
Asian American critiques of the adopted nation, but its protagonist is
much more questioning of his place in the United States. Perhaps this is
because the novel is written in full consciousness of 9/11 and is designed
to provoke debate about its aftermath within Muslim-majority countries.
In a distinctly un-Hollywood move, America is never allowed to speak in
a narrative which deliberately eschews any clear sense of closure, instead
offering at the end several frightening possibilities for the reader to deci-
pher and interpret. Thus the novel undercuts popular ideas about border-
crossing by raising thorny transnational questions without providing any
easy answers. Yet Reluctant Fundamentalist is ultimately more about America
than it is about Pakistan: despite being a ‘leaving America’ novel, it never
fully escapes its discursive reliance on an imperialist US. As I argued in
the Introduction, South Asian American culture is relatively new and, in
its ethnographic handling of the United States as home, it demonstrates
a sense of ambivalence and flux, of evolving attitudes, and of confusion
between surface and depth: that is, the contradiction between the promise
of America to new immigrants and its history of racialised exclusion at
home and imperialism abroad.

**Negotiating an Alien Climate**

I will turn now to the notion of navigating a different physical climate,
a challenge which appears to be starker for new immigrants in Britain
than the US. Indeed, the British weather becomes a pessimistic figure for
the difficulties of national belonging, but it is worth noting that this idea
is deployed to critique the UK by both British Asian and South Asian
American writers. In its wintry coldness and darkness, Britain’s physical
environment is of course a well-documented element of the postcolonial
migrant experience, and weather conditions clearly signify the unwel-
coming *froideur* of its political, cultural, and social climate, throughout the
twentieth century, in relation to non-white newcomers. Such climatic
conditions also emphasise the complications of making new homes on
British soil. In this section, I will argue that, however familiar a post-
colonial strategy this is, the powerful trope of an alien British climate takes
on a particular freight of meaning in the hands of South Asian Atlantic writers as they examine questions of home and nation.

In *The Crow Eaters* (1978), Bapsi Sidhwa reveals the Junglewallas’ disappointment at the bathetic realities of ‘the land of their rulers’ by emphasising the pinched and unappealing weather which characterises her cartoonish version of late 1920s London: ‘the bitter wind . . . grey, perpetually drizzling sky . . . dull, foggy [atmosphere]’.54 In *Fault Lines*, Alexander writes of the ‘peculiar English weather . . . the threat of rain . . . the ground and air sucked into the innards of an immense wet cheek, light filtered through a porous greyness’ (137). In each case, the British weather is used to foreground the nation’s alienness, and alienating qualities, for South Asian visitors, themselves ‘aliens’ in a sense. Later Alexander deploys meteorological imagery to assert the postcolonial subject’s sense of superiority towards Britain through a comparative emphasis on India’s tropical warmth. Elsewhere she attacks imperialism by pointing to the apparent colourlessness of the UK as opposed to India. Thus in her novel *Nampally Road* (1991), Alexander draws on the figure of Queen Victoria as depicted on an old imperial clock in India, wearing clothing which is ‘grey like fog over the Thames’:55 an image which, like *Crow Eaters*, relies on the hoary cliché of London as a Dickensian city perpetually shrouded in fog. This also echoes Rushdie’s essay ‘The New Empire within Britain’ (1982), which critiques British imperial rule by conflating grim weather conditions with a lack of colour56 and space as the ‘pink conquerors’ return from India to ‘their cold [post-imperial] island . . . [and] the narrow horizons of their pallid, drizzled streets’.57 Similarly, Sidhwa writes of a colonial British civil servant in India proleptically mourning the return to ‘his cold, damp and colourless little country’ (*Crow Eaters*, 131). Weather is also used throughout Ameena Meer’s novel *Bombay Talkie* (1994) to code different places and specifically to pit a chilly, grey, and parochial Britain against the greater warmth and sensuality of both India and the United States.

Such negative meteorological tropes may, however, also be applied in a North American context. One thinks of the coldness of Canada in Mukherjee’s work, which forms part of her wider exposé of 1970s Canadian xenophobia.58 There is, moreover, an implied connection between the racism of America’s Midwest and its freezing winter temperatures in Alexander’s *Fault Lines*.59 Despite this North American coldness – and bitter winters in the northern United States are also a prevalent aspect of the new Bengali immigrant’s life in Lahiri’s writing60 – it is worth noting that US weather plays less of a role in South Asian American literature than the British climate does for both UK and US writers. How might one account for this? On the one hand, the meteorological facts – that
the United States enjoys consistently hotter and more humid weather conditions than Britain, and suffers from a higher level of weather-related destruction – make America much more analogous to South Asia, for the first generation in particular. On the other hand, despite its own differentiated characteristics, the US weather is much less important than the British climate for such American-based authors as Sidhwa and Alexander. That they choose to highlight the British, rather than American, weather can be connected to their explicitly postcolonial position and to their perception that the US embraces immigrants more readily than the UK. It thus becomes a recognisable feature of their transatlantic critique.

As distinct from this anti-imperialist rejection of Britain by writers resident in the US, British Asian authors illustrate the lived reality of unforgiving UK climatic conditions. Indeed, such weather becomes an important feature of survival in the complicated bid by their characters to secure a British home. In a characteristic gesture, Manzu Islam depicts Bangladeshi Londoners in his short story ‘Going home’ (from the collection *The Mapmakers of Spitalfields* [1997]) as ‘shivering in the howling sub-zero wind’; while the drabness of weather conditions in Lalwani’s *Gifted* mirrors the emotional privations of the Vasi family. Dreary weather forms the backdrop to key episodes within Lalwani’s narrative, illuminating the disappointments of British life for Indians who have resolutely refused to integrate into the wider society, remaining quiet, unobserved expatriates rather than immigrants, in Mukherjee’s formulation. Thus Shreene’s intense isolation and homesickness for India are captured when she observes ‘the wretched shade of grey that seemed to own the sky in this part of the world’. As with the imagery deployed by Sidhwa and Alexander, the message is clear: such weather is categorically not hers and, in a moment of pathetic fallacy, it is rendered alien and inhospitable. Later in the novel, her daughter Rumi’s brutal self-harming is played out against a background of coldly uncaring weather: ‘it was snowing outside, in a sludgy, soiled, Cardiff sort of a way – a snow that seemed to mix itself with all the different contaminants in the air before falling on to the window-sills or lawns . . . outside’ (248). And before Shreene’s reunion with Rumi at the end of the novel, Brighton beach is experienced as ‘moisture . . . a peculiarly British incense: a soggy odour of wetness dominating the air that Shreene breathed now, as though she was actually sitting inside a big cloud, rather than on a bench by the sea’ (267). Despite the Vasis’ years of settlement in Britain, its continually defamiliarised weather is used both to mirror and to explain their rejection of the nation as home.

In Ardashir Vakil’s novel *One Day* (2003), British weather is, once again, ‘horrible . . . dark and depressing . . . you never get used to it’, its ‘grey’
pall on a par with ‘dirty baths . . . net curtains . . . empty milk bottles’, a version of British interiors which recalls Naipaul’s ‘tarnished ceiling’ and ‘over-used curtains’ in *Mimic Men* and creates a slippage between climatic and domestic gloom. Yet – as distinct from other South Asian Atlantic writers – Vakil treats such grimness with a grudging affection. Through the eyes of Priya, his privileged, Indian-born protagonist, he depicts Britain’s physical climate and the domestic hibernation it compels in winter as a source of comfort:

if you grow to love this place as Priya has, you grow to love its grey moods. Its sulky mulling, ruminative side. The side that obliges you to concentrate on what is indoors, the cushioned wintry state of mind that inspires eating, hours of brooding . . . Man in his cave, hunkered down, water pattering on the slate roof . . . Pelted glass and phosphorescent street lamps illuminating fine spring showers, lights on at 2 p.m., steaming mug of tea, dribbling egg, fat chips. (57)

Vakil’s use of soft-sounding verbs here – ‘mull’, ‘hunker’, ‘dribble’ – and his sense that this is essentially mild, gentle weather (‘water pattering’, ‘fine spring showers’) result in a warm, cosy, semi-comic tone quite different from the feelings of alienation and displacement implied by other South Asian Atlantic writers.

In Suhayl Saadi’s ‘Ninety-nine kiss-o-grams’, from his short fiction anthology *The Burning Mirror* (2001), the British-born protagonist, Sal, discovers – on a trip to Pakistan, his ancestral homeland (a ‘roots journey’ which will be discussed further in the next chapter) – that he is pining for Britain’s and, more specifically, Scotland’s temperate climate, rendered sensuously as ‘the cool spaces ae Scola, the feel ae rain on his back’. His own subject position as a second-generation Pakistani Glaswegian is crucial here, since his dead father’s struggle as an immigrant in Scotland is tellingly imagined against a merciless backdrop of ‘pissin rain’ (3). Saadi marks the cultural and emotional distance between father and son through this distinction between their experiences of British rain, which signals Sal’s longing for his Scottish homeland as the logical reverse of his father’s yearning for his birth country.

Through Priya and Sal, if not the characters in ‘Going home’ or *Gifted* or a range of anti-colonial South Asian American works, we see the figure of the British climate develop into a complex, inherently subjective device as transatlantic South Asian writing has itself evolved in new directions. Like beauty, it seems that weather is in the eye of the beholder. These climatic negotiations are used, then, to effect a reverse ethnography (another aspect of what is in fact a wider South Asian Atlantic perspective); to signal
a complete rejection of Britain as possible home; and, conversely, to demonstrate rootedness in the UK and to naturalise British Asian identities.

Claiming Territory: Property-Ownership and Map-Making

If the need to claim territory is challenged through the negotiation of an alien climate, property-ownership is, in contrast, a potent and, for the most part, positive means of staking a claim to American, and particularly British, soil. Indeed, after many years away from South Asia, first-generation characters like Amir in Hussein’s Émigré Journeys and Dr Azad in Monica Ali’s novel Brick Lane (2003) have finally come to accept the wisdom of buying a property in Britain. In Aslam’s Maps for Lost Lovers, Shamas attempts to transform his British house into a version of his Pakistani childhood home as a means of surviving ‘the years of exile and banishment’ (6). Émigré Journeys is, however, more hopeful and less elegaic. Instead Amir derives his sense of self – like some of Kureishi’s first-generation patriarchs67 – from his status as a UK homeowner. Following his initial, sojourner need to secure land in Pakistan – a point to which I will return in Chapter 2 – he comes to cherish the security of his British property, informing Salma, his wife, that ‘we possess this now, this land under our feet, these . . . good, strong walls’ (54). He makes his point most fanatically when he confronts Martin, the white boyfriend of his daughter, Parvin:

‘I am a householder . . . This is my house . . . No place for your person here. This . . . is my land’. He was standing in the middle of the room, stamping his foot on the floor and pointing down with his finger as if showing us something on the ground. ‘My land . . . freehold land’ . . . There was no boast in his voice, only the simple pride of a long labour. (204)

Amir’s sense of purpose stems directly from plans or actions connected with home, and most emblematic of all is his successful property-ownership, which signals the firm eventual desire of some immigrants to stay in Britain and marks a resolution of sorts to the dilemmas surrounding return to South Asia. As opposed to the ambivalence towards US suburban homeownership expressed by some South Asian American writers, British Asian property acquisition signals a triumph: over the hand-to-mouth, xenophobic, boarding-house world which greeted the postwar sojourner.

Manzu Islam’s trope of maps and map-making – inscribed in his choice of the title The Mapmakers of Spitalfields – suggests a collective territorial claim which goes beyond the individualistic need to own a property. This
is illustrated by his characters’ informal awareness of ‘corners, side-walks . . . alleyways’ (‘Going home’, 21) and, in the short story ‘The mapmakers of Spitalfields’, through Brothero-Man’s more formal topographical claims. Situated ‘at the very heart of this foreign city’, he is empowered by his own skill and freedom in unmapping and remapping his particular district of London:

bit by bit, he began drawing the secret blueprint of a new city. It wasn’t exactly in the likeness of our left-behind cities from the blossoms of memories. Nor did it grow entirely from the soon-to-be-razed foreign cities where we travellers arrived with expectant maps in our dreams . . . Surely a strange new city, always at the crossroads, and between the cities of lost times and cities of times yet to come. (66)⁶⁹

Rumoured to be ‘one of the pioneer jumping-ship men’ (66) – a reference to the relatively long history of Bangladeshis in London’s East End⁷⁰ – Brothero-Man’s dreamlike city is actually the network of roads around Brick Lane, and the story creates its particular geographical and temporal map through references to specific street-names and historical events, almost inviting the reader to check the accuracy of its co-ordinates. Like a number of other South Asian immigrants, Brothero-Man occupies a paradoxical position: by turns affectionate and vigilant towards his adopted home, he is both central and liminal to it; liminal because he occupies a marginal position in London as a whole – ‘the markings of our city . . . no more than tiny dots in the sea of their strange city. There were the tall glass-faced skyscrapers of the city of London. Even in the mist and darkness they loomed menacingly over Brick Lane’ (78; emphasis in original) – but central through his determined chronicling of his own local community.⁷¹

Maps are in fact a favoured device across British Asian writing. In Atima Srivastava’s British Asian novel Looking for Maya (1999), Mira sees her new sexual relationship as ‘a different place’ with ‘no map’ and her lover, Amrit, as ‘a land . . . that I wanted to live in, make mine’, while Hanif Kureishi writes movingly in his family memoir My Ear at His Heart (2004) that his dead father ‘made all the maps . . . and he’s taken them with him’.⁷² Aslam’s Maps for Lost Lovers – which, like Mapmakers of Spitalfields, privileges cartography in its title – turns this imagery into a wider political point (again, recalling Mapmakers). Deliberately refusing to name his town, Aslam eschews the specific regional pride of other British Asian writers in order, perhaps, to offer a more generalised critique of South Asian communities in the UK. Nonetheless, his migrants lay oral claim to their par-
ticular surroundings by renaming local streets in their originary languages, thus reversing British colonial practices: ‘numerous . . . places and roads have been given Indian . . . Pakistani and Bangladeshi names to give the map of this English town a semblance of belonging – amassing a claim on the place bit by bit’ (156). 73 As Richard Phillips has put it, ‘modern maps . . . naturalise the geographies they represent, and normalise the constructions of race, gender, class . . . those geographies inscribe’. 74 The ‘maps’ in question may be unofficial, but they nevertheless aid local survival through the appropriation of immediate surroundings.

Cartographic imagery also recurs across South Asian American literature, which is filled with maps, both real and imaginary, operating across space and time. Thus in Vijayaraghavan’s Motherland, Maya, the young protagonist, believes her grandmother has bequeathed her ‘maps of my past and future to navigate by . . . I . . . could surpass geography . . . be grafted and take root anywhere . . . anywhere could become home’. 75 Rajiv likens his immigrant mother to a ‘mapmaker’ in Sameer Parekh’s novel Stealing the Ambassador (2002); and Lahiri makes important points about Partition and civil war in South Asia through her use of a world map in the story ‘When Mr Pirzada came to dine’ (Interpreter). 76 In ‘Sexy’ (another story from Interpreter), Lahiri deploys maps to suggest white American insularity. It is their absence here which is significant, since the Caucasian character Miranda, who has only ‘ever been . . . to the Bahamas once . . . [as] a child’ (91), does not own an atlas. Meanwhile the historical importance of cartography is underlined in the story through the image of outdated, imperial-era maps in Boston’s Mapparium. 77 Alexander’s Fault Lines directly invokes the British imperialist project of mapping India; 78 while, as I argued in the Introduction, the hegemonic position of the US on the world map in Love, Stars, and All That clearly signals, and even quietly celebrates, the shift from British to American global influence. Like British Asian authors, South Asian American writers foreground such metaphors by incorporating them into their titles, for instance Agha Shahid Ali’s poetry collection A Nostalgist’s Map of America (1991); and Rajini Srikanth and Sunaina Maira’s edited poetry and prose collection Contours of the Heart: South Asians Map North America (1996). 79 But they do not map their immediate local surroundings in the US in the manner of the British Asian texts discussed above, thus implying a more tentative, less aggressive territorial claim and, by extension, the idea that the need to mark out new soil as South Asian is less urgent in immigrant America than in postcolonial Britain.

At the same time, maps clearly resonate for South Asian writers on both sides of the Atlantic. Why is this? One reason is that they call attention to travel and migration, suggesting the vast distances covered by a pioneering first generation, as well as the colonial voyages which first linked Britain
to India and America. In other words, these later South Asian journeys are made, in part, because of Britain’s own expansionist endeavours, symbolised so powerfully through maps, which are ‘never value-free images’, as J. B. Harley has noted. Cartography also offers proof of permanent residential settlement through the post-imperial claiming of space, authenticated and formalised in material terms through maps, even if they are at times unofficial. Harley notes that maps have traditionally served as ‘territorial propaganda in the legitimation of national identities’ and that they have played an important defensive role. Such ideas are updated here through the exploratory forging of new ‘national identities’, identities themselves under threat from nativism and xenophobia. In the British context, this process of identity formation encourages new, and often figurative, forms of mapping and the sometimes militaristic need to protect local communities, for instance Bangladeshi immigrant space in east London in ‘Mapmakers’. Rather like property-owning, this is also about the need to control territory, no matter how small; as Phillips has put it, ‘the authority of maps lies in their ability to circumscribe geography, by enclosing, defining, coding, orienting, [and] structuring . . . space’. Maps also present ‘a set of beliefs about the way the world should be’. In this context, they form a ‘blueprint’ (Manzu Islam’s word in ‘Mapmakers’), a model for how local communities in the new nation should be as much as how they actually are. Harley contends that, historically, maps have been subject to ‘manipulation by the powerful in society’ and that they have constituted ‘a socially conservative vocabulary . . . a language of power, not of protest’. Such points are reversed through the way that British Asian authors radically democratise maps, whereby they can be appropriated, subverted, and reinvented by the apparently powerless and used as ‘guides’ to new possibilities. Cartographic tropes also point to the navigation of a time-space continuum by transatlantic South Asian writers and thus to the idea of interior, psychological, and sometimes altogether imaginary maps. For Phillips cartographic and spatial metaphors are both slippery and fluid . . . contested terms, unstable, uncircumscribed, and therefore continually able to open new conceptual spaces, in which new forms of social and political action may be conceived.

Mapping is thus a polysemic metaphor, which continues to be significant for transatlantic South Asian authors because it provides a rich geographical and historical context for ideas of home.

Bids for ownership go beyond the cartographic to take a horticultural
form and, with it, an extra symbolic dimension. In *Maps*, Aslam reconfigures English surroundings along tropical lines, creating a densely detailed ecosystem through references to South Asian flora and fauna in a manner which in part recalls Rushdie’s celebrated re-imagining of London as Indian in his novel *The Satanic Verses* (1988), and in part reveals, once again, the territorial investment of immigrants in Britain. It also achieves a reverse colonisation, which recalls British imperial attempts to refashion India along its own horticultural lines. This is important in psychological terms: hence, the failure of Kaukab’s Pakistani plants to flourish in England signifies her own deracination in contrast to other migrants in the same novel who have ‘raised a banana tree successfully’ (*Maps*, 96). Similarly in the US, Kamala fails to ‘re-create a tropical [Indian] garden’ in *Motherland* (66–7), a situation which patently reflects her feelings of displacement, and indeed, the need to plant non-native fruit and vegetables in US and UK soil recurs throughout immigrant writing more generally. The harnessing of resources for survival is also at issue here, as we see with family gardens in the US in Meer’s *Bombay Talkie* and in the British Asian context within Sarfraz Manzoor’s memoir *Greetings from Bury Park: Race, Religion. Rock ‘n’ Roll* (2007). In Manzoor’s case, this space is ‘not only a place of beauty but a source of food . . . my mother was able to grow potatoes, onions and mint leaves, which she ground into chutney’. The garden becomes another form of home as it generates nourishment and increases the possibilities for self-sufficiency.

**Regionalism in South Asian American Writing**

Regional identities within the new nation are important to transatlantic South Asian writers, yet, at first sight, this seems to be more the case for Britain Asian than for South Asian American authors. This may reflect the greater transnationalism of South Asian American writers. Mainly first-generation, their identity formation might be said to derive from a blend of generalised American belonging and South Asian ethnicity and regionalism, so that – along with their fictional characters – they are, for instance, Bengali American, Gujarati American, or Malayali American. Religious affiliation also plays a key role through the identification of characters as Hindu, Parsi, Jain, Christian, Sikh, Muslim, or Jewish. A more particularised American regionalism can nevertheless be detected across this body of writing, which suggests the establishment of roots, the development of loyalty to a particular region of the US, and the making of American homes.

For Meena Alexander, the quintessential immigrant locale of New
York City is key. As Pin-chia Feng has argued in her examination of Alexander’s novel *Manhattan Music* (1997):

> the global economic, informational and cultural flows that converge at and are disseminated from the Big Apple makes [sic] it the capital of contemporary transnational passages and ... ideal background for a discussion of the problematics of diasporic identity."96

New York is also where Anju first settles in Daswani’s *For Matrimonial Purposes*. It is of strategic importance in Mukherjee’s short fiction (*Darkness* [1985], *The Middleman and Other Stories* [1988]) and novels (*Wife* [1975] and *Jasmine* [1989]); and in Lahiri’s *Namesake*. Indeed, several commentators have recognised New York’s significance for South Asian Americans.97

Lahiri draws more often, however, on New England settings, especially Boston, thus reconfiguring a canonical American literary landscape through her juxtaposition of new immigrants with this time-honoured American settler terrain. This, in turn, is a long way from California, which serves as the location for Kirin Narayan’s and Chitra Divakaruni’s fiction. Divakaruni makes this point explicitly in her short story ‘The intelligence of wild things’ (*Unknown Errors*), as her unnamed protagonist experiences an uncomfortable ‘them and us’ moment in Vermont:

> across the deck from me, a group of young men ... dart sideways glances at me and my Indian clothes. I can tell they haven’t seen many of us. I clutch at the boat’s railings, shivering, wishing myself back in Sacramento, where no one stares when I walk to the store in my salwaar kameez."98

As I noted in the Introduction, California saw some of America’s earliest South Asian immigration; and demographically, it is the heart of Asian America. Writers nonetheless present the northeast – New Jersey, rather than Massachusetts or Vermont – as the pre-eminent site for South Asian Americans, and this relatively narrow US thus stands in contrast to the diverse South Asian regional heterogeneity of writers’ ancestral origins. New Jersey’s importance is underscored by its use in S. Mitra Kalita’s *Suburban Sahibs* (2003), a work of extended reportage; alongside New York in Alexander’s *Manhattan Music*; in Tanuja Desai Hidier’s coming-of-age narrative, *Born Confused* (2002); and in Shobhan Bantwal’s ‘chick lit’ novel *The Sari Shop Widow* (2009). This local emphasis is not confined to literature, as shown by such films as Krutin Patel’s *ABCD* (1999), Raj Nidimoru and D. K. Krishna’s *Flavours* (2003), Danny Leiner’s *Harold and Kumar Go to White Castle* (2004), Pandya’s *American Desi*, and Mehta’s *American Chai*. 
As Kalita writes, ‘New Jersey has been a central part of Indians’ history in America.’99 Therefore when one learns that the Das family in Lahiri’s short story ‘Interpreter of maladies’ (Interpreter) live in New Brunswick, New Jersey, they become a recognisable part of one of the best-established South Asian centres in the United States. But the notion of ‘safety in numbers’ and the sense in which South Asians have become rooted in New Jersey are unsettled by the state’s violent history of white racism towards them, a collective memory discussed in Fault Lines; Manhattan Music; G. S. Sharat Chandra’s short story ‘Dot busters’ (from his collection Sari of the Gods [1998]); and particularly Suburban Sahibs.100 This shameful local history is perhaps less well known than the anti-immigrant narrative of postwar Britain but it, too, reflects the difficulties of immigrants facing the transition from sojourner to settler, and it takes us back to the paradoxical impulse of South Asian American writers both to celebrate and to condemn the US.

Kalita also shows that the sheer concentration of Indians in New Jersey has led to increased political clout at the local level.101 Indeed, in Suburban Sahibs, she meticulously records recent South Asian American history to reveal the robust health of this section of US society. Through her title alone, Kalita also implies that the making of American homes has followed a suburban trajectory for many ethnic South Asians.102 In contrast to the anti-suburban attitudes considered earlier — and the notion that property-ownership perhaps matters more in British Asian than in South Asian American works — Suburban Sahibs suggests that the act of settling an individual plot of land, through the ownership of bricks and mortar, represents just as powerful an investment in the United States as that of the first generation in Britain. The claiming of suburbia — and of both the East and West Coast — explored in South Asian American writing from the 1970s onwards thus suggests a lasting stake in the adopted homeland. No matter how often ancestral places are invoked and even considered to be superior, writers are endlessly energised by the encounter with a domesticated, localised America. Indeed the complexities of the search for home that it invites interrogate, rather than support, their ostensible transnationalism.

The Formation of British Regional Identities

In recent British Asian writing, regionalism plays an even greater role. Perhaps this is because ethnic South Asians have lived in Britain over a longer period and, as I argued in the Introduction, because they constitute a larger percentage of the overall population than do South Asians in the US. In British Asian literature, urban, rather than rural, settings
generally offer the best approximation of a home in the UK. As Gail Low has put it, ‘migration . . . is intimately bound up with the geographical locations and destinies of cities like London, Manchester, Birmingham, Liverpool, Leicester, Bradford or Leeds’.103 Beyond London – whose role as a centre of settlement, migrant locale \textit{par excellence}, and ‘cultural capital of black Britain’ (in James Procter’s phrase)\textsuperscript{104} is already well rehearsed\textsuperscript{105} – such major cities as Birmingham and Glasgow, and the regional loyalties they invite, are crucial in the formation of British Asian identities.\textsuperscript{106} Yet, as Seán McLoughlin notes, ‘the diverse local configuration of Asian Britain has to a large extent remained unexamined in the [scholarly] literature’.\textsuperscript{107}

In Hussein’s \textit{Émigré Journeys}, Amir discovers the extent to which Birmingham has worked its way into his consciousness:

\begin{quote}
I did not live in a palace back in Birmingham, but . . . I had my comrades around me, the nearness of bodies and souls . . . I . . . longed for the company . . . that I had in Birmingham, where everyone knew everyone else’s situation, each one relying on the other. It was a community. (209–10, 213–14)
\end{quote}

When he does return to the city, such feelings of nostalgia become even more explicit: ‘Birmingham – home from my home, so to speak. As I entered the old city I . . . knew why I had wished to come here: I wanted to regain my pride in the very city where I had once lost it’ (221). Although such powerful local allegiances exist among the first generation, as we saw earlier through images of mapping, it is their children who more clearly demonstrate the importance of regional, rather than national, affiliations. In \textit{Burning Mirror}, for instance, Glasgow is an important muse for each of Saadi’s Scots Asian characters. He conceives the city on a microcosmic, intra-urban scale and deploys a blend of demotic Scots and Urdu: a linguistic technique which renders his vision all the more distinctive and localised (and, for some readers, opaque perhaps), and which he champions when he attacks the ‘idiocy that great thoughts can only be thought in “Standard” English’.\textsuperscript{108} Through such strategies, he reveals Glasgow’s development as a network of racially diverse neighbourhoods, while critically appraising the Pakistani community itself. Thus in ‘The Queens of Govan’, the kebab house in which Ruby works is

\begin{quote}
in the heart ae Govan which wis gie unusual fur an Asian-run Carry-out. Maist ae those were in the slightly safer territory ae Kinnin Park, where broon faces outnumbered the pink and where the Changezi family held an easy sway wi machetes an hockey-sticks. (23)
\end{quote}
The Changezis underscore the prevailing sense throughout *Burning Mirror* of a hierarchy of Pakistani Glaswegian families. Indeed, ten years before Saadi, Farhana Sheikh characterised east London Pakistani communities in her novel *The Red Box* (1991) as similarly divided along economic and class lines. Aslam, too, documents the poorest Muslim, Hindu, and Sikh neighbourhoods of his unnamed, fabular northern English town in *Maps*, rather than ‘the rich suburbs’ to which ‘doctors, lawyers, accountants, engineers’ have moved, in an internal migration, ‘leaving behind the Pakistanis . . . Bangladeshis, and a few Indians, all of whom work in restaurants, drive taxis and buses, or are unemployed’ (46). In contrast to the material success of Glasgow’s South Asian businessmen and racketeers, Saadi’s dysfunctional families include one failed Pakistani patriarch after another. In ‘Ninety-nine kiss-o-grams’ and ‘Bandanna’, Sal feels contempt towards those members of the first generation who have not advanced materially, but this is really an expression of his own despair towards his mother and father. His need to move away from what he perceives as their constricted world is articulated in spatial terms as his friends and he leave behind such ‘pedestrians’ (112) on their journey through the ‘runniboard’ (112) of Glasgow:

> the Gang turned west, away fae the mosques, towards Maxwell Park . . . To muck up the quiet. To fill it wi gouts ae Bhangra and Baissee. They skatit past the tenement closes, each one a blink in the Gang’s eye. The sound of generations carved into each corniced ceiling . . . The black slaves had bled in blue: R ‘n’ R [sic], hip-hop, reggae, and now the sons of swastika-daubed Paki shop-owners would disembowel the air in syncopation. Together, with night torches, they would fire the swastikas and, in the fractured air, would spin them round in great wheels up and down the streets of Glasgow. And they would feed the skinheads of Ibrox, the white-trash tattoo of Penilee into the great, burning cunt of Mata Kali, where five thousand firewheels spun time . . . It wis aw mixed up . . . Sikh Bhangra, Mussalmaan Qawal, Hindu Raag-Bhajan-Khayals . . . Black Blues, it all swirled together and spurned into a river of Techno-Rave Brummie Beat. (112, 116–17)

If finding a home in Scotland is complicated, then aggressively marking out territory in Glasgow is Sal’s challenge. This violent, vibrant passage – in which his gang take ownership of the city through their vivid, particularised vision of it – contrasts with the gently romantic, non-localised quality of Sal’s vision of Scotland (‘the cool spaces ae Scola, the feel ae rain on his back’) when he was in Pakistan in ‘Ninety-nine kiss-o-grams’ (5). In ‘Bandanna’, Saadi instead presents a janglingly kinetic, hallucinatory
version of Scotland-as-Glasgow which draws eclectically on other ethnic, religious, and regionalised British Asian identities and traditions (the syncretic music represented by ‘Sikh Bhangra’, ‘Hindu Raag-Bhajan-Khayals’, ‘Techno-Rave Brummie Beat’) and reflects the speed and sounds of physical and psychological movement through the city.

The sense of local belonging conferred by Glasgow is also central to Hardeep Singh Kohli’s memoir *Indian Takeaway: A Very British Story* (2008). Here he claims that his ‘story becomes interesting’ when his parents moved from London to Glasgow because ‘if we had stayed in London and become another of those Hounslow Indian families, we would have all led fairly unremarkable lives’, later noting – humorously and certainly provocatively – that

being Scottish has improved my life immeasurably. I am funnier, wittier and better looking for it . . . far more likely to invent things and educate the world about the philosophy of economics. That is what it is to be Scottish.109

It is arguably true that the story of South Asians in London, with their denser settlement patterns in such areas as Southall, is better known than that of Glaswegian Asians, both Muslim (in Saadi’s case) and Sikh (in Kohli’s). Kohli’s point is also a useful corrective to the London-centrism of, for instance, Kureishi, and Glaswegian identity is clearly a source of pride and a kind of ‘unique selling point’ for both Kohli and Saadi.110 But Kohli’s polemical statements also reveal that regionalised fault lines and tensions exist within British Asian literature to a greater extent than anything comparable in South Asian American writing. One wonders how readers from west London’s Asian communities – of the kind portrayed, for instance, in Gurinder Chadha’s 2002 film *Bend It Like Beckham* – would feel about their lives being dismissed as ‘unremarkable’.

Similar regional prejudices surface in Lalwani’s *Gifted*, where Mahesh Vasi, an academic in Cardiff, congratulates himself on not being among the thirty thousand Asians haemorrhaging out of the ugly scar in Uganda’s belly that same year [1972], seeping into the dark spaces of Britain . . . the crawling masses who had fallen into the pockets of Leicester and Wembley. (8)

The haematic imagery used here owes much to the bloodshed of Idi Amin’s post-independence Uganda and to the notorious ‘Rivers of Blood’ speech given in 1968 by the British politician Enoch Powell: both explicit points of reference in the same passage. But Mahesh’s snobbery towards
certain regional locations is also about his sense of intellectual superiority, of individuality and agency (as an immigrant by choice), and thus separateness, in relation to large numbers of what he regards as uneducated South Asian refugees. Thus he imputes passivity to them (they have ‘fallen into’ the UK) and shudders at their density in particular places such as Leicester and Wembley – which denotes another dismissal of London. His vision of them as ‘crawling masses’ also reworks the more famous phrase ‘huddled masses’: a transatlantic reference in that it was first used by Emma Lazarus in her 1866 poem ‘The New Colossus’ to refer to US immigration.

In Manzoor’s Greetings from Bury Park and another recent autobiography, Sathnam Sanghera’s The Boy with the Topknot: A Memoir of Love, Secrets and Lies in Wolverhampton (2008), the traditionally banal, unglamorous English towns of Luton and Wolverhampton – where Manzoor’s Pakistani Muslim and Sanghera’s Punjabi Sikh families respectively settled in the 1960s and 1970s – are treated in matter-of-fact, yet affectionate, fashion. Manzoor in particular offers a corrective to the unfavourable image of his home town in the national imaginary, revealing early in his memoir the Pakistani appropriation of sections of Luton through details which normalise this ethnic presence: ‘with his greying hair, pepper moustache, light-brown kurta pyjama and leather chuppulls, Sadiq looked like a hundred other men you might see walking along Dunstable Road with bags of halal chicken in their arms’ (23). Local places (‘Dunstable Road’) are mentioned casually, rather than explained, therefore immersing the reader in Pakistani Luton and offering another example of remapping. This forms part of Manzoor’s implicit claims to the sheer ordinariness, and Britishness, of his particular story, which is narrated over three generations. His Luton thus recalls Philip Roth’s Newark in, for instance, his novel The Plot Against America (2004), where to be American is to be Jewish: a sense of national belonging helped by real ethnic settlement. Parallels with Roth’s New Jersey are, perhaps, no coincidence in an autobiography which venerates the music of Bruce Springsteen, a well-known son of New Jersey, and in which Manzoor even claims ‘I wanted to be a Muslim like Philip Roth was a Jew’ (239). Interestingly, Manzoor overlooks the South Asian stake in New Jersey, instead paying homage to the state’s white cultural heritage, perhaps because this has had a greater popular impact to date.

After the London bombings of 7 July 2005 (known popularly as ‘7/7’), Manzoor defends his home town, asking: ‘what was it about Luton? When I had been growing up . . . [it] was something of a national joke, but recently it had been inextricably linked with Islamic radicalism . . . When friends asked me whether Luton was as bad as the media portrayed, I would strongly defend its reputation’ (262). Such moments suggest
that – as much as replacing a sense of national belonging – regional sites (Luton, Glasgow, Birmingham, Wolverhampton) become metonymically British in their provision of a simultaneously local and national home for writers.

**Gendered Domesticity**

My earlier discussion of postwar British urban dwellings, contemporary US suburban homes, and the wider theme of homeownership should make clear that home as domestic arena can be crucial to migrant identity formation. And if it is a defining element of the masculine pride of some immigrants to own property – whether in South Asia, as I contend in Chapter 2, or in Britain and the US, as we see here – the actual daily maintenance of such homes, and their status as a recreated version of India, Pakistan, or Bangladesh, is regarded as female work by many men and women here. In view of the traditionally patriarchal nature of South Asian societies, it is perhaps unsurprising that domesticity should take this gendered form, although several South Asian Atlantic writers explicitly question the association between women and home. For instance, in Divakaruni’s stories – which tackle Indian marital life in America head-on, often as it pertains to housework – many female characters contest their Bengali husbands’ vision of domesticity as a female preserve. In ‘Intelligence of wild things’, we learn, almost in passing, that Sandeep, the unnamed protagonist’s husband, is ‘like most husbands brought up in India, no help at all’ (44); while Shyamoli in ‘Mrs Dutta writes a letter’ deems her husband, Sagar, unusual in his readiness to help her with housework and is aghast when her mother-in-law tries to take such work off his hands:

Mother! . . . This is why Indian men are so useless around the house. Here in America we don’t believe in men’s work and women’s work. Don’t I work outside all day, just like Sagar? How’ll I manage if he doesn’t help me at home? (15)

Within British Asian writing, Meera Syal uses her novel *Life Isn’t All Ha Ha Hee Hee* (1999) to critique women’s domestic arrangements. Thus she exposes the fragility of Chila’s perfect suburban home and model housewife status, while drawing attention to the spiritual emptiness of Tania’s fashionable urban apartment, bought through her professional success. Neither relationship with the home is presented as satisfactory, although Syal offers no alternative scenarios. *Brick Lane* focuses even more intently on individual, feminised interior spaces, doing so in ostensibly more
traditional fashion than Syal, although Ali presents the Bangladeshi immigrant home as both confining and liberating and thus analogous to the paradox which underpins South Asian American literary representations of suburbia. When Ali’s characters do experience happiness, it is firmly rooted in the domestic sphere since this is the novel’s principal backdrop, with Nazneen’s flat serving as its most important example.

After emigrating from India, Mukherjee initially viewed herself as ‘permanently stranded in North America’, a theme explored throughout her early work, especially Wife, which anticipates many of the concerns explored in Brick Lane and concludes its study of gendered domesticity in grisly fashion with Dimple murdering her husband, Amit. Like Dimple, Sandhya, the Indian immigrant housewife in Alexander’s Manhattan Music, negotiates loneliness and depression within the confines of her New York apartment, but instead attempts suicide. In Maps, Aslam also depicts immigrant women as ‘stranded’, this time within a Muslim society which keeps a very close eye on its members. In Brick Lane, such surveillance takes several forms. It is spiritual, part of an Islamic eschatology which has shaped believers’ consciousness from early life, although the all-seeing, divine gaze which Nazneen senses upon her at all times is reinforced in human form through the community’s own watchfulness. Indeed, the threat of public scrutiny means it is almost safer to remain indoors. At the same time, Mrs Azad explicitly conflates gendered domesticity with imprisonment – both inside and outside the home – claiming that ‘some women spend ten, twenty years here and . . . sit in the kitchen grinding spices all day and learn only two words of English . . . They go around covered from head to toe, in their little walking prisons.’

Ali suggests that, outside their immediate neighbourhood, first-generation women are invisible. When a white woman does stare at Nazneen,

it was the way she might look at a familiar object, her keys that she had just found, the kitchen table as she wiped the juice her daughter had spilled, a blankness reserved for known quantities like pieces of furniture or brown women in saris who cooked rice and raised their children and obeyed their husbands. (325; emphasis added)

Through a classic racist paradox – that of the simultaneously visible and invisible subject – Ali not only reveals the unconscious dismissal of new immigrant women of colour by some white people, but also captures mainstream British society’s association of Nazneen with the domestic: she is objectified in the same way as other household items, her complex
subjectivity reduced to a culturalist preconception of her as mother and housewife.\textsuperscript{120} Trapped, too, by Bangladeshi cultural expectations, Nazneen often feels a kind of domestic immobility.\textsuperscript{121} In a mood rather like the emotional apathy of her friend, Razia – whose damaged state of mind is reflected in the neglected condition of her home\textsuperscript{122} – Nazneen ruminates, many years after her arrival in London, upon the sparseness of her immediate surroundings, seeing her life specifically in terms of missed domestic opportunities – that is, the chance to decorate and thus personalise her apartment – because her mode of survival has been to avoid thinking of her future as British.

This idea anticipates Maps, where Aslam writes of Mah-Jabin, a second-generation British Pakistani character, that her entry into puberty marks ‘a turning point in the appearance of the house: many improvements were made to the interiors which until then had been seen only as temporary accommodation in a country never thought of as home’ (96; emphasis added). In other words, in a way distinct from Nazneen’s attitude in Brick Lane, house and homeland are brought together through the family’s commitment to their British home, an arena tightly controlled by Kaukab, the matriarch. As Aslam’s narrator informs us, for Kaukab, ‘everything is here in this house’ (65) and ‘there is so much outside the house that may not be brought into the house’ (93). Such thinking, which designates the family dwelling as a female-controlled realm of tradition – a material extension of Kaukab’s psychological and emotional state – also marks another return to George’s notion of home as a kind of exclusion zone, reliant on ‘closed doors . . . [and] borders’.\textsuperscript{123}

These fictionalised forms of gendered domesticity are mirrored in recent examples of British Asian life-writing, across ethnicity and religion, through the figures of the non-Anglophone, largely housebound mothers in Greetings from Bury Park and Boy with the Topknot. In these texts, both Manzoor and Sanghera create loving, affectionate portraits of their stoical, self-reliant mothers: home-based seamstresses whose earnings have sustained their families. Nazneen makes her living in similar fashion in Brick Lane, also remitting money to her sister in Bangladesh, although her apparently confined existence in London is undercut by the irony that it is through this culturally enforced home-working that she is able to embark upon an affair – with Karim, the young middleman whom she encounters in this context – and thus to subvert expectations of wifely obedience.\textsuperscript{124}

As Gail Low has noted in the context of Sheikh’s Red Box, ‘the . . . home worker’s place of residence is both private and public’;\textsuperscript{125} and in Brick Lane, this extends to the forging of new and ostensibly liberating relationships. In Wife and Manhattan Music, Dimple and Sandhya also engage in extra-
marital affairs; just as for Nazneen, Dimple’s home provides the site, and alibi, for this adulterous activity. Home as a site of paid work, albeit of an exhausting and repetitive variety, complicates any critique of South Asian diasporic women condemned to a domestic drudgery which is unthinking. As Devon Campbell-Hall has argued of *Brick Lane*:

> the role of the traditionally exploited sewing pieceworker has been unsentimentally transformed into a quiet rebellion against the cultural status quo . . . labour . . . provides the . . . location for . . . transgressive behaviours . . . [and the opportunity] to disengage from the moral and emotional restraints of . . . [the] larger community.126

Ali’s nuanced representation of Nazneen, Razia, and Mrs Azad in *Brick Lane* can be read alongside the characterisations of first-generation women by such other British Asian women writers as Syal and Sheikh. Their depictions – Syal’s bloody-minded Punjabi Hindu mothers in *Life Isn’t All* and Sheikh’s independent Muslim matriarchs in *Red Box* – sometimes diverge starkly from portrayals by male authors of South Asian migrant women and their attitudes to home. Despite Sanjukta Dasgupta’s claim that ‘the very basic quest for home, the domestic space, the security of the enclosed space, do not seem to be such an integral part of most migrant male writing’,127 such writers as Hussein and Aslam do address home as a domestic site. Much like Kureishi’s less-than-satisfying formulation of older South Asian women,128 they present a particular model of first-generation women in relation to issues of home: the Pakistani wife and mother with no real desire to be in Britain. In *Émigré Journeys*, Salma is devastated by her enforced migration and only comes to life when discussions turn to stories of ‘back home’ (95), while Kaukab is depicted in subtle and sometimes harrowing fashion in *Maps*, as she is made to represent a whole community of women broken by the sorrows of exile. Classically gendered ideas of home, in both national and domestic terms, are linked here to the notion of women as the embodiments of cultural tradition. At the same time, *Maps* shows us the divergent attitudes towards home of second-generation British Muslim women and – in a feminist work deeply concerned with social justice – Aslam illustrates their struggle against the traditional gender roles assigned to them.

Domesticity-as-female is a leitmotif in British Asian literature especially, even though South Asian American writing is full of immigrant housewives: Dimple in Mukherjee’s appropriately named *Wife*; Aban, Manek’s wife in Sidhwa’s *American Brat*; Sandhya in *Manhattan Music*; Ashima in Lahiri’s *Namesake* and Mrs Sen in her eponymous story; Rajiv’s
mother in Parekh’s *Stealing the Ambassador*, and Prapulla in Chandra’s ‘Sari of the gods’ (from his eponymous collection). On the one hand, these US writers – who include the male voices of Parekh and Chandra – are more interested in anatomising the collision between such women and the outside world; yet *Wife* and *Manhattan Music* do also interrogate the psychological impact of a housebound existence, suggesting that this is a wider trend within South Asian Atlantic women’s writing. Across this œuvre, then, home is used to suggest women’s feelings of imprisonment and suffocation, while hinting at the growth of a kind of domestic earning-power and even the possibility for sexual experimentation (as we see through Nazneen and Dimple). Male authors – particularly Kureishi and Hussein – do less to problematise connections between South Asian women and home; while Manzoor’s and Sanghera’s non-fictional accounts of their immigrant mothers are multi-layered, yet fundamentally driven by filial loyalty. Indeed, both writers associate gendered domesticity with childhood security, and food forms a key element of such associations, as I argue in Chapter 4. Although the connection between women and home is a familiar one across cultures, it reveals a rich seam of meaning and possibility within transatlantic South Asian writing.

The US versus Britain in South Asian Atlantic writing

**SOUTH ASIAN AMERICAN RESPONSES TO BRITAIN**

Just as South Asian American writers deploy the British weather as a vehicle for anti-imperialist critique, so too do they treat Britain itself with suspicion and even derision. Apart from Lahiri’s impeccably elegant vision of London in her story ‘Only goodness’ (from her collection *Unaccustomed Earth* [2008]), where Sudha emigrates and marries a white British man, few of these anti-British narratives are actually set in the UK, yet they attack the nation to sometimes merciless effect through the use of now-familiar tropes: besides bad weather, we have seen that the UK is apparently composed of uniformly colourless, claustrophobically urban settings. Mukherjee in particular presents Britain as no match for the US. Indeed, her acceptance of the United States depends, in a dialectical sense, on her consistent, postcolonially inflected hostility to Britain, which at times becomes the subject of an explicit rejection and at others can be discerned as an absent presence, mentioned fleetingly, if at all. This compares to *The Perfect Man* (2006), a novel by the British Lebanese writer Naeem Murr, in which the child protagonist, Raj Travers, leaves behind post-
independence India and then late 1940s Britain, handled briefly and dismissively in the text, for his ultimate destination: the United States. Similarly, in Mira Nair’s film Mississippi Masala (1991; discussed further in Chapter 3), the Lohas, a Ugandan Asian family, have apparently spent fifteen years in Britain before moving to the US, but – unlike their time in Africa – this period of British residence is completely erased from the narrative. In each case, the text seems to assume an American audience.

For Mukherjee, Britain is, paradoxically, at once unworthy of discussion and crucial to her diasporic self-fashioning. As she herself has put it, ‘my love of America is really my rebellion against British colonialism’: through its colonial history, Britain simply cannot be avoided. In a 1993 interview, Mukherjee attacks European multiculturalism, arguing that the countries of:

Western Europe . . . treat their non-European immigrants, even if they have been there for two or three generations, as though they are guest workers. They never . . . accept them as real citizens . . . People who . . . settle in Europe, are encouraged to retain their cultures so that it would not occur to . . . the Turks for instance to think of themselves as Danes and so on. Whereas America, because of its mythology, allows me to think of myself . . . as American . . . in England I would not dare assume I can be an Englishman [sic] unless I was born with a certain kind of name . . . look . . . accent.

Mukherjee is right to draw attention to a fundamentally different American ‘mythology’; and, as I argued in the Introduction, the search for a British identity has been complicated by the colonial past for many British Asian writers: perhaps more so than the equivalent quest for South Asian American artists, although one cannot ignore the existence of past and ongoing racial discrimination in the US. At the same time, the cultural capital of British Asians – and Mukherjee’s limited experience of life in Britain – make her presentation of the nation as untransformed by its South Asian population outdated, inaccurate, and clichéd.

Mukherjee has also sought to strip the English language of any prior British ownership, claiming to

have invented my own version of American English . . . Bit by bit, as I’ve . . . become closer to my material . . . the choice of point of view has become first person . . . the sentences [are] . . . now full of energy and emotion which I would not allow myself because I had been taught by the British education in independent India that that was uncivil . . . My love of America is . . . a liberation from structure.
Freed from the putative staidness and ‘structure’ of British English, language becomes another means of securing a home for oneself. Rather as Alexander has argued that she uses English ‘to make a home . . . sometimes I feel I have no real home except in language’ – and Mukherjee and her husband, Clark Blaise, have claimed that ‘[Salman] Rushdie has made his home in language, in the fecundity and ferocity of his invention’ – so Mukherjee herself claims to have constructed a literary, linguistic home on American soil. This US home relies on a fervent anti-imperialism, in which Britain remains a negative intellectual and political force: a body of ideas to be continually overthrown.

Where does this leave South Asian American literary representations of British Asians? In Meer’s *Bombay Talkie*, South Asian visitors to 1980s London have difficulty grasping the idea of British Asians in an existential sense. Sitting in a London nightclub, Jimmy, an ageing Bollywood film star, observes that ‘a few of the faces look Indian . . . but they’re strange, like masks . . . hijras . . . and their voices are the same as the rest of the people around him’. This vision suggests both gender confusion – since the sex of these British Asians is not specified and they are compared, moreover, to eunuchs or ‘hijras’ – and a kind of aural puzzlement through the implied question: how can Indian-looking people speak like the British and thus, by extension, be British? Jimmy’s daughter, Alia, is no less perplexed when, sitting on a London bus, she encounters

> Indian faces mixed in with white English ones . . . There are some Indian girls in short skirts and jackets, just like English girls. They are laughing and telling jokes with harsh British accents. Alia feels sorry for them, having long grey English lives without any hope of the hot Bombay sun burning through the clouds. (203–4)

That these girls are actually locals, rather than simply being ‘like English girls’, is not only difficult for this wealthy Indian girl to understand, but is also perceived by her as a palpable disadvantage. And once again the apparent deficiencies of the native climate are integral to this critique of Britain. Although, as I argue in Chapter 2, Sabah, the novel’s South Asian American protagonist, encounters local confusion about her own Indianness when she visits the ancestral homeland, *Bombay Talkie* implies that the US is a better place in which to be Indian than Britain. Dull, grey, and limited in comparison with America, Asian Britain – represented entirely through London – is embodied through a single character, Imran, whose unsettling Britishness is once again invoked through accent (he ‘sounds like an Angrez’ [239]) and is rescued only by his wealth and prospects.
In Daswani’s *For Matrimonial Purposes*, Anju rejects Raju, a potential suitor from London, who is presented as deceitful and desperate to appear as white as possible. Like Jimmy and Alia, Anju struggles with the reality of British Asian speech, and her assessment that ‘with his brown skin, [his accent] . . . almost didn’t fit, it was that extreme’ (176) says more about her own prejudices towards British Asians than it does about Raju. In Vijayaraghavan’s *Motherland*, Maya, the vulnerable, teenaged American protagonist, is first charmed, then troubled, by her older, British cousin Madhu and her selfish, amoral behaviour. Madhu, yet another possessor of a troublingly British accent, is depicted as badly brought up and eager to assimilate into white British culture: a cautionary figure for Maya, although Madhu is given her say in the novel, particularly on Indian women’s rights. Most revealing of all, however, are Vijayaraghavan’s lengthier comparisons of South Asians in Britain and America in the late 1980s. Madhu tells Maya that ‘all of you who went to the States, you come back here [to India] more than we do, like you’re looking to be something more than American. In Britain, we know who we are, and we’re not Indian’ (102–3). Meanwhile Maya’s uncle, Sanjay, claims that ‘England [sic] and India still have strong ties, and much to learn from each other . . . America is too young to learn from’ (104). Madhu may be regarded as a subversive, even malign, influence but Vijayaraghavan’s message is ambiguous, since – despite its absence of an established immigrant ‘mythology’ – Britain seems to have afforded Madhu a more robust sense of belonging than the United States has offered Maya. Doubts over migration to the US, rather than the UK, underpin the narrative and ultimately, it remains unclear which site Vijayaraghavan favours.

South Asian Americans are also pitted against their British counterparts in Ginu Kamani’s transatlantic story ‘Just between Indians’ (from her short fiction collection *Junglee Girl* [1995]). Here Ranjan and Sahil Patel, Gujarati brothers from London who have been ‘raised everywhere’, are prospective marriage partners for Daya, an American student. For Subhash, the boys’ father, and Rohit, his New York-based brother, Indianness (as the title suggests) – and, more precisely, Gujarati-ness – can unite the potential couple beyond any transatlantic differences. Yet Kamani’s closed third-person narrator unmistakably views the brothers through Daya’s American eyes, emphasising Ranjan’s supposedly British diffidence and Sahil’s debonair, worldweary, implicitly ‘English’ charm, while commenting upon their English accents. Indeed, in a way that recalls Meer and anticipates Vijayaraghavan and Daswani, speech is once again an important marker of transatlantic South Asian difference. The story refuses the option of uniting its two Gujarati halves: the match
between Ranjan and Daya is a non-starter, while her sexual attraction to Sahil simply results in a one-night stand, and the Patels return to London. It becomes clear in fact that they never had any intention of moving to New York, despite their initial claims, and it is significant that their uncle Rohit’s New York home is where their mother killed herself many years before. Although Kamani’s story suggests that the erotic adventure between Daya and Sahil has sexually liberated both parties to become involved with other ethnic Indians, ‘Just between Indians’ depicts an unbridgeable, even doomed, gulf between the British and American sides of the South Asian Atlantic.

In Shobhan Bantwal’s *Sari Shop Widow*, the portrayal of Rishi Shah, a biracial, British Gujarati entrepreneur, goes against this trend, since the novel unites him with Anjali Kapadia, its South Asian American protagonist. Rishi is a somewhat unconvincingly depicted ‘Indo-Brit’, the very choice of word, especially his own use of it,139 smacking of inauthenticity. His Britishness is continually referenced, despite his early years in India, his international business interests, and his peripatetic existence. As with other South Asian American-inscribed British Asian characters, his ethnic credentials are in question, his accent subjected to scrutiny and mistrust. Beyond the human need to pigeonhole people, especially in an ethnic sense – in the words of the narrative, ‘one Desi [or South Asian] could always spot another’ (32) – there is also a persistent sense here (as in the examples discussed earlier) that, although the South Asian presence in Britain cannot be denied, British Asians themselves represent a contradiction in terms for their American counterparts. As Anjali puts it early in the novel, ‘Rishi . . . looks and talks like a Brit, behaves like one’ (102): her implication is that he cannot also be Indian, even though she – and other members of her US community – can securely lay claim to their Indianness. She seems oblivious to this inconsistency and, despite her own British Asian relatives, Anjali appears to believe that some types of diasporic Indian identity are more acceptable than others.

All of this begs the question of why Bantwal makes Rishi a British Asian, especially in view of her uncertain handling of British culture and the fact that there is no evidence in the novel of any marked awareness on her part of actual British Asian lives. As with Sahil in ‘Just between Indians’, Rishi’s foreign status is perhaps more significant in symbolic terms. His sophisticated, cosmopolitan, non-traditional lifestyle lends him a palpable allure, even as it hints at a sharp divide between the two sides of the South Asian Atlantic, and like Sahil, he is a sexually liberating influence on the female protagonist. Crucially, his Britishness distinguishes him from Gujarati men in the US, who are described as being
as interesting as plain boiled potatoes. They . . . lacked sophistication . . . Indians in America . . . were a homogenous [sic] bunch . . . essentially decent, honest, hardworking, and obsessively goal-oriented, but the one thing . . . that bored Anjali to tears was their lack of humour. (15)

This sweeping generalisation is clearly open to question, but it paves the way for a transnational ethnic match for Anjali, whose own life is depicted as parochial through her lack of familiarity with life outside the US. The fact that Rishi and she can overcome their rather superficial transatlantic differences – for instance, in the pronunciation of ‘schedule’ (96) – suggests that, unlike the message of Kamani’s story, shared ethnicity (again, Gujarati-ness) can overcome initial misunderstanding. It can also override the inauspicious premise, in a traditional Indian context, of Anjali’s widowed status and Rishi’s racially mixed provenance. Indeed, his Britishness (further underscored by his white ‘half’) and the potential move to London it offers promise to free Anjali from the control of her loving, yet ‘puritanical . . . [and] conservative’ parents (24). Sari Shop Widow also highlights the tendency within South Asian Atlantic writing to present the US and Britain as the most viable centres for desi settlement outside India.

THE US IN BRITISH ASIAN CULTURAL PRODUCTION

As I argued in the Introduction, the United States exerts a powerful influence on British Asian writing and cinema. It is generally depicted in markedly more favourable terms than Britain is in South Asian American works and indeed, the second generation’s sense of place is often addressed in transatlantic terms. Thus in David Attwood’s film Wild West (1992, scripted by Harwant Bains), young British Asians ultimately choose America over Britain, as west London is exchanged for Nashville. The same trajectory also informs the conclusion to Chadha’s later and better-known Bend It Like Beckham. These British Asian characters are frozen in transit, however, since their lives in America – and any problems they might face there – remain beyond the scope of the narrative. Interestingly, Naveen Andrews and Parminder Nagra, the respective British Asian stars of these films, have fared well as actors working in the US.

Kureishi’s literary works display a pro-Americanism similar to that of such films. In Black Album, Chili wishes his father had stood ‘in line on Ellis Island’ and harbours his own ambitions to ‘hit New York’.140 In this respect, he succeeds Farouk in Kureishi’s play Borderline (1981), who believes that ‘most of England’s a miserable place’ and plans to emigrate ‘to America or Canada eventually’.141 Charlie, too, welcomes the chance
to exchange ‘decrepit’ 1970s Britain for America in *Buddha of Suburbia*.\textsuperscript{142} Such attitudes are undercut by ambivalence, however, since – Charlie aside – these ambitions to settle in the US are rarely fulfilled, rather as we never witness British Asian lives in America in *Wild West* and *Bend It Like Beckham*. This half-hearted transatlanticism, which may reflect Kureishi’s own resolution to stay in London, even casts America in an ominous light, for instance when Shahid argues that rising racial inequality in Britain means ‘it’s gonna be like America. However far we go, we’ll always be underneath!’ (*Black Album*, 209). Such transatlantic allusions nonetheless reveal the importance to Kureishi and his characters (Jamila in *Buddha*, for instance) of black American models of writing and political resistance.\textsuperscript{143}

In *Greetings from Bury Park*, Sarfraz Manzoor directly addresses the choice of Britain over America for ethnic South Asians. His relationship with the US goes through three key stages. Initially, he envisions it as a magical place, and his discovery of the music of Springsteen emblematises his adolescent sense that ‘I . . . loved America and hated Luton’ (99). But even before this, the United States is the subject of unquestioning veneration:

I would fantasise that I was an American high-school student . . . the possibility that my . . . experience might differ on account of not being white did not arise . . . All my hopes were encapsulated in the life I imagined was possible in the United States. Why had my father not landed at Ellis Island? . . . It wasn’t that I was unaware the United States had its own race problems but even those seemed glamorous . . . I knew more about American black history than I did about the fight for civil rights in Britain. In the absence of British Pakistani role models I borrowed Martin Luther King and Malcolm X . . . I had not read of any discrimination against Pakistanis in America and so the United States remained a place for second chances. Why would they care that I was Pakistani? (128–31)

Rebelling against his father’s aversion to America, which represents ‘everything he hated about Britain multiplied a hundredfold . . . “Americans are unclean, immoral”’ (135), Manzoor resolves to go to the US, a trip he finally makes in 1990, made possible, ironically, by his father’s touching generosity.

During this second phase – in which Manzoor actually experiences America – his euphoria is affectionately recalled. It is difficult, incidentally, to imagine a South Asian American experiencing this much excitement about coming to Britain. At the same time, Manzoor recognises that ‘I did not look how Americans imagined Brits looked and I was worried
that something in my daily behaviour would expose me as not being quite British enough’ (142). While in Yuba City, California, Manzoor has his own South Asian Atlantic encounter when he shares a meal with a Pakistani American couple, who inquire about his ancestral village, and he reflects that ‘perhaps my father had been right when he had talked about a shared sense of community, it was just that I needed to travel to the United States to witness it first-hand’ (147). This moment implies (once again) that South Asian ethnic allegiance can move beyond purely national boundaries.

But Manzoor’s transatlantic dream is dealt a huge blow by 9/11: arguably the third stage of his relationship with America. His British Sikh friend, Amolak, reveals that

‘America isn’t ours anymore . . . we always thought . . . if Britain doesn’t want us we . . . have America. Not any more . . . now we are going to have to do what we can in this . . . country because you know that the second you . . . land at JFK they are going to haul your arse into jail’ . . . The newspaper reports of innocent Asians being detained for questioning and then slung back to Britain confirmed Amolak’s grim theory that the United States was no longer our promised land. (235–6)

It is worth noting that the ancestral homeland is never considered part of this contingency plan. Manzoor had in fact already resolved to stay in Britain before 9/11 and its aftermath – for instance, the detention of British Asians at Guantánamo Bay – and his memoir ends by applauding his father’s decision to settle in the UK, since ‘every opportunity, every job and every chance to pursue my dreams has been offered by this country, not by America, and not by Pakistan’ (269). Within this triangulation of South Asia, the US, and the UK, Manzoor’s ultimate allegiance to Britain is as much connected to intensely personal family dynamics, especially paternal loyalty, as it is to wider political issues. Despite the primacy of ethnic affiliations, then, South Asian diasporic writers on both sides of the Atlantic are surprisingly keen to maintain the national status quo by vindicating their decisions to remain in America or Britain.

**STRATEGIC ANGLOPHOBIA VERSUS STRATEGIC AMERICANOPHILIA**

This brings us back to the question, posed at the beginning of this chapter, of why specifically national identities should be so significant to apparently transnational writers. I have argued here and in the Introduction that, although the South Asian diaspora spans the globe, writers explore the
notion that their characters could have been either British or American – presented as two quite separate forms of existence – but for different circumstances. Thus British Asian writers effect transatlantic comparisons because, like millions of other immigrants, their characters could logically have gone to the US; hence the image of Ellis Island in *Black Album* and *Greetings from Bury Park*. British Asian artists are tantalised by the prospect of America as a mythic land built on immigration and a country which offers the promise of personal reinvention. They also respond to the international pervasiveness of US culture in a globalised world.

Thanks to old imperial ties, Britain was, on the other hand, a serious destination for early waves of South Asian immigrants. Despite the fact that British rule in India is long gone – and despite the idea that the colonial past has traditionally made Britain a more predetermined, constricted place for South Asians – the UK continues to attract and retain people from the subcontinent. South Asian American writers thus feel the need to engage with it and to explain why they chose not to live there: for instance, Mukherjee, Alexander, and Lahiri all spent time there, albeit briefly, before eventually settling in North America. To adapt Alan Rice’s concept of ‘strategic Anglophilia’ on the part of African American visitors to Britain in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries – ‘a very successful tactic for undermining their home country’ in the fight against racial injustice – what we witness here are forms of strategic Americanophilia (harnessed by Kureishi, Manzoor, and several British Asian films) and strategic Anglophobia across a range of South Asian American writing.

Why Anglophobia but Americanophilia? The ‘philia’ part of the equation suggests a utopian vision of the US, while the ‘phobia’ part hints at a conversely dystopian Britain. Yet neither reflects reality. As I argued in the Introduction, the US is no more a post-racial, uniformly egalitarian society than the UK is hopelessly atrophied in terms of class and race. In the words of Ann Massa and Alistair Stead:

> the accumulating oft-repeated perceptions that the Americans and the British have had of each other constitute a kind of ‘international folklore’... that engages in myth-making rather than the strenuous pursuit of something more objectively verifiable.

Instead, such phobias and philias, whereby Britain is used to discuss America and vice versa, serve as powerful instruments with which to validate one’s choice of national home. British Asian artists deploy a strategic Americanophilia to question the parameters of South Asian
inclusion in the UK. This remains rather superficial because it is never followed through with a full rejection of Britain and often relies on little actual experience of the US. As I argued above, the work of Kureishi and Manzoor ultimately demonstrates their British allegiance, while those films which end by choosing the US fail to take the next step in narrative terms. The Anglophobia which informs South Asian American literature is more sustained and deep-seated, shoring up each creator’s patriotic status as an American (and thus reflecting, perhaps, the patriotic pressures exerted by US society) and as an American writer by paralleling India and America through a joint antipathy to British imperialism. This is especially true of Mukherjee. Anglophobia is used to thank America, explicitly and implicitly, for the material, cultural, and heuristic opportunities it has given writers and their characters. Within this Anglophobic discourse, such figures as Madhu in *Motherland* and Raju in *For Matrimonial Purposes* come to perform a more generalised British villainy, rather as Hollywood cinema makes ample use of British ‘baddies’ and rather as sections of American literature have always relied on forms of Anglophobia. In creating such characters, who exhibit a straightforward, unproblematised form of (post)colonial mimicry, writers like Vijayaraghavan and Daswani may be looking down on British Asians for settling in the country of the ex-colonisers and, in a revealing slippage, for apparently aping white ways. An element of competition could be at work here through the self-justificatory need of certain writers to prove that South Asians are happier in the United States than in Britain (and vice versa in the case of Kureishi and Manzoor) and that America’s global influence has waxed as Britain’s has waned. But Vijayaraghavan, Daswani, and Mukherjee at times undercut their strategic Anglophobia by protesting too much. Recalling Faran Tahir’s point, discussed in the Introduction, about the historical pre-eminence of British Asian films over South Asian American cinema, South Asian American writers are generally less well known than British Asian ones (Lahiri is a notable exception to this rule). Thus they may feel the need for assertive South Asian Atlantic comparisons in ways that many British Asian authors – statistically part of a much more prominent community in relation to the UK population than their American counterparts vis-à-vis US demographics – do not. Despite the increased visibility of South Asians in the US since the 1970s and 1980s, they barely feature in the British Asian works under discussion in this study. Meanwhile, even in the more favourable South Asian American accounts I have considered, British Asian characters are portrayed as curiosities. This hints at a pervasive mutual ignorance, even though the impulse by artists to frame South Asian lives in transatlantic terms remains strong.
family networks and personal outlook, the daily lives of characters and their creators take place at the domestic level (where ‘domestic’ may be read as national, local, and material): an old-fashioned message, perhaps, in a globalised era of apparently shrinking distances.149 Writers use representations of America or Britain – and the rejection of one in favour of the other – in order, then, to support the particular national case they are making and to strengthen their own sense of belonging.

Conclusion

Beyond such overtly transatlantic manoeuvres, home is taken for granted as the thematic foundation for many of these narratives, while actively informing their plotting and characterisation, and their linguistic and rhetorical strategies. Arguably, home is equally important to writers on both sides of the Atlantic, although regional questions appear to preoccupy British Asian writers to a greater extent than South Asian American authors, who show more interest in transatlantic comparisons. Where their treatment of home overlaps most, perhaps, is in its attention to the material conditions of daily living. Blunt and Dowling have considered ideologies of the ‘homely and unhomely’, while noting that home may act as ‘a refuge from work’ for men, but not necessarily women.150 South Asian Atlantic writing explores and problematises such dynamics, highlighting issues like the need to settle land, buy property, and forge a sense of local belonging; the challenges of suburban living; and the home as a site of labour. Some also attempt to contest traditionally gendered ideas of domestic space. This concern with the material aspects of home points to the difficulties of claiming a national home: it is easier to fashion ‘homely’ domestic surroundings than to achieve a sense of home within a sometimes ‘unhomely’ nation. Indeed, as Keya Ganguly has argued of South Asian American immigrants, the ‘only stability and fixed point of reference is their home’.151

That said, we have seen that a number of British Asian and South Asian American writers do ‘claim the nation’,152 particularly those who venture bold transatlantic comparisons (sometimes based on little actual knowledge of the US or UK) to bolster their feelings of national belonging and those who assert the representatively British or American nature of their writing. But the continued emphasis within South Asian Atlantic literature on the microcosmic (home-as-house, home-as-immediate locality), to a greater degree than the macrocosmic (home-as-nation), weakens the confidence of these positions. The drive to domesticity is sometimes a retreat – from the harshness of a South Asian past and/or a British or
American present – and it hints at the ongoing experience of putting down roots, sometimes over several generations. It also suggests that the difficulties of this process apply more or less equally to South Asians on both sides of the Atlantic. After all, their presence in decent numbers in the US, but in Britain to an even greater degree, is relatively new in historical terms and represents a story which is still unfolding. Although some writers’ handling of these issues (gendered domesticity, for example) remains rather conservative, others continue to deploy home and nation in richly subversive ways as they construct a multi-layered critique of ethnic and cultural assumptions.

NOTES

1. A vast body of scholarly work on home has appeared since the early 1980s. See, for instance, Rushdie, Imaginary, pp. 9–21; Martin and Mohanty, ‘Feminist politics’, pp. 191–212; George, Politics; Morley, Home Territories; and, for a useful overview of this literature, Blunt and Dowling, Home.

2. See Jacobson, Roots Too, pp. 3–4.


8. Divakaruni, Unknown Errors, p. 50.


13. For theories of a postnational, borderless world, see Morley, Home Territories, pp. 204–5.


15. See, for example, Jussawalla, ‘South Asian diaspora’, p. 20; Nasta, Home Truths; Procter, Dwelling Places; and Lal and Kumar, Interpreting.

16. Procter, Dwelling Places, does attend to the material aspects of home, but his study differs from mine in that it focuses on black British, as well as British Asian, writing; his selection of South Asian diasporic writers is thus narrower; and his emphasis is not transatlantic. Lisa Lau considers the importance of space within Indian households, but only in the work of women writers and not in the diaspora; see Lau, ‘Emotional’, pp. 1097–116. Some critiques of Jhumpa Lahiri’s short story ‘Mrs Sen’s’ (from her South Asian American collection, Interpreter of Maladies [1999]) discuss the recreation of a Bengali ménage in the US, but do so only briefly; see Banerjee, ‘No nation woman’, pp. 174–5; and compare Dasgupta, ‘Locating “home”’, p. 83.
17. Blunt and Dowling, *Home*, p. 3, emphasis in original; and compare Chatterjee, ‘Thoughts’, p. 312, where she observes the ‘Bengali . . . distinction between basha and barhi, “house and home” . . . an emotional distinction between “a mere shelter” and “a place where one belongs”’.


23. Compare such novels as John Braine’s *Room at the Top* (1957) and Lynne Reid Banks’s *The L-Shaped Room* (1960), whose very titles inscribe the idea of dwellings. This era of bleak domesticity is suggested by the phrase ‘kitchen sink drama’, widely applied to British cinema and theatre of the early 1960s. For a discussion of these issues within 1950s and 1960s black British literature, see Procter, *Dwelling Places*, pp. 21–68.


26. This obsession with return through the vision of a kind of deferred home will be properly examined in the next chapter.


28. One might compare this to the lyrics of Lord Kitchener’s song, ‘My landlady’ (1952), included in Ainley and Noblett, *London* [CD]; and see also Procter, *Dwelling Places*, pp. 21, 63n.


30. Srinivas does, however, appear to anticipate later dangers when he initially views his London home as a trap, rather than an achievement: ‘what they had done was to shackle themselves to bricks and mortar, and it filled him with misgiving. So long as they were mobile, he liked to believe the way back to India . . . lay open’; Markandaya, *Nowhere*, p. 21.


33. This phenomenon ranges from such literary works as Theodore Dreiser’s *An American Tragedy* (1925) to Bret Easton Ellis’s *American Psycho* (1991) to films which include Paul Schrader’s *American Gigolo* (1980) and Sam Mendes’s *American Beauty* (1999); for discussions of this trend within American cinema, see Merck, *America First*.


39. George, Politics, p. 9. For a non-literary discussion of this paradox, see Blunt and Dowling, Home, p. 214.
41. Divakaruni, Unknown Errors, p. 172; see also Parekh, Stealing, pp. 103–4; and Kalita, Suburban, p. 127; and compare Tan, Joy Luck, p. 250.
42. Lahiri, Namesake, p. 29.
43. Throughout this book, I will generally refer to ‘Calcutta’, ‘Bombay’, and ‘Madras’, rather than ‘Kolkata’, ‘Mumbai’, and ‘Chennai’, since this is the nomenclature more often used by writers themselves, often because they are referring to the city in question before it was renamed.
44. See Brian, Modern, p. 109; and compare similar observations on New York poverty in Alexander, Fault Lines, pp. 161, 176, 182–3.
46. Hamid, Reluctant Fundamentalist, pp. 144–5, 149; and see also Ghosh, Shadow Lines, p. 204.
47. Hamid has argued that ‘a novel of leaving America . . . is as much the immigrant novel of today as a story of going to the United States’; quoted in Yaqin, ‘Mohsin Hamid’, p. 46.
48. On transnational mobility and cultural hybridity as paradigmatically positive, even utopian, see Rushdie, Imaginary, p. 394; and Bhabha, Location, pp. 37–8, 112. Such celebrations of hybridity have, of course, been strenuously rejected by many commentators. For a helpful discussion of these debates, see Morley, Home Territories, pp. 205–13, 225–42.
50. By ‘model minority’, I refer to the well-known notion of law-abiding, family-minded, high-achieving Asian Americans: a problematic term which elides individual differences between Asian Americans, ignores the ongoing difficulties they may face, subtly maintains the implicitly outsider status of Asians in the eyes of mainstream America – foregrounding ‘minority’ as much as ‘model’ – while being used sometimes as an invidious means of explaining the lack of ‘progression’ of other communities of colour.
51. This is supported in literary terms by its use of American and colonial intertexts, including F. Scott Fitzgerald’s The Great Gatsby (1925) and Joseph Conrad’s Heart of Darkness (1899). The theme of imperialism is underpinned by references to ancient and medieval empires (Greece, Ottoman Turkey, and – through Changez, whose name recalls ‘Genghis’ [Khan] – the Mongols) and to places with more recent, US imperial associations such as the Philippines and, as I have already noted, Chile; on the significance of Changez’s name, see Shamsie, ‘Reluctant Fundamentalist’.
52. This forms the starting-point for Lonely Londoners, for instance; see also Bhabha, Location, pp. 169–70; Bryan, ‘Homesickness’, p. 45; and Candappa, Picklehead, pp. 95–6, 179, 285.
53. Compare Claude McKay’s description of the English as ‘a strangely
unsympathetic people, as coldly chilling as their English fog’ and of 1920s London as a ‘cold, white city where English culture is great and formidable like an iceberg’ in McKay, *A Long Way*, pp. 67, 304; my thanks to Graeme Abernethy for this reference.

54. Sidhwa, *Crow Eaters*, pp. 259–60. Sidhwa draws on a range of other devices to deride Britain in the novel: poverty, dirt (particularly in a lavatorial context), tasteless food (an idea I will revisit in Chapter 4), and the unpleasant corporeality of Caucasians. On this latter point, compare Maxey, ‘Who wants’, pp. 532–5. Sidhwa’s caricatured, colonial-era Britain in *Crow Eaters* forms a marked contrast to her nuanced, layered critique of the US, a country she knows much better, in *American Brat*.


58. See Blaise and Mukherjee, *Days and Nights*, p. 169; Mukherjee, *Middleman*, p. 197; and Mukherjee, *Darkness*, p. 87.


64. Vakil, *One Day*, pp. 52 and 17 respectively.


68. Compare Phillips, *Mapping*, p. 20: ‘post-colonial critics . . . unmap (literally) the geographies of empire, and (metaphorically) the identities, particularly the imperial masculinities, constructed in that geography’.

69. See Nasta, *Home Truths*, p. 197; and Procter, *Dwelling Places*, p. 46, where both critics note the appropriation of local London territory in Selvon’s *Lonely Londoners*.

70. See Adams, *Across Seven Seas*.

71. For more on these aspects of the text, see Bromley, *Narratives*, pp. 128–9, 131–2.


73. Compare Nasta, *Home Truths*, p. 197; Procter, *Dwelling Places*, pp. 53, 55; and Ball, *Imagining London*, pp. 135–6. This tactic provides an important
counterhegemonic reversal of the colonial tradition whereby, in J. B. Harley’s words, ‘indigenous place-names of minority groups are suppressed on topographical maps in favour of the standard toponymy of the controlling group’; see Harley, ‘Maps’, p. 289.

81. Ibid., p. 281.
91. See Bald, ‘Images’, pp. 421–2, for a discussion of Naipaul’s use of plant imagery in a related sense; for British Asian horticultural practices in a non-literary context, see Murphy, ‘Back to our roots’, pp. 86–7; and within an Indian domestic setting, see Lau, ‘Emotional’, p. 1111.
92. Thus it plays a psychological role in Maxine Hong Kingston’s Chinese American family history *China Men* (1977), and in Timothy Mo’s novel *Sour Sweet* (1982), where Chen, a Chinese immigrant in London, successfully raises a mango tree in his British garden; see also Ashley and Wilson, *Growing Good*, n.p., a children’s book in which the bicultural heritage of Samuel, a young black British boy, is reflected in unobtrusive fashion through the cultivation of ‘beans from St Lucia’ and ‘old [English] foxgloves, from what was growing here before’.
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102. Beyond its alliteration with ‘suburban’, ‘sahib’ is an interesting choice. A polite form of address which implies the authority of the person so called through its various meanings (in Urdu, via Persian and Arabic) of ‘lord’, ‘owner’, and ‘master’, its connotations again suggest the right of South Asian immigrants to stake their claim on US land.
103. Low, ‘Separate spheres?’, p. 23.
105. See, for example, ibid.; Sandhu, *London Calling*; McLeod, *Postcolonial London*; and Ball, *Imagining London*.
110. On Saadi’s assertion of his Scots Asian identity, see Upstone, *British Asian*, pp. 197–9, 201, 204–5.
111. Again one might compare Luton with New Jersey, the latter described by the American novelist Tom Perrotta as ‘a national joke [in the 1960s and 1970s] . . . we had that pride that you have when you live in a much-maligned place’; see Maxey, ‘New American’, p. 277.
114. The perceived female responsibility to sustain a particular ethnic culture within the diasporic home is linked to the well-recognised notion of women as repositories of tradition; see Yuval-Davis, *Gender*, pp. 39, 43–6. For more on the male/female split between house-building and ‘home-making’, see Blunt and Dowling, *Home*, pp. 4–5.
115. See Hiddleston, ‘Shapes’, p. 59, where she argues that Ali’s ‘penetration of interior space’ is classically Orientalist.
117. For more on the sources of Dimple’s rage, see Koshy, *Sexual Naturalisation*, pp. 145, 153.
118. Compare Mankekar, ‘India shopping’, pp. 209, 211, for a consideration of this phenomenon in the South Asian American context.
120. For a discussion of such stereotypes, see Brah, *Cartographies*, pp. 13, 68, 74;


122. That domestic interiors should reflect psychological states is of course well understood; see Bachelard, *Poetics*, pp. 18–20.


125. Low, ‘Separate spheres?’, p. 29.


127. Dasgupta, ‘Locating “home”’, p. 82.


129. See Blunt and Dowling, *Home*, pp. 15–16.

130. Usually London is a point of departure for the US in Lahiri’s writing, with North America ‘the third and final continent’, as she puts it in the eponymous story; see Lahiri, *Interpreter*, pp. 173–98. In ‘Only goodness’, however, Sudha’s parents remain Anglophile despite their decision to settle in the US, and they find it easier to accept their daughter’s interracial marriage to a white British man than they would have if she had chosen a Euro-American; on Bengali Anglophilia, see Dasgupta, ‘Locating “home”’, p. 76. Lahiri’s own background – like Sudha, she is a British-born Bengali American – has led her to make transatlantic comparisons, especially in interviews with British journalists – for instance, when she notes that ‘India was an unknown thing for most Americans [during her 1970s childhood]. I felt that it was basically like the moon to them . . . [but it] has never been as foreign a place to the English . . . because of the . . . colonial past’; quoted in Tayler, ‘Change’. At the same time, she does very little to compare the two places in her writing, which includes no British Asian characters.

131. See, for example, Mukherjee, *Holder*, pp. 67, 102, 156, 199; Mukherjee, ‘Love me’, p. 189. In *Reluctant Fundamentalist*, Hamid never presents settlement in Britain as a viable option for Changez, the protagonist, despite Hamid’s own years of living in London and his discussion of the novel’s reception in specifically transatlantic terms; see Yaqin, ‘Mohsin Hamid’, p. 47.


143. Ibid., pp. 53, 95; and Kureishi, *Dreaming*, pp. 29–31; and compare Ranasinha, *South Asian*, pp. 231–2.

144. For one reviewer, however, both this conclusion, which offers an ‘overly schematised narrative of assimilation’, and the author’s earlier pro-American stance suggest Manzoor’s ‘publisher’s voice’ in a post-9/11, post-7/7 climate; see Mukherjee, ‘Born in Pakistan’.

145. This global presence includes Canada, the Caribbean, South Africa, the Middle East, Australia, the South Pacific, and South East Asia; see Brown, *Global South Asians*; and Lal et al., *Encyclopedia*.


148. Thus for such nineteenth-century writers as Ralph Waldo Emerson, ‘England’ is seen as ‘an old and exhausted island’; cited in Weisbuch, ‘Cultural time’, p. 100.


