

Fach: Englische Philologie

**Adoptions across Borders, Children and Diaspora:
Representations of Transnational Adoption in Diasporic Indian
Women's Writing**

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The jigsaw can never, ever be completed. There will always be missing pieces, or the pieces will be too large and clumsy to fit into the delicate puzzle. The search is often disappointing because it is a false search. ... You are made already, though you don't properly know it, you are made up from a mixture of myth and gene. You are part fable, part porridge.

—Jackie Kay, *Red Dust Road* (47)

Foreword and Acknowledgements from Three Continents

This dissertation is a product of three countries, and indeed of three continents. This is a detail which cannot and should not be ignored, as each place, as well as the movements between places, has contributed to its form and content. Conceived in Canada, gestated in India and Germany, and birthed in Germany, this dissertation owes its existence to more people than can be named here, though all faults, errors, and omissions are my own. The above quotation, from adoptee/writer Jackie Kay, refers to the search for one's biological family and birth story. However, it is also, in many ways, applicable to the writing process; the search for perfection and completion. The ideas on these pages have been shaped by interactions with myriad peoples in myriad places, without whom it would not exist in its present form, or perhaps at all, and all of which have contributed pieces to the puzzle. It is a child of the Marie Skłodowska Curie Initial Training Network CoHaB: Diasporic Constructions of Home and Belonging, funded by the European Union's FP7 program and is itself in some ways diasporic, as it has left me and returned more times than I can count.

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In India, where I spent eight months in the middle of this project, my time spent at the University of Mumbai and with the Centre for Advanced Studies in India granted me new insights into many aspects of this project. At the University of Mumbai, I am most grateful for the supervision and encouragement of Dr. Nilufer E. Bharucha, whose support was invaluable as I navigated my stay in India. She also furthered my understandings of many of the concepts I explore throughout this project, and allowed me to have some very unique experiences in India including organizing and participating in numerous international conferences, and experiencing a wide range of cultural activities.

A large portion of my time spent in India was also spent under the supervision of Dr. Sridhar Rajeswaran of the Centre for Advanced Studies in India (CASII). During my time at

CASII, I visited partners in Mumbai, Bhuj, and Santaniketan—each of whom also impacted the trajectories of this work. I am particularly grateful for the time I spent in Mumbai, where I stayed in a Snehasadan home for street children, and shadowed some of the activists working at Majilis Legal and Cultural Centres. At Snehasadan, I worked closely with Sister Cyrilla Chakalalal, who welcomed me with open arms and treated me like family. During my time with her, I learned a lot about the intersecting systems of oppression facing the urban poor in Mumbai, as well as many of the organizations who assist them. As a white scholar of Canadian origin with minimum exposure to the realities of life in Mumbai *or* the world of transnational adoption, my time in India more broadly, and Snehasadan specifically, gave me some context to better understand how some of the narratives I had read about might play out in reality. Being in Snehasadan allowed me to better understand the numerous forces at work when families attempt to adopt from India, as well as the challenges facing those who attempt to help street children and orphaned children at a local level.

At Majilis, the time I spent with the legal network, in particular, expanded my understandings of the complexities of the Indian legal system and the ways that women's access to justice and legal assistance may be stifled. I attended meetings which were designed to help volunteers prepare to educate women about their legal rights, and in turn gained an increased understanding of the ways that the justice system is complicated by India's vast linguistic and religious diversity, limited literacy in some communities, strict gender norms, and economic disparity. In the cultural office of Majilis, I viewed some of the documentaries prepared by local community members, which helped me better characterize Mumbai in its many manifestations. The cultures of Bollywood, and their appeal to those across India, function as a magnet drawing hopefuls to the city, where they have, in a symbiotic way, reshaped the city as they are simultaneously reshaped by it. The two branches of Majilis therefore allowed me to interpret the varied representations of the city that come up in literature, film, and news. Moreover, it provided me with a new lens from which to observe the city which features so prominently in many great works of Indian and Diasporic Indian literature, including two of the texts examined in this project.

In Bhuj, the CASII-organized visit to The Gujarat Institute for Desert Ecology (GUIDE) expanded and complicated my understandings of the effects of internal migration within India, as well as emigration from small communities. Dr. Vijay Kumar's assistance facilitating these visits and workshops was invaluable, and the exciting content delivered by his colleagues broadened my understandings of the environmental impacts of migration, as well as some of

the unique ecosystems of Gujarat. Similarly, our time spent in Santaniketan at Viswabharati University with Dr. Somdatta Mandal broadened my knowledge of the 1971 Partition and its impacts, as well as my knowledge of the work and legacy of Rabindranath Tagore. Dr. Rajeswaran's extensive efforts through CASII to provide us with a varied and relevant sampling of academic and activist partnerships around India therefore invaluable enhanced my time in India, and granted me valuable contextual and practical knowledge.

This project therefore endeavours to be unique in both its content and its origins as it attempts to span disciplines, genres, and nations. My many friends and family members in Canada have provided me invaluable support, and this project would likewise not have been completed without them – particularly my brother Kevin Morgan. The Departments of English and Women's Studies at Lakehead University were also invaluable to me as I defended and completed this project. In particular, the ongoing support of Dr. Anna Guttman should be acknowledged, as she guided this project from the inception of the idea through to its current state. This work, and its author, have been shaped by numerous migrations, and it owes its existence to the nurturing and stimulating communities on three continents from which it has sprung forth.

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[T]he fictions that adoptive and birth parents may make about their adopted child's heredity or their birth child's life have some parallels in the fictions that other parents make about their children, whose lives they can never entirely know.

—Marianne Novy, *Imagining Adoption* (11)

Introduction: Adoptions across Borders, Children and Diaspora: Representations of Transnational Adoption in Diasporic Indian Women's Writing

This project brings together the broad fields of Diaspora Studies, Adoption Studies, and Literary Studies in an analysis of the representations of transnational adoption in diasporic Indian women's writing in an attempt to promote a dialogue between the varied fields. The three distinct fields of inquiry overlap through their associations with globalization, as well as through the ways that transnational adoptees can be constructed in relation to theories of literature and diaspora. Marianne Novy's introduction to her anthology, *Imagining Adoption: Essays on Literature and Culture* (2004), cited above, captures the ways that parenthood is built on fictions, narratives, and imaginings and emphasizes the way it is compounded in adoptive contexts. If one accepts the fictions inherent in all notions of parenthood and the notion that this is emphasized in adoptive contexts, then the value of the examination of adoption through literature and of literature through adoption becomes clear and uncontested.

Adam Pertman's *Adoption Nation: How the Adoption Revolution is Transforming America* (2000) is a useful starting point for anyone hoping to learn more about current changes to adoption law and practice, though its focus is very American. As Madelyn Freundlich notes in her foreword to Pertman's book: "There is no shortage of books on the topic of adoption, from personal accounts by birth parents, adoptees, and adoptive parents, to 'how-to' manuals on adopting and raising adopted children, to academic research and clinical presentations" (ix). This statement is certainly true, and Freundlich makes it in an effort to differentiate Pertman's book from others in existence. However, Novy's work aside, there are few texts in existence which look strictly at literary representations of adoption, and fewer still which look at smaller, more specific canons or writing. Another work examining adoption quite broadly is Carol Singley's *Adopting America: Childhood, Kinship, and National Identity in Literature* (2011). Singley, however, defines adoption broadly as "the care of children by nonbiological parents through practices such as placing out, indentured service, foster parenting, and guardianship and ... focuses on the religious and domestic aspects of these placements in order to show how American adoption narratives evolved through the nineteenth century" (4). Thus, Singley's

work deals with a time period and definition of adoption that differs from this project, and is not found to be entirely relevant.

To turn back to Pertman, his work on adoption is relevant because it provides a straightforward lay account of the contemporary adoption scene. He is cited here as evidence of the growing but under-theorized body of work focusing on adoption. Trained as a journalist, Pertman presents a wide range of relevant information about the contemporary adoption market in the United States in a very accessible way, and his writing is littered with colloquialisms and commonplace expressions, presumably to make the reader comfortable with the often uncomfortable subjects of child-selling, secret adoptions, and infertility—all of which are issues that permeate the contemporary adoption market. These issues mean that adoption is not only a fascinating field of study, but also that further studies in the field are necessary to bring issues surrounding adoption to the fore. Highlighting the commercialized nature of adoption, Pertman compares contemporary adoptees to goods being transacted in a manner that seems unduly harsh, but also rings true; children “are subject to the same economic forces as automobiles and toasters. Supply and demand. Whatever the market will bear” (Pertman 51). Likewise, on transracial/transnational adoptions, Pertman writes that “adoption is inculcating our society with more and more children who don’t look like their parents, and by doing so, it is playing a small but important role in alleviating bias on a personal level” (75). Thus he not only emphasizes the changes taking place in constructions of adoption, but also the ways that adoption can change the perspectives of those not immediately affected by it.

Just as diasporas mobilize and unite groups of people, the trend of transnational adoption creates globalized family units. Conversely, literature produced by members of a diasporic group can reflect the relationship between diaspora and originary homeland, as well as challenge and critique conceptions of home, belonging, and identity. By combining these three fields of study, this project seeks to develop a framework for understanding representations of adoption in narratives by diasporic Indian women in an attempt to further explain and complicate the relationship between adoption and diaspora, as well as between literature and adoption.

Published in Diana Marre and Laura Briggs’ edited collection, *International Adoption: Global Inequalities and the Circulation of Children* (2009), Peter Selman’s “The Movement of Children for International Adoption: Developments and Trends in Receiving States and States of Origin, 1998-2004” demonstrates that the rates of transnational adoption increased steadily in the years covered in the study. Selman notes that the twenty countries with the highest rates of intercountry adoption saw a 42 percent increase in the overall number of

adoptions in the seven year period that he studied (34). Transnational adoption arrangements typically allow individuals to nurture and raise children who come from another country in which there is a shortage of families deemed appropriate, willing, or able to care for them. The transactions are not always smooth and representations of the adoption process in literature highlight some of the larger issues of inequality and racism that can be embedded in the process. Furthermore, although the adoption process has the potential to commodify children, it also grants them increased mobility and access to nations which may be otherwise potentially reluctant to grant citizenship. This, in turn, brings to the fore the issues of raising children away from their nation of birth and the preservation of “homeland” culture in both adoptive and diasporic communities.

Diaspora and adoption scholarship, though not commonly conceptualized together, share a lot of similarities. The focus on generational difference and parent/child conflict, host-/homeland identification, return journeys, and hybrid identities are all highlighted in both fields, though often by different disciplines. Influenced by research conducted by social scientists, literary scholars, and diaspora theorists, the following chapters bring together works featuring adoption by diasporic Indian women to develop and apply a diasporic framework for the literature of transnational adoption, as well as highlight and problematize trends and trajectories within this body of literature.

Towards a Diasporic Framework for Literature of Transnational Adoption

There is no consensus in scholarly debates about how to characterize adoptees, particularly regarding whether or not transnationally adopted children should be considered a unique diaspora unto themselves, subjects in their own various national or regional diasporas, individuals exhibiting diasporic consciousness, or none of the aforementioned. The very title of this project, however, hinges on understanding the adoptee to inhabit a diasporic subject position due to its classification of writers considered as “diasporic Indian women.” Asha Miró, the author of a memoir considered in this project (*Daughter of the Ganges*), was herself adopted from India at the age of seven. Thus, by including her in this project, a very deliberate statement is being made about the relationship between adoptees and diaspora. Examined at length in the second chapter, Miró identifies a strong pull towards India and understands herself to have strong ties to India as a nation and place of home for her, rendering her similar to other characters and individuals associated with diaspora, and justifying the classification of her as such.

However, further interrogation of the relationship between diaspora and adoptions is necessary. On the one hand, adoptees do not necessarily have the networks and community affiliations that are common in diasporic communities, and may have limited connections to their birthland. “Return Journeys and the Search for Roots: Contradictory Values Concerning Identity,” an article by anthropologist Signe Howell in Marre and Brigg’s collection, argues:

[W]hereas diaspora communities ... are replete with significant others in... many corners of the world, the significant others of adoptees are their adoptive family and their kin. By and large, adoptees are ‘socially naked’ in relation to their country of origin. For this reason transnationally adopted persons are anomalous within the diaspora community of their birth country ... to characterize international organizations of transnationally adopted persons as a manifestation of diaspora would be to extend the meaning of the concept beyond the limits of its usefulness. (“Return Journeys” 257)

Thus, Howell quite clearly argues against applying the frameworks of diaspora to transnationally adopted children on the basis of their lack of connectedness to the birth land.¹ Notably, in her own book, *The Kinning of Foreigners: Transnational Adoption in a Global Perspective* (2006), Howell acknowledges a “marked contrast” between the Norwegian-adopted children of her research and those who are adopted into American families (*Kinning* 121-122). Nevertheless, her arguments against classifying adoptees as a diasporic group or as members of their birth-land diasporas without additional classifiers in order to preserve the integrity of concept of diaspora are cogent and succinctly outline one of the main criticisms against reading transnationally adopted children as diasporic.²

The article “The ‘Diaspora’ Diaspora” (2005) by Rogers Brubaker is also brought to mind by Howell’s claim, though Brubaker does not address the issue of transnational adoption,

¹ Howell’s work in “Return Journeys” deals with Korean adoptees in Norway, beginning with an examination of the “Second International Gathering of Adult Korean Adoptees held in Oslo in 2001” (Howell “Return” 256). The essay focuses on “contrast[ing] the situation of transnationally adopted persons with that of other immigrants in Norway *and other countries* that adopt from overseas” (Howell “Return” 256, emphasis added). For this reason, the utilization of her work to interrogate non-Norwegian adoptions is justified, and her point, in conjunction with Rogers Brubaker’s article “The ‘Diaspora’ Diaspora” (2005), invites an assessment of the relationship between the language of diaspora and the language of adoption.

² Howell makes clear that one of the ways that transnational adoption to Norway differs from adoption to the United States of America is that in Norway there are no children in the foster system who are unadopted (*Kinning* 19). In a footnote to her preface, Howell notes that the fact that she has a daughter she adopted transnationally from Nepal while living in the UK and that differences in practice between the UK and Norway piqued her interest (Howell *Kinning* xiii). Thus, it is important to keep in mind that marked differences in practice and concept permeate adoption literature, scholarship, and practice.

and Howell does not refer to Brubaker in her work. Brubaker's analysis of the numerous extensions of the notion of diaspora is in many ways echoed in Howell's claims. On diaspora, Brubaker asserts: "As the term has proliferated, its meaning has been stretched to accommodate various intellectual, cultural and political agendas in the service of which it has been enlisted. This has resulted in what one might call a "'diaspora' diaspora"—a dispersion of the meanings of the term in semantic, conceptual and disciplinary space" (1). He likewise makes the argument that "[i]f everyone is diasporic, then no one is distinctively so. The term loses its discriminating power—its ability to pick out phenomena, to make distinctions. The universalization of diaspora, paradoxically, means the disappearance of diaspora" (3). This powerfully worded assertion aligns closely with Howell's, particularly in terms of its focus on the utility of the term "diaspora." Also noteworthy is that Brubaker repeatedly uses the word "adopt" to refer to the taking up of a "diasporic stance" (12, 13, 15). That one can "adopt" a diasporic identity or state of being, then, queries the relationship between the two concepts once more, as it allows "diaspora" as a concept, to both adopt and be adopted.

Brubaker's conclusion, however, remains promising for studies such as this one: "[R]ather than speak of 'a diaspora' or 'the diaspora' as an entity, a bounded group, an ethnodemographic or ethnocultural fact, it may be more fruitful, and certainly more precise, to speak of diasporic stances, projects, claims, idioms, practices, and so on" (13). Thus, one can consider the writers of this project to be writing a diasporic stance onto their characters, who fit many of the criteria for a diaspora as outlined by major theorists in the field. This opposing view is solidly encompassed in the term "Diaper Diaspora," used in the popular media to describe a relatively recent increase in transnational adoption rates in the United States and increasing adoptee visibility. Peter Selman's article "Diaper Diaspora" (2007) which appeared in the Washington Post's *Foreign Policy* is a reflection on the adoptions made by celebrities Madonna and Angelina Jolie and the increases in transnationally adopted children in the United States. Selman's article appears to represent the origins of the term, which has been incorporated into a small sample of scholarly discourses on the subject but interestingly does not provide a solid definition or overview of how the application of a diasporic framework is useful for the study of trends in transnational adoption.³

³ A footnote within Pamela Anne Quiroz's "Cultural Tourism in Transnational Adoption: 'Staged Authenticity' and Its Implications for Adopted Children" (2012) credits Selman with coining the term "Diaper Diaspora" (Quiroz 553). Quiroz employs the term again later in the title her own article "Transnational Adoption: Reflections on the 'Diaper Diaspora': On Reconfiguring Race in the USA." The term has not gained a large academic following, and neither Selman nor Quiroz include in their works an explanation as to why or how theories of diaspora are applicable to groups of transnationally adopted children, as is attempted by this project.

Furthermore, the term “Diaper Diaspora” fails to acknowledge the growth and development of transnational adoptees beyond early childhood, as well as the possibility for children adopted at older ages to develop a diasporic consciousness. Nevertheless, it remains a useful way to collectively identify children brought to Europe and North America for adoption, and highlight the academic potential for an examination of the group as a unique diasporic entity. Other scholars, such as Alexandria Johnstone, have characterized adoptees as a diaspora, though she fails also to contextualize her use of the term. In the article “Recasting the Diaspora: Current Transnational Adoption Flows” (2005), Johnstone examines Chinese children adopted to Canada. She notes that Canadians have adopted “more than eight thousand Chinese children ... since 1993” (28). She further refers to the use of diaspora in relation to adoption as “both a concept and an imagined space for revamping national and transnational communities based on destination, association, and a common set of anti-oppressive social practices, economic responsibilities, and political commitments” (30). Thus, the application of the label of diaspora to adoptees is not new, however a more thorough examination is warranted. Drawing on some of the foundational scholars of diaspora theory and the literatures of adoption, what follows will first highlight the potential for overlap between diasporic theories and theories of adoption as a literary trope, and then assesses how, and to what degree, the label of diasporic can be applied to transnational adoptees, as well as the challenges and limitations of such a label.

The widely cited Greek origins of the term “diaspora,” meaning to scatter and sow, was first applied to the dispersal of Jewish peoples from Israel (Cohen ix; Anthias 560; Safran 83; King and Christou 104-105). However, Floya Anthias’ “Evaluating ‘Diaspora’: Beyond Ethnicity?” (1998) contains a more contemporary definition of diaspora that is useful here, as she highlights the potential for studying diaspora as the identifier of a condition rather than a group label. Although she is not the first to use the term, and is, in fact, critical of its expansive use,⁴ her definition effectively summarizes the meaning of the term in contemporary understandings. Drawing on earlier works by Paul Gilroy and Stuart Hall, Anthias writes:

‘Diaspora’ references a connection between groups across different nation states whose commonality derives from an original but maybe removed homeland; a new identity becomes constructed on a world scale which crosses national borders and boundaries ... it may also denote a *social condition*, entailing a

⁴Anthias’ article “Evaluating ‘Diaspora’: Beyond Ethnicity?” focuses on how the expanding use of diaspora and how most work on diaspora “fails to examine trans-ethnic commonalities and relations and does not adequately pay attention to differences of gender and class” (558).

particular form of ‘consciousness’, which is particularly compatible with postmodernity and globalization. (559-560, emphasis in original)

This consciousness, exemplified in both writings on adoption as well as studies of adoptees, forms the foundation of much of this project. Steven Vertovec likewise proposes further analysis of the different applications of the notion of diaspora in his article, “Three Meanings of ‘Diaspora,’ Exemplified among South Asian Religions” (1997). Vertovec examines diaspora as “social form,” as a “type of consciousness,” and as a “mode of cultural production” (278). Drawing on Clifford and Safran, Vertovec defines diaspora consciousness as “a particular kind of awareness said to be generated among contemporary transnational communities ... marked by a *dual of paradoxical nature*. It is constituted negatively by experiences of discrimination ... and positively by identification with a historical heritage (e.g., ‘Indian civilization’) of with contemporary world cultural or political forces” (281). The development of diasporic consciousness on the parts of characters in the examined texts reflects both the author’s perceptions of the conditions of transnational adoptees, as well as a potential (indirect) reflection of the authors’ own diasporic conditions.

James Clifford’s analysis of diaspora discourse in *Returns: Becoming Indigenous in the Twenty-First Century* (2013) is also worth noting here, as regardless of one’s opinion about the status of adoptees as “diasporic,” the discourses of diaspora are useful conceptual tools for understanding and theorizing narratives of adoption. Clifford writes: “No single analytic language can exhaust what is at stake in these complexly rooted and routed experiences. Diaspora discourse is good at keeping multisited, multiscaled predicaments in view and resisting teleological narratives of transformation” (*Returns* 83).⁵ Transnational adoption, as a process, is necessarily both multi-scaled and multisited, and therefore perfectly occupies the space which Clifford reserves for diaspora discourse. As Clifford invokes his own earlier work on the “rooted” and “routed” natures of diasporas, the botanical and transportive invocations of these homophones also bring to mind the genetic and geographic descriptions and metaphors commonly used to describe adopted children.⁶

As narratives of adoption become increasingly common, so too does the study of such representations. A leading scholar of adoption in literature, Marianne Novy has several works

⁵ Clifford’s *Returns* is examined more in the second chapter, where the notion of return migration in adoptive and diasporic contexts is interrogated more thoroughly.

⁶ Throughout the book *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* (1997), James Clifford repeatedly invokes a comparison of the homophones “roots” and “routes.” He asserts that “roots always precede routes” (3). In the chapter entitled “Travels,” he likewise asserts that “the roots and routes, the varieties of ‘travel,’ need to be more broadly understood” (78). In the same way, the roots and routes facing adoptees could stand to be further examined.

published on the subject, and although her work deals largely with more canonical texts such as those by Charles Dickens, her arguments for the validity of the study of adoption not only ring true, but can also be further extended into the realms of Diaspora, Postcolonial, and Transnational Studies. Novy writes that “[a]doption often implicates in each other’s lives people from groups usually widely separated—frequently by economics, sometimes by ethnicity, and increasingly by nation of birth. Its use in fiction can structure an exploration of their contrasting lifestyles and can protest against their split and/or against the victimization of one group by the other” (*Imagining* 3). Like adoptive literature, many diasporic texts also highlight the difficult experiences faced by an individual or group attempting to assimilate into a new nation or community. Contrast between old and new homelands are common areas of exploration, and the theme of victimization in the form of racism is also frequently found, allowing for the application of diasporic theories to adoptive literature, and theories of adoptive kinship patterns to diasporic writings.

Although transnational adoption in literature is not central to Novy’s collection, she addresses the trends briefly in her introduction, suggesting that it is a fruitful avenue for future studies.⁷ She writes:

The recent increase in international adoption makes it especially obvious that the adoptive relation evokes the quintessentially North American issue of communicating culture across bloodlines, which these days is also a European issue. Immigrants have often been referred to as America’s adopted children; their teachers and their government deal with some of the same issues about accepting otherness that face adoptive parents. Optimism about how well adoption can work, as about Americanization, can be based on a belief in the universal similarity of human nature and its infinite malleability. (Novy *Imagining* 7-8)

While one might disagree with Novy that adoption is a “quintessentially North American issue,” most of the texts that are considered in this project feature protagonists who are adopted

⁷ In fact, only Novy’s own work in the introduction and Claudia Castañeda’s “Incorporating the Transnational Adoptee” mention transnational adoption, though transracial adoption is addressed in multiple chapters. For example, Nancy K. Gish’s “Adoption, Identity, and Voice: Jackie Kay’s Inventions of Self” is an interview with adopted Black Scottish poet Jackie Kay. In the interview, Gish and Kay discuss Kay’s construction of her birth mother in her works, and Gish then provides her analysis of the meeting. Gish asserts that “for Jackie Kay [adoption] is the most fundamental form of difference ... What distinguishes the difference of adoption from other forms of difference is, first, its individualized form ... [a]nd second, adoption creates an internal differentiation, an awareness of all the people one theoretically might have been” (180). This poignant construction of the difference embodied in adoption is, in many ways, amplified in transnationally adoptive narratives, and can be witnessed throughout the texts considered in this project.

to the United States and therefore must negotiate the American constructions of Self and Other and American discourses of multiculturalism.⁸ As Novy notes, the appropriation of the term “adopted children” as a way to refer to immigrant communities highlights the relationship between migration and adoption, as well as the infantilization and increased surveillance of non-Anglo American groups in some media and policy networks.

Along the same vein as Novy, Laura Briggs and Diana Marre outline the relationship between adoption and international relations in their introduction: “Adoption opens a window onto the relations between nations, inequalities between rich and poor within nations, the history of race and racialization since the end of slavery in Europe’s colonies and the United States, and the relationships between indigenous and non-indigenous groups in the Americas and Australia” (Briggs and Marre 1). The texts considered herein bring poverty and economic inequalities to the fore, particularly as adoptees learn about and travel to India, where they experience the lives of their biological family members.⁹ Likewise, the relationship between adoption and indigeneity takes on new meaning in narratives of return, particularly when considered in relation to Clifford’s work. That is to say, how the adoptees construct themselves in relation to the local people, and how they articulate their right to reside in relation to individuals in their birthlands is worthy of further examination. Theories of diaspora thus lend themselves well to the study of transnational adoption, particularly as portrayed by diasporic Indian women, as the relationships and structures of power highlighted by Briggs and Marre are central tenets of Diaspora Studies.

Though the arguments can be made that the applicability of diaspora discourse is itself justification enough for the examination of transnationally adopted children through theories of diaspora, it should be noted that they also meet many of the classic criteria of diaspora, as laid out by foundational diaspora scholars such as William Safran and Robin Cohen. Robin Cohen’s *Global Diasporas: An Introduction* (2008) outlines nine common features of a diaspora, and the applicability of each of these concepts to the transnationally adopted child is analyzed in what follows. More than simply listing and arbitrarily applying Cohen’s criteria, one should seek to engage with and contextualize the relationship between adoption and

⁸ Exceptions to this include Asha Miró’s *Daughter of the Ganges*, where the adoption is to Spain, and Renita D’Silva’s *The Forgotten Daughter*, where the adoption is to the United Kingdom. In Bharati Mukherjee’s *Jasmine*, the protagonist is not the adoptee, but an adoption to the United States occurs.

⁹ Johnstone’s articulation of the relationship between adoption and economics is useful here. She does not contest that economic forces may play a part in when, why, and from where families may choose to adopt, but asserts that “transnationally adopted children are not simply bought and sold as they exchange hands and cross borders. Rather, people and institutions around them enter into social relations of exchange, meaning, and value that include both caring and consumption” (28).

diaspora to work towards a framework for understanding the similarities between diasporic and adoptee consciousness. Cohen's work utilizes William Safran's earlier list of criteria (Cohen 2-7) altering and adding to the list "more recognition of the positive virtues of retaining a diasporic identity" (7). Cohen's first criteria, "[d]ispersal from an original homeland, often traumatically, to two or more foreign regions" (27) is quite simply applicable due to the fact that adoptees are frequently sent to a wide range of receiving countries. The texts considered here feature adoptees from India being dispersed to the United States of America, Spain and the United Kingdom. The numerous studies on adoption that are consulted also highlight the fact that children and infants are adopted to a huge array of countries around the globe. Adoption also has the potential to be traumatic, and could be necessitated by trauma (such as war), but the texts considered in this project largely ignore this factor. As Briggs and Marre note: "Transnational adoption emerged out of war. Only recently has it become, rather than an occasional practice, a significant way of forming a family for those who cannot have children. Even this new form of transnational adoption has been marked by geographies of unequal power, as children move from poorer countries and families to wealthier ones" (1). Thus many, but certainly not all, narratives of adoption feature a migration trajectory of Global South to Global North, and less wealthy nations to those perceived as more wealthy.

Cohen's second common feature of a diaspora, considered an alternative to the first, is "the expansion from a homeland in search of work, in pursuit of trade or to further colonial ambitions" (17). Through the inclusion of this criterion, Cohen represents some of the earliest forms of adoption not considered in this paper but nevertheless relevant. The first wave of transnational adoptees stemmed from the children orphaned during the Korean and Vietnam wars, as well as those born to local women fathered by visiting soldiers (Briggs and Marre "Introduction"). Transnational adoption is thus very literally tied to the expansions of homeland and colonial ambitions; the formation and breakdown of nation states as the violence of wars and colonizations had the potential to render children parentless as well as to re-home them. Furthermore, war and colonization created some of the economic imbalances that render "sending" countries unable to care for orphaned or impoverished children, thereby implicating them in the formation of a "Diaper Diaspora" in a way that is similar to their implication in the formation of other diasporas.

Cohen's third and fourth points, "a collective memory or myth about the homeland, including its location, history, and achievements" and "an idealization of the putative ancestral home and a collective commitment to its maintenance, restoration, safety and prosperity, even to its creation" (17) are clearly embodied in narratives of adoption considered in the following

chapters. In addition to myths about a physical geographical space, parents, families, and communities are sometimes both mythologized and idealized by adoptees. This mythologization and idealization leads to the appropriation of Cohen's fifth criterion: "the development of a return movement that gains collective approbation" (17), as many companies are now capitalizing on adoptee-return journeys as a growing and lucrative travel business market.

As transnational adoptees frequently band together as a group on the basis of either shared experience or shared heritage, Cohen's sixth, seventh, and eighth criteria; "a strong ethnic group consciousness sustained over a long time and based on a sense of distinctiveness, a common history and a belief in a common fate[,] ... troubled relationships with host societies, suggesting a lack of acceptance at the least or the possibility that another calamity might befall the group [and] a sense of empathy and solidarity with co-ethnic members in other countries of settlement" (17) are all applicable, particularly in situations where the race of the child and adoptive family members differ. For example, the relationships between parents and children are complicated when there are ethnic differences in the household, and the house in adoptive contexts can at times be read as a microcosm for the host society. Likewise, the association of adoptees in groups, such as those studied by Howell ("Return Journeys"), points to sense of solidarity among individuals adopted from the same locale.

Cohen's ninth and final criterion, "the possibility of a distinctive creative, enriching life in host countries with a tolerance for pluralism" (17), can broadly be applied to all migrants, regardless of reason for leaving the originary nation. Creative works being produced by and about adoptees all highlight the ways in which adoption has benefited the adoptee and other members of their community. The non-fiction texts included in this dissertation, as well as works by non-Indian adoptees such as scholar and poet John McLeod or author/poet Jackie Kay attest to this in rich and varied ways. Although McLeod's focus is on the relationship between post-coloniality and adoption, his points in the article, "Postcolonial Fictions of Adoption" (2006) remain relevant:

As a social practice ... adoption has often played a central, if under-acknowledged, role in the social negotiation of discourses of national, cultural, and racial filiation; yet its varied historical and cultural consequences remain unexplored. The postcolonial legacy of adoption has been rarely acknowledged yet is often a major component in the negotiation of public and private life, where the operations of imperious state authority have structured the seemingly private realm of the family. The family has often been the site where legislative

and divisive discourses of race and nation unhappily encounter loving and often brave human relations which reach subversively and threateningly across such divides. (45-46)

The relationship between the state and the formation of family is salient in many of the works considered in this project, as not only is the adoption process heavily regulated by state legislatures, but so too is the migration process, and the two processes go hand in hand in the context of a transnational adoption. McLeod's invocation of the relationship between post-coloniality and adoption also echoes the claims made by Briggs and Marre in their introduction about the production of "adoptable" children through economic and political injustices.

Although the validity of the term "Diaper Diaspora" can be debated, the negotiations undertaken at the personal, national, and supranational levels by adoptees and parents emphasize the value of applying theories of diaspora to literatures of transnational adoption. Novy asserts: "Adoption today exists at the intersection of many contested issues[:] ... the role of culture as distinct from heredity, the rights of children, the rights of parents, the relation of the individual to group membership, the rights of minorities, the rights of poor people, the role of the state in social engineering" (*Imagining* 6). Nowhere does this become more salient than in works featuring transnational adoptions. The added complexity of examining the application by diasporic authors of a diasporic consciousness to characters who may or may not otherwise be understood to be diasporic situates this project solidly at the crux of both adoption and diaspora studies, and at the same time renders its completeness impossible.

As outlined in the following sections, this project is limited to a relatively small canon of literature produced by women writers of the Indian diaspora. In her book *Kin of Another Kind: Transracial Adoption in American Literature* (2011), Cynthia Callahan states that "[c]ontemporary international adoption creates a series of ruptures—familial, cultural, and national—that obscure personal origins, perhaps even more so than domestic transracial adoptions in which, at least theoretically, the adoptee participates in his or her national culture of birth" (131), and it is therefore imperative that some limits be imposed vis-à-vis national culture, heterogeneous though "Indian culture" is.¹⁰ Transnational adoptees transcend the boundaries of traditional diasporas by virtue of the fact that they lack kin connections, but also have, in the unknowability of their kin, limitless options for imagined relationships. Just as

¹⁰ The author recognizes and understands the vast diversity of the Indian subcontinent. Where possible, regional and cultural differences are highlighted throughout this paper, rather than being erased. However, all of the works considered talk about "India" broadly, and the utilization of the nation as an overarching theme for defining this work hinges on this. It should also be noted that Callahan's work deals with transracial adoptions, which are not necessarily transnational.

every text is different, so too is every narrative of adoption, however adoptees, uniquely, can be understood to represent both a collective “Diaper Diaspora,” as well as members of their own respective diasporic groups depending on the kinship networks that they form. In the literature by diasporic Indian women writers which features adoption, it therefore becomes increasingly useful to apply theories of diaspora to adopted characters, as well as those around them. Like analyses of traditional diasporic literatures, the relationships between different generations of characters, as well as the relationship between the adoptee and home and host lands warrant further examination.

Why India? Why Women’s Writing?

As the previous section has outlined the relationship between some of the seminal texts of diaspora scholarship and theories of transnational adoption, it is important to clarify why this project is limited to studies of writing by diasporic Indian women. In essence, three questions are raised here instead of simply two, as focus of this to study—representations of adoption in diasporic Indian women’s writing—is limited in three ways: as it considers writing, featuring India as a setting, by diasporic Indian women writers. Each of these limitations has contributed to the formation of the canon which this dissertation seeks to examine, and shall be explained herein.

In response to the question “why writing?” the most simple answer is “why not?” Of course, the reality of the question is clearly far more complex, and this simple answer is insufficient. However, by examining representations of adoption, rather than conducting anthropological, sociological, or psychological analyses of actual adoption cases, one gains an understanding of the ways that adoption is imagined, and the stories that people have deemed worth telling. That is to say, individuals who choose to write about adoption have made conscious choices to perpetuate and circulate a specific narrative, which those who are involved in actual adoptions may not choose to do. Moreover, the use of the term “writing” rather than “literature” is intended to acknowledge the relationship between the creation of narrative and “fictions of adoption” cited by Novy (*Imagining* 11), as well as to account for the various sources considered. While the application of the classification of “writing” to a documentary film remains somewhat awkward, it is used here to imply the construction of narrative and representation that is inherent in the conception, execution, and editing of a film project, as well as the ways that the adoptees being followed are shaping their own images. Documentary film maker Sasha Khokha and her participants were active members of the construction of the

construction of “adoption” within the film. As much of the general population exists outside of the adoptive community, it becomes relevant to look at the ways that adoptive families are constructed for a broader public through literature, film, and media. Novy acknowledges this phenomenon in the opening lines of *Reading Adoption: Family and Difference in Fiction and Drama* (2007), in which she notes that “film, theater, literature, television, and other media” contribute to people’s understandings of adoption (1). She further notes that “[e]ven people who are personally involved [with adoption] may find themselves interpreting their own experiences in terms of adoption plots well known in their culture” (1).

A widely cited adoptee and writer, Scottish poet, playwright and novelist, Jackie Kay has published several works dealing with the concepts of adoption, home, and belonging and her work contains interesting reflections on the notions of “writing” and “fiction” in relation to adoption.¹¹ *Red Dust Road* (2010), Kay’s memoir, details her meetings with her biological parents, and provides direct quotations from both her adoptive and biological parents. Kay strengthens the ties between writing and adoption throughout *Red Dust Road*, and speaks again to the way that the adoptive condition is often built around a series of fictions. Speaking of making up stories about her biological father in Nigeria, Kay writes that “once you make a story up, it is hard not to believe it yourself. We all do that. We never know where the truth ends and the story starts, and in a way it doesn’t matter” (*Red* 43).¹² She likewise addresses the reader in the second person to dispel a myth about narratives of adoption: “You think adoption is a story which has an end. But the point about it is that has no end. It keeps changing its ending” (*Red* 46). Kay’s work, then, strengthens the claims made by Novy that narrative construction (and re-construction), is inherent to the adoptive condition. The relationship between adoption and literature is shifting but permanent, as adoptions of fiction and fictions of adoption continue to occupy readers’, parents’, and adoptees’ minds and bookshelves.

Considerations of the question “why India?” are somewhat more complex. As a relatively young nation, in many ways still addressing the ramifications of decolonization, India presents itself as an interesting avenue for study. The high levels of religious, cultural,

¹¹ Kay’s adoption was not transnational, as she was born to a Scottish woman and fathered by a visiting student from Nigeria, but her quest for answers and belonging on her two trips to Nigeria renders her work relevant here. Moreover, one of Kay’s collections of poetry, *The Adoption Papers*, narrativizes the perspectives of a daughter and her biological and adoptive mothers in a way that is similar that approach taken in Shilpi Somaya Gowda’s novel, *Secret Daughter*, which is examined in the following two chapters. Kay utilizes different typefaces to identify who is speaking in each of the poems throughout the work (*Kay Adoption* 8), and this strategy renders the visual text as significant as the aural due to the fact that the different subject matters are often broached by two or all of the narrators.

¹² The notion of believing oneself will be considered in the analysis of Asha Miró’s *Daughter of the Ganges* in the second chapter.

linguistic, and economic diversity within India render it a very rich field for inquiry, while the complicated histories and unique relationships with its many diasporic groups present limitless research opportunities. Signe Howell's manuscript on kinship patterns in transnationally adoptive contexts, *The Kinning of Foreigners*, describes the relationship between adoption and nation in the following way:

Transnational adoption activates one nation-state in a dialogical relationship with other nation-states, at the same time as it has become a global process. ... Adoption across national borders has become a matter in which the state in both countries plays an increasingly controlling role. Ultimate power to relinquish a child (a citizen) is held by the nation-state. It transfers these rights to another nation-state, which incorporates the child as its own citizen. (229)

Therefore, if one wants to focus on the political and cultural implications of adoption, it is imperative to limit the scope of either sending or receiving countries to a small subset. By applying these limiting criteria, it becomes possible to examine the ways in which authors construct nations as homelands, as hostlands, and as political entities in the world-wide exchange of children. Further, by looking at works by diasporic authors with ties to the same originary lands about which they write, an interesting dialogue about their current and past or ancestral homelands begins to unfold.

Safran gives a lot of credit to the Indian diaspora, calling it "a genuine one in several respects" (88). This "genuineness," for Safran, is characterized by four things: the diaspora's "spread across three continents, its long history, its auxiliary (or middleman) role within host societies, and the varying attitudes of its members—ranging from integrationist to particularist" (88). By looking at works by Indian diasporic writers featuring characters who have strong ties to India as either adoptees, adoptive parents, or both, one is able to not only situate the characters as part of a unique diasporic group, but also to assess the ways in which one nation (India) is repeatedly constructed in relation to others and the power differentials represented in these relationships. The texts considered feature diasporic Indians as both authors and characters in Europe and North America, capturing a small but relevant sampling. Absent are cases which feature Indians of African origin or narratives of Indians in Southeast Asia and the Caribbean, due to the fact that no narratives featuring adoption were located in these corpuses.

The introduction to the anthology, *Indian Diaspora and Transnationalism* (2012), by editors Ajaya Kumar Sahoo, Michiel Baas, and Thomas Faist characterize the uniqueness of the Indian diaspora in the following way:

Perhaps no other diaspora in the world is characterized by such diversity in its population as the Indian diaspora in terms of culture, including languages, regions, religions, and other forms of social stratification ... In so far as the Indian diasporic communities are concerned, the ties with the motherland are not only reinforced and intensified but also extended to reach the members of Indian community settled in many other parts of the world. (2)

As outlined above, then, the Indian diaspora is one which maintains strong ties to the homeland, and this is reflected in the literature produced by individuals within the diaspora as well. The size and scope of the Indian diaspora is likewise outlined by N. Jayaram in his introduction to *Diversities in the Indian Diaspora: Nature, Implications, Responses* (2011). Jayaram summarizes the Government of India 2001 statistics on the population of the Indian diaspora: "It is estimated that besides six million Indian citizens [residing abroad], there are more than twenty million people of Indian origin all over the world ... Taking 10,000 as the minimum figure, overseas Indians are found in as many as fifty countries, and in seven more countries they number between 5,000 and 10,000" (1).¹³ Gijbert Oonk's introduction to *Global Indian Diasporas: Exploring Trajectories of Migration and Theory* (2007) cites similar statistics, but asserts: "Although there are regional variations in their adaptations, in many ways, [members of the Indian diaspora] display a common 'Indian' identity. They may want their children to prosper in their adopted countries, but at the same time they may prefer them to adopt Indian family values, marry other Indians, and share their common culture" (9). Interesting, here, is Oonk's use of the term "adoption" in reference to cultural practices, thereby strengthening the justification for an examination of the relationship between the two concepts.

The religious, cultural, and linguistic diversity found within India means that there are a wide range of texts available which address different norms and practices. In this project, the focus is on works written in English by diasporic Indian women who come from a variety of regions and backgrounds.¹⁴ Some of the authors considered, such as Bharati Mukherjee, associate themselves more with their current homelands than with India or the Indian

¹³ Jayaram here differentiates between individuals who have maintained Indian citizenship, and those who have not, and while such differentiations are not maintained throughout this project, it is useful to consider when examining the politics of return, as well as communication patterns within kin groups.

¹⁴ The focus on English language texts is the result of this author's limited linguistic capabilities, as well as the fact that these works tend to be more widely circulated and available to Western readership having limited ties to Indian communities. Oonk likewise draw attention to this in his work, when he asserts that the "mosaic of Indian identities abroad is presented as the mirror of India itself. India is diverse, and so too are its migrants. It is acknowledged that Indian migrants abroad tend to reproduce their own religions, family patterns, and cultures as much as possible" (12).

diaspora.¹⁵ In the case of Mukherjee, she continues to be studied as a diasporic writer due to the nature of her works, and her treatment of transnational adoption is particularly unique, making her impossible to ignore in this project. In addition to the vast and diverse populations of Indian and diasporic Indian people, the widely cited preference for male children in some communities make works on family formation by diasporic Indian women written in English a fruitful field of study.¹⁶ Furthermore, the widely varied cultural and religious norms within India make it a particularly interesting “sending country” to study, principally when considering the relationship between nationalisms and identities that is inherent in the following chapters.

As previously noted, Signe Howell’s work focuses on the development of kinship groups among adoptees in Norway. However, Howell features an analysis on each of the sending countries that make up significant percentages of the adoptee population in Norway, or that she has experience researching. On India, Howell writes that:

Because large sections of the Indian elite are highly ambivalent about their relationship with the West, India is a particularly interesting donor country ... More books on adoption, whether domestic or transnational, have been published in India than in any other donor country. At the same time, there is a noticeable ideological resistance to what is perceived as Western encroachment in Indian intellectual life as well as in social and economic affairs. (*Kinning* 190)

India’s complex and relatively recent history of colonialism and global and expanding diaspora make the comparisons between receiving and sending countries contained within the texts selected for this project all the more interesting, as these comparisons highlight some aspects of diasporic consciousness on the part of characters and, at times, authors. Moreover, Howell’s assertion that many books about adoption in India have been published is not, by and large, reflected in her bibliography, or in Vinita Bhargava’s *Adoption in India: Policies and Experiences* (2005). Bhargava’s work focuses specifically on adoption in an Indian context,

¹⁵ In the introduction to her collection of short stories, *Darkness*, Bharati Mukherjee writes: “I see myself as an American writer in the tradition of other American writers whose parents or grandparents had passed through Ellis Island. Indianness is now a metaphor, a particular way of partially comprehending the world” (xv).

¹⁶ Navtej K. Purewal’s *Son Preference: Sex Selection, Gender, and Culture in South Asia* (2010) contains an examination and analysis of the meanings and implications of an overt preference for male heirs and the resulting gender imbalances in the South Asian subcontinent. She asserts: “The question of son preference, alongside other gender asymmetries, requires different types of enquiry and explorations that account for dynamism, contradiction, and change” (3). Her work therefore seeks to bring together many methods, and includes an analysis of the role of diaspora in relation to son preference. She does not, however, focus on literary representations, and this topic presents itself as an interesting avenue for further analysis.

and includes both an historical overview of adoption policies and practices within India as well as complications for researching adoption in India. Although becoming dated by changing laws and regulations, Bhargava's book remains one of the only widely available English-language texts outlining the policies and procedures surrounding adoption in India. Transnational adoption is not a key theme in Bhargava's work, but the insight she provides on specific cultural and religious practices is useful for understanding the legalities of child relinquishment and adoption within India. In her prologue, in direct contrast to Howell's claim, Bhargava asserts: "Adoption is not an easy area to research within the Indian subcontinent, and that may be one reason why [she] did not find much literature in the area" (14). Likewise, many of the sources Bhargava references throughout her work discuss sociological, psychological, and anthropological theories of adoption broadly and do not deal with India specifically.

Bhargava's manuscript provides a useful overview of the realities of adoption in India, considering what she refers to as the macro issues of adoption such as the varied social and legal frameworks through which adoption is constructed, and the micro issues, such as the personal and familial issues typically arising in adoptive contexts. India's current regulations on adoption simultaneously hinder potential adoptions and make them more politically charged. Globally, adoption policies reflect the contemporary political climates of the world, constantly shifting as countries fall in and out of favour with each other and political parties with different values come to power. In India "no Indian child can be adopted overseas unless another child is adopted by an Indian couple," and Howell labels this policy as "the so-called 50/50 rule" (Kinning 190). She further notes that the concept of returning to one's "roots," discussed in greater detail in the second chapter, is a popular concept among Indians involved in transnational adoption because "[i]t allows them to maintain that the children are not really abandoned by India, that they continue to be Indian, [and] that adoption abroad does not represent real rupture" (Howell Kinning 201). Ties to India, as well as themes of child abandonment and rescue, permeate the texts examined in this work.

The idea of abandonment resonates not only on national and community levels, but also on personal and familial levels. Due to the fact that adoption and family formation are not issues which exclusively affect women, it is important to clarify the rationale for the gendered nature of this project. All of the texts that consider children adopted from India feature the adoptions of female children, and all of the narratives follow the stories of the mothers much more closely than those of the fathers.¹⁷ Novy notes that "[a]doption is a more salient issue for

¹⁷ The exception is Bharati Mukherjee's *Jasmine*, which features a male teenager adopted from Vietnam by an

women since family membership is in general more salient for women. Birth (inevitably) and relinquishing for adoption and choosing to adopt (in our culture) have been issues more for women than for men” (*Imagining* 9), and therefore the decision to look at writing only by women authors seems both practical and logical. Although Novy’s statement assumes a unanimity of white Anglo-American readership through her use of the words “our culture,” and takes on an air of biological determinism as it reflects highly patriarchal traditional gender roles, the relationships between women and childrearing are repeatedly highlighted in the following textual examinations, thereby resonating Novy’s claim in the context of diasporic Indian women’s writing.

In *Transnational Women’s Fiction: Unsettling Home and Homeland* (2008) Susan Strehe discusses at great length the importance of studying women writers. She asserts: “Women writers reflect specific cultural locations, individual positions inside or outside the land about which they write; they are also aware of the shadow cast by the Western imperial home and its associated values. How this special home shapes the practices of postcolonial home is one focus of their narratives” (9). Although Strehe’s work focuses on postcolonial writing rather than diasporic writing, the potential for overlap in both theory and subject matter is significant, and there is a very distinct consciousness of the traumas of the Partitions of India and the colonial period, as well as the ensuing inter-racial conflicts, in some of the texts that this project considers. Similar to Strehe, in the introduction to *Stories of Women* (2005) Elleke Boehmer argues that:

For obvious reasons, most notably that gender like the nation is composed by way of fictions, the concept of narrating the self represents a central area of *crossover* between the study of *women’s writing* and *postcolonial studies*. Although woman writers tend perhaps to be especially concerned with those narratives that cannot be integrated into the grand teleological march of official history, they, too, deploy the genre to claim and configure national and other identities. By conveying women’s complex give-and-take between public and private spaces, women writers use the novel as a powerful instrument with which to reshape national cultures in a way more hospitable to women’s presence. (12, emphasis in original)

Indeed, the novels considered in this project incorporate stories of female characters that are not often heard. The stories of poor women who do not know how they will feed their children

Indian woman and her American husband.

are presented side-by-side against the struggles of the wealthy who, for any number of reasons, cannot have the biological children that they desire, and many of the texts feature intimate details about the lives of these women, both fictional and non-fictional, that argue for the incomprehensibility and inherently gynocentric nature of the processes of maternity and family formation.

In addition to the fact that woman writers are able to provide access to narratives that many male writers may not be able to, adoption appears to be dealt with much more frequently by contemporary female writers than by their male counterparts. Despite lengthy searching, only two texts by male authors dealing with transnational adoption in an Indian context were located and only one of the authors can be deemed “diasporic.” Stephen Alter’s novella, *The God Child* (1987), features the return of a transnationally-adopted Indian girl to her birth village, where she seeks out the missionary doctor who placed her with her adoptive family and, eventually, the woman who relinquished her for adoption.¹⁸ Rather than emphasizing the relationships between women, however, a large section of the narrative focuses on the role of the missionary doctor who facilitated the adoption and his kinship networks. The author’s own subject position of having been raised by American missionary parents in India (Alter, first leaf) is incredibly salient throughout the text and it was therefore not comparable to other texts being considered. Indo-Canadian author Shaun Mehta’s novel, *Divya’s Dharma* (2004), features a transnational adoption that is prevented from occurring when it is found that the baby’s biological mother is still alive and he was kidnapped rather than willingly relinquished for adoption. Due to the fact that the adoption does not occur, and plays a relatively minor role in the fast-paced narrative, Mehta’s novel is also not given further consideration herein. Both Alter and Mehta use adoption in their works as a way to highlight class and caste injustices, which are central to their respective works but are discussed in far more nuanced ways in the works considered in this project.

It becomes increasingly clear, then, that an abundance of literature exists featuring transnational or nearly transnational adoptions in an Indian context. Some of the novels considered in the project, such as Bharati Mukherjee’s *Jasmine* (1989) or Shilpi Somaya Gowda’s *Secret Daughter* (2010) have been consumed en masse and widely translated, and for some readers these fictional representations are their only engagements with India, Indian-Americans, and adoptees. It therefore becomes imperative to understand how literature

¹⁸ It becomes apparent at the end of the novel that this woman was not her birth mother but a kidnapper who stole her from another woman on a train (Alter 137, 151-2).

constructs reality, and in exchange, how reality constructs these literatures. By examining and extrapolating possible trends in representations of adoption in diasporic literature, this project seeks to deconstruct the ways that adoptive parents, children, and nations are being represented and consumed.

To turn again to Bhargava's *Adoption in India*, on the relationship between gender and adoption, she notes that "[i]nequality of the sexes is an issue that is very often visible in the process of adoption. When a couple comes to adopt it is more frequently the woman's need to nurture a child that brings them to the agency" (68). From Bhargava's statement, it becomes clear that some scholars still identify an inherent link between femininity and nurturing, and the pervasiveness of these links is explored in literature in the first chapter. Bhargava further emphasizes the social implications of childbirth for a woman and couple, and notes that "[c]hildbearing is a means for women to achieve social status, receive respect from their husbands, families, and communities, and fulfill their own personal lives[,]" and that some cultural and religious groups continue to look down upon women who cannot bear children (77-78). Thus, framing adoption by looking at relationships between women as represented by women is not only logical but highly feasible given the high degree of significance placed on relationships between women, particularly those between mothers and daughters, both adoptive and biological, in the texts considered by this project.

Texts in Contexts

Most of the works considered in this project feature children and infants adopted from India by families in the United States and Spain. The only exception is Bharati Mukherjee's *Jasmine*, which features both an Anglo-American child adopted by an Anglo-American family but raised by an Indian nanny, and a Vietnamese teenager adopted by the same Indian woman and a different Anglo-American man. The centrality of adoption to the plot of Mukherjee's novel, as well as the lack of scholarly attention paid to the role of the adoption in the text make it a fruitful avenue of research. Furthermore, the parallels drawn in the novel between Jasmine's adoption of children and America's adoption of Jasmine speak very clearly to the relationship between adoption and multiculturalism outlined above by Novy in her introduction (8). Mukherjee's later novel, *Leave it to Me* (1998), is also considered as it emphasizes the darker side of adoption and the potential for violence and dissent when an adoptee attempts to search for her birth parents.

Bharti Kirchner's *Shiva Dancing* (1998), Shilpi Somaya Gowda's *Secret Daughter*, and Indu Sundaresan's "Shelter of Rain," from the anthology *In the Convent of Little Flowers* (2008), also feature children who are adopted to the United States. In Kirchner's text, a seven year old girl is kidnapped by bandits on her birthday and taken to the United States by a couple who take pity on her sad state. Central to the novel is her desire to return to her homeland and find the family and husband that she left behind. The child marriage that is featured in Kirchner's text invites comparisons to be made between contemporary American and Indian cultures, rendering the novel's conclusion particularly relevant to studies of diasporic consciousness and returns. Gowda's novel, in contrast, follows an infant who is relinquished for adoption in Mumbai by parents who cannot afford to care for a baby girl, and adopted by an infertile couple in the United States who strongly desire parenthood. As in Mukherjee's novels, there is a heavy emphasis on the conflict between acculturation and cultural preservation that must be negotiated by both the adoptee and the adoptive parents. This theme is also central to the narratives presented in Sasha Khokha's documentary *India: Calcutta Calling* (2004), which follows a group of American-adopted teenage girls as they return to India for the first time to explore their personal histories.

This project also considers Asha Miró's memoir, *Daughter of the Ganges* (2006). Due to her process of self-discovery, Miró's memoir blurs the lines between fact and fiction. Although published as a memoir, the two-part text follows Miró two trips to India as she learns, disproves, and relearns her own personal history and the facts about her pre-adoptive life, rendering parts of the text fictional and others questionable. Miró's text differs further from the others as she is adopted by a Catalan family in Barcelona rather than an American family, and therefore represents a different process of acculturation and affiliation, but follows a similar narrative of return, making it a useful point of comparison for the other works considered.

A later addition to this project, Renita D'Silva's *The Forgotten Daughter* (2014) also includes an adoptive family outside of the United States, this time in the United Kingdom. D'Silva's protagonist, Nisha, is a young adult female dealing with the death of her adoptive parents when she finds out from the family lawyer that she is adopted from Karnataka, India, at the age of four. This discovery causes her to have dreams of India that she believes (correctly) are her suppressed memories resurfacing, and she contacts the convent from which she was adopted, returns there, and tracks down her biological mother. D'Silva's text interrogates ideas of trauma and memory, as well as notions of return and belonging, as Nisha first rejects the label of Indian, and later embraces it alongside her biological relatives.

Although the project is limited to a very small canon of texts, a larger body of work featuring adoptions from or within India must be acknowledged. As the justification for excluding the two texts by male authors has been provided, the exclusion of several further works by female authors also needs to be acknowledged. These can be categorized into two groups: texts featuring transnational kinship adoptions, and texts featuring domestic adoptions which are closely followed by a transnational migration. The first category includes works such as Anita Rau Badami's *The Hero's Walk* (2000),¹⁹ Preethi Nair's *Gypsy Masala* (2004), Shauna Singh Baldwin's *The Selector of Souls* (2012), and many others. Kinship adoptions are a common occurrence in diasporic Indian literature, and attempting to categorize and examine all of the texts featuring kinship adoptions would go beyond the scope of this project, as there is such variation in length of time, age at time of transfer, and reasons for sending children abroad to live with kin. For example, Nair's protagonist, Evita, narrates: "Having lost my own parents in an accident, a long, dusty road had lead me to the doorstep of the Vishavans. I'm not too sure about the details of how I arrived there, but it was my Auntie Sheila and my Uncle Bali who brought me up" (4). The process of transferring children from one family member to another is far from uniform and is dependent on numerous variables. In Baldwin's text, a child named Chetna is sent to live with cousins in Canada when her mother leaves an abusive marriage to become a nun. Emphasis is placed on the fact that due to her placement within the family and Canada's multiculturalism practices "Chetna won't be asked to sacrifice being Indian" (Baldwin 251). Baldwin's novel therefore contains interesting representations of familial relationships, as well as negotiations of identity, but deals with much more than adoption. Furthermore, whereas adoption and the adoption process is central to the plots of the works considered within this project, many works feature kinship adoptions as a sub-plot, rendering it difficult if not impossible to ascertain whether one has obtained a significant sampling of texts.

In the second category are works such as Shonali Bose's novel *Amu* (2004), and the film of the same name (2005), and Shobhan Bantwal's *The Unexpected Son* (2010). In all three of these works, an adoption is paired with a migration, but the adoption itself is not transnational in nature. *Amu* features the adoption of a child orphaned by the 1984 Delhi riots by a single woman in India. Rendered silent by fear and grief, the newly adopted child is taken by her new (Indian) mother to Canada for a fresh start as an attempt to overcome the multiple

¹⁹ Badami's novel is particularly interesting, as it features the adoption of a young child back to India from Canada by the biological grandparents after the death of the parents, rather than away from India.

traumas that she has witnessed and experienced. Although there are many similarities between Bose's and Gowda's protagonists, *Amu* focuses much more heavily on trauma and secrecy surrounding the Delhi riots than it does on relationships between parent and child, which are central to the works considered in this project. Despite having an Indian mother, Bose's protagonist, Kaju, becomes more interested in India and the notion of return in college (Bose 4). Furthermore, the adoption is processed and treated as a domestic one, in line with the wishes of the biological mother, who commits suicide due to horrific crimes she has witnessed and wills her daughter into the care of her social worker-cum-adoptive mother. Bantwal's *The Unexpected Son* is similar, as it features a child put up for adoption in India and the birthmother's subsequent relocation to the United States. In Bantwal's narrative, the entire adoption process is kept secret from the biological mother, Vinita, who thinks that her baby died in delivery (100). The mother only finds out about her son's existence more than twenty years later when she receives an anonymous letter stating that he requires a bone marrow transplant to save his life (3). Thus, in many ways Bantwal's text subverts the narrative of the adoptee's search for unknown biological parents by requiring the biological mother to search for an unknown child. The son, raised by loving adoptive parents within India, does not struggle with his own identity the same way that the transnational adoptees in texts discussed do, nor does he have a place within any diasporic framework, and it is for this reason that Bantwal's text is not considered in relation to the others discussed in the project. This differs from Kirchner's text, as the adoptive parents in *Shiva Dancing* (The Gossetts) understood their time in India to be temporary and undertook the adoption of Meena with the knowledge that they would be departing from India and taking her with them.

The small canon of texts isolated by this project is united by several common themes, which form the foundations of the following chapters and subchapters. Loosely following the chronology of the life cycle, this project examines first constructions of birth and maternity. The second chapter consists of a study of the depiction of adoptee return journeys in relation to memory, translation, and diasporic return. Finally, As Mukherjee's work deals with adoption in a vastly different way, an examination of the theme of adoption in her novels will make up the third and final chapter.

By examining the way that birth and maternity are represented in several works, a framework for the ways that birth and adoptive homelands intersect is constructed. Utilizing works from early feminism coupled with works by contemporary transnational feminists, the first chapter, "Adopting Maternity: Constructions of Transnational Motherhood," considers the ways that motherhood is constructed in relation to nationality and nationalism. This includes

an examination of the potential conflict between adoptive mothers and daughters, as well as of ways that mothers are constructed as in opposition to each other. All of the texts considered feature negotiations of constructions of maternity, as adoptive mothers address issues surrounding their decision to adopt or birth mothers tackle their decisions to relinquish. By considering how biological and adoptive mothers are constructed, hierarchies between cultures become clear, which can, in turn, speak to the author's views of their homelands and their diasporic positions. Split into five subchapters, Gowda's, Kirchner's *Khokha's* and Miró's works are considered at length within this chapter. Sundaresan's short story is addressed as a way to bring together the themes of the chapter, as it deals with a young woman who learns that her mother is unwell in India and grapples with the idea of return. Sundaresan's protagonist, Padma, therefore comes to understand both maternity and identity as fluid.

Given the focus on diaspora at the heart of this project, and the invocation of the motivation towards return as a key criterion for examining adoption in relation to diaspora, an analysis of the adoptee's return journeys makes up the second chapter. Entitled "Power, Subalternity, and Nations of Birth: Constructions of Difference and Return Journeys in Narratives of Adoption," this chapter looks at Miró's memoir, *Khokha's* documentary, and Gowda's, Kirchner's and D'Silva's novels. As a unifying theme and the concept that links Gowda's, Miró's, Kirchner's, and D'Silva's protagonists to diaspora, the desire to return to the nation of birth and to seek out the birth family branches beyond mere curiosity, and is so pervasive that it causes the young women to risk their current lifestyles for a chance at something different. *Khokha's* documentary is utilized here as a point of comparison, as it represents a small sampling of the potential relationships between adoptees and their nation of birth. Although one must be careful not to allow *Khokha's* participants to speak for all adoptees, their experiences provide a valuable insight into the different ways that adoptees react to the return to the birthland, as well as the ways that adoptees may construct their own identities and nationalities.

The chapter begins with an overview of the politics of diasporic return and the function of memory which is followed by a close analysis of these concepts in each text. Through the avenues of return and memory, a comparison of host- and homeland is achieved in each of the works, so it is here that an examination of the constructions of India is also conducted. Due to its unique position as both fact and fiction, the function of memory comes up first in Miró's work, followed by an analysis of the way that Miró's language use and the act of translation contribute to the Othering of her biological family and her contacts in India. The participants in *Khokha's* documentary form a unique relationship with India due to the formal nature of

their return. Their trip serves to highlight their Americanness as much as it enlightens them about their Indian pasts. In a similar manner, in Gowda's text the return journey is once again framed by comparisons between Self and Other; Asha is unable to accept India without comparing it to her adoptive home, and she structures her comparisons hierarchically, with America ultimately coming out on top. In Kirchner's text, the protagonist finds herself to occupy a more complex position, as she returns to India seeking a home that no longer exists, but simultaneously reaffirms her Indian and American identities. D'Silva's novel likewise demonstrates a shift in constructions of self in relation to India, but complicates the notion through the idea of twin bonding, suppressed memories, and deception on the part of the adoptive parents.

Unlike the other works, which feature tidy narratives and happy endings, Mukherjee's writings on adoption are not so positive, and it is for this reason that she is examined on her own, in the third and final chapter. Entitled "Adoption, Abjection, and the Fictions of Bharati Mukherjee," this chapter reads Mukherjee's work in relation to the works of Julia Kristeva and Judith Butler. In both of Mukherjee's novels that feature adoption, the adoptee is maladjusted and seeks to return to his or her birth family and both novels contain representations of gruesome violence and abjection. Importantly, there is no mention of a return to the adoptive family after the location of the birth family, and there is no simple resolution to the adoptee's identity questions. For Du in *Jasmine*, an actual return to his family in Vietnam is impossible, and his journey is framed around leaving Iowa for California to meet his biological sister. For Debby/Devi in *Leave it to Me*, it means leaving her family in New York for California, where she turns to the same life of crime undertaken by her biological father. Through an examination of the processes of acculturation through adoption of Du, Debby, and Jasmine herself (who, as highlighted earlier, goes through a series of pseudo-adoptions on her way to becoming American), the third and final chapter examines how the politics of return function in the absence of a real return, and how the pervasiveness of a "homing desire" drives adoptees away from their adoptive homes and families and towards an unknown.²⁰ It further questions how the insider/outsider dichotomy manifests within a dysfunctional family, as well as the implications for the adoptees' failure to acculturate and "home" within their new families.

The texts considered in this project represent the small but growing body of literature by diasporic Indian women writers dealing with transnational adoption. By examining the way

²⁰ "Homing desire" is used in this context as outlined by Avtar Brah in the introduction to *Cartographies of Diaspora* (2006).

that various processes throughout the adoption and lifecycle are represented, the relationship between diasporic consciousness and the subject position of a transnational adoptee becomes clearer. Transnational adoption creates transnational families, and works to both break down and re-inscribe difference. Central to the work of each of the diasporic Indian women writers considered in this project are notions of identity, home, and belonging, and these unifying themes render their work worthy of further examination in a project such as this one. Vastly different, in many ways, reading the seven works considered in this project side-by-side highlights the ways that notions of diaspora are read and written on to adoptees, as well as the ways that diaspora is a useful framework for decoding the relationships between adoptees and their parents and lands.

All human life on the planet is born of women. The one unifying, incontrovertible experience shared by all women and men is that months-long period we spend unfolding inside a woman's body.

—Adrienne Rich, *Of Woman Born* (11)

Chapter One: Adopting Maternity: Constructions of Transnational Motherhood

1.1 Maternity, Motherhood, Nation: Constructions and Conceptions

As outlined in the introduction, the texts examined in this project share the common feature of highlighting the experiences of women, as well as being created by women. As works produced by women about women's experiences becoming mothers, the fictional and non-fictional works examined in this project can therefore be read together to examine how motherhood is constructed in relation to adoption, as well as in the multiple cultural locations featured in these works. All of the texts feature a minimum of two maternal figures, with some featuring other women who take on maternal significance to the adoptees, such as extended family members or orphanage workers. The terminology used to denote familial relationships varies depending on circumstances leading up to and following an adoption, however I use the term mother with the added qualifiers of "adoptive" and "birth" or "biological" when discussing the various women who raise the protagonists in these texts, and also consider the relationships with other women who fill maternal roles.

Referred to by Nora Moosnick in *Adopting Maternity: White Women Who Adopt Transracially or Transnationally* (2004) as "a panoptic institution" (xi), motherhood is an arena in which everyone endeavors to have an opinion, making mothers one of the groups most susceptible to criticism in contemporary Western society. It is important to note that although the *concepts* (rather than the conditions) of motherhood, mothering, and maternity affect women universally as either mothers, daughters, or both, understandings of the norms, practices, and connotations of the terms vary culturally as well as socio-economically; there are limitless different types and methods of motherhood and maternity. Moosnick goes so far as to assert: "The intersections of race, ethnicity, class, and gender are often lived and experientially understood through mothering" (30). Depictions of mothering as an act, and motherhood, as an institution, therefore become an adequate field from which to examine these intersections, with transnational adoption providing an avenue from which to access and theorize these intersections. Some women choose to embrace their roles as mothers or daughters, while others are not granted that choice: this project does not seek to value one experience over the other, but rather to examine how each is constructed in relation to the other in the selected texts. Thus,

the issue of motherhood is treated in this dissertation as a concept in which all are implicated, rather than a condition affecting only those who raise children. In some of the works considered, such as in Shilpi Somaya Gowda's *Secret Daughter*, multiple mothers are given a chance to speak within the text, and an open dialogue about the nature of maternity in the United States and India exists, while other works such as Asha Miró's *Daughter of the Ganges* contain more nuanced comparisons of biological and adoptive motherhood, as well as expressions of gratitude.

There is also a noteworthy relationship between the female author, the text-as-child metaphor, and fulfillment of maternal desires within a narrative, and these are complicated through a consideration of the roles of mothers in literatures of adoption. These three concepts are explored at length in the anthology *Textual Mothers/Maternal Texts: Motherhood in Contemporary Women's Literature* (2010), edited by Elizabeth Podnieks and Andrea O'Reilly, and are not unique to any genre or time period of writing. While the works included in Podnieks' and O'Reilly's collection survey a wide range of texts and authors, the editors succinctly summarize the relationships between maternity and textuality in their introduction "Maternal Literatures in Text and Tradition: Daughter-Centric, Matrilineal, and Matrifocal Perspectives." The works included in their collection consider "the connections between a text and life itself, ... how textual representations reflect and help define or (re)shape the realities of women and families, how mothering and being a mother are political, personal, and creative narratives unfolding within both the pages of a book and the spaces of a life" (2). These connections therefore place a strong emphasis on literature for shaping worldviews and understandings about family structure, rendering the relationship between text and reality as one in which each is reflected in, and refracted through, the other. If one accepts this to be true, then the examination of the portrayals of maternity in contemporary literature featuring transnational adoption becomes a way to both better understand and further complicate the negotiations of maternal identity and motherhood in adoptive contexts.

The concept of transnationally adoptive motherhood is therefore inherently political; perhaps even more so than biological motherhood due to the increased role of multiple nation-states and third parties. The presence of the transnationally adoptive mother in literature invites readers to consider the roles of nature, nurture, and nation in childrearing, as well as her function at a literary level. The complicated and political nature of the role of adoptive mother is echoed in the search narratives of adoptees for their biological mothers, as well as in the conclusions that they make about the mother figures in their lives. If one is to understand the relationship between authorship and literature through the text-as-child metaphor, then the diasporic authors

considered in this project must be understood to undertake their own transnational adoptions, as they birth, rebirth, adopt, and modify narratives set in their familial homelands.²¹ By producing and nurturing a narrative or narratives from their familial homelands, and by blending those experiences with those in a diasporic setting, the authors birth stories that emphasize their own diasporicity, including the estranged but potentially warm relationship with “Mother India” as location and personified in the remorseful and dedicated birth mother. That is to say, the representations of adoption examined in this chapter allow authors to explore the relationship between the diasporic and the homeland utilizing a literal mother/daughter relationship to stand in for the figural Mother India/daughter of India dyad.

Much of the existing scholarship on the text-as-child metaphor stems from the Renaissance and Early Modern Periods, though the idea of conceptualizing one’s magnum opus as a child is also not uncommon today. Stephen Guy-Bray’s *Against Reproduction: Where Renaissance Texts Come From* (2009) provides an overview of early uses of the concept. Opening his book with reference to the work of the Duchess of Newcastle, Guy-Bray identifies how Newcastle “uses the familiar reproductive metaphor, according to which the author is the parent of the work and writing a text is like having a baby” (3). Though Newcastle’s use complicates common understandings of the metaphor by also suggesting that texts have bodies of their own with which they reproduce themselves, Guy-Bray provides valuable insight into the history and value of such a metaphor. Guy-Bray writes:

The presentation of the author as parent and the book as his or her child is so widespread as to have become a dead metaphor – or at least a zombie metaphor, as most uses of this figure of speech have been unreflective, or even mindless, and the idea that the author is the parent of his or her work has become so much a part of what everyone apparently knows. Newcastle’s interrogation of the metaphor does not appear to have influenced other writers, whose use of it tends to stop at the idea that books are like children: there is almost never any consideration of what it would really mean to endow books with life. What is more, even critical discussions of the reproductive metaphor have tended not to challenge it but rather to seek to modify it so as to extend it to female authors.

(4)

²¹ I am deeply indebted to Caroline Cox for drawing my attention to this concept while we were undertaking our own respective Master’s projects, as well as for suggesting the texts I consult in this section.

New life can be breathed in to such a metaphor, however, by utilizing it in relation to adoption and the diasporic author, as the act of writing back to the originary homeland is, in many ways, the symbolic adoption of a past or history from that land.

Reading the diasporic woman writer who narrates her home land as transnationally adopting her narratives, rather than “birthing” them, is problematic but also potentially useful. On the one hand, the metaphor becomes problematic when it suggests that the ownership and origins of their narratives is contested. This, in turn, runs the risk of reducing artistic freedom by defining one’s creative potential in relation to one’s lived experience. The very existence of myriad fictional genres outside the realm of lived possibility should negate the expectation of realism, though many authors still face the burden of representation, particularly when they belong to or narrate the experiences of minority groups. Adoption scholarship, however, validates adoptive kinship, and therefore validates the relationship between these narratives and their authors; those who support adoptive family formation would see it as potentially different from, but no less authentic than, biological reproduction.

Guy-Bray also acknowledges that the use of this term may be seen to reduce women, and particularly women writers, to merely their reproductive potential:

The unfortunate effect of [the use of this metaphor] is that the woman writer becomes the only too familiar figure of woman as container for the womb, in this case a womb that comes furnished with metaphorical possibilities. Ironically, while feminist critics typically interrogate various aspects of patriarchy, they frequently do not question the society that reduces women to this one-use value. (7)

Again, the truth of this statement cannot be ignored, and reducing the relationship between author and text to that of mother/child does, to a degree, essentialize the woman writer, as well as eliminate the potential for male mothering that is outlined by O’Reilly (*Twenty-First Century* 8) and male authorship, but such an argument only holds water when women are reduced to functioning *only* as mothers, and when mothering work is seen as less valuable than other forms of labour. In a contemporary context, where many women hold the role of mother in addition to other social and professional roles, and where a solid group of people seek to place greater value on the labours of parenting, Guy-Bray’s criticism becomes less remarkable, though ultimately still valid—particularly for the writers about whom he founds his arguments.

With this in mind, the metaphor of text-as-child and narrative-of-homeland-as-transnationally-adopted-child become useful ways to understand the relationship between the diasporic female author and the narrative of adoption. The fictional works considered in this

dissertation are written by authors who do not overtly identify any affiliation with the adoption community, yet it features as a constant thematic focus, which begs the question of *why*.²² A reading of the texts as performing the role of adopted children to reaffirm authorial ties to India nullifies this query. Guy-Bray's other main objection to the use of the text-as-child metaphor—"that it forces textuality into a teleological and heterosexual narrative, one that is no better for women – or for that matter, for men – than it is for texts" (15)—also becomes moot. In a world where men can mother (to refer back O'Reilly) and parenting has increasingly become the result of choice and perseverance rather than the simple biological result of heterosexual union, the text-as-child metaphor becomes more about labouring than about sex. Adopting a child, like birthing one, requires a lot of effort but is, at least theoretically, removed from the constraints of biological determinism and centered wholly on social and legal constructs allowing the term to take on a meaning reflective of the effort, pride, and nurturance that are encapsulated in the writing process.

Furthermore, in the Indian context portrayed in the works considered in the following, India's favouritism towards domestic adoption mirrors the ways that writers are often expected to write about lands and characters with which they are familiar, thereby further strengthening the use of this metaphor in relation to these texts.²³ By reading the narrative of the homeland by a diasporic author as a transnationally-adopted child, rhetorics of culture keeping are also re-affirmed, and this concept will be expanded on later in this chapter. Adopting a narrative, like a child, not only means caring for and nurturing that narrative to fruition, but also performing due diligence when representing the homeland. To understand the relationship between text and author as one in which the narrative may be created elsewhere and simply nurtured and brought to maturity by the author allows for a more open dialogue between text and community, and accounts for a contested understanding of ownership vis-à-vis the originary and current homelands of the diasporic author. As the transnationally adopted child must oftentimes straddle a past and present understanding of home and belonging, so too must the work of a diasporic author oftentimes negotiate and rewrite the same complex understandings of self, other/Other, home and belonging.

²² This is in contrast to works such as Wendy MacGown's *Little Sister* (2006), which features the adoption of an infant girl from China. MacGown's novel features an "About the Author" page which identifies her as the mother of two adopted daughters from China, clearly demarcating her vested personal interest in the topic.

²³ Bhargava's *Adoption in India: Policies and Experiences*, cited in the introduction to this project, provides a detailed overview of India's laws and regulations governing adoption. Of particular note is the fact that "before a child is given in adoption abroad, all efforts must be made to find a home for her within the country. Agencies licenced for inter-country adoption were expected to do a minimum of 50 per cent of their placements in-country" (46).

The concept of text-as-child, as well as the significance of mother-daughter relationships within these works, becomes even more relevant when one considers the titles: of the seven works considered in this project, three of them employ the term “Daughter” in the title, thereby alluding to the emphasis on familial relationships and maternal presence before the narratives even begin. A search for a mother in three of these texts (*Secret Daughter*, *The Forgotten Daughter* and *Daughter of the Ganges*) is central to the narrative, which also brings to the foreground that relationship between adoptee and adoptive parent.²⁴ In many cases, the adoptive mothers are given voice and presence in the texts and the daughters actively engage in discourses about their relationship with both their birth and adoptive mothers.²⁵ Kirchner’s *Shiva Dancing* also contains excerpts from the adoptive mother’s journal, but they are not featured with much prominence within the text. Conversely, Khokha’s *Calcutta Calling* gives minimal attention to the thoughts and actions of the adoptive mothers, but still creates a discourse around ideas of maternity, identity, and belonging that contributes in a meaningful way to the discourses of motherhood in an adoptive context.

The following examines the way mothers and motherhood are constructed and theorized in both an Indian and Western context. In an effort to shed light on some of the cultural constructions of motherhood, the assumptions about motherhood and femininity, and the relationship between the adoptive condition and understandings of maternity will be examined, beginning with an overview of theories of motherhood and maternity by drawing on feminist, literary, and adoption scholars. In particular, the relationship between adoption and postfeminism will be considered, followed by an examination of the construction of the homeland as “Motherland,” particularly in relation to India and the construction of Mother India. This chapter concludes with an analysis of specific aspects of motherhood in each of the works selected for this project. Although the overall aim of this project is to examine how diaspora intersects with the representations of adoption and, in turn, maternity in selected works, the goal of this chapter is to open up a dialogue among these works to ultimately identify trends and commonalities in the portrayals of the relationships between birth and adoptive mothers in literature featuring transnational adoption by diasporic Indian women writers.

²⁴ In D’Silva’s *The Forgotten Daughter*, the adoptive mother is deceased, but the biological mother is present, as are excerpts from her journal. The impact of the adoptive mother’s death, as well as the presence of the biological mother, reiterate the significance of mother/daughter relationships in shaping adoptee identities.

²⁵ To a lesser degree, these texts also invite analyses of the relationships between fathers and daughters, as well as mothers/fathers and sons, and where necessary I will refer to these relationships, but none of the narratives give extensive attention to these relationships, and they tend to be invoked as a means to compare the relationships between mothers and daughters.

1.1.1 Feminism and Motherhood: Past, Present, and Future

Feminist scholarship on motherhood and maternity has been growing since the advent of feminist scholarship itself. Issues such as women's labour and women's reproductive rights have been addressed in relation to the ability of many cisgender female bodies to bear children.²⁶ Arguments exist today in both Indian and Euro-North American contexts about the roles and places that women in those respective societies occupy and/or are believed to be obligated to occupy. Feminists in the first, second, and third waves have considered the role of woman in the domestic sphere, the role of the female body, the value of domestic labour, and the importance of corporeal autonomy as it relates to the ability to bear and nurture children.

Feminist theorists in the first wave concerned themselves primarily with aspects of suffrage and personhood. Although they laid the foundations for later activists and scholars, this project does not endeavour to provide a synopsis of the history of feminist thought, but rather feminist thought as it relates to contemporary constructions of maternity. Later, scholars during the period now identified as the second wave of feminism, including Betty Friedan and Simone De Beauvoir, concerned themselves more with issues including but not limited to women's participation in the work force and home/life balance. Finally, third wave feminists, including those considered transnational and third-world feminists have occupied themselves with issues such as equality and access to resources from women in the Global South. In the section that follows, I attempt to give a brief overview of the ways in which the works of some of the most well-known feminist scholars interact with and challenge concepts of maternity and motherhood in their work, while acknowledging that a complete overview of the intersections of feminism and motherhood is beyond the scope of this dissertation.

Addressed by Betty Friedan in *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) is the issue of self-fulfillment and identity for women. In particular, Friedan examines the emotional wellbeing of women working in and outside of the home in the late 1950s in relation to the tasks of mothering and household management. She finds, in general, that women are unfulfilled if they do not put effort into defining themselves outside of the household, and she calls this issue "the feminine mystique":

The feminine mystique implies a choice between 'being a woman' or risking the pains of human growth. Thousands of women, reduced to biological living by

²⁶ Although none of the texts considered in this project contain overt descriptions of queer mothering, I use modifiers "many" and "cisgender" to acknowledge that some women cannot have children and that transgender individuals may identify as women but be unable to bear children. One of the adoptees in Khokha's film (*Lizzie*) is depicted with two women who appear to be her mothers, however their relationship is not identified or explored within the film.

their environment, lulled into a false sense of anonymous security in their comfortable concentration camps, have made a wrong choice. The irony of their mistaken choice is this: the mystique holds out ‘feminine fulfillment’ as the prize for being only a wife and mother. But it is no accident that thousands of suburban housewives have not found that prize. The simple truth would seem to be that women will never know sexual fulfillment and the peak experience of human love until they are allowed and encouraged to grow to their full potential as human beings. (275)

Friedan’s work rings true today and in the works considered in this dissertation, as female characters grapple with career and family decisions. As one of the earliest works to support women’s work outside the home and to recognize that domestic labour may not be enough for some women to feel satisfied, Friedan’s work is one of the most oft-cited works of the second wave, particularly in discourses surrounding mothering, motherhood, and labour.

Friedan includes in *The Feminine Mystique* a brief reference to the reception of Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* (1949) in the United States. Predating Friedan’s work by fourteen years, *The Second Sex* features a lengthy analysis of the role of the mother in the development of both the child and the female self, and the unnamed critic to whom Friedan refers questions the relevance and necessity of de Beauvoir’s work in the United States, where “the woman problem” was thought to no longer exist (Friedan 16). Drawing heavily on psychoanalysis, de Beauvoir’s work examines the way that the figure of woman is constructed in relation to that of man, as Other. She also acknowledges the ways that communities construct like and non-like (self and Other), with a generalized failure to acknowledge that the Self is the Other outside of one’s own home (7). Not unlike the way that the Orientalized body is constructed in relation to a socially constructed Western norm (Said 7), “woman” and “child” in the context of the works considered in this dissertation are therefore doubly othered, as Other of man, and as racialized Other to subsequent members of the adoptive family.²⁷

Although de Beauvoir does not consider the position of the Mother in relation to the position of the Other in *The Second Sex*, her observations on the nature of both Otherness and maternity are noteworthy in the context of transnational adoption. Referring to maternity as a “strange compromise of narcissism, altruism, dream, sincerity, bad faith, devotion and cynicism” (570), de Beauvoir both affirms and deconstructs notions of the naturalness of

²⁷ In the introduction to *Orientalism* (1978), Edward Said writes that “In a quite consistent way, Orientalism depends for its strategy on [a] *positional* superiority, which puts the westerner in a whole series of possible relationships with the Orient without ever losing him the upper hand” (7). This same positional superiority is reflected in the constructions of woman as inferior Other of man the De Beauvoir discusses.

motherhood, noting that although bearing children *is* a natural function of women's bodies, "human society is never left to nature" (538). The naturalness of childbearing and its relationship with childrearing is challenged in an adoptive context, and further challenged in the context of transnational or transracial adoption, where mother and child have even less in common (biologically, linguistically, and culturally) than children who are adopted from within the communities of their birth.

Thus, the adopted child is the cultural and racial Other of the mother figure. This concept is of particular relevance in the works of Gowda and Kirchner, where the differences are exemplified and dwelled upon by the adoptive mothers. By viewing the adopted child and the nationals of her nation of birth as Other, a divide is created, and a hierarchy invoked, while at the same time there is shock and confusion about the adoptive parent's own role in relation to their adoptive child's birthland. Drawing on the works of Hegel and Lévi-Strauss on the relationship between nature and culture, de Beauvoir writes:

Travelling, a local is shocked to realise that in neighbouring countries, locals view him as a foreigner; between villages, clans, nations and classes there are wars, potlatches, agreements, treaties, and struggles that remove the absolute meaning from the idea of the Other and bring out its relativity; whether one likes it or not, individuals and groups have no choice but to recognise the reciprocity of their relations ... No subject posits itself spontaneously and at once as the inessential from the outset; it is not the Other who, defining itself as Other, defines the One; the Other is posited as Other by the One positing itself as One. But in order for the Other not to turn into the One, the Other has to submit to this foreign point of view. (7)

De Beauvoir questions the act of submission on the basis of numbers; due to the fact that woman is not a minority in relation to man, but eventually notes that in some cases women derive satisfaction in their position as Other of men (10).²⁸ This relative nature of Otherness, including as a point of potential pleasure, is also manifest in the relationships between parents and

²⁸ De Beauvoir's claim is somewhat tenuous when considered in relation to India due to the fact that female foeticide, infanticide, and sex selective abortion have made women a minority in relation to men. This claim is taken up in Gowda's novel, when Kavita learns that families are having trouble marrying their sons off (193), and when Meena tells Asha that "the birth rates are all bungled up in India ... something like nine hundred and fifty girls born for every one thousand boys" (229). Chetan Ghate in *The Oxford Handbook of the Indian Economy* (2012) cites the sex ratio at birth to be 1.12 males born for each female (468). The United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs—Population Division (2012) supports this claim, asserting that 111 males are born for every 100 females, and estimates that the gap will decrease only slightly by the turn of the next century (UN 3). A 2011 article by Chris Arsenault in the popular news outlet Al Jazeera takes this analysis one step further: "There were only 914 girls for every 1,000 boys under the age of six in India, according to the 2011 census, compared with 927 for every 1,000 boys in the 2001 census. Today's ratio is the highest imbalance since the country won independence in 1947" ("Millions of Aborted Girls Imbalance India").

children in literatures of transnational adoption. The presence of Otherness within the family units of transnationally and/or transracially adoptive families is what separates the role of the Other in this project from de Beauvoir's analyses of Otherness in community contexts. In the context of transnational and/or transracial adoption, an Other is introduced into the family unit and separated from her community of origin. When she lacks a "same" against which to understand herself in relation to, the Otherness present in her maternal figure may become more salient. Her sense of self and maternal identification then run the risk of becoming skewed (as happens in both Gowda's and Kirchner's novels). That is to say, the adoptee who cannot find her self in her adoptive family runs the risk of being unable to assimilate.

Like de Beauvoir, many other feminist scholars have considered the role of the mother in terms of obligation and biological necessity. Sara Ruddick's *Maternal Thinking: Towards a Politics of Peace* (1989) deconstructs notions of motherhood as natural, while at the same time assesses the value of mothering labour on a global scale, as it refers to peace politics and the preservation of human life. Separating the role of mother from the institution of motherhood and the labour of mothering, like Moosnick, Ruddick asserts: "Neither a woman nor a man is born a mother; people become mothers in particular historical and social circumstances. Even if pregnancy and birth are taken as part of mothering, the biological fact of birthgiving is, both medically and symbolically, culturally various" (52). Differentiating between birthgiving (which can only be done by a biological female) and mothering (which according to Ruddick can be done by any person who chooses to devote her or his time to raising children), Ruddick concedes that "[s]ince most of the people who have taken up the work of mothering have had female bodies, mothers, taken as a class, have experienced the vulnerabilities and exploitation as well as pleasures of being female in the ways of their cultures" (41). Ruddick expands the thinking about motherhood to include a greater awareness of the cultural differences that shape the institution of motherhood, as well as responds to some of the earlier radical feminist writings which suggested that women should eschew heterosexual relationships and the maternal role to assert their individual and feminist identities. She concludes that "[m]others strengthen even as they are strengthened by feminism" (243), thereby asserting that feminism and maternity are not mutually exclusive.

It is this same assertion that is central to Adrienne Rich's *Of Woman Born* (1986). Much like Ruddick's work responds to the complex relationships between feminism and maternity, Rich's work addresses the intersections of patriarchal ideologies in the concept of mothering. This, she asserts, becomes the foundation for the patriarchal institution of motherhood. She argues:

The institution of motherhood is not identical with bearing and caring for children, and any more than the institution of heterosexuality is identical with intimacy and sexual love. Both create the prescriptions and the conditions in which choices are made or blocked; they are not ‘reality’ but they have shaped the circumstances of our lives. (42)

While Rich’s use of “our” assumes a certain unanimity of readership that should not be taken for granted, it also speaks to the pervasiveness of the assumptions about women and mothers that are still applicable today. Throughout her work, she argues for the institution of patriarchal motherhood to be disbanded, which would grant mothers more autonomy over their bodies and their children. In this argument, she maintains that the processes of conception, giving birth, and raising children are not the issues, but that the way that the mother is constructed by patriarchal society is, and that this can be altered by changes in the way that we think and talk about motherhood.²⁹

Despite the vast oeuvre of scholarship on motherhood, mothering, and maternity which spans the disciplines of Sociology, Anthropology, Psychology, Literature Studies, and Gender Studies, the concepts still receive a good deal of attention as the roles of women in society and the family continue to evolve and the laws and processes surrounding the formation of families shift in accordance with technologies and social norms. At the heart of contemporary research on mothering, motherhood, and maternity is Andrea O’Reilly.³⁰ Crediting herself with the naming of the discipline of Motherhood Studies in 2006, O’Reilly’s initiatives have not only expanded but also legitimated the field as a discipline (*21st Century* 1).

O’Reilly’s edited collections, *From Motherhood to Mothering: The Legacy of Adrienne Rich’s Of Woman Born* (2004) and *21st Century Motherhood: Experience, Identity, Policy, Agency* (2010), among others, build upon and re-contextualize the earlier writings of motherhood discussed above. In both the introductions to *From Motherhood* (2), and *21st Century Mothering* (2) and in her own essay therein, O’Reilly makes the assertion that motherhood can become a site of empowerment. She states that “while motherhood as an institution is a male-defined site of oppression, women’s own experiences of mothering can

²⁹ Rich refers to scholars such as Shulamith Firestone who “[discard] biological motherhood from [a] shallow and unexamined point of view, without taking full account of what the experience of biological pregnancy and birth might be in a wholly different political and emotional context” (174). By proposing a reassessment of the possibility of feminist mothering and motherhood as a site of empowerment for women, Rich renders feminism once again accessible to women who genuinely desire having families and want to dismantle patriarchal structures of oppression from within rather than eschew them altogether.

³⁰ Currently a Professor at York University in Toronto, Canada, O’Reilly co-ordinates The Motherhood Initiative for Research and Community Involvement, and is the founder of Demeter Press, a publisher devoted to issues surrounding motherhood and maternity (andreaoreilly.org).

nonetheless be a source of power. The oppressive and the empowering aspects of maternity, as well as the complex relationship between the two, has been the focus of feminist research on motherhood over the last twenty-eight years” (*From Motherhood* 159). Framing her analysis in relation to Rich’s groundbreaking work, O’Reilly considers the relationship between how societies value the work that mothers do and the respect awarded to the individuals who mother: “The devaluation of motherhood, the mother’s abdication of maternal authority, maternal inauthenticity and so on, give rise to matrophobia; this in turn frustrates and thwarts understanding and intimacy, empathy and connection between mothers and daughters” (*From Motherhood* 162).³¹ Shaping the field of motherhood studies, O’Reilly calls on feminist scholars to work towards making mothering less oppressive to women (*From Motherhood* 171), and credits Rich for paving the way for current scholars and mothers to work towards this goal.

Assessing her predecessors, O’Reilly writes: “Since the turn of the millennium a new theme in motherhood has emerged that I have termed *agency*. Motherhood scholarship, whether its concern is mothering as an institution, experience, or identity, has tended to focus on how motherhood is detrimental to women because of its construction as a patriarchal entity within the said three areas” (*21st Century* 3). Through a focus on agency, and the ways that women reclaim or reject agency in and through acts of mothering, O’Reilly focuses at length on the potential for motherhood to be a site of empowerment.³² Research on motherhood and maternity is therefore ongoing and limitless. The work undertaken by O’Reilly and colleagues and the publications of Demeter Press represent only a small fraction of the scholarship in existence, but nevertheless provide a valuable starting point for further investigations.

1.1.2 Motherhood, Postfeminism, and “Mommy Lit”

As the preceding has already demonstrated some of the ways that motherhood has been debated by feminists, one now arrives at what has been defined by some scholars as postfeminist culture. Scholars of postfeminism are quick to point out that postfeminism, rather than

³¹ According to O’Reilly, “mothering may be performed by anyone who commits him- or herself to the demands of maternal practice. This perspective also enabled scholars to study the actual experiences of mothering as apart from, albeit affected by, the institution of motherhood” (*21st Century* 5). This demonstrates, in some ways, both a progression and stalemate of in the battle for gender equality as the very fact that the act is referred to as mothering and not parenting genders it, though the inclusion of men demonstrates how far the feminist agenda has come since Rich wrote in *Of Woman Born* that “[e]ven those of us whose fathers played an important part in our early childhood rarely remember them for their patient attendance when were ill, their doing the humble tasks of feeding and cleaning us; we remember scenes, expeditions, punishments, special occasions” (12).

³² O’Reilly’s edited collection, *Mother Outlaws: Theories and Practices of Empowered Mothering* (2004), further expands and explains what it means to become an empowered mother, as well as how theories of empowered mothering build upon previous discussions of motherhood and mothering in feminist circles.

indicating a completion of the feminist agenda, refers to a cultural shift away from the ideologies of feminism towards a new feminine ideal characterized, in many ways, by consumption and corporate culture (Tasker and Negra 5). Along the same vein, Diane Negra notes in *What a Girl Wants? Fantasizing the Reclamation of Self in Postfeminism* (2009) that “[a] great number of fictional and non-fictional postfeminist texts embed the assumption that women remain uniquely responsible for the conditions of family life” (152), meaning that despite the prefix of “post,” postfeminist heroines sometimes represent a regression towards a more gendered division of labour, even as women obtain growing representation in a wide range of professions. Postfeminism therefore interacts in myriad ways with constructions of motherhood and maternity, as postfeminist ideologies have the potential to influence women’s attitudes towards childrearing, domestic, and public labour.

It is important to note that the shift from pre- to post- feminism is not considered to be universal or ubiquitous, but is nevertheless present, particularly in Anglo-North American and British popular culture. Adoption, as it is represented in some of the literatures considered, can be read as a manifestation of the culture of consumption embodied in postfeminism due to the fact that it highlights the ways in which families aspire to recreate the family unit in a way that may or may not be biologically possible for them.³³ Furthermore, in some cases, including that which is presented in Gowda’s novel, adoption is necessitated by women’s increasing presence in the workforce and the fact that they want to have children. Significantly, adoption from some countries is dependent on the notion of the heterosexual family unit, and restrictions exist prohibiting the adoption of children by either same-sex couples or single individuals, as well as individuals with disabilities and those who cannot afford the (often quite significant) financial expense of procuring a child from overseas.³⁴ This makes it a more suitable arrangement for couples or individuals with a greater degree of financial stability, which often (though not always) coincides with an increasing number of years spent in post-secondary education and the workforce and therefore an increased age. Adoption by single parent families and same-sex families occurs, but is not represented in the literatures examined by this project.

³³ In *The Mommy Myth: The Idealization of Motherhood and How it Has Undermined Women* (2004) Susan Douglas and Meredith Michaels address this when they refer to celebrity parenthood: “[I]f you are a celebrity, you are entitled to have children whenever and however you want them, no matter how many you already have or how old you are. If you can’t have them yourself, you buy them” (137).

³⁴ Adoption from China, for example, is a “highly regulated process overseen by the China Centre for Adoption Affairs” (Jacobson 25). Jacobson further notes that “[i]n some countries, older (or younger), divorced, married, homosexual, overweight, mentally ill, and disabled prospective parents are prohibited from adopting” (38). These regulations vary broadly by nation and sometimes organization, and are therefore difficult to summarize conclusively, but nevertheless influence trajectories of adoption and rises and falls in the popularity of specific nations as sending or receiving countries.

In the introduction to *Interrogating Postfeminism: Gender and the Politics of Popular Culture* (2007) editors Yvonne Tasker and Diane Negra outline the origins and implications of postfeminism for women as well as for those who still subscribe to notions of feminism. Although the two acknowledge that there remains disagreement within academia about what it means to be postfeminist, and to live in an era of postfeminism (19), their anthology works to both define and characterize contemporary media today. Highlighting the link between postfeminism and consumption, the pair notes that:

If postfeminist popular culture celebrates female agency and women's powers of consumption, it also anxiously raises the possible consequences of female independence, crudely: emotional isolation for women (a preoccupation that neatly sidesteps questions of women's economic instability); and loss of power for men (again, a formulation premised on the somewhat tenuous assumption that all men previously occupied equally elevated positions of social and economic power). ... [P]ostfeminism signals more than a simple evolutionary process whereby aspects of feminism have been incorporated into popular culture – and thereby naturalized as popular feminism. It also simultaneously involves an 'othering' of feminism (even as women are more centralized), its construction as extreme, difficult, and unpleasurable. (4)

The "othering" characterized in many works, and present in Gowda's novel, may be emphasized in an adoptive context by a woman's desire to be defined by her role as mother (a definition that many feminist movements fought against). There is, however, a marked difference between the act of being extrinsically defined and the act of selectively defining oneself, which is embodied in the notions of postfeminism and embraced by mothers in postfeminist literature, including those works considered in this project. It is thus only through deliberate, complex intercultural negotiations that the adoptive mother in the texts is able to define herself as a mother in relation to her adoptive child.

Similarly, in *Postfeminism: Cultural Texts and Theories* (2009), Stephanie Genz and Benjamin A. Brabon define postfeminism in an academic context as "the outcome of feminism's intersection with ... anti-foundationalist movements whereby the 'post-ing' is seen to denote a shift in feminist thinking and, specifically, in the way in which 'woman' as the subject of feminism is conceptualized" (17). They further assert that postfeminism embodies "the rejection of the assumption that feminism is based on a unified subjectivity, a universal sisterhood" (17). Their work raises the following questions: "Can feminism be political and popular at the same time? Once feminism has become a commodity, does it still have the power

to enforce social change?" (6). These questions, central to understanding postfeminism's existence and popularity as a movement, as well as the place for feminism in a postfeminist society, reflect the disenfranchisement some women feel within the contemporary feminist movement, and address persisting gender inequalities in relation to the (often not yet achieved) goals of feminism. These questions are at the heart of Gowda's novel, as her protagonist Somer actively and overtly breaks down her understandings of gender in relation to power in order to justify her career and parenting choices.

Tasker and Negra are quick to point out that "postfeminist culture poses particular challenges to feminist media studies, a discipline often characterized by an interest in reading popular culture against the grain, seeking out those traces of feminism that might be available to female viewers and readers" (5), thereby complicating the entire notion through the simultaneous presence and absence of "traditional" feminist ideologies in postfeminist texts. At the same time, it is difficult to utilize any one category to define feminism and therefore postfeminism, as it is impossible to separate the individual from the social and to further understand the role of free will in a woman's decision about whether (or not) to have children and how she should obtain said children. Rather than framing postfeminism as the explicit rejection of feminist politics, then, it is important to understand the movement as one which presumes the achievement of equality and therefore supports sexual and financial liberation while championing independence and consumption. To draw again on Tasker and Negra, postfeminism "frequently imagines femininity as a state of vitality in opposition to the symbolically deathly social and economic fields of contemporary Western cultures, and the highest-profile forms of postfeminist femininity are empowered to recharge a culture defined by exhaustion, uncertainty, and moral ambiguity" (9).

Let us consider for a moment the representations of transnational adoption embraced by the popular media. Celebrities such as Madonna and Angelina Jolie have openly championed the practice and their families have graced the covers of tabloids and newspapers, and made their way in to scholarly examinations of adoption as well. For example, Laura Briggs manuscript, *Somebody's Children: The Politics of Transracial and Transnational Adoption* (2012), examines the ways that celebrities promoted and were shaped by their role as adoptive parents. Speaking of a *People* magazine cover in 2005 which featured Jolie and her new baby girl, Briggs notes that "[a]lthough transnational adoption was a half-century old by 2005, and had involved significant numbers of parents and children since the 1980s, Angelina Jolie and other celebrity adoptions in the decade after 2000 marked for many the moment when it became undeniably mainstream, no longer exotic" (1). Briggs frames her work as a response to

Elizabeth Bartholet's work promoting adoption in the United States, *Nobody's Children: Abuse, Neglect, Foster Drift, and the Adoptive Alternative* (1999), which suggests increased adoption—including transracial adoption—as way to get children out of the foster care system and in to more stable homes. Bartholet's championing of adoption is perhaps most clear when allowed to speak for itself: "The evidence is clear that adoption works, and that it is the best of the available alternatives for children who have been subjected to abuse or neglect. This is true in terms of all the measures social scientists use to assess well-being, including measuring self-esteem and outcome measures related to later education, employment, crime and the like" (177). Bartholet's work does not, however, adequately address some of the systems of oppression that contribute to raced and classed divisions between available children and adopting families that could be solved by more equal access to employment, healthcare, and other social services, and this is by and large the problem that Briggs seems to have with it (Briggs 17). Therefore, in addition to being more recent, Briggs' work addresses some of the issues not raised in Bartholet's texts, and challenges narratives of rescue in which upper-class (often white) families provide a simple solution to the problems facing minority communities and nations in the Global South vis-à-vis transnational and transracial adoption.

More accurately, Briggs invites her readers to think critically about the practices that produce adoptable children (both in the United States and abroad), and the problems with viewing adoption as the penultimate solution:

The failure of simple, heroic narratives of rescued orphans is telling. The orphans turn out not to be orphans; money, troubling ideologies about single mothers, or the failure to respect legal parental rights corrupt the exchange; relatives' consent seems ambiguous or tempered with loss and tragedy. The dualistic structure separating stories of child stealing (like the Baptists and Madonna) and child rescue (like BRESMA and Angelina Jolie) can't be sustained ultimately, as there is often not much separating the facts to which those narratives are attached. (4)

Both Madonna and Angelina Jolie, women often idealized by their fans for their strength and independence, have been embraced as icons of modernity and a simultaneous sense of feminism coupled with femininity in their respective eras. The public nature of their adoptions worked to normalize the practice while at the same time opened up an avenue for frank and critical interrogations of practices. Their respective adoptions of children from abroad worked towards normalizing and promoting transnational adoption as an acceptable and accessible way to form a family and provide aid to a child in need, while the scandals that later broke surrounding the

means through which they obtained their children sparked much-needed thought and scholarship about the methods and practices of transnationally adoptive families. Similarly, the adoption of a young Chinese girl was featured on the popular television serial *Sex and the City* (1998-2004) as a final solution to Charlotte's infertility.³⁵ Framed alongside *Bridget Jones's Diary* (1996), *Sex and the City* is thought to be one of the quintessential texts of postfeminism, making its portrayal of transnational adoption highly significant, though the phenomenon is notably absent in the book and present only in the television adaptation. By inviting the association of transnational adoption with popular icons and increasing its representation in popular culture via a widely viewed and inherently postfeminist television series, the link between postfeminism and adoption is, if not solidified, invited as a point of further investigation.

As an ideology, postfeminism is often linked to the literary genre of Chick Lit, and it is important here to also attempt to classify the texts that are considered in this project, varied though they are. In *Chick Lit and Postfeminism* (2011), Stephanie Harzewski catalogues and analyzes some of the most widely read example of chick lit in relation to the notions of postfeminism. Drawing on the Oxford English Dictionary's definition of Chick Lit, Harzewski characterizes the genre as "[a]n underanalyzed body of postmodern fiction" (5). She further supports the breaking down of the field of chick lit into further subcategories, one of which being "Mommy Lit," a category into which Gowda's novel solidly falls. If "[c]hick lit is both a commentary on and a product of the singles market" (Harzewski 3), then "Mommy Lit" "retains the humor of standard chick lit ... yet addresses workplace politics, sexual harassment, and the double burden. ... The genre advocates neither a retreat from the workforce nor a uniform condemnation of this retreat" (Harzewski 172). In the introduction to their anthology, *Chick Lit: The New Women's Fiction* (2006), Suzanne Ferriss and Mallory Young note that "'Mommy lit' ... [adds] new complexity to the old question, 'Can women have it all?'" (5) and that novels in the Mommy Lit genre "both stage and complicate issues of middle-class maternity, an area rife with political implications" (5-6). By providing the middle-class mother with an image of herself (realistic, idealized, or otherwise), Mommy Lit simultaneously capitalizes on and serves a readership largely underrepresented in literary genres.

³⁵ Adoption is first suggested by the character of Charlotte when she is with her first husband, Trey, in episode 4.12 ("Just Say Yes"). Trey's family is displeased with the idea of a Chinese baby, and the idea is tabled. Trey and Charlotte's marriage disintegrates, and in the final episode of the series (6.20—"An American Girl in Paris: Part Deux"), Charlotte and her new husband attempt to adopt a baby girl from China, which is realized in the film that was released following the serial. No mention of adoption is made in Candace Bushnell's novel of the same name, upon which the series is based.

Within Ferriss and Young's collection, the article by Heather Hewett, "You Are Not Alone: The Personal, the Political, and the 'New' Mommy Lit," both summarizes and analyzes the genre of Mommy Lit. Hewett writes:

At a time of both national and global change, the category of mommy lit has come to signify, for many, all forms of writing that explore the private and public dimensions of motherhood. Both the prevalence and the popularity of mommy lit suggest the deep need among many mothers to speak out and listen to each other, to remember that no matter how difficult or challenging our lives are, we are not alone. (135)

Comparing the genre to the rest chick lit, she notes that "the plot of these books centres on their heroine's quest," but differentiates between the quest of the Mommy Lit heroine and the Chick Lit heroine because the Mommy Lit heroine is not searching for the perfect shoes or husband but "instead, on a journey from womanhood to motherhood, and her challenge lies in integrating her new role into her former identity ... this struggle manifests itself in the task of reconciling the work of motherhood" (120). Fertility issues, like those emphasized in Gowda's novel and represented on HBO's *Sex and the City*, complicate the journey to motherhood, and necessitate the exploration of issues such as adoption, surrogacy, and new reproductive technologies. As one of the many ways that women can become mothers, then, adoption literature represents a small but growing subfield of "Mommy Lit" worthy of consideration as such.

By reading contemporary literatures of adoption with an eye to both feminist and postfeminist ideologies, the role of mothers and children, as well as the role of the literature and popular culture in constructing and perpetuating these narratives, I hope to add to the growing realm of analyses on motherhood in relation to feminism and postfeminism, while maintaining inclusivity towards those who form their families differently. To draw once more on Tasker and Negra:

Feminism challenges us to critique relations of power, to imagine the world as other than it is, to conceive of different patterns of work, life, and leisure. Postfeminist culture enacts fantasies of regeneration and transformation that also speak to a desire for change ... Postfeminism displaces older forms of trivialization, generating a sense of newness, yet it also refreshes long familiar themes of gendered representation, demonstrating the ongoing urgency of speaking feminist critique. (22)

Adoption, particularly transnational adoption, operates along multiple axes of power, and affects women differently than men and the poor differently than the wealthy. As women in

affluent nations are granted greater autonomy over their careers and reproduction, decisions about where, when, how and whether or not to obtain children remain salient, which in turn necessitates explorations in to new ways to form, maintain, and balance family life.

1.1.3 Motherhood in Adoption Scholarship

Adoption scholarship often focuses on the relationships between the adoptive parents, birth parents, and children, and very frequently features personal narratives or studies of one or more mother figures.³⁶ The relationships between maternity and adoption are discussed at length by adoption scholars, including Novy in her work on adoption in literature. Novy writes that:

Questions about whether adoptees need knowledge of their ancestry, about whether it is healthy or possible for a birth mother to put the memory of a relinquished child behind her and what her privacy rights are, and about whether birth or nurture is more important in cases of disputed custody, all now being debated in legislative sessions and in courts, are also at issues in such novels as *Silas Marner*, *Great Expectations*, and *Bleak House*. (*Imagining 2*)

It is worth noting, then, that Novy does not grant the same attention to either birth or adoptive fathers; not one of the articles included in her anthology deals directly and explicitly with paternity and fatherhood, whereas several deal only with maternity and connotations of adoptive motherhood, thereby alluding to a perceived difference in the roles between mother and adopted child and father and adopted child.

Novy's reference to literary classics which address maternity and motherhood in relation to adoption highlights how pervasive the issue is, while her limited attention to more recent works alludes the gap which this project seeks to fill. One of the articles dealing with motherhood in Novy's collection is Julie Berebitsky's "Redefining 'Real' Motherhood: Representations of Adoptive Mothers, 1900-1950." Although the article deals with a different time period than that which is outlined in this research, and generally pre-dates the advent of transnational adoption as a common practice, Berebitsky highlights several interesting points which are still relevant to the texts considered in this project. She likewise highlights the naturalization of motherhood, as well as the assumption that all women should want to be mothers and that a mother was a woman who gave birth to a child, not one who raised her/him

³⁶ Single men and male couples also adopt children, but many countries have regulations against this. As neither of these practices are portrayed in the texts considered these possibilities are not further explored in this project.

(83). She notes that “[m]otherhood and maternal sacrifice generally were glorified and romanticized and described as a woman’s highest and truest calling and as key to her female identity” (83), and this phenomenon can be witnessed in some camps of thought today, as well as within Gowda’s novel. Berebitsky’s work teases out some of the tensions between adoptive and biological motherhood, noting that many people saw an adoptive mother’s role as different than that of a woman who had birthed her own children (85-86), which is again embodied in the works considered in this project. Sacrifice is central to the representations of maternity presented in the texts, and discourses about who has made a greater sacrifice are sometimes invoked to produce a hierarchy between birth and adoptive mothers.

Like Novy’s work, Judith Modell’s research on adoption in contemporary America addresses cultural representations and understandings of adoption, though her work is not focused on literature. Modell’s *Kinship with Strangers: Adoption and Interpretations of Kinship in American Culture* (1994) addresses the differences between biological and adoptive mothers based on the ways that kin relationships are formed. In her introduction, Modell writes that “[t]he meanings of mother and the values attached to motherhood profoundly influence the behaviors of those who give away and those who take in children—as well as of the children who are thus transacted” (5), noting that the act of adoption utilizes the concept of mothers as an abstract symbol, but one that plays a crucial role in the exchanges of guardianship undertaken at the time of adoption. That she considers the exchange of children to be a transaction, often between mothers, speaks volumes to the way that she conceptualizes contemporary adoption as a system which runs the risk of commodifying children. Modell’s work focuses on all types of adoption, rather than just transnational or transracial, but her emphasis on the position of a mother who relinquishes her child for adoption as a “childless mother” resonates within some of the texts considered (such as *Secret Daughter*, though Kavita does not remain childless for long). The term challenges understandings of motherhood by removing the limitation that one must currently have a child to be considered a mother, and therefore extends the concept of motherhood to women who have miscarried, suffered the death of a child, or relinquished their children for adoption.

By referring to mothers who relinquish their children for adoption as childless, Modell re-writes common understandings of maternity: how can one be childless and still be referred to as a mother? She argues that the phrase “perfectly capture[s] the paradox of being a parent whose child [is] nonexistent. The child [is] real, but not *there*; nor [is] its absence noted . . . This also marked a central contradiction in adoption: a parent by birth who [is] then not a parent at all” (86, emphasis in original). Adoption, then, opens up broader definitions of parenthood,

while simultaneously trying to adhere to the norms of the society involved in the process; constructions of parenthood and parental obligation become almost as important as the acts of parenting themselves. The tension between parents to determine which parents are the “true” parents of the adoptee comes up in several of the works considered, as adoptees struggle to understand their relationships to their birth and adoptive families. Modell’s definition removes the biological requirements for one to be considered a mother, as well as opens up a platform for individuals who are neither biological nor adoptive parents to be considered as parental figures.

Sarah Ruddick, whose work has already been briefly discussed, makes the argument in *Maternal Thinking* that all children are adopted and therefore that all mothers adopt. Speaking both of this paradox and of the paradox of birth, she writes that:

Birth is both in the world and a world’s beginning. A mother completes a birthing woman’s labor by adopting her infant and thus protecting in the world the physical promise and vulnerability she has created. To ‘adopt’ is to respond to an infant’s trust that ‘good and not evil will be done to him.’... To adopt is to make a space, a ‘peace’ where the promise of birth can survive. In this myth of peacemaking, birth is the beginning of a world; all mothers-in-the-world are adoptive; all adoptive persons are peacemakers. (218)

Through this assertion, Ruddick erases the oft-implied hierarchy of adoptive vs biological mothering and presents the act of adoption as the great equalizer among mothers.³⁷ By Ruddick’s definition, the birthing woman who takes care to ensure that her child will be raised by loving parents—the woman usually referred to as a birthmother—also goes through a simultaneous act of adoption and release. Her concern and attention to the infant’s well-being are what ensure its placement in a loving and supportive family; the alternative, a birthgiver who does not express any concern with the child prior to or after its birth, is not often witnessed, and is certainly not present in the literary narratives considered in this project.

1.1.4 Motherlands, Otherlands, Birthlands, Nations

As Boehmer asserts in *Stories of Women*, the term “mother,” in reference to lands and tongues, “invites connotations of origins—birth, hearth, home, roots, the umbilical cord – and

³⁷ It is, however, worth noting that Ruddick’s analysis frames the adoptee as an infant, rendering it difficult to apply in the same way to narratives in which the child is adopted at an older age, unless one is to assume that it is a repeated act, and that one must continually adopt one’s own child through acts of mothering. This is *not* the way that the process is outlined in Ruddick, but presents an interesting area for further speculation.

rests upon the frequent, and some might say ‘natural’, identification of the mother with the beloved earth, the national territory and the first spoken language, the national tongue. In contrast the term fatherland has conventionally lent itself to contexts perhaps more strenuously nationalistic” (27). The motherland, then, is thought of as the place of comfort, just as the absent birth mother is idealized by the adoptees in the fictional works considered in a way that the father generally is not. In the context of transnational adoption, an examination of motherhood necessarily invokes the ideas of a relationship with a motherland.³⁸ In general, I refrain from using the term “motherland” and utilize the term “birth land” instead, but the connotations of this choice must nevertheless be explored. This choice is due to the fact that constructions of motherhood may vary, but the fact of having been born in one place is fixed. Referring to a land as a motherland suggests a relationship between individual and land or nation state extending beyond the mere incident of having been born there, whereas birth land makes this clear.

Caroline Rooney opens her article “‘Dangerous Knowledge’ and the Poetics of Survival: A Reading of *Our Sister Killjoy* and *A Question of Power*,” in Susheila Nasta’s edited collection, *Motherlands: Black Women’s Writing from Africa, the Caribbean and South Asia* (1991), with a reference to the definition of motherland from the Oxford English Dictionary, which defines the motherland simply as “native country” (Rooney 99). She then deconstructs this definition and compares it against the definition for fatherland:

‘Mother’ then functions as a substitute for ‘native’ and a trope for ‘of origin’. It seems then that one could alternatively take ‘fatherland’ which is defined as ‘one’s native land’. However, there is obviously an assymetry [sic]. Fatherland is marked by ownership – ‘one’s’ – whereas motherland is, in comparison, ‘no one’s’. ‘Motherland’ can also be placed next to ‘mothercountry’, defined as: ‘country in relation to its colonies’. ‘-land’ therefore pertains to the native, while ‘-country’ to the colonial relation, which suggests that motherland/native country is only country in terms of terrain, whereas mothercountry, as country-country and not country-land, is proper country, a territory. (99)

When broken down to this degree, the construction of India as a mother figure becomes even more controversial; to be of Mother India is to belong to her, not vice versa. Rooney also links adoption to her definition, noting that “the motherland can be situated in relation to colonial history, where it would signify (a) country belonging to no one, so open to adoption by the colonizing as its other land” (100). Simultaneously mother and child, then, the motherland

³⁸ In most of the texts considered in this work, the “motherland” is India. Mukherjee’s works complicate this somewhat, as In *Jasmine*, India is the nation of origin for the protagonist (not the adoptee), and in *Leave It to Me* the biological mother gives birth in India but is in fact American.

adopts even as it is adopted and relinquishes for adoption. Unfortunately, only one of the texts considered in this project features an adoption to India's colonizer-nation (in this case, Britain), and it is not interrogated in this chapter. However, adoptions to the United States (featured in two of the novels considered in what follows) could be read in some ways as neocolonialist, particularly in relation to the absence of culture keeping practices in those households. Moreover, the United States, in these texts through the acts of the adoptive American parents, and more broadly in a popular context, participates in the economic practices (including those related to adoption) which maintain or fail to address inequality on a global scale. The nation state utilizes their economic powers in myriad ways, and this is refracted through the structure of the adoptive family.

"Motherland," and, indeed, "Mother India," are icons that are raised in some form or another in all of the texts. The most obvious invocation of images of nation as mother are in Gowda's novel when it is declared that "Mother India does not love all of her children equally" (229), hinting at the perceived obligations of the nation to rule and provide for its citizens, while at the same time alluding to the overt wealth discrepancies present in contemporary India. Studied at length by scholars such as Mrinalini Sinha, representations of India as mother-figure predate the independence of contemporary India, and any analysis of constructions of motherhood in India would be incomplete without an examination of such constructions.

In her introduction to *Mother India: Selections from the Controversial 1927 Text* (2000) Mrinalini Sinha asserts that the controversial nature of Katherine Mayo's *Mother India* (1927) is still relevant (1). Referring to Mayo's work as a "polemical attack against Indian self-rule" (1), Sinha notes that it acted as a point of genesis from which many other works of literature were born.³⁹ Central to Mayo's work were issues of sexuality, and she highlights one of India's major problems to be premature maternity, which is one of the reasons for the emphasis on maternity in its title (Sinha 4). Sinha highlights the fact that Mayo's work drew attention to the "woman question" in India, as well as brought issues of gender to the fore in the struggle for Indian independence (28). Mayo's book is neither the only nor the earliest representation of India as Mother figure, but one which sparked an increasing utilization of them term. *Mother India* became an icon of the Indian woman, and "both the tremendous nationalist investment in the figure of the Indian woman, who as the traditional guardian of the spiritual realm, became the very embodiment of Indianness and the exaggerated nationalist claims about the superiority of Indian spirituality over Western materialism" (Sinha 31). In contemporary adoptive

³⁹ According to Sinha, more than fifty books and pamphlets were published in response to Mayo's work, and that it inspired both plays and films of the same name (2).

literature, then, the invocation of Mother India in an examination of poverty and inequality speaks to histories of imperialism, as well as to neo-colonialism. This, in turn, raises questions about the relationship between colonization and adoption, which will be examined further in subsequent chapters.

Sumathi Ramaswamy's *The Goddess and the Nation: Mapping Mother India* (2010) provides a visual overview of the history of Mother India, noting that "she was over time imagined as the substantial embodiment of national territory—its inviolable essence, its shining beacon of hope and liberation – and also a powerful rallying symbol in its long hard struggle for independence from the modern world's largest empire" (1). Tracing the ways that time has altered both the image of Mother India and her reception, Ramaswamy notes that images of the Bharat Mata have taken numerous forms (14-17), but asserts that "her predominant identity is that of a compassionate and nurturing mother figure who gave birth to the millions who were her children, nourished them on her milk, and raised them into patriotic citizens of India" (60). Reading each image in relation to the socio-historical contexts that produced and consumed it, Ramaswamy's work highlights the way that the construction of Mother India is a trope for nationalism. Ramaswamy's text emphasizes the fact that the images are simultaneously timeless and specific, and each embodies at different times the concepts required to rally and unite groups.

Nasta's *Motherlands*, and more recently Lisa Bernstein's anthology *(M)Othering the Nation: Constructing and Resisting National Allegories through the Maternal Body* (2008) also challenge and analyze constructions of the nation of origin as a maternal construct. Importantly, both works look at India in addition to other nations that have been framed as maternal. In her conclusion, "Saving the Motherland?", Bernstein acknowledges that "'Mother Russia,' 'Mother Ireland,' 'Mother India,' and 'Mother Africa' are familiar terms through which we imagine the nation as mother to her citizen-children. From creation myths to symbolic mother countries, fertility goddesses and mothers of religious deities, the maternal body has been used to represent national communities across geographical regions and historical periods" (211). Likewise, in her introduction, Nasta highlights the ways that mother-as-nation tropes intersect with constructions of motherhood and physiological, lived experiences of maternity. She notes that motherhood is a "major concern universally in contemporary women's literature and has obvious reverberations in terms of feminist criticism" (xix). Specifically, Nasta refers to the presence of women's stories that are unwritten and the "notions of the birth of female identity through transference to text and symbol" as being particularly timely as more and more postcolonial narratives come to light (xix). By aligning the construction of Mother India with

the construction of other nations, the essays collected by both Nasta and Bernstein emphasize the pervasiveness of the mother-as-nation framework, as well as the implications it has on people, ideas, and literatures in and of those nations.

That the adopted child from India seeks a relationship with Mother India, and then returns to her new home in the Global North speaks, on the one hand, to the failure of the nation of India to nurture her. On the other hand, the very desire to return and act of returning, examined in greater detail in chapter two, suggests a tie to India that cannot be severed, even by years apart, thereby reaffirming India's status as a mother nation in the same way that birth mothers remain mothers even if they become childless (Modell 86). Moreover, in the specific context of Gowda's novel, Asha finds mothers in India making up for the lack created by Mother India through their hope and hard work for the future. Her overt focus on the ways in which mothers are breaking the cycle of poverty suggests that the power of mothers in India can overcome the power of Mother India, as well as the power of the myth of Mother India in North American consciousness.

1.1.5 Transnational Adoption and Mothering: An Overview

Finally, there exists a growing body of literature on parenting and adoption in transracial and transnational families. Within this body of scholarship are many studies on the roles of mothers in the maintenance of the birth culture. One key scholar in this field is sociologist Heather Jacobson, whose work on culture keeping in transnationally adoptive families forms the basis of the analysis undertaken in the following sub-chapter. Jacobson's *Culture Keeping: White Mothers, International Adoption, and the Negotiation of Family Difference* (2008) deals primarily with Russian and Chinese-adoptive families, but her theories about the preservation of the birth culture still hold largely true within an Indian-adoptive context (such as that found in Gowda's and Kirchner's novels). Jacobson analyses not only the role of mothers in culture-keeping practices, but also the numerous industries that have arisen to help adoptive families maintain cultural ties for their transnationally adopted children.

Many scholars of transnational adoption, but particularly Jacobson, complicate how mothers—Indian and British, North American or Spanish, birth and adoptive—can be read in relation to each other and their children. Shilpi Somaya Gowda's novel, *Secret Daughter*, focuses heavily on the narratives of mothers. Gowda weaves together the stories of Kavita and Jasu, Usha/Asha, and Somer and Krishnan (also referred to as Kris). Born in Dahanu, a village in rural India to Kavita and Jasu, Usha is secretly relinquished for adoption by her mother Kavita

and her aunt Rupa when she is just two days old. Her father is told by the midwife that his infant daughter died in her sleep (233), and this comes as a relief to him, as he had previously sanctioned the infanticide of the couple's first daughter at the hands of his cousin (7, 232), and for financial reasons this daughter was expected to have the same fate. In the United States, American and NRI couple Drs. Somer and Krishnan Thakkar discover that they are unable to have biological children due to the fact that Somer suffers from premature ovarian failure and early menopause (36). The couple decides, at the suggestion of Kris' mother in India, to adopt a child from his homeland, so at just under a year old, Usha/Asha is taken to America. Her name change, which I will discuss later, is accidental but functions symbolically to highlight both Somer's stubbornness and lack of flexibility throughout the adoption process, as well as Asha's re-birth into the Thakkar family.

As Asha grows up, she becomes increasingly interested in returning to India to seek out her birth family. When she is awarded a scholarship for a journalism project in the slums of Mumbai, she jumps at the opportunity to travel to India for the first time to attempt to locate her birth family and to reconnect with the family of her adoptive father. Gowda's novel is unique in that it provides accounts of all three parties of the adoption triad: the birth parents, the adoptive parents, and the adoptee, and it therefore repeatedly constructs and deconstructs hierarchies between families and cultures, while at the same time providing an insightful and unique representation of the challenges and negotiations of self and other inherent in a transnationally adoptive context. Although they never meet, and do not even know each other's names, the relationship between the two mothers is tense, as Somer is resentful towards Kavita, and all of India, for being able to bear the child she so desperately wants to have herself. As a result, Somer prevents Asha from accessing her Indian heritage, despite Kris' family remaining in Mumbai and his mother having played an integral role in the facilitation of the adoption.

By examining the ways in which Gowda's novel essentializes maternity, as well as the ways that Somer works to prevent Asha from integrating with her nation and culture of birth, this chapter seeks to promote greater understanding of the potential for racial and cultural tensions in a transnationally adoptive narrative, even as the characters are granted their happy endings. The emphasis placed on motherhood and mothering reaffirms essentialist constructions of gender despite the fact that Somer, Kavita, and Asha are strong and assertive female characters and the text overtly attempts to raise awareness of the confines of binary constructions of gender. A paradox is thus inherent in Gowda's novel, as the female characters are granted agency only as far as they can manage to work within heteropatriarchal norms in both India and the United States.

Bharti Kirchner's *Shiva Dancing* precedes Gowda's novel by more than ten years, yet addresses many of the same issues. Following an analysis of motherhood in Gowda, I therefore examine the ways in which culture keeping behaviours function in both Kirchner's and Gowda's novels, and how this is influenced by and implicated within the racial politics of the contemporary United States and the broader discourses of multiculturalism. Kirchner's protagonist, Meena, is kidnapped by bandits from her home in rural Rajasthan on her seventh birthday, which also happens to coincide with the date of her marriage. Rescued by a kind train conductor, Meena is taken to the first-class compartment where she meets Mr. and Mrs. Gossett, who take her into their home to save her from ending up in an orphanage. When the police finally locate Meena's village, Mrs. Gossett tells them that Meena does not want to return home, and the couple keeps her in their home in Delhi. Later, they complete the adoption process and take her with them to the United States.

The text features a fairly large gap, jumping from Meena's kidnapping at the age of seven to her thirty-fifth birthday in the span of a few pages. Closely following the death of her mother, the combination of the death of her mother, her thirty-fifth birthday, and troubles in her workplace awaken in her a desire to return to India and seek out her child-husband Vishnu and attempt to locate her birth village. The positioning of the death of Meena's mother as a catalyst for her return to India serves to highlight the ways in which her mother hindered her affiliations with her country of birth, as well as the ways in which Meena allowed herself to be assimilated into the lives of her adoptive family, while her return to seek out her birth mother makes maternity central to the text.

Regardless of being raised by white mothers, both Asha and Meena maintained ties to India after they left; Asha through her adoptive father and Meena through Auntie Bimla, the nanny who the Gossetts hired and brought with them to America. Despite these connections, however, the texts feature an outright resistance on the parts of the mothers towards the maintenance of the birth cultures of the girls which does not coincide with current trends towards preservation of birth culture that are celebrated by contemporary adoption communities. Rather, both narratives construct situations where the mothers are fearful of the daughters returning to their birth lands, and therefore fearful that efforts to promote connections with India will cause them to return.

In direct contrast to these fictional constructions of mothers as resistant to culture keeping practices are the mothers present in Asha Miró's memoir *Daughter of the Ganges* and Sasha Khokha's documentary, *India: Calcutta Calling*. An examination of these texts will therefore conclude this chapter. Miró's memoir includes excerpts from her mother's journals,

which her mother kept from the time of adoption for both of her adopted daughters. In each journal, she chronicled her daughters' experiences, as well as her own emotions and reactions to becoming a mother through transnational adoption. Miró utilizes the excerpts to strengthen her memories of her early adoption, but they also serve to highlight her mother's willingness to engage with her culture of birth and the efforts made by both of her parents to engage with her Indian heritage rather than eschew it. Like Gowda's novel, Miró's memoir documents her experiences as she returns to India for the first and second times to seek out her personal history and her birth family, but ultimately constructs the family as a much more supportive site for the exploration of her personal history.

Along the same vein, Sasha Khokha's documentary follows a group of teenaged girls who return to India for the first time with their adoptive families through the Ties program, an organization which specializes in birthland tourism for adoptees. As the girls are young, they lack the ability to return to India without, at the very least, parental consent, and likely also require significant financial support from their parents to undertake the journey. Thus, the very premise for their trip features a greater parental interest in the preservation of their birth cultures than is evidenced in Gowda's and Kirchner's novels. Through their support of the return journey (in some cases with greater enthusiasm than the daughter), the parents in Khokha's film demonstrate a strong tendency towards culture-keeping in their households, and gratitude towards the biological families of their daughters.

More interesting, still, is the position that the Indian orphanage workers take towards the girls, their biological families, and their positions as adopted Indian-Americans. The references made regarding the biological parents of these girls by the women in India speaks to the ways in which women who relinquish for adoption may be constructed by other women in India, as well as the ways in which a hierarchy of motherhood is created and maintained. Thus, the works considered represent many different kinds of mothers who engage in a wide range of parenting practices. The fictional adoptive mothers, as constructed by diasporic Indian women writers, fail to characterize the nuanced emotions of gratitude, awe, and pride in relation to their child's nation of birth that are evidenced by the writings by and featuring real-world adoptive families. Instead, birth mothers are sympathized with (more so in Gowda's novel than in Kirchner's), adoptive mothers are constructed as ignorant at best and racist at worst, and adoptees are constructed as conflicted about the roles of the various women in their lives. The following chapter seeks, therefore, to analyze and compare the trends in the representations of motherhood in the fictional and non-fictional works considered with works by feminist and

adoption scholars to work towards a framework for understanding the relationship between diaspora, nation, maternity, and adoption.

1.2 Feminism and Foil: Reading Maternity in Shilpi Somaya Gowda's *Secret Daughter*

Shilpi Somaya Gowda's novel, *Secret Daughter*, highlights the many different types of mothering that may be undertaken in different cultural locations. As previously noted, the novel is largely sympathetic to the plights of all the female characters, framing both Indian and American mothers as victims of different but equally pervasive forms of patriarchal oppression; the women are framed as fighting different battles of the same war. The heterosexual family unit is vital to the text, and the narratives of mothers make up the bulk of the novel. More than simply featuring characters who happen to be mothers, the motherhoods that are constructed in Gowda's novel are central to the progression of the plot and the development of the story. Each mother in the novel shapes her identity around her role as mother, and an inherent comparison between different mothering styles and positions is implied. Adoptive mother Somer and biological mother Kavita are central, but so too is the character of Sarla, the mother of adoptive father Krishnan. Somer and Kavita function as foils for one another, and even their own mothers are invoked at similar points in the narrative to provide points of contrast. The mothers that Asha interviews in the slum are also significant, as they further help to shape her understandings of the roles of the women in her life, as well as the ways that women in India may unite to combat poverty. This group of mothers challenges Asha's understandings of poverty and family, ultimately allowing her to come to terms with her adopted position. Through the juxtaposing of various types of motherhood and maternity, and the eventual privileging of the American adoptive family over the Indian family (either adoptive or biological), *Secret Daughter* not only champions adoption but reaffirms "the American Dream" by highlighting suffering, poverty, and inequality in an Indian context.

Within the novel, Gowda first constructs and then deconstructs feminist notions of motherhood and maternity by assessing issues such as the glass ceiling and the double (or triple) shifts that working women in the West may have to complete if they want to have thriving families and careers. At the same time, she constructs equal but different struggles for the Indian mother characters, who face their own career and home challenges. Somer and Kavita's lives are aligned as foils for each other, as each "milestone" that one of the characters achieves is matched by a similar achievement on the part of the other woman. Gowda's work seems, on the surface, to unite the plights of women around the world, bridging locations, classes, cultures,

and religions. Closer analysis, however, reveals a hierarchy of experience which privileges Somer even as she remains ignorant to the culturally specific needs and desires of her husband and daughter. Although her engagements with India, as well as her attempts at self-actualization, are shallow and commercial, they are nonetheless celebrated within the text.

Somer and Kavita's experiences are parallel from their pregnancies to their career/job changes, concerns over their mothers' health, and through their own experiences with illness. Where Somer succeeds and flourishes, Kavita struggles and fails, and the text ultimately constructs the United States and the blended American family as a site of success, while the lower-class Indian family is the site of unending suffering and untimely death.⁴⁰ Moreover, Somer's narrative physically interrupts Kavita's; each day of Kavita's life is interrupted by a day in Somer's, sometimes with a gap of several months.⁴¹ Although Gowda does not directly identify the date of each scene, each chapter is preceded by a title, a year, and a location. These shifts in time and place, and the fact that Kavita's days are interrupted by Somer's more often than Somer's are interrupted by Kavita's suggests that Somer's life is both more important *and* moving at a faster pace. The novel therefore perpetuates stereotypes of India as poverty-stricken, frozen in the past, and particularly cruel towards women, who are constructed to have minimal agency. At the same time, the portrayal of Somer's occasional feminist thoughts juxtaposed against Kavita's suffering suggests that Western feminism can provide reprieve for women in developing countries; this is the very notion that third-world and transnational feminists have worked against. Finally, the novel's conclusion, with Somer, Asha, and Krishnan leaving India together on airplane while Kavita lies on her deathbed, ignored by her prodigal son, reaffirms the notion of the American Dream as the Thakkar family flies away towards a happy ending while the Merchant family continues to suffer.

Following the prologue, the novel opens with Kavita Merchant entering the village birthing hut in Dahanu, India to give birth.⁴² Readers are made immediately aware that this is

⁴⁰ Caste may also be a factor, but is never invoked within the text and is therefore difficult to ascertain. The upper-class Indian families, such as Krishnan's biological family in Mumbai, do not address the role that caste plays in their economic position, though some of the discrepancies, such as the presence and employment of servants, highlight their upper-caste status, and Asha's reflections on poverty and economic inequalities gesture towards acknowledging this.

⁴¹ For example, chapters 1-3 ("Dawn of Mourning" Kavita-Dahanu-1984, "Clean" Somer-San Francisco-1984, "Never Again"-Kavita-Dahanu-1984) may be the same day, while chapter four ("Without Much Effort" Somer-San Francisco-1984) is an unspecified later date, chapters five and seven ("A Long Journey" Kavita-Dahanu-1984, "Shanti"-Kavita-Bombay-1984) are clearly only one day later than chapters one and three, and chapter six (A Fair Assumption- Somer- San Francisco- 1984) is overtly identified as a few months following her miscarriage (27).

⁴² Gowda's prologue is, in fact, an almost verbatim copy of a scene from near the end of the novel in which Jasu goes to the orphanage where Asha was placed to inquire about her whereabouts in an effort to please his dying wife (2, 336-337). The only difference in the two is the final sentence, where in the later example, Arun Deshpande is introduced by name and in the prologue he is simply described as the "man behind the desk" (2).

Kavita's second child, and that the first was the victim of female infanticide. Kavita prays that this child will be a boy so that she does not have to endure the loss of another child (6). Before the birth is completed, the next chapter begins, taking readers to California and the home of Somer and Krishnan Thakkar, who are also experiencing their second pregnancy. Instead of giving birth, as Kavita is, however, Somer is experiencing the pain of miscarriage, which also mirrors her experiences with her first pregnancy. By structuring the two narratives as direct parallels to each other, Gowda not only links the two mothers, but also sets the stage for bringing the two women together as mothers of the same child. This results in privileging Somer as Kavita's loss becomes her gain, but at the same time places her in a position of uncertainty and instability, as she is unclear about her role as adoptive mother and is therefore unable to negotiate the invisible relationship she perceives between Kavita and herself.

The abrupt nature of the shift from Kavita's narrative to Somer's highlights the unexpectedness of her miscarriage, but also invokes a comparison between the two women over whose suffering is greater, and encourages a comparison between the settings in which the two women exist. The text shifts to Somer's narrative not directly from Kavita's present activities, but from her reverie of the time following the loss of her first child. Kavita's chapter ends with an example of her experiences of agency: the times in which she asserted autonomy over her own body and subverted the culturally inscribed power of her husband through manipulating his food and denying him sex. By shifting from a loss that was beyond Kavita's control due to social constraints to one that was beyond Somer's control for biological reasons, a false dichotomy is constructed; the two women's losses are staged as equal when in fact they stem from two vastly different situations. Reading this comparison as an attempt to unite the two women endeavours to erase the differences between Kavita and Somer and unite them in a commonality that is not really there; although both women struggle and their struggles are related to their biological ability to bear children, their situations are the products of two different socio-historical contexts.

The chapters which follow feature the same sort of interjection of Somer's life into Kavita's, further perpetuating this dichotomy. Just a day after she gives birth, Kavita sets out for Mumbai with her sister Rupa to deliver Asha (then called Usha) to an orphanage in Mumbai. This act is bisected by Somer's attendance at a baby shower for her friend in America. Though the text notes that a few months have passed since Somer's miscarriage (27), the scene interrupts Kavita's ride to the orphanage and her actual encounters there, as happened in the birth scene. Gowda's break from linearity pushes Somer's narrative ahead of Kavita's, while still attempting to parallel the two; several months have passed in Somer's life while only a day

has passed in Kavita's life. Thus, Somer's narrative is allowed to progress at a faster rate than Kavita's, and this reflects a form of stasis or frozenness and the inability to progress in Kavita's Indian narrative. This, in turn, highlights the ways in which some of the practices portrayed in Kavita's community (such as female infanticide) are framed by the West as evidence of backwardness, ignoring some of the complex and longstanding cultural implications and significances of these actions.⁴³ Instead of the celebration witnessed at the baby shower Somer attends, Asha's birth warrants a different kind of bonding between women, as Kavita's sister takes her to the orphanage in Mumbai to relinquish the baby. By interrupting one of the most central days of Kavita's and Usha/Asha's life with ordinary days from Somer's life, the text firmly asserts that her narrative is not only more important, but that a mundane day at her office or her attendance at a baby shower is of equal significance to Kavita's difficult journey to Mumbai and the relinquishment of her child.

Gowda's portrayal of Kavita likewise embodies one of the central points made by Maithreyi Krishnaraj in the introduction to the anthology *Motherhood in India: Glorification Without Empowerment* (2010). Krishnaraj writes: "Reading through the various views on motherhood, one is driven to the conclusion that motherhood invites glorification but no empowerment. The real life conditions of mothering in terms of pre-natal and post-natal care, give the lie to the exalted position a mother is supposed to have" (6). The works contained in Krishnaraj's collection highlight the same paradoxes that are portrayed in Gowda's novel: women are understood to be important participants in family and community life, but not given power in decision making processes. Jasu's treatment of Kavita echoes this, as he secretly acknowledges that he "would have frittered away his family's money and his own life were it not for Kavita ... most of their fortune is really due to her" (231). Even in her husband's eyes, then, Kavita is glorified and revered, but her treatment from him and others in their community does not reflect this, as she has minimal power within the household and continues to defer to him for important decisions, as she was told to by her mother (92).

As a result of her multiple miscarriages, Somer also reflects extensively on the status of mothers and maternity, at times invoking rhetorics of feminism, and at other times blatantly contradicting herself. Although Kavita does not have the same sort of reflections, the position within the text—in close proximity to Kavita's struggles with the pervasive preference for male children in her community—invites the reader to make her or his own comparisons about the

⁴³ It is worth noting that Gowda *does* situate the practices that she portrays in relation to local customs and the potential socio-economic realities of her characters, potentially rendering readers sympathetic towards them and absolving them of blame. Jasu, for example, is haunted by his actions towards his first daughter, but is constructed to have been without the means or agency to behave in any other way (230-233).

roles of women in reproduction in the two communities discussed. These reflections begin after the miscarriage scene (12), and continue well past the aforementioned baby shower. Somer notes that, at least biologically, motherhood “seems so easy for everyone else” and deduces that “maybe [she is] just not meant to be a mother” because she cannot carry a baby to term (12). When she attends the baby shower for her friend, she is overcome with emotion and has to leave; “[s]he sits down on the street curb. She cannot face it all again ... She can’t listen to women discussing stretch marks and labor pains as rites of passage. Everyone acts as if being a woman and a mother are inextricably intertwined. A fair assumption, since she made it herself. Only now does she know it’s an enormous lie” (29). This realization on the part of Somer sets the stage for her engagements with feminist debates about mothering and motherhood that permeate the text as she attempts to come to terms with her roles as a woman who is unable to bear children (who is no less a woman for it), and as an adoptive parent. Both women are constructed as having been disenfranchised by patriarchal societal norms (Somer by a community which made it difficult for her to be a doctor and a mother, and Kavita by a community which deems that she must be a mother of sons), but their challenges are altogether different.

Aside from providing a point of comparison against which to assess the emotional trauma a woman may experience when losing a wanted pregnancy (as Somer did), the baby shower scene also highlights the way that a specific type of middle and upper-class maternity is constructed and consumed in a North American context, creating a paradox. On the one hand, birth and maternity are framed within the text as something natural and inherent, evidenced by Somer’s direct commentary on the matter. On the other hand, however, Gabby’s baby shower highlights the way that pregnancy is constructed as an accomplishment, something to be celebrated, a cause for a party. The creation of spectacle for something constructed as “natural” and “inherent” reinforces Somer’s assertion that these constructions are “a lie.”⁴⁴ It is also juxtaposed against the lack of celebration for Asha’s birth to Kavita, which is not even acknowledged by members of her community due to the fact that the child was female. More than merely highlighting differences, these two scenes provide direct commentary on the excesses of one community in relation to the perceived lack in the other.

That Gabby’s baby will be a boy is also made quite clear (27), and is juxtaposed with Somer’s wondering about the gender of the child in a dream she had from waking up after the

⁴⁴ Diane Negra’s *What a Girl Wants: Fantasizing the Reclamation of Self in Postfeminism* (2009) addresses the baby shower in relation to other milestones marked by consumption and “female identity legitimization”, such as sweet sixteen parties and hen parties (50).

surgery following her miscarriage,⁴⁵ which further highlights the loss that she felt after her miscarriage and the significance of the life that she had built around it (10). This then invokes a comparison between Somer's desire for *any* child and the overt preference for sons in Kavita and Jasu's community, a preference around which they build their life. In comparison to Somer's question which is posed without preference, and Gabby's child which would have likely been celebrated regardless of sex, Jasu's rage in reaction to the realization that his wife has given birth to a second female child seems even more extreme. The celebration in one scene is framed in direct comparison to the condemned practices of female infanticide and pronounced patrilinearity, once again perpetuating a negative view of India. This is not, of course, to say that female infanticide should remain unchallenged or be condoned, but rather that Gowda's juxtaposing once again highlights the false dichotomies that the novel creates or invites readers to create.

A few months after her second miscarriage and Gabby's baby shower, Somer and Krishnan go to see a fertility specialist in hopes of getting to the root of their inability to conceive, as they had been told following the miscarriage that they would be able to continue trying to have a child and had not been successful (10, 34). Once again addressing the unnaturalness of their actions, it is noted that Somer "was tired of waiting for nature to take its course, fed up with opening a bottle of wine every month as her consolation prize for another negative pregnancy test" (34), and it is here that Somer learns that she is experiencing early menopause (36). She reflects on this: "By the time she reaches the age of thirty-two, she will no longer have the ability to bear children, the one thing that defines her as a woman. *What will I be then?* She has spent her whole life competing with the boys, compensating for her femininity, tempting fate it would seem" (36). As this reflection comes *after* her assertion that "being a woman and a mother are [not] inextricably intertwined" (29), it is evidence of the conflicting rational and emotional thoughts that she is experiencing. It is possible that the narratives are presented in a non-linear manner, as both are only identified as months after the miscarriage, but this would go against the linearity that is present in Kavita's narrative, and throughout the rest of the text. Although the parallel narratives of Kavita, Asha, and Somer are non-linear in relation to each other, each individual narrative seems to flow chronologically,

⁴⁵ It is assumed that she has had a dilation and curettage procedure to remove the miscarried foetus; this is suggested by the combination of her need to wake up from surgery, as well as Dr. Hayworth's assessment that she is "clean" (11) and Somer's reflection that twenty babies were born "while her dead baby was being scraped out of her" (12). Gowda's refusal to name the procedure, in a text in which the medical profession is so pertinent, highlights the silencing and taboos surrounding discussions of women's fertility. She further draws attention to this fact when she notes that attention and sympathy from Somer's friends and family tapered off in the first few weeks following her miscarriage (45).

which suggests that Somer does in fact feel conflicted about her gender identity in relation to her ability to bear children.

Motherhood remains a concept which affects all women (either through their decision about whether or not they wish to be mothers or their inability to execute such a choice), and it is not surprising that Gowda also uses motherhood to unite her two female characters. More specifically, just as she parallels their physical pregnancies and their ascension into motherhood (as Kavita learns that she will be able to keep her third child at around the same chronological time that Somer finally obtains Asha from the orphanage), Gowda also frames the actions of both women around a rhetoric of choice. Where Somer executes her choice to mother, against her physical capabilities, Kavita is granted a lesser choice: continue trying for a son, or mar her body to prevent future pregnancies as her only way to exercise reproductive agency against the will of her husband (16). Krishnan tells Somer that they “have other options” (33), while Kavita’s options are framed as limited and exacerbate the differences between the two women even as their lives are constructed as being so similar. Somer’s miscarriage, surrounded by plush towels and running water, is juxtaposed against Kavita’s birth in a crude hut, isolated from the others in her village where she muffles her cries. As Kavita gives birth, her voice “no longer resembles a human voice. [Her] body is no longer her body, it is driven by primal impulses that belong to the earth, the trees, the air” (13); this essentializes the very motherhood that eludes Somer and naturalizes the process that she speaks out against.

Moreover, as Somer undergoes the medical testing to determine whether or not she can conceive a child, Kavita and Jasu seek medical attention in a neighbouring village to determine the sex of their unborn third child, ostensibly also covertly deciding whether or not the child should be allowed to live. Due to the fact that Kavita is found to be pregnant with a son, the text stops short of actually portraying sex-selective abortion, but outlines that the practice exists and is only thinly veiled by the suggestion that ultrasounds are to check health rather than determine sex (42). A practice that is condemned on the global stage, sex-selective abortion in India is addressed again later in the novel by Asha, who is presented with articles on several aspects of gender-based violence and inequality by her mentor Meena at *The Times of India* office (185-186). A further sense of irony is added when Meena tells Asha that India is “a five-star pile of contradictions... Some people like to demonize India for her weaknesses, others only glorify her strengths. The truth, as always, lies somewhere in between” (186). Although Gowda’s novel may be attempting to fall in the middle, the successful and happy ending that is granted to the American families in the face of the suffering on the part of Kavita and Jasu

serves to highlight the many ways that the system in India fails, while at the same time reaffirms the American Dream and ignores the struggles that many immigrant groups face in America.⁴⁶

As she grapples with the news that she will not be able to bear children, Somer reflects on her role as a woman and the differences between the sexes in America in the late 1980s. Her thoughts at this moment, which once again minimize the roles of women and the differences between the sexes to only the ability to bear children, go against both her personal assertion that she can “compete with the boys” by becoming a doctor and her previously asserted stance that bearing children is not necessarily synonymous with being a woman. More interesting, however, is that Somer is a pediatrician, while Krishnan is a neurosurgeon, suggesting that she could not compete, as neurosurgery is a highly specialized and competitive field, and pediatrics is seen as being more akin to general practice. References to the increased demands of his job in comparison to hers are emphasized at two points within the novel. First, when the couple applies for residency programs, Somer notes that she had a one in ten chance of being successful in her application for Pediatrics at The University of California at San Francisco, while his odds were “[d]efinitely lower” (22). Later, when the text grants insight into Krishnan’s thoughts, it is noted that he “finds it hard to feign interest in runny noses and muscle sprains after dealing with brain tumours and aneurysms all day” (117). Without discounting the valuable work that a pediatrician may do, popular constructions of medicine typically place more value on physicians who are more specialized, and they are usually compensated accordingly. By casting Somer as a pediatrician and Krishnan as a neurosurgeon, the novel reinforces the same links between women and children that Somer seeks to dispel. Somer’s specialization is constructed as a deliberate choice that she has made; however, her struggles following Asha’s adoption cause her to re-think even this choice, as she accepts a job at a local community clinic doing largely unspecialized work.

Moreover, Somer’s reflections on her role as a doctor highlight the problematic nature of her feminist ideologies. Rather than promoting inclusivity and opportunity for all women, Somer emphasizes the fact that she is different: “She was raised to believe her gender didn’t have to handicap her aspirations. She spent her career thinking she wasn’t like other women” (29-30). It is here that the postfeminist ideologies of the text are most present, and here that the novel most solidly affirms its situatedness within the genre of Mommy Lit as, according to Harzewski “[t]he mommy lit protagonist experiences conflict between self-development and her responsibilities toward the family unit” (170). Likewise, by suggesting that she was

⁴⁶ A brief reference is made to the fact that the Krishnan’s family wealth in India does not go as far as in the United States, and that he experienced homesickness and difficulty due to his accent, but by and large his transition to the United States is presented as smooth and uncomplicated (57, 241).

different than other women in her aspirations, Somer removes either agency or ambition from a vast grouping of “other” women. In so doing, she not only suggests that women who are not doctors or other professionals are either unable or unwilling to achieve as much as she did, but also ostracizes herself even as she claims to want what is “so easy for everyone else” (12).

Essentially, Somer invokes a convenient model of feminism that is both problematic and overt within the narrative which allows her to see herself as better and more progressive than her contemporaries. These assertions are in line with the rhetorics of postfeminist culture which “does not allow us to make straightforward distinctions between progressive and regressive texts. Nevertheless, it urgently requires us to develop new reading strategies to counteract the popularized feminism, figurations of female agency, and canny neutralization of traditional feminist critiques in its texts” (Tasker and Negra 22). Somer’s identifications with feminism, and her efforts to utilize feminist discourse are not negated by her becoming a mother. On the contrary, the novel embodies a hyperbolic articulation of the challenges faced by women, particularly those who desire both a career and children, in the contemporary postfeminist era.

Ironically, after becoming a mother, Somer sinks to a field of medicine she considers to be less impressive than her previous position as a pediatrician. Originally invoked as evidence of her love of children, Somer’s specialization and her shift from pediatrics to community medicine draws attention to the complicated state of contemporary women in the US workforce. On the one hand, her position as a doctor engaged in research and complex diagnoses of uncommon illnesses highlights the fact that more and more women are attending universities and enrolling in the ever-growing STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Medicine) fields. However, her struggles to manage child-rearing and a career draw attention to the fact that she is still being forced to choose between her career and her family, ultimately making career sacrifices to be able to spend more time with Asha. This becomes most evident when, later in Asha’s life, Somer

rushes to pick Asha up from school, where she is known only as ‘Asha’s mom’ by the other mothers, who seem to all spend a lot of time together. Somer has no time for the PTA and bake sales. She has no time for herself. Her profession no longer defines her, but neither does being a mother. Both are pieces of her, and yet they don’t seem to add up to a whole. Somer didn’t know that having it all, as she always believed she would, would mean feeling like she’s falling short everywhere. She tries to reassure herself that life is about trade-offs and she

should make her peace with this one, though more often than not, it is an uneasy peace. (98)

This feeling of failure is even more evident when Somer runs into an old colleague at the hospital who makes a condescending remark about doctors who deal with common ailments such as coughs and colds, the very illnesses Somer sees on a daily basis in her job at the clinic (97). Somer's thoughts echo the assertions made by Betty Friedan, encapsulating the entirety of the feminine mystique; "The feminine mystique permits, even encourages, women to ignore the question of their identity. The mystique says they can answer the question 'Who am I?' by saying 'Tom's wife ... Mary's mother'. [...] The truth is [...] an American woman no longer has a private image to tell her who she is, or can be, or wants to be" (63). By reading Somer in relation to Betty Friedan's work, and against the struggles of Kavita, her class and cultural location become even more prominent.

Moreover, Somer's use of the term "mom," as opposed to "mother" is significant when one considers her construction of self in relation to the way that others perceive her throughout the text. In other words, it is noteworthy that the others refer to her as Asha's mom, rather than Asha's mother, due to the fact that, as outlined by Susan Douglas and Meredith Michaels in *The Mommy Myth: The Idealization of Motherhood and How it has Undermined Women* (2004):

'Mom' – a term previously used only by children – doesn't have the authority of 'mother,' because it addresses [women] from a child's-eye view. It assumes a familiarity, an approachability, to mothers that is, frankly, patronizing; ... 'Mom' sounds very user-friendly, but the rise of it, too, keeps us in our place, reminding us that we are defined by our relationships to kids, not to adults. (19-20)

In contrast, Somer constructs herself and the mothers she sees in her practice at work, using the word "mother" rather than "mom," thus granting them a respect and authority that is seemingly denied to her by the other mothers (12, 17, 18, 38). Significantly, Somer's role as an American woman, integral to my analysis of culture keeping in the following section, makes her simultaneously relatable to a very specific reading audience and also highly utilitarian. By privileging Somer's reflections on these issues within the text, Gowda draws attention to the plight of the upwardly mobile American woman, which she contrasts against the image of the upwardly mobile Indian family, exemplified by both Krishnan's family (already wealthy), and Kavita and Jasu, who seek greater wealth and comfort in Mumbai.

That Somer makes career sacrifices for her family (and that Krishnan does not), is therefore quite obvious. These sacrifices, however, are juxtaposed once again against Kavita's suffering and the sacrifices she makes—first as she works in the fields in Dahanu and then later as she takes on domestic work in the home of a benevolent mistress who makes accommodations for her maternal obligations. While Somer's struggles are altogether different than Kavita's the two are presented as parallel to each other by virtue of the fact that both women work hard to provide for their children and families. By attempting to unite the two women through their struggles, however, Gowda's text erases vital differences between their situations, and unites women as mothers above all else. Struggle as she might, Kavita cannot get ahead and provide for her son Vijay, while Somer and Krishnan are able to send Asha to a prestigious private school and later an Ivy League University. Vijay's life of crime and poor treatment of his parents not only punishes Kavita and Jasu for relinquishing their daughter and taking Vijay to Mumbai, but also parallels, to a degree, Asha's resentment towards her adoptive parents for being unable to give her information about her birth family. Whereas Asha eventually comes to terms with the decisions made by her parents, however, Vijay continues his journey towards the life of crime and away from his family, thus granting Somer the peace that Kavita so desperately longs for.

The character of Sarla, Krishnan's mother, adds a further layer of complexity to any reading of maternity in Gowda's novel. Her presence in the text makes it clear that not all Indian women struggle the way that Kavita does, and highlights the vast variations in wealth within urban India.⁴⁷ However, she also functions as a cultural mediator for Asha and Somer, as well as the reading audience. There are only two points within the novel when the reading audience is invoked in the second person, and the first of which is in a chapter dedicated to Sarla:

Sarla had always longed for a daughter, some female company in this house full of men. ... Being a woman in India is an altogether different experience. You can't always see the power women hold, but it is there, in the firm grasp of the matriarchs who still rule most families. It has not been easy for Sarla to navigate the female path: she has become a master traveler, but one with no pupil. (59)

Through the use of the second-person "you" in lieu of the more formal "one," readers are brought into the novel, as though the narrative must convince an outside readership of the power that women in India hold in spite of the suffering that is portrayed throughout the rest of the text.

⁴⁷ That Sarla's family performs this role is made quite obvious when Meena tells Asha that her father's family belongs to one India, and her interview subjects in Dharavi another (189).

Sarla's second-person address to the readers also firmly positions the reading audience as one which is outside of India and therefore in need of these further explanations. Gowda goes to great lengths to construct a portrayal of India that is accessible to Western audiences, providing simplified descriptions of everything from Partition (238) to the sari (198), as well as including a "Foreign Terms Glossary" (343-346). While the inclusion of a glossary is not noteworthy in and of itself, the labeling of such a feature as foreign further alienates and exoticizes India for the Western readership. Furthermore, by failing to characterize *which* Indian language the terms come from, the vast linguistic variations within India are erased,⁴⁸ and India is positioned as highly monolithic—one "foreign" text in the face of one "same" audience. At the same time, by including a glossary labeled as foreign, Gowda's text becomes positioned as staunchly for those who are unfamiliar with all aspects of Indian culture rather than readers who are more familiar with Indian cultures.

The final group of mothers who are relevant to understanding constructions of maternity in Gowda's novel are those who Asha interviews in Dharavi for her journalism project. These women are not given names within the text, though it is noted that Asha "asks Parag to write down the names of all the mothers they speak to" (290), thus acknowledging their individuality for the purposes of Asha's documentary, but not for the reader of Gowda's novel. These women are the catalysts that cause Asha to understand the actions of her own birth mother as acts of love and sacrifice rather than abandonment or discardment, and make her grateful for the life that Somer and Krishnan have given her. In addition, rather than highlighting inequality and despair, the text utilizes the mothers who live in the slum to highlight the fact that women as mothers share many similarities. It is also through the mothers in the slum that Asha comes to understand her relationship with Somer, and she acknowledges that Somer, as her non-biological mother, is making maternal sacrifices for a stranger. Somer's sacrifices and struggles, as an adoptive mother, are therefore once again confirmed as superior through a direct comparison with an economically disadvantaged woman in India.

It is also when describing Asha's portrayal of these mothers that the reader is invoked in the second person for the second and final time. After Somer views Asha's film, it is noted that "Asha managed to find hope in the most unlikely place. In the midst of the poverty and despair of the slums, she showed the fierceness of a mother's love. And how we're really all the same in that way" (321). This declaration is not directly identified as something that Somer

⁴⁸ It is noted throughout the text the Krishnan speaks Hindi and Gujarati, but the setting of the novel in Mumbai also invites the possibility of Marathi (the state language of Maharashtra). The cosmopolitan nature of the city of Mumbai also makes it possible for any other language to be overheard or spoken by those with whom Asha interacts.

was thinking or feeling, but is made as a broad statement, much like the previously discussed invocation of the second person when Sarla discusses the power of Indian women. By asserting that “we’re really all the same” as mothers, the text once again suggests that the reading audience may have doubted this fact, and positions the novel as one which is most likely to be read by women and mothers. Thus, it takes on an explanatory air as it becomes an instructive text about life in India for Western consumers and invites the reader to identify with Somer rather than the Indian women in the novel.

Furthermore, it is therefore noteworthy that this second person address comes from Somer. Somer and Sarla, as upper-class women, are granted the ability to address the reader directly, while Kavita is not. As a birth mother and a woman of lower socio-economic status, Kavita’s silence in relation to the reader suggests that although she may have fought for a voice in her own community, she still lacks an avenue with which to address the upper class and/or Western women, including the woman her daughter has become. This is further exemplified through the fact that Asha, having been raised in the United States, is able to leave a message for Kavita and Jasu, while they are not able to contact her. As a birth mother and a member of first the rural poor and then the urban poor of India, Kavita is not allowed to speak across borders, even in a novel which invites her to tell her story.

Gowda’s treatment of Indian women could be read as a criticism on the systems of oppression that lead to their situations, and the sympathy with which the characters of Kavita, Jasu, and the mothers in the slum are treated supports such a reading. Kavita and Jasu must adhere to the many norms and practices that they disagree with but situate as tradition, and both characters are framed as victims of these systems. The fact that Kavita and Jasu are only able to achieve financial stability when their son takes to dealing drugs also invokes sympathy, and evokes a critical reading of contemporary Mumbai and India. Kavita’s act of defiance (delivering Asha to the orphanage and lying to her husband) is the only thing that brings her comfort on her death bed, and this supports a reading of the empowerment of Indian women. Similarly, the mothers in the slum cite hard work as a way out of their poverty as they struggle to send their children to school and allow them to have better lives. However, the narrative ends before they are able to realize that goal: the struggle has no visible end point, despite the widely invoked concept of hope. Moreover, where Kavita and, to a degree, Sarla, must endure the loss of their children to the United States, Somer regains her daughter and leaves India, having gotten what she came to India for. By staging Kavita and Somer as foils for one another, and tracking their lives along similar trajectories with very different outcomes, the text paints a picture of life in India in which women who are mothers cannot succeed.

The culmination of Somer and Asha's narratives in the novel firmly positions the United States, as the adoptive nation, and Somer, as the adoptive mother, as being superior. The final scenes depict Somer, Krishnan, and Asha leaving India on an airplane, mimicking the journey that they took when they first brought Asha home, and Kavita dying in her apartment in Mumbai (a full four years after Asha, Somer, and Krishnan's departure) (336). Despite the passage of time, made obvious only through the chapter sub-titles, Kavita's pending death coincides with Asha's realization that Somer has been a good mother to her and has done the best that she could; since she is no longer needed in Asha's life narrative, she fades away. At the same time, Sarla, also an Indian woman, suffers the loss of her husband and the recognition that her son belongs to Somer in America now. Her class prevents her from enduring the kind of suffering that Kavita must, but like Kavita she also loses her child to the American Dream. Through the use of parallel structures in which one narrative ends happily and the other does not, *Secret Daughter* constructs a simplified, moderately Orientalized picture of India for Western consumption, and champions transnational adoption for the American-adoptive parents, while simultaneously victimizing the Indian woman.

1.3 White Mothers, Other Mothers: Culture Keeping and Maternity in *Secret Daughter* and *Shiva Dancing*

The previous sub-chapter asserts that *Secret Daughter* privileges Somer and American adoptive motherhood through the ways that her narrative quite literally interrupts Kavita's repeatedly throughout the novel, and also through the ways that she is successful and comfortable while Kavita suffers. However, an examination of the ways that motherhood is represented in the novel would not be complete without an examination of the ways that Somer, as an adoptive mother, is also framed in a negative light and acts in ways that can be understood as racist at worst and Orientalizing at best. Somer has a pervasive fear of India that appears throughout the novel and shapes her interactions with Krishnan's family, the Indian community, and Asha. This same fear is present in Bharti Kirchner's novel, *Shiva Dancing*, as the death of the adoptive mother becomes a driving force for the protagonist's return to India. The fear of India, as the natal homeland of their daughters, runs counter to the notions of culture keeping as a current trend in transnationally adoptive families. Instead a relationship of fear and distrust between the adoptive mothers in the United States and the biological families in India, is promoted, as is a fear of India as a country.

Jacobson's *Culture Keeping* summarizes and analyzes various culture keeping practices undertaken in American Russian- and Chinese-adoptive families. Drawing on the work of Sara Dorow, Jacobson notes that adopted children are "both object and subject in" the adoption process (Jacobson 90), and highlights how children can be simultaneously commoditized and constructed as legitimized members of the adopting family. About adoptees, Jacobson poetically asserts: "As she moves between countries, she is seen to transform. She first 'belongs' to one context and then to another. She is seen to embody this bifurcated history and to have, therefore, a bifurcated identity" (90). Jacobson further provides insightful analysis of a mother's role in culture keeping in post-international adoptive families; Somer's and Abby's fears of India can therefore be read against the norms and practices outlined by Jacobson. Gowda's and Kirchner's portrayals of adoptive mothers as xenophobic and "bio" phobic⁴⁹ thus challenge notions of adoption as an easy solution for childlessness and as an altruistic act. It brings to the fore the power that adoptive parents have over their adopted children, particularly in regard to cultural affiliation, consumption, and production.

Importantly, Jacobson also frames culture keeping in her work as a task most often undertaken by mothers, noting that although "culture keeping is posed as a necessary component of adoptive *parenting* ... the experiences of the women in [her] study attest to the ways in which culture keeping is not shared by men and women but rather is experienced as a distinct *mothering* duty" (8, emphasis in original). Jacobson further notes that men often redirected her towards their wives for discussions about the family's cultural practices, highlighting both her desires to frame the practice as a family one, and the necessity to regard it as an issue affecting primarily mothers. Significantly, the informants in her study were primarily white middle-class adoptive mothers, rendering them quite similar to the mothers in both of the novels being considered. The literary mothers in question (Gowda's Somer and Kirchner's Abby) act in opposition to the norms present in many contemporary adoptive communities, instead creating adoptive families in which one culture and nation is constructed as indefinitely superior to another. Although Charles Gossett, Meena's adoptive father, would have also had a say in her cultural affiliation and upbringing, his character does not have the same presence within the text, and it is therefore Abby Gossett who is portrayed as responsible for Meena's limited affiliations with India growing up. Similarly, Krishnan's Indian heritage in

⁴⁹ In this context, I use the term "bio" phobic to explain the pervasive fear of the adoptive mothers in these novels that their daughters may return to their biological families. To the best of my knowledge, this term has not been used in this manner by any other scholar but, I feel, adequately describes the relationship between adoptive and biological mothers, as portrayed in this text. The irrationality of the fears of the mothers that they will lose their adult daughters to women in India is central to my understanding of this phenomenon as a phobia rather than a simple fear or concern.

Gowda's novel is not enough to allow Asha to access her Indian self, as Somer seems to have unwavering control over the affiliations of her daughter, including her social activities *and* what she is allowed to do with Krishnan. These two novels therefore reinforce culture keeping as a mothering duty in the contemporary transnationally adoptive American household, at the same time reinforcing patriarchal norms about childcare.

This is not, however, to suggest that transnational adoption, either in reality or as it is portrayed in these works, is rooted in racism or that families who choose not to maintain ties to the birth family or nation are racist. Rather, the intention is to highlight the dynamics of power at play in transnational adoption, as well as the identity politics that must be negotiated by and in adoptive families, particularly in regards to the relationships between mothers and daughters. Central to both Gowda's and Kirchner's work, the complex relationship between adoptive family and natal culture, and the adoptees' emotional ties to their natal homeland, reaffirms the utility of undertaking a reading of the adoptee through a diasporic framework.

Jacobson defines "culture keeping" as the attempts made by internationally adoptive parents to "cultivate ethnic connections for their internationally adopted children" (1). She further notes that: "Culture keeping has become standard practice within the adoption community. ...[C]ulture keeping is framed as a mechanism for facilitating a solid ethnic identity and sense of self-worth in children who may experience difficulties because of their racial, ethnic, and adoptive statuses" (2). In both Gowda's and Kirchner's novels, the mothers attempt to keep culture from, rather than for, their daughters. By rejecting this "standard practice" of contemporary transnational adoption, the mothers in these two works perpetuate a fear and discomfort with India and the Other, despite the fact that they successfully left India with the children they so deeply desired. Significantly, Jacobson notes that the 1989 United Nation Conventions on the Rights of the Child also deem access to one's birth culture a right that all children should be granted (Jacobson 4). In a country such as India, with such vast cultural diversity, this becomes nearly impossible in the sense that so much diversity exists that, at least in the case of infants, it may be impossible to know what specific group a child comes from. Nevertheless, culture keeping could be embraced in a broader sense by allowing children access to various aspects of Indian culture. Access to their culture of birth is overtly and deliberately denied to the adoptees in the two novels. The resultant confusion on the part of the adoptees and desire not only to see India but to return there to reclaim a lost part of themselves emphasizes the problems that can arise when the relationship between the adoptee and the nation of birth is withheld, however their eventual return to and/or forgiveness of their adoptive mothers still allows the adoptions within the text to be understood in a positive light.

Kirchner's novel differs from Gowda's due primarily to the fact that whereas Asha in Gowda's text is adopted as an infant, Meena is kidnapped by bandits from her home village in Rajasthan at the age of seven and rescued by the Gossetts on a train. She has memories of her biological family and India, and therefore suffers more openly as a result of their separation. Overtly framing adoption as a form of rescue, *Shiva Dancing* blatantly portrays the adoptive parents as the saviors of the Indian child, while Meena's resolution at the end of the text that they were right to keep her from India seems to validate this approach. Jacobson addresses this notion of rescue in relation to histories of colonization, making her work all the more relevant to the texts in question, particularly when she notes that "[s]ome argue that adoption as rescue reeks of colonialism, glosses over parental desire, and places too much pressure on adoptees to be grateful for having been 'saved'" (31). Indeed, the Gossetts do rescue Meena, and make that rescue known, however Abby Gossett also identifies in her journal wanting a child to replace the son she has lost (Kirchner 87-88).

The novel opens on Meena's seventh birthday, which is also her wedding day and the day of her kidnapping, and quickly shifts to her thirty-fifth birthday (the novel's present day), which shortly follows the passing of her adoptive mother. Now rendered parentless, Meena reflects thoroughly on the relationship she had with both of her adoptive parents throughout her life, while notes she finds in her adoptive mother's diaries while clearing out her house cause her to question her relationships with her parents and India. Most notably, Meena discovers that the police came to her house while she was still in India and claimed to have located her home village, offering her an opportunity to return to her biological family (88). Her adoptive mother decides against returning her to her village, which Meena first sees as a great disservice akin to kidnapping, but later realizes was only done out of kindness. Her change of understanding stems from an awareness gained upon her return to India that her biological family and kin may not have accepted her after her kidnaping. After her return to her village, Meena also realizes that although she feels a strong connection with the community there, she cannot return there to live permanently (263).

The two texts, though vastly different, highlight an interesting facet for approaching adoption as a potential precursor for diasporic identity, as well for reading adoptive motherhood in the works of diasporic Indian women writers, as the mothers at once reject kinship with their adopted daughters, but also reject their affiliations with their previous kinship groups. This results in adoptees who identify feelings of non-belonging in both India and the United States, and who are therefore emotionally tied to both lands and neither. By portraying adoptive mothers in such a light, these texts reaffirm notions of adoption as Orientalizing and threatening

to the host culture and family units, until their respective conclusions. The novels' conclusions, which show both daughters accepting their roles in their families and the acknowledging an understanding of the actions of their mothers, reaffirm the adoptees' affiliations with their adoptive mothers and the United States as their new home, confirming transnational adoption as a viable and acceptable way to recreate the American family. The mothers' rejections of culture keeping practices are portrayed as unproblematically justified by their fear and ignorance, as the protagonists realize that their mothers "did the best they could" and ultimately saved them from a less ideal alternative (Gowda 116, Kirchner 65).

In *Secret Daughter*, Somer makes several assumptions about India in general, and her adopted daughter specifically, that suggest she is largely critical of, rather than grateful towards, the nation and families that gave her husband and daughter to her. Somer's actions indicate the presence of racism and a sense of cultural superiority which is both overtly and covertly present in the text. Jacobson argues that "[c]ulture keeping ... is largely an attempt to negotiate race and ethnicity and to normalize international adoptive families within a white, middle-class social milieu that characterizes them as different" (166), and Somer's rejection of these practices in Gowda's novel in relation to the racial diversity within her family and community is noteworthy, particularly when one considers the vast commercial success of the novel. As a popular novel, Gowda's text is an avenue for those who may not otherwise be interested in diasporic or Indian literature and literature of adoption to access these narratives, while still remaining identifiable and accessible. The position of the text at the top of several best-seller lists, as well as the fact that it is being turned in to a film are evidence of both its popularity and broad reach.⁵⁰ Drawing on the work of Kenneth Herrmann and Barbara Kasper (1992), Jacobson makes the point that, "[g]lobally, international adoption pulls children from certain parts of the world – namely, ones that are largely poor and darker-skinned – and places them in other parts, ones that are largely wealthy and lighter-skinned" (20), which encourages reading adoption on a global scale as an axis of power, along which countries have to balance economic and humanitarian concerns. With this type of discourse, it becomes easy to view children as commodities (like Somer does) and to erase their past, as there are often large sums of money and a great deal of effort expended before one can claim an adopted child as their own. For this

⁵⁰ An article by Etan Vlessing in *The Hollywood Review* online entitled "Deepa Mehta to Adapt 'Secret Daughter' Novel for Film" was published online in May 2013, and is linked to from Gowda's own webpage, lending credit to the claim. Vlessing notes that "Canada's Harold Greenberg Fund helped option *Secret Daughter*... for movie treatment." Gowda's website, *shilpigowda.com* celebrates the fact that the rights for the novel have been sold to over 23 countries. Gowda's novel was also included on the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation's list "One Hundred Novels that Make you Proud to be Canadian," which highlights some of the difficulties of categorization, as Gowda was born in Canada but resides in the United States, where the novel is also set, meaning the text has very little to do with Canada.

reason, Somer embraces attempts to normalize and assimilate Asha into her new world, but does not appear to value or engage in Asha's birth culture.

In contrast to Somer, who is ignorant about India, the Gossetts have fairly extensive knowledge of India due to the fact that they lived there for a long time. However, their views of India are filtered through the same Orientalist lenses as Somer's, and their negative construction of the country is exacerbated by the fact that their biological son was killed there in a bus accident. Meena is told that she is "very fortunate" to have been found by the Gossetts on the train, who are identified to Meena by the train conductor as "hav[ing] no children" (22). The erasure of their deceased son in this case, much like the way that Kavita's daughters were erased in *Secret Daughter* further complicates the ways that maternity is read and constructed as the two women function as "childless mothers." Mrs. Gossett's pain makes her unable to warm up to Meena in the manner typically idealized and expected of maternal figures, but her devotion to Meena's welfare is made obvious throughout the novel as she strives to give her the life she feels will allow Meena the most opportunities in her future.

Abby Gossett's "problem" with India surfaces most clearly when Meena reflects on her death in a phone conversation with her friend Kazuko: "With Mom gone, I find myself thinking about India..." (28). Kazuko replies: "You went through the Indian phase in your teens" (28), confirming her stance that she neither views Meena as Indian nor encourages her to re-discover her heritage. Meena then explains further that her mother "always had a problem with me returning to India ... She thought if I went there I might catch the plague or something. ... [H]er only son died in India in a bus accident" (28). This immediately identifies opposition from her mother as a reason for her weak ties to her Indian heritage, and attempts to justify her mother's actions by linking them to fear and grief.

Remembering her "Indian phase" fondly, Meena also notes that it was her Indian caregiver, Auntie Bimla, who taught her about her Indian heritage and customs. She reflects:

The sari had been her outfit of choice during her teenage years—her 'Indian phase.' It was Auntie Bimla who taught her how to wrap herself in a sari as well as to prepare spicy Indian dishes and perform the Hindu religious rituals of puja. ... Mom's disapproval finally wore Meena down. She didn't have any Indian friends of her age to turn to for support. (30)

Key here is that her mother not only disapproved of her incorporation of Indian cultural practices in her life, but that she so openly disapproved of them that Meena felt unable to continue engaging in Indian cultural practices. Bimla is more than just a nanny, and functions as Meena's surrogate Indian mother, though she is forced to defer to the rules of her employers,

the Gossetts. Bimla's deference to her employers—who took her with them to the United States and are therefore likely responsible for her immigration status—reinforces colonialist and classist hierarchies, as even in India the Gossetts had been in control of Bimla's life. Rather than simply failing to encourage engagement with her heritage, then, Abby Gossett kept Meena's culture from her, instead of for her, and limited Bimla's ability to introduce Meena to aspects of her past.

Rooted in fear of loss, then, Abby Gossett's resistance to India is at once justified and alarming. Meena recalls another point in her life, when, at the age of nine, she asked her parents about returning to India and her mother responds by making her feel guilty for even asking, stating: "You're an American now, my dear. This is a great country. There are plenty of kids in India who'd love to trade places with you. If you went back there you might catch malaria. You don't want to get sick, do you?" (171). This patronizing statement at once affirms and destabilizes Meena's Americanness by threatening her with an alternative. Abby's suggestion that other kids would like to be in Meena's position suggests that she expects Meena to be grateful for being rescued and adopted, ignoring the fact that Meena was happy and loved when she resided with her biological family. Meena's American identity is reaffirmed as being attained, and permanent, however despite the fact that no threat is uttered, Mrs. Gossett seems to suggest that Meena could have been replaced with any other child from India and returned to her perceived suffering. Her reduction of India to a place of disease, rather than one of familial ties exemplifies the idea that she expects Meena to forget about India as a place of origin and view it as somewhere foreign, the way that she does.

Like Meena, Asha in *Secret Daughter* is unable to access her Indian past even though she resides with an Indian father. The two women have trouble fitting themselves into either of the worlds that they straddle, due to the active and pervasive prevention of cultural affiliation undertaken by their mothers. They occupy what Homi Bhabha refers to in *The Location of Culture* (1994) as the "margin of hybridity, where cultural differences 'contingently' and conflictually touch" (296). That is to say, they touch but do not mix. There is minimal overlap between Asha as an Indian and Asha as an American until she, as an adult, brings the two parts of her identity together, against the wishes of her mother. Likewise, Meena identifies feeling marginalized among Indians and Americans. After donning a sari to visit with an Indian immigrant family who lived next door to her, Meena changes back in to her pajamas and reflect: "She had been Indian for the evening, but not the way the Rasul family were. To them India was the mother with an enormous hold on them. They were connected by a bond stronger than anything she had ever known. To them life in the U.S. was pleasant, yet their homeland was

something greater and more magical” (102). She likewise is wounded by their observation that she “look[s] Indian” and notes that “the meaning behind the words stung her... Was she, an American, posing as something else?” (100). The comma usage in the statement seems to negate the existence of a hyphenated identity, as Meena expressed that she must be American “posing as something else,” negating any questions about Meena’s Americanness. As Meena’s Indianness is framed as something that she can put on or take off as she wants, akin to a child playing dress up, her actual identity becomes ambiguous: she sees her Indian Self as part of her whole hybrid self, while Americans see her as not quite fully American, and Indians see her as not quite fully Indian. The invocation here of Mother India, a longstanding trope previously discussed in an historical context and in relation to Gowda’s novel is also noteworthy, as Meena had both a mother in India and extensive memories of her life there, yet is unable to claim India as a motherland, even as the nation’s hold on Meena remains pervasive, though different. Furthermore, if we agree with Bhabha that “[t]erms of cultural engagement, whether antagonistic or affiliative, are produced performatively” (3), then Somer’s and Abby’s ability to prevent their daughters from performing, and thereby producing, a hybrid Indian-American self becomes all the more clear.

In *Secret Daughter*, Somer’s goal is to assimilate her daughter and husband into her construction of an ideal life. Although the narrator briefly identifies Kris’ desire to achieve the American dream, Kris also overtly longs for the family he left behind in India, and differentiates between his Indian constructions of family and Somer’s American ones. Somer situates Krishnan’s Indian ideas of the relationship between family and self on the periphery, and does not allow Asha to engage with Kris’ family, nor does she like Kris’ suggestion of subsequent visits to India. Her rejection of India ignores Asha, who occupies a place somewhere in the middle, as she is neither wholly Indian nor American. This in-betweenness likens Asha to the position of a diasporic subject, rooted in one place but growing in another. Some scholars, such as anthropologist Signe Howell, have questioned the identification of transnational adoptees as diasporic subjects. However, the similarities between Asha’s desire to return to a homeland, and the feelings of longing often attributed to diasporic subjects cannot be ignored; Asha understands herself to have a home in India, which she is compelled to access through knowledge of both her pre- and post- adoptive families. Despite being adopted, the position which Asha occupies is in direct contrast to Howell’s positioning of adoptees; as “the inverse of that of diasporic communities [because the] adoptees focus on a place devoid of identifiable people, while diasporic communities focus on place rendered meaningful by being linked through identifiable people” (*Kinning* 266). The intercultural negotiations that a diasporic

claiming of a homeland entails for both Asha and Somer are significant and complex, and throughout the text Somer simultaneously resists and resents them. Although Asha does not know the faces of the people she longs for, she still desires knowledge of her birth family, but is willing to settle for increased interaction and experience with India.

Like Asha, Meena wonders about her identity and how it affects her relationship with her mother, particularly when she finds her Indian clothes tucked away in a box with the diaries outlining the truth about when she was adopted. About her [adoptive] mother, she queries:

Had she been trying to suppress Meena's soul to make her transition to being an American easier? Did she think Americanizing Meena was the only way to be close to her? Meena would never know for sure. What she knew was that she belonged to neither culture—adopted to one, but not at home in it, wanting to belong to the other, but too long away from it. (90)

The idea that affiliations with Indian cultural practices could threaten the relationship between adoptive mother and daughter therefore echoes through both works. Similar to the mothers in the novels, Jacobson notes that in her study most women thought being American was equated with sameness, and to be Chinese was to be Other (107). The key difference, then, between Jacobson's participants and the mothers in these novels, is that that Otherness is embraced and fostered in adoptive families that keep culture in a way that it is not embraced in these texts. This is further highlighted by the ways that the mothers are constructed in relation to the daughters: Somer as the embodiment of the stereotype of the upper-middle class American woman, and Abby as an equally successful and arguably more performative version of the same.

In contrast to Asha's complicated identity, Somer is described as "thoroughly American" (75), and she fits all of the stereotypes that come to mind when one thinks of a "California Girl." Blond-haired, blue-eyed, and successful as a doctor, Gowda explicitly links Somer and her lifestyle to "The American Dream," noting that Kris fell in love with both at around the same time, and suggesting that a blonde girlfriend-cum-wife is part of the larger package of ideals he subscribes to as an immigrant in America (114). In Gowda's text, it seems, "Americanness" is defined by cultural superiority, individualism, and entitlement; it is clearly juxtaposed against Krishnan's "Indianess" and the sense of community and familial responsibility he left behind. The real evidence of Somer's "Americanness," comes after she adopts Asha, and is most evident in the way that she rejects anything more than a superficial engagement with her husband's and daughter's birth culture. Somer's explicit goal is for Asha to be "just like everyone else" (125) and a young Asha laments this fact in an excerpt from a letter she wrote to the birth mother she cannot name. To borrow from Seemin Hasan's article

“The Dynamics of Repatriation in Shilpi Somaya Gowda’s *Secret Daughter*,” “Somer unconsciously brings [Asha up] to be white and see the world from a white perspective. As a white mother, she is not prepared for the racial prejudice and discrimination that backlash on her daughter” (148). Curiously, there are very few hints in the text that Asha has faced racial prejudice, although one has to assume along with Hasan that they probably occurred.

One of only two prominent examples within the text occurs when Asha is very young. While at the park with Asha, Somer is mistaken for her nanny because they do not look alike (99). This is because Somer lacks what Jacobson calls “biological privilege”; the ability to look biologically related to one’s adopted child and therefore not be questioned about their status (Jacobson 158). In Gowda’s novel, Kris has the biological privilege that Somer covets. In the park scene just discussed, Somer “has to resist feeling she’s the one who has been adopted into [Asha and Kris’] family” (99), which deepens the chasm between mother and daughter, and also gives Somer outsider status and increases her resistance to integrating an Indian identity within the home. Gowda’s text subverts the trope of a non-white child being brought up in an all-white family, however while Kris’ Indian background should have served to strengthen Asha’s ties to India, fear of alienation pushes Somer to reject engagement with India in her home, thereby limiting Asha’s cultural experiences.

Also lacking biological privilege in her relationship with her adopted child, Abby Gossett’s identity as an American and as a member of the upper class is central to her character. Physically similar to Somer, Abby is described as having “eyes the color of a rainy sky... [being] rounder than [Meena’s] Mataji... [and having] curls the color of wheat straw with gray touches” (19). Meena assumes them to be European, noting that “[s]he had only seen pictures of Europeans in books” (19). This assumption and Meena’s profiling of Abby temporarily reverses the Orientalist gaze, even as Abby is described as wearing a “pale wool shawl, much like that worn by the women of Meena’s village,” indicating her consumption of Indian culture (19). On the Indian train, Meena is the local and the Gossetts the foreigners, however they quickly shift her in to their upper-class lifestyle, where she remains an outsider.

Comparing the formalities of meals with the Gossetts with that of her biological family, Meena recalls learning customs and norms from her new family very quickly: “Silverware must be used at the table even when peeling an orange. A torture, since Meena likes touching her food. Mom was never harsh... her eyes got rounder and became red when she disapproved. One such look from her was enough to make Meena slump down in her chair and lose her appetite” (59-60). Meena’s acknowledgement that Abby Gossett “set the table with the perfection of a hotelier” (59) highlights not only the differences in culture and class between the two

households, but also the Gossetts' unwillingness to acquiesce to Meena and their staunch expectation that she conform to their lifestyle wholly and completely. These details themselves are largely irrelevant, but demonstrate the vast differences Meena was forced to adapt to, and emphasize the ways that her adoptive parents failed to accommodate her previous understandings of the world, despite the fact that she had fully-formed habits and preferences by the time she was adopted. The description of their decorous life and Meena's complicated role in it, as both insider and outside, child and souvenir, further exemplifies Meena's role as a commodity added in to their life rather than a unique human entity involved in a give-and-take relationship.

Abby Gossett uses Meena to fill a desire she has for a child, and more efforts are made to fit Meena into her lifestyle than to structure her life around Meena.⁵¹ Along the same vein is the way that Somer views her husband and daughter in relation to her own identity. For Somer, both Asha and Krishnan are representative of her tolerance, and their race and heritage serve as signs for Somer of who Somer is rather than as integral parts of who Krishnan and Asha are. The Indianness of her husband and daughter is maintained and encouraged only on the surface, a façade of Somer's acceptance. Gowda acknowledges this within the text to a degree, but seems to reward Somer for the intention behind her efforts. She writes that Somer "seems intent on preserving Asha in the little cocoon they have woven around her... Somer has good intentions, she tries to make an effort with Asha where she can: going through National Geographic, pointing out maps of India, reviewing facts on agriculture and animals" (116). The disclaimer that Somer is making an effort "where she can," serves to justify her inactions and suggest that there is nothing more that she could have done to help Asha maintain a feeling of connectedness with India. The presence of her Indian husband within her household negates this claim, as she easily and obviously could have allowed for Asha to forge stronger relationships with her extended adoptive family in India.

This same example is used in Kirchner's novel, which suggests that the mother has done the best she could;

Mom seemed to think she had done her a favor, that the life she had given Meena was the best possible. But was it? To be sure, she had had material comfort and freedom of choice. But was that equal in price to the rich tradition and human warmth she had missed? She didn't know the answer. Most of all she resented Mom for presuming to decide the course of her life. (89)

⁵¹ Entries from Abby Gossett's diary appear in the novel when Meena finds the diary in a trunk in the attic. These diary entries give the readers and Meena insight in to the struggles Abby faced integrating Meena in to her life and the efforts she made to learn to mother her and connect with her (Kirchner 86-89).

Ignoring the fact that many parents, in some form, decide the course of their children's lives, Abby Gossett's actions are explained and justified within the narrative similar to the way that Somer's are. To frame the (in)actions of these adoptive mothers as the best that they were capable of strips them of both privilege and responsibility and renders culture keeping behavior as an added optional activity outside of the realm of regular caregiving. By failing to frame culture keeping as an integral part of transnationally adoptive families, Kirchner and Gowda normalize the assimilative attitudes of the adoptive mothers. Likewise, the minimal significance of the paternal figures in the texts suggests that the failure to keep culture within the household was their shortcoming. Given the class statuses of both families, little prevents Somer or Abby from travelling to India as their daughters grow up, and equally little prevents the daughters from undertaking such a trip with their respective Indian caregivers.

Somer's lack of engagement with Indian culture and her daughter's Indian heritage are apparent to Asha, and at one point in the novel she reacts in anger towards her parents. Although the fight begins like a typical parent-teenager confrontation about academic performance, Asha brings her origins into the mix, asking her mother: "'Why don't you ever tell me about my real parents? You're scared they'll love me more than you do.' ... 'And why don't you ever take me to India? Every other Indian kid I know goes all the time'" (137). Unable to control herself, Somer reacts to her daughter's frustration by attacking her birth parents and country of origin: "'Well, Asha, at least I *tried*. At least I tried to be a parent to you. More than those ... *people* in India who abandoned you. I *wanted* a child, and I've been here, Asha. Every single day [...] at least I *wanted* you'" (137, emphasis in original). Through the emphasis on the word "people," it becomes clear that Somer feels superior to the people in India who gave Asha up for adoption. Furthermore, her emphasis on the words "tried" and "wanted" demonstrate her ignorance to the myriad of situations that lead parents to relinquish their children for adoption, including the poverty faced by Asha's birth parents. At another point in the text, Somer is also unable to refer to Asha's biological parents as parents, calling Kavita and Jasu simply "them" (162); this reaffirms the disgust she feels towards them and, in turn, towards all of India. Somer's reaction to Asha effectively summarizes her feelings toward India, and, indeed, the illusion of cultural superiority reinforced for Somer by Asha's adoption.

Adoption is identified as an industry in contemporary discourses, and India is adequately able to meet the demands of Somer as a consumer. Adoption, then, becomes framed by power on a global scale, and Asha's adoption by Somer and Kris is no exception. The commodification of Asha is evident before Somer and Kris even take her home. At the adoption agency, they find out that Asha was born Usha, and that she is only called Asha because

someone misread the handwriting on the file. However, in order to make her fit into their expectations of her, they change her name and continue to call her Asha, stripping her of the name her birth mother gave her very deliberately and removing the agency of both infant and birth mother (77). By stripping her of her birth name and later denying her access to India, Somer attempts to prevent Asha from identifying with a biological family, and also with India as a homeland. Furthermore, though Asha expresses interest in her past at numerous times throughout her childhood, her parents never feel it necessary to inform her of her early name change. Drawing on the work of Adrienne Rich, Bhabha writes in the preface to the 2010 edition of *The Location of Culture* that:

No name is yours until you speak it ... You are part of a dialogue that may not, at first, be heard or heralded ... but your personhood cannot be denied. In another's country that is also your own, your person divides, and in following the forked path you encounter yourself in a double movement. (xxv)

Asha undergoes this encountering of the self when she visits the orphanage in Mumbai. By learning her birth name, Asha establishes a personhood in India. She comes to realize that she had a past there, and the realization that a part of herself is in India causes her to reconsider the way that she views the people she meets in Mumbai, the events leading up to her relinquishment for adoption, and the privileged life she now lives.

Somer's fears of losing her daughter to an anonymous Indian mother, or to the figurative Mother India, for that matter, rupture the relationships between husband and wife, and mother and daughter. This rupture is sutured back together by Asha and by Somer, who is also able to reconnect with her husband when she realizes that she lost herself when she became a mother. However, Somer "fixes" her relationship with her daughter through self-actualization via yoga and the realization that she is lonely without her husband and daughter, while Asha actually comes to terms with the roles of the various maternal figures in her life. Spiritual and physical benefits of yoga aside, planning a yoga retreat in Mysore has very little to do with accepting one's adopted daughter and in-laws from Mumbai, and accepting the differences of others simply to avoid being alone is equally problematic. Throughout the novel, Somer demonstrates a resistance to culture keeping which is reflexive of ideas of American superiority and child-saving. Her interest in India at the conclusion of the novel is superficial, and serves to preserve rather than disband her Orientalist views of the nation from which her husband and daughter originate. She rejects hybridity as a model of existence for her daughter, and as a result minimizes the potential impact of her daughter's Indianness on her life, and grossly over

simplifies the intercultural negotiations that inevitably take place in mixed-ethnicity and transnational adoptive families.

Mother and daughter in Kirchner's text reach a similar resolution only as Abby Gossett lies on her deathbed, with Meena reclaiming her Indian self only after her mother's passing. Abby is quite literally positioned as the sole force that has kept Meena from reconnecting with aspects of her Indian life, and from seeking out her biological family. The discovery upon her return to India that her adoptive parents were right to keep her from going back ignores the fact that such a discovery at an earlier point in her adult life would not have caused her any harm, and would have perhaps given her a greater understanding of the role of India in her self-construct, as well as how her two lives manifest as a whole singular self. By keeping culture from Meena while granting limited exposure through the character of Auntie Bimla, Abby exhibited full control over the role of culture (Indian and otherwise) in Meena's life.

Reading the mothering practices presented within the two texts through the rhetorics of culture keeping and inter-familial racial and cultural difference highlights the way that the authors attempt to demonstrate the complex topographies of transnationally adoptive families. The conclusions of both novels support adoption as the daughters reaffirm their identification with their adoptive mothers and lands and come to understand their complex relationships with India. Importantly, both Asha and Meena forgive their adoptive mothers for sheltering them and preventing them from exploring their respective Indian heritages, and come to terms with their lived experiences in a way that reconciles them with their adoptive and biological families. This, in turn, strengthens the notion that adoptive parents rescue their children from their previous lives, and therefore casts India as a place from which one must be saved. American motherhood and cultural practices are reaffirmed as superior, even as the mothers deign to follow what has been identified as best practice within the adoption community. Through their failure to keep culture within the home, the mothers are asserting cultural dominance and unequivocally promoting assimilation within the household, mirroring American discourses of multiculturalism.

In a broader context, the narrative of adoption in which the transnationally adoptive mother is hostile towards the birth land/mother functions as a microcosm for the way that the immigrant and/or diasporic subject is treated in the host land. On the surface, ties to the homeland are encouraged, however state restrictions surrounding immigration law, as well as normative practices, encourage assimilation rather than celebrate prolonged and sustained difference. By reading the adoptive household as a stand-in for the new homeland and the adoptee as the diasporic subject, the superficial acceptances of India and aspects of Indian

culture in the texts can be understood by way of the superficial ways in which those living in diaspora are expected to integrate aspects of their home life into their new lands.

1.4 Miró and Khokha: “Realities” of Maternity and Adoption

Fictional representations of the maternal condition and conditions of maternity in an adoptive context present only one side of a very complex issue. Another side to be explored is the way that biological and adoptive mothers are constructed in non-fictional narratives of adoption. Of particular interest, of course, is that ways in which these narratives differ from those portrayed in the fictions previously discussed, but also important is the way that the mother/nation – mother/daughter relationship is portrayed. Asha Miró’s memoir, *Daughter of the Ganges*, and Sasha Khokha’s documentary, *India: Calcutta Calling* each feature the narratives of young women who were adopted transnationally from India as they return to India for the first time. Miró’s text is an autobiographical account of her experiences in India, while Khokha’s film follows four families taking their transnationally adopted daughters to India for the first time.

Worth noting, too, is that “motherhood” in these two works is in many ways superseded by “parenthood”; fathers have a much more significant role in the two non-fiction works than they are given in the fictional narratives of adoption.⁵² Miró identifies her adoptive parents as being very supportive of her trip to India, while the adoptive parents in Khokha’s film are physically present with their daughters as they return to India. This level of support, absent on the part of the fictional adoptive parents, suggests a degree of comfort and willingness to undertake culture keeping activities in the household. Significantly, birth mothers are sympathized with and revered by the daughters and mothers in these works, though the Indian social workers that the tour group in Khokha’s film encounters attempt to construct them in a less-than-ideal light. By analyzing representations of motherhood first as it is reflected on and constructed in Miró’s work and then as it is framed in both Khokha’s film and reactions to the documentary, this sub-chapter both complicates and reifies notions of culture keeping as essential to adoptive parenting, and perpetuates the notion that adoptees benefit from returning to their birthlands, but challenges the notions that they find home there.⁵³

⁵² One of the families featured in Khokha’s film appears to be headed by a same-sex female couple, and therefore does not feature a male parent, but their relationship is never explained or explored within the film and they appear only once. Likewise, the additional feature chapter of the DVD version of the film, “Minda’s Story,” features a girl raised by a single mother. Thus, in at least two of the four families featured in Khokha’s film, father figures are not central to the family unit.

⁵³ This notion is explored more fully in the following chapter, particularly in relation to Miró’s text.

Miró's adoptive parents are framed undoubtedly as a positive force in her life. The text contains excerpts from her adoptive mother's journal outlining the adoptive process and her desire for children, as well as her difficulties navigating the adoption system at a time when transnational adoption was less common (the mid-1970s) and the challenges of integrating a six year old into a new family and country. Miró frequently refers to her parents without modifiers, and readers are expected to understand that she is referring to her adoptive parents unless otherwise indicated. Thus, the adoptive family is assumed to be the "natural" one, with the biological parents being described using additional modifiers where necessary. The differentiation between parents is evident from the very beginning of the book, as Miró dedicates the book in the following way: "To Sitabai Sanasare, the woman who gave me life. To Radhu Ghoderao, for having wished me to have hope. To my sisters, Sakubai Jagtap and Asha Meherkhamb ... [and to] my parents, Josep Miró and Electa Vega" (vii). This is significant, as she names her biological parents but does not refer to them as parents; they are identified through name and not role, which is in direct contrast to the thanks given to her sisters and adoptive parents, who are identified by both name and relation. By refusing to identify a relationship to her biological parents in this segment, Miró recognizes them but does not claim them as her parents, even as she claims and names her biological sisters but does not mention her adoptive sister. Like the fictional characters, her quest to find her "real" parents has lead her back to her adoptive family, though she cared deeply about interacting with her biological family as well. This complex matrix of thanking and identifying therefore makes sense only after one has read the entire text and understands the role of each of the individuals named; Miró's father, for example, very literally wished her hope when he changed her name to Asha before relinquishing her for adoption (Miró 180).

With familial roles simultaneously defined and complicated before one even enters the body of the text, it is no surprise that Miró is quick to outline her history and the gratitude she feels towards her adoptive family. The notion of culture keeping, though never named as such, is invoked very early in the text when Miró describes a common activity from her childhood: "[W]e always talked about India, my country, the place where I was born. Whenever there was a program on television about it we would all get together on the sofa" (Miró 7). Likewise, she refers to the concept of return as one that affected her whole family: "[W]e always agreed that one day we would all go back there together. For us girls it would be a return to our country, while for them it would be a chance to get to know the country that had given them two daughters" (8). Similarly, an excerpt from Miró's adoptive mother's journal addresses the undertakings of the parents to engage with India before importing children from such a faraway

place. In an excerpt dated October 28, 1974, Miró's mother writes: "Your father and I have read a lot of books about the customs in your country. It helped us to feel a little closer to you while we were going through with the adoption. We had books and maps scattered all over the dining room table" (Miró 67), which demonstrates a clear and obvious desire to engage with Miró's lived India and not just cast aside her early life the way that Somer seeks to do to Asha's life in Gowda's novel. Miró's mother also makes it clear that these were family activities and that her husband was significantly involved in the process, however this should not negate the fact that it is she who is recording, memorializing, and in some ways validating these processes.

Addressed in greater length in the following chapter, Miró's return, and, indeed, re-turn to India as an adult functions in complex ways when one considers the practice of adoption in relation to practices of diasporic consciousness. At a semantic level, the notion that all of the family would be going *back* to India suggests that that the notion of return is applied to the adoptive parents, who have in fact never been to India. The adoptive parents, then, function in some ways on the inverse level of the second generation diasporic, as they are framed to be taken *back* to a place where they have never been, visiting the ancestral homeland not of their parents (as would be the case in second generation diasporic return), but of their children.

Referring to herself and her adopted younger sister Fatima, Miró compares the work of the adoptive parents to that of pottery artists, who have turned them in to the people that they are today:

They may not have given us the breath of life, but they had given us the essentials, and, with the same care as a potter molds his clay, they had formed us in to people. I am often shaken by the excessive importance many people place on being related by blood. Obviously, it has a certain importance. But so does everything that comes afterward, all that my parents have given me, a legacy that goes beyond blood. (13)

Ironic, when one considers the lengths that Miró goes to to connect with those with whom she is related by blood, the notion of the adoptive parents being responsible for the child taking form obviously highlights the value of nurture, rather than nature, in family settings, echoing the discoveries of fictional adoptees who realize and appreciate their adoptive families by the end of their narratives as well.

Even when one considers the important role that her fathers play, however, Miró's mothers are still far more integral to the work as a whole. Miró's use of excerpts from her adoptive mother's journal highlights this significance, and also points to the fact that women are often the ones in charge of recording, remembering, and co-ordinating everyday life as the

details in the diary reflect Miró's adjustments to daily life (Miró 16-17, 20, 22-23, 25-26, 31, 40-44, 65-68, 73-76, 80-82, 90-94, 100-102, 108-109, 111-112). She describes her mother's fear that if she did not record her experiences, no one would remember "how things had been[.]" removing the burden of remembering from Miró's father and shouldering it herself (Miró 14).

Podnieks and O'Reilly identify diary (alongside other genres of life writing) as "an especially valuable arena in which we can register and understand the ways women inscribe an 'I' or series of 'I's' in the authoring of their own maternal selves, accounting for and expressing awareness of factors such as the body, sexuality, gender, race, class, and nationhood" (7). As a trope which comes up in both Kirchner's novel and Miró's memoir, the adoptive mother's diary becomes a valuable way to invite a secondary speaker in to the text and bring the adoptive mother's stories to light. The primary difference between the two works is that Kirchner's Meena discovers the diary only after her mother has died, while Miró receives it from her adoptive mother before her trip to India. This allows for a dialogue to occur between the women, and for Miró to better understand her mother's writings. Miró reflects:

On the day I told them I was going back to India, Mom went to her room and took the notebook out of her chest of drawers, and revealed that she had begun to keep the diary when I came into her life ... Over all these years she had been writing a record of how things had been. She was afraid that if her memory failed she would be unable to explain these things in detail. (14)

The diary, addressed to Miró in the second person, creates a dialogue between her and her mother that does not exist between her and her father within the confines of the text, thereby strengthening the bond between adoptive mother and daughter and also highlighting the effort on the part of the mother to connect with the daughter that is mirrored in the fictional representation of the journal in Kirchner's novel.⁵⁴ Through the act of journaling with Miró as the intended reader, mother and daughter are united and the mother/daughter relationship, which echoes the title of the book, is brought to the fore.

The journal also provides a space within the text for Miró to explore the relationship between the various mother figures in her life without having to dive too far into the issue herself. As the text contains only noteworthy excerpts from her mother's journal, presumably selected by Miró herself, she therefore controls the relationship between the various maternal

⁵⁴ Miró refers to the book as both a diary and a journal. For example, she writes that she was grateful on the plane to "have Mom's diary to keep [her] company" (14), and later refers to "going through the journal" (15). The differences between the two forms of life writing are therefore blurred. This is a potentially a symptom of the translations the text has gone through, but could also reflect Miró's changing relationship with the book, as it represents the emotions commonly associated with a diary and contains the factual retellings commonly associated with journaling.

figures in her life. The excerpt from October 29, 1974, for example, depicts her mother constructing herself in relation to other mothers and establishing a commonality: “Like all mothers, I watch over you night and day... It is marvelous to be your mother” (73). Similarly, her mother’s journal entry from the eve of Miró’s seventh birthday outlines her thoughts towards Miró’s birth parents:

Today I thought about your parents, just as I did on the day of your sister’s birthday; the parents who gave you your body, your smile, your brown skin. If they could just see you for a moment... they would be so happy to see that you are well. [...] When you are grown up you will no doubt wonder where your features come from, your body, you will search for explanations for what you have inherited. (93)

Unlike Gowda’s character of Somer or Kirchner’s Abby Gossett, Miró’s adoptive mother reveres and respects her biological parents, wishing them well and hoping that they are pleased with their decision to relinquish Miró for adoption. She is neither fearful of them, nor angry towards them for their decisions, and is open to the idea that Asha may want to explore her past by and for herself one day. However, one must always be conscious of the fact that the picture is incomplete, with journal entries selected and edited by Miró for what they contribute to the broader narrative of *Daughter of the Ganges*, knowing, particularly, that Miró became a strong advocate of transnational adoption after her return to Spain.⁵⁵

On her second trip to India, where Miró actually meets her biological sister and half-sister, she reflects on her mother’s name, particularly when she learns that the name recorded on the baptismal register is that of her father’s first wife and not actually her mother: “Sitabai, my biological mother, doesn’t appear anywhere! I still recall the emotion I felt the first time I read the name Shevbai, thinking that it was the name of the woman who gave birth to me” (211). Through seeking and recording the stories of her biological parents, Miró invites readers to sympathize with them, while still maintaining a positive relationship with her adoptive parents. Whereas the fictional adoptees seek out their birth mothers as a rejection of their adoptive parents, Miró’s narrative allows readers to imagine a more harmonious relationship between the various mother figures in her life. Although slightly idealized, Miró’s work, and the excerpts from her adoptive mother’s journal contained within it, allow readers to imagine a transnationally adoptive life beyond the “Mommy Wars” featured in Gowda’s text and the pervasive fear of Kirchner’s to move towards notions of empowered mothering.

⁵⁵ Miró outlines her involvement in promoting adoption within the text (Miró 133-136), and so it is therefore quite likely that she filters her adoptive parents’ presence in the novel through a positive lens in a way that authors of fiction may be less compelled to.

The concept of unity with the family and nation of birth further extends in to Khokha's film, *India: Calcutta Calling*, where the adoptive parents travel with their child to learn about her origins. The film opens on the farm belonging to the adoptive parents of one of the girls, Kaylan Johnson, highlighting the vast emptiness of rural Minnesota to provide a point of contrast to the busy areas of urban India the family later visits. Their brief narrative outlines the way that when they look at Kaylan they see not an Indian girl, but simply their daughter. They further note that Kaylan is the only reason the family is drawn to India, and that they otherwise have minimal interest. Through this statement, it is suggested that the family "does not see race," and any idea that they might be Orientalizing India through their daughter becomes therefore flawed. One of the other girls, Anisha, refers to herself as being of "Indian background but completely American ... just brown" (*Calcutta Calling*). As in the case of Kaylan, nationality eschews race in understandings of the self, though the statement obviously utilizes a very narrow definition of "American" which depends on the hegemony of whiteness. Similarly, Lizzie, the third adoptee featured in the main part of the film, states that she feels she is "not quite as materialistic as a lot of Americans are" but seems to position herself as American rather than Indian. Her construction of herself as outside of the consumerist matrix complicates her position within her family, her community, and the rhetorics of adoption, but is also reflexive of the ways that she views her peers in relation to herself. The role of the adoptive family is central to Khokha's film, which brings into perspective Jacobson's assertions that:

The contemporary American family is a site of kinship relations, ideological negotiations, and political confrontations. Who lives together as a legally defined and socially recognized family and their experiences doing so in the early twenty-first century in the United States is not only a question of interpersonal relations and physical proximity but also of popular ideas that frame the family as a 'natural' unit. (13)

As the text which features the most normative narratives of American family of all those considered in this project, the families presented in Khokha's film are constructed as unique due to the fact that they feature adopted daughters from India, but are otherwise normal in every other sense. This normalizing on the part of the filmmaker serves, on the one hand, to allow viewers to focus solely on the way(s) that the adoptees experience return, and on the other hand to portray adoption as a normal and un-trying process.

Following the girls' first reactions to being in India, they are filmed visiting the orphanages where some of them once lived prior to their adoptions. Just before the visit is shown, the girls are told by a social worker about some of the conditions that may have led to

their relinquishment for adoption. The woman tells them “Your mother who has given birth to you, she may be so much compelled to give you away thinking that you may have a better life. And you getting that chance of going away into a more developed country than India, it is all because of your karma in your past life” (*Calcutta Calling*). Later, however, another woman outside the orphanages tell the families her thoughts on biological mothers: “I believe it is like being an animal ... The woman who left a child like that is just like another dog on the street or a cat on the street, you breed and you just forget about your child. That’s very cruel, just like being an animal” (*Calcutta Calling*). This understanding of the birth mother, rather than looking at her sympathetically or neutrally, places blame on her and ignores the complex and varied realities facing women who relinquish children for adoption. Significantly, as well, it places all blame for the child solely upon the woman and absconds men from any responsibility.

Bearing in mind this reality, then, while at the same time recognizing that it is a small excerpt of a larger picture, a positive narrative of birth parents becomes necessary, and works such as Gowda’s novel fill this gap. On the PBS (Public Broadcasting Service) website, where a shorter version of Khokha’s film is hosted online, several of the viewer comments take issue with the portrayal of birth mothers in the film. For example, message board commenter Janet Hoffman of Vista, CA, calls the social worker’s comments “insensitive.” The birthmother likewise comes up in a comment made by poster Carol Burns of Mankato, Minnesota, who identifies herself as Kaylan’s aunt. She writes about the tears which are brought to her eyes when she views the film: “... They are tears of gratitude that her mother gave her up to us. They are tears of thankfulness that she had this chance to explore her roots and the culture of her heritage. She has always been curious and this experience has allowed her to grow.” This post adds what is absent from the film, as a member of the adoptive family reacts and responds to the negative constructions of birth mothers in the film. She re-frames the relationship in a positive way and attempts to break down the hierarchy of relationships between mothers, as the adoptive parent would cease to exist as a parent if it were not for families who relinquish children for adoption.

Once again adding a personal touch to the narrative, commenter Reena Kapoor of Redwood City, California posted a lengthy response to the film as well, locating herself within the adoption community and aligning adoptive and biological parents in a respectful relationship. She writes:

What was quite shocking were the comments of the insensitive, so-called social worker in India in that she completely lacks any empathy and understanding of what kind of desperation drives mothers in India to give up their children.

Ironically her vacuous and cruel comments were made standing in the middle of abject poverty that Calcutta is well known for. ... In my house, my daughter's birth mom, whom we do not know, is remembered with respect and dignity. Shocking! (Kapoor)

By comparing the construction of “birth moms” in the film with the state of affairs in her own household, Kapoor simultaneously expresses disgust at the content of the film, disgust at others’ reactions to the film, and pride in her own knowledge and practices. Embodying the notion of maternal competition, Kapoor’s comments highlight the expectation of culture keeping as well as the idea that one must maintain what she deems to be a realistic understanding of India.

Neither Miró’s memoir nor Khokha’s documentary focus primarily on motherhood. Yet, the mothering relationships in both works provide valuable points of contrast for reading the representations of motherhood contained within the novels examined in this project. A paratextual reading of Miró’s work, which positions her dedications as central to the text, allows readers to better understand the ways that she shapes and understands her relationships with the mother figures in her life. Likewise, reactions to Khokha’s film, as evidenced by the comments on the online forum, have centered around either praising the filmmaker for her project or criticizing the portrayals of birth mothers in the film. This makes motherhood a central issue, and the film’s portrayal of birthmothers is unquestionably problematic. The teens’ trip to India is haunted by specters of their past, reconstructed by orphanage workers as well as by their tour guides.⁵⁶ The presence of their adoptive parents with them no doubt eases their burden—none of the other adoptees considered in this project undertake their returns with their adoptive family—but also invites comparisons between mothers and challenges the idea that adoption may be in the best interest of the child.

1.5 Final Reflections: Motherhood through Sundaresan

By way of conclusion, consider briefly Indu Sundaresan’s short story “Shelter of Rain.” In Sundaresan’s narrative, Padma (formerly called Padmini) waits at the airport to receive Sister Mary Theresa from the Convent of Little Flowers in Chennai, India. Travelling to Seattle for a nuns’ conference, Sister Mary Theresa has requested a meeting with Padma, as she was one of the nuns who cared for her until she was adopted at the age of six. While Padma waits at the

⁵⁶ While on their trip, the teens have the opportunity to meet with women who worked in the orphanages in which they lived. The women show the girls photographs of babies, and find one of each of the girls. However, the dates on the photographs do not line up with the girl’s ages. The teens are skeptical that the images are actually of them and that the workers remember them as infants, but play along because they astutely recognize that the women may gain a sense of peace or satisfaction by imagining these girls to have been the infants in their direct care.

airport, she dispenses to the reader the facts about her past that lead to where she is now: the history of her adoption, as well as the contents of a letter she received from Sister Mary Theresa disclosing to Padma that her biological mother was Sister Mary Theresa's sister, and that the mother is dying of cancer. Padma begins to remember things about India she had previously forgotten as she reads the letter from Sister Mary Theresa, and becomes increasingly interested in an Indian past that she had previously largely ignored. Throughout the narrative, she refers to her adoptive parents as "Mom" and "Dad," while Mary Theresa refers extensively to Padma's biological mother in the letter she has sent. Padma likewise wonders "how could anyone but Tom and Diana be Mom and Dad?" (15). This statement solidifies her positioning of her adoptive parents as her "true" parents, the ones with whom she feels she belongs.

As Padma reads through the letter from Mary Theresa she undergoes a shift in understanding from being angry at both Sister Mary Theresa and her biological mother to being understanding and wanting a connection. It is only when she is required to reflect on her past that Padma realizes she is not like her adoptive family: "I don't think I have ever realized I am different. I cannot say not American, because what really *is* American? But I look into the mirror more often now and I see that dark skin" (7).⁵⁷ The recognition of difference, in relation to the mother figures, is what grants Padma first an understanding of herself, and then an understanding of the roles of the various others in her life. Similar to the "change of heart" that Asha has in Gowda's novel, Sundaresan's text captures, in a brief span of time, the ways that perceptions of a birth mother can change from anger to sympathy and understanding.

At the story's conclusion, Padma is excited to meet Sister Mary Theresa and is contemplating returning to India to see her mother before she dies. Sister Mary Theresa has told Padma that she is her "perima... It means 'Big Mother.' As [her] mother's older sister, [she] is [Padma's] mother too" (18). Complicating the concept of maternity, Sister Mary Theresa's claims seem to get through to Padma and she realizes that her biological mother and Sister Mary Theresa wanted the best for her when they chose to let her be adopted by the Merricks. When Padma states that "she let [her] go to a better life, away from her, as only a mother could[.]" the "she" refers to Sister Mary Theresa, but the understanding that letting a child go may be an act of love and sacrifice can be extended to her biological mother as well (19). The penultimate sentence of the text reflects the familiar recognition that Padma is adopted, and demonstrates her new found sense of Indian self when she looks at Sister Mary Theresa's face and proclaims:

⁵⁷ The discrepancy between Indianness and Americanness comes up in Sister Mary Theresa's letter as well, when she asks Padma if she has a husband, querying "Who did you marry? Is he Indian? American?" (11). This statement could be read to suggest that the two are mutually exclusive, or to be understanding of the fact that even if he is Indian, he may still be American.

“It is just like my face, after all” (20). This recognition alludes to Padma’s acceptance of her biological relations as family, and leaves the reader hopeful that she will return to India to be re-connected with her biological mother. Padma’s acceptance of her aunt as her “perima,” coupled with her desire to introduce Mary Theresa to her adoptive family and spouse demonstrate that the bonds formed by blood and early kinship are strong, and emphasize Padma’s willingness to reconnect with her maternal biological family.

Motherhood, mothering, and mother-daughter relations are therefore central not only to the narratives presented in these texts, but also the way that the nation as motherland functions in both adoptive and diasporic contexts. In Sundaresan’s text, as in the others, the protagonist comes to understand herself and her relationship with her nation of birth through a negotiation of her relationship with the mother figures in her life. Whether it is an imagined competition between two women who are in actuality fighting for the same thing, the overt prevention of affiliation with one’s past life, the celebration of a mutually beneficial decision or criticism of someone’s past choices, constructions of mothers in Gowda’s, Kirchner’s Miró’s, Khokha’s, and Sundaresan’s texts are integral to understanding the plight of the adoptee, particularly as she relates to national identities, herself, and the women in her life. Competition between mothers is central to the novels examined in this chapter, while collaboration, co-operation, and mutual respect frames much of the discourse surrounding the mothers in the non-fiction works, with the obvious exception of the orphanage workers’ description of the bio-moms featured in Khokha’s film.

As alluded to in the chapter introduction, understandings of motherhood vary by field of study, culture, and time period, and these texts capture some of the many ways that motherhoods can be imagined. Drawing on feminist theories, in particular, this chapter has not only highlighted difference, but proposed an alternative reading for the relationship between adoption, diaspora, and literature through a reconfiguring of the text-as-child metaphor. The extension of this metaphor to include an understanding of the diasporic author’s narrative of homeland as a transnationally adopted child adds significance to the texts which feature adoption, as well as works to complicate a reading of this phenomenon in the chosen texts. In particular, it validates an author’s application of the compulsion to return to adoptees, which will be examined in the next chapter, as the use the adoptee as way to represent their own relationship with narratives of home. Stephen Guy-Bray ruminates:

What distinguishes children and texts from other bodily products, of course, is that both are seen as good, indeed – although in very different ways – as necessary to civilization. And this, I think, is precisely the problem: for textual

production, for having babies, and for the metaphoric equivalence of the two. Our culture's willingness to overlook the messiness of both personal and literary origins in the interests of social utility depends to a considerable extent on the elision of the reproducing, writing, and desiring body. (Guy-Bray 40)

Where Guy-Bray sees a problem, however, one can find the solution in adoption, which can be undertaken by male or female parents, and is inherently messy or at least infrequently linear. It is laborious, like the act of writing, and in many cases requires the parent/author to literally or figuratively travel great distances to actualize the fruits of their labours. The notion of motherhood (and, less frequently in this project but no less so in reality, parenthood), invites the reader to contemplate one's reproductive wishes and ponder the roles of mothers, authors, nations, people, and ideas. These complex negotiations are at the heart of these works, and indeed at the heart of the way that these works frame adoptees and their identities.

The shards of memory acquired greater status, greater resonance, because they were remains; fragmentation made trivial things seem like symbols, and the mundane acquired numinous qualities. There is an obvious parallel here with archaeology. The broken pots of antiquity, from which the past can sometimes, but always provisionally, be reconstructed, are exciting to discover, even if they are pieces of the most quotidian objects.

—Salman Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands* (12)

Casting oneself as indigenous, and others as alien, is never an innocent act.

—James Clifford, *Returns* (14)

Chapter Two: Power, Subalternity, and Nations of Birth: Constructions of Difference and Return Journeys in Narratives of Adoption

2.1 Reading Adoptee and Diasporic Return

This chapter considers the ways in which power differences are emphasized in narratives of adoption by diasporic Indian women writers, with a particular focus on the way that the texts represent the subalternity and otherness of the biological families of adoptees when they make their respective return journeys to India. Additionally, this chapter outlines the ways that the adoptees construct themselves in relation to others in their adopted homeland and within their nation of birth, with an emphasis on where they understand themselves to belong and be most at home. The notion of return is examined in relation to Miró's memoir, *Daughter of the Ganges*, Khokha's documentary, *India: Calcutta Calling*, Gowda's novel, *Secret Daughter*, Kirchner's novel, *Shiva Dancing*, and Renita D'Silva's novel, *The Forgotten Daughter*. All five of these works follow young transnationally adopted women as they return to India for the first time. Some of the young women seek to learn about their personal histories and try to gather information about their respective pasts and families, while others simply want to gain a broader understanding of the socio-cultural contexts from which they were adopted. The works, although very different, each feature similar negotiations of self and Other, as well as shifting understandings in the constructions of birth families and Indian peoples and cultures. In myriad ways, the adoptees seek to situate themselves within the families and broader communities of their birth, and to reconstruct their own senses of home and belonging.

For the real-life Miró and the fictional characters of Asha in Gowda's narrative, Meena in Kirchner's text, and Nisha in D'Silva's work, the return to India represents a journey towards understanding and accepting the situations which lead up to their adoptions. Miró, Asha, Meena, and Nisha are on quests to find their own personal roots, and although the three come

from very different cultural and economic backgrounds, their trips are framed in similar ways. The four women are, to a degree, successful, and gain increased understandings of the decisions of their biological and adoptive families, while at the same time learning about where they truly belong and how they should read their own cultural affiliations. Khokha's film features younger adoptees who travel with their adoptive families to get a taste of India; their trip is shorter, less personalized, and has the broader goal of expanding their understandings of India without necessarily seeking personal biological relations. The film therefore demonstrates how community-building in the adoptive homeland can help adoptees understand themselves in relation to their birth and adoptive homelands, and provides a point of comparison to challenge the other representations of the adoption processes. More than that, though, Khokha's film highlights the ways in which adoptees on return journeys situate themselves as members of their adoptive community groups rather than as Indian, challenging the literary representations of adoptees as rooted in their birthlands. Reactions to the film, including Khokha's own reflections, highlight the tensions between the assumptions made before filming/viewing/taking the trip, and the conclusions one can make after viewing the film.

Margaret Homans' "Adoption and Return: Transnational Genealogies, Maternal Legacies" (2011) opens with the following series of questions:

Is a transnational adoptee in the U.S. an exile, an immigrant, or just an American with a 'different' face? Is she a victim of kidnap, or of racist and sexist expulsion, or is she the beneficiary of a rescue, or perhaps a misguided 'study abroad' plan gone awry? Did love alone motivate her relinquishment and adoption, or was she an object of exchange in a global market in human lives? Does her identity derive from her DNA, her 'blood,' her 'birth culture,' or her adoptive environment; from her point of origin, from her adoptive 'fresh start,' or from her unstable location in global circuits of migration and exchange? (185)⁵⁸

Succinctly capturing many of the questions that come up in the narratives considered in this project, Homans' questions also draw attention to many of the ongoing debates surrounding adoption, particularly as it engages with and is shaped by a range of markets, industries, and shifting political affiliations. Linking all of these questions to the notion of return, Homans cites the desire to return and undertake a journey of self-discovery to be "acutely expressed" in the United States (187), though Miró's and D'Silva's narratives challenge this.⁵⁹ Like much adoption literature and scholarship, her work focuses on Korean adoptees, making it only

⁵⁸ Homans' reference to "study abroad gone awry" brings to mind Jackie Kay's *Red Dust Road*, as her father was an international student from Nigeria.

⁵⁹ D'Silva's narrative less so, due to Nisha's strong identification as British until the discovery of her adoption.

tangentially related to the status of adoptees from India, but her conclusions surrounding return in general are broadly applicable. She notes that many Korean adoptees have returned and set up lives in Seoul and that many reconnect with members of their birth communities, and links the search and the comfort of finding “homes” in Korea to the search for the comfort of the birth mother (189). There is often a difference in the fantasies and realities of return, and this discrepancy is exacerbated in the texts considered in this project, where adoptees cannot and do not “rehome” themselves in their nations of birth.

Miró’s, Gowda’s, Kirchner’s, and D’Silva’s books demonstrate shifts in understanding the reasons and circumstances leading up to adoption, however Khokha’s documentary does not emphasize such a transition. Rather, the film is largely critical of the biological families of the children in India, and many of Khokha’s respondents demonstrate varying levels of disgust and displeasure with their experiences in India as they struggle to understand the vast cultural differences and wealth disparity which separates the adopted girls from their biological families. Depending on the age at the time of adoption, adoptee return journeys can either mirror a diasporic return, or the return of a second-generation migrant to their homeland. I am hesitant to label these movements as migrations, because all but Kirchner’s Meena intend for the movements to be temporary, however the trip (which I refer to as a journey) is central to all of the narratives. By utilizing the term “journey” rather than “migration” or simply “trip,” I hope to connote the quest-like structure of the movements as a search for self, a search for roots, and a search for identity. All of the adoptees frame their journeys around learning more about themselves and understanding where they belong in the world by attempting to understand their pasts. The unique, de-kinned position of adoptees means that they are not necessarily sure about what they are going back to, or if they have anything to return to.⁶⁰

The journeys [back] to India in the works considered are therefore both returns and non-returns; the journeys allow readers to question the rhetorics of return by implying that one can go back to somewhere to which there is no memory and yet still feel as though one is returning to a place of significance. In the same article as she questions labeling adoptees as diasporic, Signe Howell also questions the nomenclature used to discuss returns. She writes that:

Transnationally adopted persons’ relationship with their country of origin is not analogous to that of other migrants. Their places of origin are not a globalizing space ... because for adoptees their country of origin is a naked place. If you cannot identify the place where you were born and where your birth parents live, if you cannot name your birth parents or other relatives, then what do ‘roots’

⁶⁰ As outlined by Howell (“Return Journeys” 257) and referenced in the introduction to this project.

tours that return you to your ‘motherland’ mean? (Howell “Return Journeys” 266)

Literary representations of adoption, then, complicate Howell’s assertions that the country of origin is a naked space for adoptees as they seek not only to return to the country but to seek out the families that may or may not be known to them. Howell questions the very returns that are at the heart of this chapter, but her arguments about social nakedness are in many ways disproven by the kin groups formed among children adopted from the same place, as well as by individuals who successfully locate their biological families. For example, by following a group on a “roots” tour, Khokha’s film sets out to further understandings of the roots tourism industry, and ends up confirming the “American-ness” of the teenage girls she follows. Although their journeys are more complex, the adoptees in other texts come to similar understandings of themselves as having more in common with their host countries than their birth countries.

Both second- and first-generation return migrations have been documented by numerous scholars in a wide range of fields, but scholars of literature have been relatively silent on the issue of returns — either as migrations or journeys of discovery. Despite the frequent occurrence of returns in literature, no theorist has directly addressed the implications of a diasporic writer re-writing the return journey, though several author- or text- specific analyses can be found.⁶¹ Moreover, to date, an overarching theory of the function of the diasporic return journey does not exist, perhaps because the reasons, feelings, and methods of return are so varied. Although the five works considered in what follows are also varied, all of the adoptees leave their adoptive lands hoping to discover some sort of essential truth about themselves in relation to their birth lands, and seek a belonging that they do not associate with their adoptive lands. The lengths and goals of their trips differ, but they all travel to India in hopes of gaining a better understanding of themselves in relation to the both the birth and adoptive lands. Narratives of adoption are rife with power discrepancies, and an analysis of the ways in which otherness is constructed by adoptees undertaking return journeys sheds light on the hegemonic forces at play within these texts, as well as the ways that they can be overcome. Divisions of power based on age, gender, and class intersect and dictate the trajectories that adoptees follow on both their initial departures from India, as well as their returns, and an examination of the return would be incomplete without a consideration of these power dynamics.

Return migration is not a new concept, and has been studied since before the term “diaspora” came into popular parlance. Despite the outlined hesitance to use the term

⁶¹ Several studies on return migration have been published in recent years, including Fran Markowitz and Anders H. Stefansson’s edited collection, *Homecomings: Unsettling Paths of Return* (2004) and Maria Antonia Oliver-Rotger’s anthology, *Identity, Diaspora and Return in American Literature* (2015).

“migration” to describe the return movements in the texts considered, one cannot consider the cultural and economic implications of return journeys without considering the broader concepts of migration and return. Early issues of the journal *International Migration* address the phenomena of different return migrations, as well as gauge the impact of these movements on both returnee and homeland populations. Saverio Callea’s paper on return migrations within Europe highlights some of the potential problems with reintegration into the originary homeland. Entitled “Different Forms, Reasons and Motivations for Return Migration of Persons who Voluntarily Decide to Return to Their Countries of Origin” (1986), Callea’s paper focuses on the conditions of migrants from Southern European countries to Northern ones and the counter-migration that occurred post 1973, at least in part as a result of the oil crisis (62). Perhaps more relevant to contemporary constructions of adoptee return than Callea’s actual findings are his speculations on the broader concept of return. He writes: “Return is a part of the migratory process, and constitutes its concluding phase. The departing emigrant always thinks of his return. He or she may cultivate this feeling for a whole lifetime only to realize, finally, that it is no longer possible” (63). Thus, Callea’s work emphasizes the same longing for the homeland as that which was characterized by the early theorization of diaspora.

Published in the same year as Callea’s study, the article entitled “The Meaning, Modalities and Consequences of Return Migration” (1986) by the Population Division of the Department of International Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat also focuses on the economic implications of return migrations. This UN publication quite succinctly defines return migration in such a way that it encompasses several forms of movement:

[T]he return of emigrants who had left their country intending to settle permanently abroad, the return of migrant workers upon the expiration of their temporary contracts in another country, the repatriation of administrators of overseas colonies and their families or even the ‘return’ of ‘second generation migrants’ (i.e., descendents of emigrants)[sic] who may have never themselves been residents of the country they enter. (UN 77)

By accepting that many types of migration *could* be considered return migrations, this UN publication opens up a vast and fruitful area of potential research which, I would argue, has not yet been fully explored. The UN calls return migration “one of the most deficient areas [of migration statistics]... In most cases, statistics on return migration do not even exist” (UN 78). This lack of statistics perhaps speaks to the current lack of theoretical research, though

innumerable empirical studies have been conducted within the Social Sciences on one group or another.

As if predicting the ensuing interest with diaspora, migration, and return, the UN publication is quick to point out that visits back to the homeland are not necessarily returns (UN 81). The publication goes on to outline the seemingly paradoxical notion of second- (or later) generational return:

[P]ersons at risk of returning can only be those who have left. However, the real world is often less than logical, and cases of ‘return’ without departure do arise as, for example, when the foreign-born descendents [sic] of the original emigrants return. It is in those instances that the criterion indicating belonging plays a crucial role for, without it, persons entering the country for the first time could hardly be considered ‘returnees’. In fact, the belonging criterion is the only element distinguishing return migration from general immigration and, to be a serviceable basis for measurement, it must be linked to objective ‘measurable’ characteristics of the immigrant. (UN 80)

The UN’s invocation of the notion of belonging is particularly telling, as it lays the foundations for studies such as this one, which interrogates the concept of return by individuals without homes or memories to “go back” to. Although the returns in the works considered in this project are still returns in the sense that the adoptees were once in India, their places of belonging have shifted as a result of their adoptions, as have their relationships with India.

More contemporary research characterizes return migrations as counter-diasporic migrations or diasporic return journeys. Robin Cohen includes reference to return movements in his criteria for characterizing diasporas, outlined in the introductory chapter (Cohen 17), and William Safran likewise refers to the myth of return in his “Diasporas and Modern Society: Myths of Homeland and Return.” On returns, Safran writes:

Some diasporas persist—and their members do not go ‘home’—because there is no homeland to which to return; because, although a homeland may exist, it is not a welcoming place with which they can identify politically, ideologically, or socially; or because it would be too inconvenient and disruptive, if not traumatic, to leave the diaspora. In the meantime, the myth of return serves to solidify ethnic consciousness and solidarity when religion can no longer do so, when the cohesiveness of the local community is loosened, and when the family is threatened with disintegration. (91)

The fact that nearly all of the texts considered in this project feature a movement towards return and resettlement is curious because it suggests that the adoptees participate in the same mythologizing of homeland as diasporic subjects. Moreover, this identification with the birth land as “home,” and the resistance on the parts of the adoptive parents to accept a connection with India is in contrast to Howell’s finding in *The Kinning of Foreigners*. As Howell notes, “many parents (but not adoptees) claim that the return visit was one of the most significant events in their lives, little indicates a desire to really find out about the country. Viewed from a different perspective, these visits may be analyzed as an aid to the kinning process; perhaps even its culmination” (*Kinning* 80). The compulsion to return with the intention of resettlement, as highlighted in these texts, therefore emphasizes a strong tie to India as a homeland rather than simply a place of birth, and unites these characters into a group worthy of examination utilizing theories of diaspora.

James Clifford’s *Returns: Becoming Indigenous in the Twenty-First Century* is useful to consider here as well, as Clifford’s interrogation of the right to claim indigeneity is complicated by adoptees’ claims of belonging. To approach what he refers to as the “the complex terrain of contemporary indigeneity, [Clifford relies] on three analytic terms: articulation, performance, and translation. ... All are terms of process” (45). These processes are emphasized in the texts considered in this project, as adoptees articulate feelings of nonbelonging, perform in efforts to belong, and undertake and undergo acts of both literal and cultural translation.

Russell King and Anastasia Christou outline what can be characterized as the second possibility for reading adoptee return: reading adoptee return as a second-generation return. In their paper “Cultural Geographies of Counter-Diasporic Migration: The Second Generation Returns ‘Home’” (2010), King and Christou expand on the numerous ways that second-generation migrants maintain ties to the ancestral homeland, including seeking a life-partner from their parent’s birth land (108), or embarking on a quest to find one’s ancestors (107). Naming the phenomenon “counter-diasporic migration,” King and Christou carefully outline the problems with identifying second-generation migration as return, but ultimately suggest that it is a worthy and burgeoning field to be further examined. Importantly, King and Christou’s study deals with neither adoptee nor Indian return migration, but with individuals of Greek heritage returning to the ancestral land, but they nevertheless provide a useful framework for analyzing the movements embodied in the literatures of adoption. Careful to emphasize the inherent paradox of naming the movements of a second-generation migrant group a “return” (115), King and Christou instead employ theories of diasporic movement and return to the

second-generation participants in their study. They note that “[e]vidence of return is sporadically present in the literature on diasporas, but is not systematically conceptualised as a migratory flow” (104), highlighting one of the problems encountered while conducting this research. They also provide a useful overview of previous literatures dealing with return, including Cohen’s, Safran’s and Brah’s foundational texts of diaspora studies.

King and Christou conclude their survey arguing that “one of the most revealing objectives of diaspora research is to illuminate the complex processes by which migrants mediate and reconcile the contradictions between the diasporic condition, the notion of ‘home’ and the role of the homeland as an actual (or denied or destroyed) nation-state” and argue that the complex relationship between “home” and “kinship” contribute to varied readings of diaspora (115). They further refer to the process by which second generation migrants return to the homeland as “illogical, unless it represents the deferred ambition of the first generation to return, transmitted explicitly or implicitly to the children of the immigrants” (116), which raises questions about the constructions of both home and hostland in literatures of adoption which feature return journeys. Significantly, King and Christou’s theorizing of the diasporic return as “illogical” is applicable and confirmed by narratives of adoption in which adoptees seek to return only to find that there is little to return to (116).

This chapter therefore moves forward with an examination of Miró, due to the fact that her return to India is, on the surface, the most simple. As a memoir, her text purports to outline the reality of her lived experiences as an adoptee returning to India, the same way the Khokha’s film chronicles the experiences of other adoptees’ returns to India. However, the inconsistencies in her narrative (both explained and unexplained), render parts of the text fictional and other parts subject to scrutiny. Split into two subsections, the following considers the ways that Miró inserts herself into the lives and narratives of those she meets in India, as well as the way that she creates a fictional past both more dramatic and traumatic than her lived experiences. Miró’s work creates a hierarchy of experience that renders her Indian family, friends, and colleagues and their experiences secondary and subordinate to her adoptive life, even as she capitalizes on it. This analysis relies heavily on theories of memory, as well as analyses of the production of memoir to undertake a close reading of the relationships between self and Other in Miró’s work.

Miró’s memoir, *Daughter of the Ganges*, is a first-person narrative account of the experiences of a transnational adoptee attempting to return to her nation of birth as an adult. Miró was adopted into a Catalan family around the age of 7 and she knew very little about her biological family except that they had placed her in an orphanage in Nasik as an infant and that

she was moved to Mumbai to a larger orphanage with a school at the age of three.⁶² *Daughter of the Ganges* is unique in that begins as an attempt by Miró to chronicle her own history, and ends with her disproving many of “facts” that she has gathered about her own life. It is therefore imperative to note that the version of the text that is analyzed in this project is not the original publication, but an English translation which combines Miró’s original narrative (“Daughter of the Ganges”) with a second text (“The Two Faces of the Moon”) which she writes after her second visit to India.

The first section of the text (“Daughter of the Ganges”) chronicles Miró’s first trip back to India as a volunteer with the Setem, a Spanish based organization which takes volunteers to Mumbai and also to Nasik, where Miró believes she was born. While on her trip, Miró participates in home-stays and work projects with other Spanish youth and gains some insight into the lives of locals, both poor and middle-class. She also arranges to visit the orphanages at which she lived prior to her adoption. Her first stop is the orphanage she lived in from the age of three until she was adopted, Regina Pacis in Mumbai, followed by a visit to Dev Mata in Nasik. The second section of the text covers Miró’s second trip to India, which she undertakes seven years after the first, after publishing her book and garnering interest in a documentary about her life (141). During this second visit, Miró uncovers more details about her past, and disproves and complicates some of the information she gathered on her first visit. After summarizing the events of her return trip to Regina Pacis, Miró learns that a man from her birth village remembers when she was surrendered for adoption, and returns to the town where she was born to meet her biological family. The final section of the text gives an overview of Miró’s sisters’ lives, and they compare their pasts with Miró’s.

Miró’s text highlights many of the challenges facing transnational adoptees who attempt to seek out their pasts and return to their birth lands and/or families. Her trip to India functions simultaneously as both a return and a first journey; she was a child when she left and therefore has had little exposure to the cultures of India since she arrived in Barcelona in 1974, but feels that her heritage grants her special privileges and obligations for her trip. Miró’s attempts to reclaim her roots in India serve to highlight the vast linguistic, economic, and social differences between her birth and adoptive lands and families, as well as to emphasize that one cannot simply return to a pre-adoptive land or family and attempt to find a place for oneself, as Miró appears to attempt. The errors and omissions made in *Daughter of Ganges*, which Miró corrects in the updated versions of the text, raise questions about how Miró has constructed India

⁶² Miró states that she was adopted at the age of 6 (4), but later says she was nearly 7 (7), that she wanted to “fill the gap of those first seven years” (12) and that the exact date of her birth is unclear (226, 234).

throughout her years in Barcelona, as well as how her adoptive family's class and economic status may have influenced her conceptions of the orphanage and her life in Mumbai.

The following two subchapters therefore analyze the ways in which Miró's narrative both creates and maintains hegemonic constructions of otherness throughout her visits to India. In the first, "Asha Miró's *Daughter of the Ganges: Silence, Translation, and Appropriations of Otherness*," the ways that Miró attempts to insert herself into the lives of the Indian women that she meets and assumes aspects of their identities for herself are considered, as are the ways that she constructs herself in relation to other tourists and adoptees. Miró's efforts to learn about her past go beyond mere curiosity, and her pervasive and intense longing to fit in actually serves to further ostracize her. Of even greater interest is that fact that she concludes her text by stating that she had always known she would not fit in India, despite the fact that she spends the entirety of her first trip attempting to. This project further considers the ways that Miró's appropriation of voice and otherness work to silence and further subalternate her biological siblings. With a focus on language use, the ways in which her use of unreliable interpreters allow her to access and claim the narratives of her sisters, and the implications of her choices is also analyzed. Rather than allowing their voices to be heard, Miró's appropriation of the stories of her sisters works to silence them, as she sees their life experiences only in regards to how they relate to her and denies them a merit or worth of their own.

The second subsection, "Narrative, Truth, and Archeology: Digging through the Remains in *Daughter of the Ganges*," considers the ways in which Miró's errors and omissions function within the text to evoke sympathy and to perpetuate the construction of the struggling orphaned child, obscuring the fact that Miró is now a middle-class adult who has actually gained a great deal from the publication of her adoption story. Miró is read as an unreliable and at times self-deceiving narrator, and an analysis of the ways in which Miró's text both fits and complicates the genre of memoir is conducted here.

In the third subchapter, one moves on to consider the return journey as portrayed by Sasha Khokha in *India: Calcutta Calling*. Return to the nation of birth in Miró and Khokha's texts is mired in a desire to visit, to understand, and to give back to the India which the adoptees and/or their parents feel has given them so much. In the fictional narratives of adoption, the return journey serves quite a different purpose than in the two non-fictional accounts of return, as adoptees seek to take from India, rather than give to her. What therefore follows is an examination of return in Khokha with a study of the return journeys undertaken in three fictions works, with an emphasis on adoptee identity and belonging. Adoptees in the non-fictional narratives seek to go to India temporarily in hopes that they will leave with an understanding

of the situations that led to their adoption (on the personal level in Miró and at the systemic level for Khokha's subjects), but the characters in the novels considered in this project want more; they want to reclaim a simultaneous sense of belonging in India and ownership of India that they feel has been denied to them by the circumstances of their adoption. Khokha's work demonstrates the ways in which the return journey is constructed as an integral part of the adoptee experience to highlight the ways that transnational adoption is an emerging market, as well as a point of contrast against which to examine the selected literature. As an exemplar of one aspect of the burgeoning "Roots Tourism" industry, Khokha's film also functions as an avenue to explore the inherent complications of roots tourism, adoptive homeland tourism, and return journeys as a whole. The analysis here draws on James Clifford's work on the homophones of roots and routes to examine the adoptee return journey as a potential failed route to the discovery of roots which thereby reaffirms the process of grafting children into their new families. The botanical process of grafting a branch from one plant on to another thus becomes a useful way to look at adoptees as individuals who cannot easily return to their prior lives, as they have become integrated into their new kinship structures.⁶³

Gowda's Asha and Kirchner's Meena seek a more permanent return to India and a reclamation of an identity which they claim as their own. Renita D'Silva's *The Forgotten Daughter* makes its debut here as well, as the adoptive parents' death precipitates Nisha's return to India in a similar way to that of the other characters. An examination of the way that return contributes to adoptee identity formation and understanding of self in relation to multiple understandings of home and belonging will therefore be undertaken here, beginning with Gowda's novel, and then progressing on to Kirchner's and D'Silva's texts. In all of these works, adoptees come to understand themselves and their experiences through meeting with an Other and by witnessing how their birth families, either present or imagined, live in India, but this is most present in Miró's, Gowda's, and D'Silva's works. The concept of subalternity, in a Spivakian sense, is helpful here for understanding the dynamics of power within the texts that are discussed here.⁶⁴ In the context of Miró's work, this is relevant in the ways that she attempts to speak for and to many groups of people at the same, time, as well as in the ways that she

⁶³ The book *Grafted: Preparing the Way for Adoption* (2012) by Mark Young is evidence of the common usage of this metaphor. Young's book is designed to help couples make a decision to adopt, but he fully articulates the metaphor of grafting, breaking it down into a step by step process throughout the entirety of his text. Novy also analyses the Shakespearean use of the metaphor of grafting in relation to the character of Perdita (Novy *Reading* 83, 131). A reading of the relationship between grafting and adoption in Shakespeare can also be found in Erin Ellerbeck's "Adoption and the Language of Horticulture in *All's Well that Ends Well*."

⁶⁴ Gayatri Chakraborty Spivak interrogates the notion of subalternity in several of her works. However, in *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason* (1999) Spivak deconstructs "the postcolonial performance of the construction of the constitutional subject of the new nation, in subalternity rather than, as most often by renaming the colonial subject, as citizen" (141), and it is in this manner that I employ the term.

attempts to insert herself into the lives of her biological family in India, validating their experiences by comparing them to her own and vice versa. For Asha and adoptive mother Somer in Gowda's novel, the return journey presents an opportunity for mother and daughter to come to terms with the fact that Asha has strong ties to both India and the United States. Asha, in turn, has to accept that just because a part of her past is inaccessible to her does not make it valueless. For Kirchner's Meena, the lesson that one cannot simply go home is learned the hard way when she attempts to return to her village. Likewise, D'Silva's Nisha comes to understand herself as loved by both her adoptive and biological families, and as a result becomes more open to expressing her emotions to her long-time partner.

In all five texts, adoptees grapple with how to understand the differences between the self and the other in economic, cultural, and linguistic terms, and learn to situate themselves within their nations of birth. Of the texts considered, Kirchner's character of Meena is the oldest at the time of her adoption, and for this reason, she demonstrates the greatest nostalgic longing for a past of any of the protagonists. Unlike the others, she clearly remembers her life in India, and demonstrates both a longing to go back as well as a construction of her birthland as frozen and the expectation that things will be the same upon her return, despite the fact that twenty-eight years have passed. Thus, I bring together narratives from three different genres with the aim of aligning the constructions of home and return in adoptive texts with the broader discourses of home and return in the context of diasporic South Asian writing. At the same time, in the examined texts, the return is coupled with the realization that although ties to the originary homeland may exist and be very positive, the adoptees acculturation to their adoptive hostland is complete, and they are more foreign in their birth lands than they would like to admit. An examination of the return journey is central to understanding how the adoptees in these narratives construct "home" as well as how protagonists construct themselves in relation to the nation states of their birth and adoptive families, which is, in turn relevant to understanding how diasporic authors represent home, and more specifically their affiliative homelands, in their respective literatures.

2.2 Asha Miró's *Daughter of the Ganges*: Silence, Translation, and Appropriations of Otherness

The primary function of Miró's work is autobiographical, but the text also functions as an (auto)ethnography as Miró attempts to provide insight into the communities of adoptive

families, Catalan families, Indian families, and Indian orphans.⁶⁵ Throughout the text, Miró creates a fiction of her imagined past rather than the representation of reality that she set out to create. In many ways, she appropriates the voices of her biological family members and attempts to speak to and for all transnational adoptees, which contributes to the unreliability of her work and serves to highlight the inequalities between Miró's European and Indian lives. Rather than gaining and granting access to the narratives of her biological family in rural India, Miró's text obscures the realities of both transnational adoptees and rural Indian women by constructing a false similarity and propagating a false universality of experience. She inserts herself into the lives of her biological family, thereby claiming their histories as her own, and is unable to free herself from the biases she has developed from growing up in Spain, despite an awareness of her shortcomings. An analysis of Miró's comparative constructions of self and other, as well as an analysis of the role of language and translation in the construction of self, illuminates the many ways that Miró constructs hierarchies which reinforce cultural hegemony and further other, silence, and construct as subaltern the people with whom she interacts.

Before delving in to Miró's work, it is important to note that, as a memoir, it stands out among the works examined in this project. The study of life writing has expanded significantly in recent years, though much of the research focuses on autobiography rather than memoir. As noted by Philippe Lejeune in *On Autobiography* (1989), the two forms are closely related, though memoir tends to deal with different subject matter, focusing on one experience rather than an individual's entire life (Lejeune 3-5). Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson likewise expand on the differences between the two genres in *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives* (2010) (2-4). Significantly, in contrast to autobiography, which they refer to as "life writing," Smith and Watson refer to memoir as "life narratives," which encompasses life stories told through a wide range of mediums (4). Miró's story is the narrative not only of her own life, but also of the lives of biological and adoptive families, and her approach to narrating the lives of others is particularly interesting in relation to the structure of power present within the text.

Miró's elevated self-construction is evident from very early on in the text. For Miró, it is not just a serendipitous coincidence that she can visit both Mumbai and Nasik in one trip and participate in community building and volunteer projects in the two communities that she is tied to, but something she attributes to fate (Miró 10). Miró uses this act of "fate" to elevate

⁶⁵ Ryan Prout refers to Miró's two original publications as "autoethnographic memoirs" (493) and *Daughter of the Ganges* as an "autoethnographic documentary memoir" (499), while the back cover of the English language edition identifies the text as belonging to the "Biography & Autobiography" genre. Prout's identification more succinctly captures the othering nature of Miró's text, but one may question how much of an autoethnography it is when she is not, in fact, looking at groups to which she really belongs.

herself above others who go to India simply as tourists; a point which emphasizes a lot about her character and demonstrates one of the ways in which Miró constructs herself in relation to others by establishing a hierarchy. When discussing her decision to return to India on her own, rather than with her adoptive family, Miró asserts: “Finally, I reached the point where I felt that I was ready, that I wanted to go back to my country. However, for me, the return itself was as important as the way in which I made the journey... Knowing the reality of India, I wasn’t going to settle for just passing through the country, passively taking in the view” (9). On the one hand, her desire to return and give something back is laudable. On the other hand, however, she sets a precedent for others and suggests that those who do not want to travel in the same way are selfish and unaware of the “reality of India,” ignoring the benefits of tourism on the country as well as the privilege required to undertake a sustained trip like hers. She comes close to realizing this when she notes that “[t]hose of us who travel to India with their [sic] heads full of good intentions and a will to work and make themselves useful often find themselves disillusioned... Yet in retrospect I realize that these work camps are focused primarily on having us observe and learn from everything around us” (71). However, Miró continues to make comparisons between her experience and a more comfortable tourist travel experience. In the above statement, Miró comes close to identifying an awareness of the constructed nature of volunteer trips like the one that she makes, but falls short of recognizing that her trip is not entirely altruistic and authentic.

Miró’s condemnation of other tourists comes up again when she goes to the Taj Mahal Hotel, when she notes that:

Seeing the people who are lodged at the Taj Mahal makes me think that many of them come here only to take everything that India offers them, marvelous sights, great temples and palaces, a little exoticism, but without letting it get too close. Many of them would be so taken aback by what they would see that they are probably better off spending their holidays sealed up inside these walls, with their air conditioning, not having to tread on anything but these sumptuous carpets. (88)

Miró again ignores the gross contributions tourism makes to the Indian economy, as well as the ways that short term volunteer programs and work camps like the ones she participates in simply produce a different but equally constructed experience. Furthermore, she again does not acknowledge that a certain degree of economic privilege is required to undertake the kind of sustained travels generally required for “making a difference,” but this does not stop her from

reinforcing a hierarchical comparison of types of travel which relegates her to the top and most altruistic position.

From a very early point in the text, Miró makes it clear that she considers herself to belong in India and makes a strong effort to do so. Upon her arrival in Mumbai she notes that “the clothes [she] had brought with [her] were not the most suitable in the stifling heat. [She] felt very hot and decided to dress the way Indian women do – partly because of the weather, but also as a sign of having decided to be like them” (46). The caveat that Miró chooses her clothes out of desire to “be like the Indian women” illustrates just how fluid she views identity to be; being Indian is reduced merely to a style of dress that Miró can put on and off as she chooses. Additionally, the statement suggests that others will also be able to read Miró’s sign and understand that it is a sign of solidarity rather than appropriation; her emphasis on the significance of the salwar kameez she begins to wear is further evident when she identifies the meanings of the colours of the outfit she wears to go to the orphanage for the first time (45).

Her strong, pervasive desire to insert herself into Indian society is exemplified again when she embarrasses herself by asking a group of local girls which caste she belongs to: “When they finally manage to stop laughing, they tell me that I don’t belong to any caste because I am not Indian ... that there is nothing left about me that is Indian” (96-97). Her lack of perspective appears again when she notes that: “It’s one thing to notice that they look at me and treat me in a strange way, as though they don’t really know if I belong here or which planet I come from, or they don’t know what to make of me, but it is quite disappointing to be flat-out told that I have nothing to do with this place. It is painful to feel that I have lost everything” (97), ignoring the fact that she has as much gained a Catalan/European identity as she has lost an Indian one.⁶⁶

During the interim period between her first and second visit to India, Miró notes that: “The act of filling the gaps, of finding answers, has allowed me to find myself, to form a more solid identity. Now I know that I also belong to the wonderful land of India, and it is wonderful not because everyone says so but rather because in many ways I felt just like another Indian; I was happy to be a part of it” (132-133). This statement directly contradicts the alienation discussed throughout the text, and suggests that Miró’s acculturation into India was smooth and easy, which she has already demonstrated was not the case. In a story that is supposed to be her

⁶⁶ In a footnote in her paper “‘Normal’ in Catalonia: Standard Language, Enregisterment and the Imagination of a National Public” (2009), Susane Frekko draws on Miró’s work as evidence that Catalan identity is cultural and has little to do with origin or physical appearance. Frekko notes that Miró “was widely celebrated as a Catalan person because of her linguistic and cultural assimilation to Catalan ways, despite her South Asian origin. Other foreign-born adoptees are treated similarly; if raised by Catalan speaking parents, they are considered Catalan as well, regardless of their phenotypic characteristics.” (91).

own, Miró continues to perform for her readers, constructing a narrative that is congruent with what one might expect to have happened rather than what she actually experienced. At the same time, Miró decides that the story of her adoption should be used to inspire and promote more adoptions, assuming that others will be as fortunate as she been: “Coming back to Barcelona also opened my eyes to another reality. There was a whole movement of people adopting children from other countries. I felt obliged to tell my story. I couldn’t just keep it to myself because I had taken as much as I could from it... I could show people that even though things seemed complicated they would turn out well in the end” (133). While this statement appears to be motivated by altruism, readers can infer that Miró believes to be able to speak for adoptees, ignoring the inherent differences that are bound to be present in each family and individual.

Later in the text, Miró moves beyond trying to insert herself broadly into Indian society and works specifically at recreating the life she would have had if she had not been surrendered for adoption. On her second visit to India, Miró meets with her biological sister and half-sister, as well as members of their extended families. She strives to learn their about their lives so as to imagine what her own life would have been like had she not been adopted. Through attempting to narrate the stories of her birth sisters, Miró assumes a position of power over them. Moreover, their stories are only constructed as relevant in relation to hers. A lengthy conversation with both of her sisters takes Miró’s text beyond being simply autobiographical and draws it into the broader group of texts telling the stories of women, creating a sort of pseudo-(auto)ethnography constructing their lives as peripheral and her own as central.

Miró first meets with her sister Asha,⁶⁷ and later the two of them travel together to meet their half-sister Sakubai. Asha was quite young when Miró was surrendered for adoption, so she has little memory of her, but Sakubai is quite a bit older and nursed Miró during the interim time between the death of her mother and her relinquishment for adoption (Miró 179, 225-228). As such, she is able to fill in gaps in Miró’s actual past, while Asha is able only to relay events in her own life which Miró appropriates to imagine an alternative history for herself. In *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason* (1999), Spivak writes that “[w]hen publishing women are from the dominant ‘culture,’ they sometimes share, with male authors, the tendency to create an inchoate ‘other’ (often female), who is not even a native informant, but a piece of material evidence” (113), and one can see echoes of this in Miró’s construction of Asha. Miró employs the narratives of her siblings in order to create a point of reference and situate herself in Indian

⁶⁷ Miró and her biological sister are both named Asha. Miró was originally named Usha and her older sister named Asha, but Asha means “hope” and before relinquishing her for adoption her father thought that Miró needed hope as well, so he attempted to switch the names of his children. As Asha was older and verbal at this time, she rejected the name change and continued to be called Asha (Miró 181).

society to recreate the past that she might have had if she had remained in India. Few aspects of Asha's identity are not utilized by Miró as points of comparison against which she examines her own life; she considers marrying a similar man, having similar childbirth experiences, having a similar childhood, and even imagines what her life would be like if she moved in with her sister now:

The Asha who lives in Kolpewadi could be the Asha who lives in Barcelona. I could be the other Asha. If Radhu had decided it was more difficult to take care of a young child than a baby, I would have had another life, probably very similar to the one that Asha is living. So similar that it might have been the same. By now I might have four children and a husband like Bikhaji. And the life of Asha might have been very similar to mine ... Could she have been the Catalan one and I the one who spoke only a dialect of Marathi? (209)

Thus, Miró constructs herself and Asha as interchangeable, and strips both herself and her sister of any sort of capability of autonomy and difference. Asha's life becomes relevant to the text only as a foil for her own; something to be held up and compared against.

Furthermore, Miró's reference to Asha's spoken language reinforces hierarchy. As pointed out by Ryan Prout in "Cradling the Nation: Asha Miró's Autoethnographies, Discourses of International Adoption, and the Construction of Spanishness," (2009) Miró's comparisons are not neutral, but in fact serve to once again reinforce a hierarchy between Spain and India. Prout asserts that:

Miró does not qualify the language she speaks, she simply names it. Her sister's language, on the other hand, is named within a qualification, [a dialect of Marathi]. Indirectly, then, the unlikely permutations established by the unexpected convergence of the Catalan and the Indian create a hierarchical order of possible identities in which the language of the birth culture is merely a dialect and the language of the adoptive culture is a securely named entity requiring no further definition. (506)

The hierarchy to which Prout refers is also reinforced by Miró's use of the word "only," as readers are by this point aware of the fact that Miró speaks Catalan, Spanish, and basic English. To expand on Prout's work, this affirmation solidifies Miró's construction of herself as superior to her sister and Catalan culture as more valuable than Maharashtra/rural Indian cultures.

Despite their linguistic differences, Miró still goes on to tell Asha's and Sakubai's stories in her text. The first conversation between Asha and Miró is interpreted by Francis Waghmare, a local teacher whose father helped Miró's biological father place her at the

convent. Grateful for the assistance he provides, Miró writes that “Francis is a perfect translator, the best interpreter we could possibly have. He never stops talking, in one language or another. He too is a part of our story and these moments are very intense for him ... His accent in English is a little difficult for me to understand and he has to work hard to allow both Asha and myself to express ourselves through him” (199). Miró also notes that Francis sometimes pauses to emphasize the cultural differences or the significance of certain objects that she may not be familiar with (199). Despite his best efforts, however, it is unlikely that Francis is able to convey the full meaning of what the women are saying to each other as the conversation is occurring. Moreover, he translates not into Catalan or Spanish, which Miró is more familiar with, but into a spoken English that Miró identifies as “difficult to understand” (199); Miró likewise refers to her own English as “precarious” (214).

Her subsequent meeting with Asha is also subject to a translation of questionable reliability, as Merlyn from the convent translates Asha’s Marathi “to a Spanish that she claims to hardly ever use but that she speaks very well” (242). For such nuanced and intimate conversations, it is surprising that Miró does not reference any instances in which the correct words could not be found to convey an idea, or where she felt that she was missing something, particularly when considering how misinformed she became about her own origins on her first visit to India. Miró’s conversations with her sisters have therefore been translated a minimum of two times; first by Francis or Merlyn as they occur, and then as the text is translated by Jamal Mahjoub into English. Furthermore, it is unclear whether Miró transcribes the conversations from recording, memory, or as they are occurring, which makes the hierarchy that Prout highlights is ever more salient. This series of translations begs the question of what has been lost, and to what extent readers are actually hearing the voice of Asha. That Miró is in many ways giving her sister a voice complicates the ways in which we read Miró as either Indian or Catalan, and whether or not one can read her text as oppressive, neutral, or liberating.

Although most scholarly research on translation focuses on literary translation, such as that which Mahjoub conducted in Miró’s work, and not on the simultaneous interpretation that Francis and Merlyn undertake, many of the theories of power and hegemony apply in both cases. Oft cited translation scholar Lawrence Venuti refers in *The Translator’s Invisibility* (1995) to translation as an act of violence. He notes that “violence ... resides in the very purpose and activity of translation: the reconstitution of the foreign text [is] in accordance with values, beliefs and representations that preexist it in the target language, always configured in hierarchies of dominance and marginality, always determining the production, circulation, and reception of texts” (18). Miró’s appropriation of her sisters’ narratives is no exception, as she

reinforces a hierarchy of languages throughout her text. Susan Bassnet likewise notes in “The Translation Turn in Cultural Studies” (1998) that translation “is a primary method of imposing meaning while concealing the power relations that lie in the production of that meaning” (136), and Miró’s acts of translation work in the same way, as they initiate comparisons between Miró and her sisters but ignore the ways in which Miró constructs the meaning of their lives in relation to her own.

It is worth noting that on her first visit, Miró attempted to learn Marathi (38), but no mention is made of any attempt to improve her skills in the interim period between visits; her disappointment that she did not remember the language from her childhood puts her off from attempting to learn more, despite the fact that her second trip is undertaken with the intention of locating her family and filming their reunion (Miró 142). Knowing that she is going back to seek out her biological family in rural Maharashtra, it is likewise surprising that neither Miró nor the television producer anticipate the need for a trained interpreter, and this oversight, too, suggests a lack of cultural awareness and sensitivity towards the power of translation. Venuti touches on this when he further asserts that “[o]n the one hand, translation wields enormous power in the construction of national identities for foreign cultures... On the other hand, translation enlists the foreign text in the maintenance or revision of literary canons in the target-language culture” (19), which indeed, can be said of most literatures. Miró employs translation in both ways in her text; constructing India for her Catalan readers (and subsequent communities as the text underwent various other translations), and also to reassert her own success as an attempt to construct herself in relation to India.

Clifford’s work on translation as a tool for understanding cultural change in relation to indigeneity and return is helpful in understanding the transformations and complexities of Miró’s work. He writes that:

The concept of translation, better than transmission, communication, or mediation, brings out the bumps, losses, and makeshift solutions of social life. The theory/metaphor of translation keeps us focused on cultural truths that are continuously ‘carried across,’ transformed and reinvented in practice....And it is harder to naturalize a racial essence or an authentic cultural tradition: you belong or you don’t. Cultural translation is always uneven, always betrayed. (Clifford *Returns* 48)

By highlighting the unevenness of the act of translation, Clifford draws attention to the ways in which it establishes hierarchy. Miró’s use of translations highlights her position of non-belonging, while at the same time emphasizing her position of power over her subjects, who in

this case are her biological family members. Most importantly, Clifford brings together theories of diaspora and translation in a way that makes more clear its application to Miró's work; he highlights and identifies the problems of cultural translation to be central to establishing new meanings in a cultural context. To paraphrase, cultural translation allows practices to be transmitted across boundaries, and ultimately understood differently in varied contexts (Clifford *Returns* 48-49).

Thus, even in its Catalan original, Miró's text would still be considered a translation by some because, according to Anuradha Dingwaney in the introduction to *Between Languages and Cultures: Translation and Cross-Cultural Texts* (1995) "translation is not restricted to such linguistic transfers alone; translation is also the vehicle through which 'Third World' cultures (are made to) travel—transported or 'borne across' to and recuperated by audiences in the West" (4). In an examination of the ways in which culture is (re)created through the act of translation, Dingwaney highlights the ways that Miró was translating even as she was experiencing and writing about things in her (adopted) mother tongue. Like Venuti, she links translation to violence (4, 6), and further notes that "[a] different, albeit related, exercise of (Western) power has to do ...with what and who gets translated. This has to do with the selection of certain voices, certain views, certain texts – by the publishing industry ... and by reviewers and critics – that are then constituted as a putative 'canon' of 'Third World' texts and/or authors" (5). Miró's story was found worthy of publication, translation, and television creation most likely because it fits in to an expected preconceived notion of adoptee identity construction: Miró returns (home?) to India only to find that does not fit in there, that she is better off where she ended up.⁶⁸ However, it also sets up and openly invites comparisons between Miró's life and the lives of her sisters as a hierarchical construct.

As rural Indian women, Miró's sisters both fit into the category of subaltern. Through her communication with them and the subsequent publication of her books, Miró attempts to give them a voice, but instead succeeds only in appropriating their stories for personal gain; she spends little time allowing them to share their personal histories, and focuses only on the parts of their narrative that relate to her. When she does allow them to speak about their experiences, she compares herself to them and attempts to imagine her life having been like theirs. Thus, their stories are constructed as valueless on their own unless held up against Miró's middle class Western narrative; the differences between Asha's and Sakubai's lives and Miró's life are

⁶⁸ Information about the production of Miró's documentary, released in 2003, can be found online in the Catalan Films & TV company database under the title *Asha, Daughter of the Ganges*. Miró's website, ashaMiró.org details Miró's involvement with the adoption community after her returns from India, as well as publication information for her texts in various translations.

the only reason their stories are heard, or given weight in a public or international forum.⁶⁹ While on the surface readers are given privileged access to Asha's narrative and she is given access to speech, in actuality she is being stripped of her capacity to speak because we assume to now know her story, when in actuality we know only the parts that Miró was able to employ in constructing her narrative. Western biases about the lives of rural Indian woman are in fact reinforced; Miró's narrative complicitly reiterates a palatable and desirable success story. Miró's story was not constructed as one of loss, but as one of great gain; she benefitted by being relinquished for adoption and relocated to Barcelona, she gained from her return, and she gained from the inaccuracies in her text, because without them she may not have been redirected towards her biological family. Asha and Sakubai gained access to a sister they thought to be lost forever, as well as international and local acclaim. However, Miró very explicitly constructs their identities, and indeed, constructs their identities with a focus on the way that their lives are different from her.

Miró concludes the second section of her book in much the same way as she concluded the first: with an address to other adoptees and their families that implies sameness and ignores privilege. She "urge[s] all those who were adopted when they were very young and might have thought of making the journey one day... to put aside the notion that it is not worth the effort and to take the chance of returning to their country of origin. It is worth it to find the street where you have always been told you were discovered" (261). In this statement, the "it" in "worth it" remains ambiguous—is Miró referring to the financial costs of return journeys, the emotional toll, or the risk of upsetting adoptive family members? Likewise, her use of the term "discovered" echoes the discourses of colonial expansion, thereby granting further power to adoptive families and organizations and removing agency from surrendering parents. Regardless of what sort of burden she is referring to, her statement functions based on the assumption that all adoptees will be able to associate positively with their nations and families of birth, and that all will be able to deal emotionally with their personal histories, and that all have the privilege of being able to afford the time and the money to travel to a country that is potentially on the other side of the world from their current location. This assumption comes from a constructed similarity that is prevalent throughout the text which devalues and discredits parts of Miró's narrative and serves to further other those whose adopted lives have not turned

⁶⁹ In the original version of "Can the Subaltern Speak," Spivak writes that "Western intellectual production is, in many ways, complicit with Western international economic interests" (271). In *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, Spivak returns to the same question (281-311), somewhat challenging the broad application of her work by other scholars. However, in relation to Miró's publication of her sisters' narratives, the notion of production for Western consumption is emphasized: Miró's sisters are given voices in the text only because of their relationship to Miró.

out as Miró's has, as well as those who choose to privilege and identify with their adopted culture rather than focusing on their birth cultures.

To once again draw on Dingwaney to synthesize the implications of Miró's undertakings as a cultural and verbal translator:

In the translation of non-Western cultures (and languages), it is imperative that translators/ethnographers make their power and privileged vantage point evident. This task entails not only that they remain aware of their own locations with respect to the cultures they study, but also ... that they fully understand whom they write for, within what contexts, and, more than anything else, the mediated status of their accounts. (9)

Thus, the issue with Miró's text is not that it is written, nor is it that she highlights differences through her attempts to erase them, but rather that she fails to acknowledge the privileged position from which she writes. Her attempts to speak for her sisters, as well as her attempts to speak for other adoptees, fall short because she does not, within the confines of the text, recognize the factors that have influenced her ability to write for herself and others. Instead, Miró tries to carve out a position for herself within the communities she writes about, claiming insider status in groups that are highly heterogeneous and not hers alone to claim. She creates hierarchies of experience and language which reserve the top position for individuals with experiences like to her own, and ultimately reinforces the very hegemonic constructions of India that she seems, on the surface, to be seeking to dismantle. Within Miró's text, adoption necessitates translation within the family unit, and establishes linguistic and cultural hierarchies that are impossible to break down. Her return to India grants her access to the pasts of her family, without reciprocating and providing them access to her life. Her trip is therefore one of consumption, despite her best efforts to give back to the communities of her birth.

2.3 Narrative, Truth, and Archeology: Digging through the Remains in *Daughter of the Ganges*

In his introduction to *Imaginary Homelands* (1991), Salman Rushdie writes about the propensity of diasporic authors to place increased emphasis on certain parts of their memories. In the epigraph of this chapter, Rushdie links this concept to archeology, suggesting that fragments of memories, like the physical fragments of history, become important simply because they are all that is left. Miró's text quite literally realizes the connections made by Rushdie between archeology and diasporic writing, as she sifts through the physical and

remembered remains of her childhood in India in hopes of learning something about her lost self. Her memories, as well as the memories of others, make some details of her early life seem highly significant because the memories themselves are so few. Later, Miró discovers that some of the details which are so vivid and significant in her mind actually never occurred at all; she learns that she has falsely reconstructed her own history.

Miró's first attempts to recreate her past are fruitful; there are women at the orphanages she visits who remember her and who are able to fill in or corroborate parts of her memory that had been lost or skewed by the passage of time. However, her success is short lived when she learns that many of the details she remembered or uncovered are false; thus, the very nature of Miró's text raises questions regarding her reliability as a narrator, as well as the reliability of memory, despite her intentions to discover and portray a series of truths. As a narrator, then, readers are forced to read Miró in one of three ways. She can be read either as a liar, an unreliable narrator, or a self-deceiving and mis-informed narrator. The first reading can be rejected for two reasons: firstly because the truth of Miró's past is unattainable and therefore cannot be proven, and secondly because lying requires an intention to deceive which would be an unfair quality to attribute to Miró and her work, given her tenuous access to information. Similarly, reading her as only unreliable negates the instances in which the story is told to the best of Miró's knowledge; her knowledge is unreliable, but her narration remains true to the story as she knows it. Thus, readers are left with the option of reading Miró as a self-deceptive or mis-informed narrator. Reading Miró as self-deceptive also runs the risk of falsely labeling her as suffering from some sort of psychological affliction. To avoid this, one must differentiate between Miró as a character and narrator *within the text* and Miró as a person. Thus, the following discussion of the function of Miró's self-deception is strictly *as a narrator in her text*, and this project does not seek to apply this reading to Miró as author or extra-textual being. Philippe Lejeune addresses this differentiation in *On Autobiography* when he asserts: "An author is not a person. He is a person who writes and publishes. Straddling the world-beyond-the-text and the text, he is the connection between the two. The author is simultaneously a socially responsible real person and the producer of a discourse" (11). Later, Lejeune elaborates: "When we try, then, to distinguish fiction from autobiography, to determine what it is that the 'I' refers to in personal accounts, there is no need to go back to an impossible world-beyond-the-text; the text itself offers this last word at the very end, the proper name of the author, which is both textual and unquestionably referential" (21). Thus, one can examine Miró's work and the labelling of *Daughter of the Ganges* as memoir without making a value judgement on the character of Miró as a person. As it is impossible to ascertain whether Miró

or the others she consults are telling the truth throughout the text, one also must not rule out the possibility that the individuals Miró consults are misremembering or misreporting, but the fact remains that *Daughter of the Ganges* contains two very different versions of Miró's childhood which are thought, at one point or another, to be truths.

Amit Marcus outlines the characteristics of the self-deceptive narrator in his book *Self-Deception in Literature and Philosophy* (2007). Marcus notes: "Contemporary multicultural discourse has shattered the belief in a privileged objective and impartial vantage point, from which the whole truth can be captured" (2) and Miró's work embodies this claim. Reality, for Miró, is not necessarily what happened (as that cannot be ascertained), but a feeling and construction that she identifies with. That is to say, what Miró remembers, regardless of whether or not it happened, is real for her, however it would be dangerous to ignore the discourses of power inherent in the reconstruction of her memories: Miró is a middle-class adult in a European country recording the experiences of a lower-class child in India, and her current position of privilege may have motivated her to construct a less positive past experience. In essence, Miró can be read, to a degree, as being self-deceiving, or to have deceived herself in the construction of parts of her past. Marcus defines self-deception as

A mental state in which the subject is *motivated* (as opposed to harbouring a conscious intention) to believe in a specific proposition of state of affairs *p*. This motivation causes the subject to enact certain *mental strategies* and *behavioral patterns* that convince him of *the truth* of *p*, despite his exposure to information that tips the scales towards accepting the truth of the proposition (or state of affairs) not-*p*. (17)

This point is especially relevant when one considers what Miró remembers of her time spent at the Regina Pacis orphanage; what she narrates and what she is told of her time there are very different stories. Miró has a very obvious motivation to remember her life as she narrates it in the first half of her work, and does not benefit from the more egalitarian constructions of her early life that are later espoused in the second segment.

Drawing on her childhood memories, Miró notes that "Regina Pacis was divided into two parts, the school and the orphanage. In the school were girls who came from wealthy families. They were boarders who lived in twin bedrooms, with their own beds, cupboards, and bedside tables ... We didn't have rooms of our own. I recall an enormous hall with arches in the ceiling and overhead fans" (50). Miró's desire to have "a room of her own" brings to mind Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* (1929), particularly as one considers Miró's relationships with the notions of writing and fiction. Woolf famously asserts that "a woman

must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction” (3). Miró draws attention to the economic disparities between the children, and in some ways proves Woolf’s point by virtue of the fact that she is now able to write her story while the others she lived with presumably cannot, while Woolf’s emphasis on fiction echoes the contestable nature of Miró’s narrative. Unsurprisingly, Miró recalls herself receiving less than the others she witnessed, and her narrative is infused with echoes of child-like jealousy. However, she acknowledges being the favorite of Mother Adelina, and being taken on special trips which were a reward for her insistence; “[w]e would visit all of the city’s grand hotels, such as the Taj Mahal, where we collected extra food to bring back to the orphanage. We orphans, of course, wouldn’t see a morsel of it. We were given nothing more than rice and vegetables, no fish or meat. All of those succulent treats must have wound up on the plates of the rich girls” (54). Despite her acknowledgement that the trips were a special privilege not afforded to all of the children, Miró still recalls them with jealousy and reconstructs herself as having less than those around her.

On her second trip to India, Miró meets with Margaret Fernandes, who is in charge of Regina Pacis. Fernandes informs Miró that her work was “full of mistakes” (149). One of the most pertinent details that Miró misremembered was that there were no rich children who attended boarding school at Regina Pacis; the girls Miró remembers were from poor families, and the entire group ate the same food and were treated similarly (150). From Miró’s tone, one can infer that she is confused by, and also skeptical of, this new information, but she is also receptive towards it because she does not want to cause any upset. These facts, which were pertinent in constructing the image of Miró as the lesser orphan, are found to be false, and are replaced with a much more egalitarian picture of the orphanage. Whereas Marcus shies away from applying theories of self-deception to autobiographical writers,⁷⁰ it is clear that either Miró or Fernandes must be mistaken in the facts that they provide and that one of them has constructed a false image of what Miró’s life at Regina Pacis must have been like. Regardless of who is misremembering or misconstruing Miró’s past, the deception (whether intentional or unintentional) outlined in the above segment raises unanswerable questions about the reliability of Miró’s memoir, in turn highlighting the fact that the return journey does not provide adoptees access to an authentic and complete truth.

In addition to her confusion about the quality of life she had at Regina Pacis, Miró originally writes that she has no memory of Dev-Mata, the convent in Nasik where she first

⁷⁰ Marcus argues that a “less radical approach to self-deception in literature is to maintain that fictional autobiographies, or fictional narratives in which the narrating character is the protagonist of her own story ... are regularly self-deceived because the retrospect and introspect, and therefore their interpretation of narrative reality tends to be selective and biased” (5), but avoids delving further into the realm of autobiography because biography studies is largely constructed as a unique field of research (7).

lived before being transferred to Regina Pacis at the age of 3 (122). She chronicles a conversation during her first visit with Mother Nirmala, one of the nuns who cared for her, in which she is told about Johnny, a little boy she used to play with, but expresses no memory of the time spent there and writes about no memories of Johnny (127). When she returns there the second time, she writes that “there weren’t that many children at Dev-Mata. I remember only Johnny, my playmate” (184). While it is possible that a memory of a person exists without a memory of a place, it is rather curious that the only mention of Johnny on first visit is made by Mother Nirmala and not Miró herself. Spivak addresses this issue in “Can the Subaltern Speak,” where she notes that “the origins of what [has] been heard and what [is] remembered [are] not necessarily continuous or identical” (281). That is to say, Miró might be confusing what she remembers with what she has heard about her time spent in Dev-Mata, which would be understandable given the sheer volume of knowledge that she gains on her first visit. This instance creates further uneasiness in the reader about Miró’s ability to truthfully recall and narrate her own early life, while simultaneously highlighting the confusion that is caused by her return journey. Another narrative inconsistency occurs when Miró notes that she has not seen Mother Adelina for twenty years (60), but then includes a photo with the caption “Summer 1977. This is the first time Adelina came to visit us in Barcelona. I am nine years old” (Miró n.p).⁷¹ Her use of the word “first” suggests that there were other visits, while the photo itself acts as proof that Miró has seen Adelina in the twenty years between leaving the orphanage and returning for her first visit. Although these details are largely insignificant, they serve to emphasize the fact that Miró omits or alters details about her story as she constructs it in addition to the omissions and alterations that are due to misinformation.

One such potential error due to misinformation is Miró’s narration of her relinquishment for adoption as an infant. On her first visit to Dev-Mata, Mother Nirmala tells Miró about when she was surrendered by her father. She is told that after the death of her mother, her father made three attempts to abandon her, but that the first two times resulted in a chastising neighbor returning her home. On the third try, a group of nuns found the infant and took her into their care (126). On her second visit to India, this story is corrected by Margaret at Regina Pacis, who tells Miró that her “father did not abandon [her] but handed [her] over to the nuns to ensure that [she] would have a better future than the one he could offer. To abandon someone is too strong a concept and Indians would never do that to their children” (150). Margaret’s corrections are corroborated by Mother Nirmala, who “has also read [Miró’s] book and found

⁷¹ Near the middle of Miró’s text, several photographs have been inserted which break up the pagination but are not counted.

inaccuracies in it. She remembers having told [Miró her] story exactly as it was and doesn't understand where [Miró] found the ideas for what [she] wrote. [Miró tells] her that it makes no sense for [her] to invent things" (165). Miró has undertaken the writing of a second volume to correct the errors she made in the first edition; however it is still not clear why or how Miró obtains such vastly different stories on each of her trips.

After reading Miró's text, questions about the burden of representation and the burden of truth also abound. As Miró's book was being republished to include the details learned on her second trip, readers worldwide were outraged to learn that best-selling memoir by James Frey, *A Million Little Pieces* (2003), was also partly fictionalized. Although any assumption of a relationship between the two texts is tenuous at best, the reaction to Frey's work is useful in establishing the weight given to the burden of representation in literature that is marketed as non-fiction and memoir. Unlike Frey, Miró's deception of readers appears to have been accidental and she herself is unclear about the details that she publishes, but the result is the same: Miró ends up with a narrative that is more dramatic and exciting than the truth that she learns, and the republication of her text to include the new truths that she uncovers on her second visit no doubt increase her sales and readership.

Whereas Frey claims full ownership of his errors,⁷² Miró does not accept responsibility for the errors and omissions in her text. The 2005 version, instead, includes the following disclaimer: "Any inaccuracy in this account is due to the passage of time, which has erased some tracks that proved difficult to find. I have tried to reconstruct it from everything that was told to me, at times lending more weight to some sources than to others, but always with the best intentions" (Miró 265). However, this statement ignores the fact that some of the most pertinent misrepresentations are the ones that Miró claims from her own memory and not from what she is told. While any analysis of the reasons for Miró's errors and omissions would be purely speculative (and potentially cross borders into the realm of psychology that extend beyond the scope of this project), Alicia Partnoy's analysis of Frey's inconsistencies in "Disclaimer Intraducible: My Life / Is Based / on a Real Story" (2013) proves useful here. Partnoy writes that "[s]ince the truths [the publishing industry] wants from survivors are restricted to certain recipes for mass consumption, and aiming for the coveted movie deal, they are the kind of truths most easily produced by fiction writers. The industry should not be surprised, therefore, when the works it finds appealing and publishable are totally fabricated"

⁷² Later versions of Frey's work, for example, include the disclaimer that the "book is a combination of facts about James Frey's life and certain embellishments. Names, dates, places, events, and details have been changed, invented, and altered for literary affect. The reader should not consider this book anything other than a work of literature" (Frey n.p).

(Partnoy 19). Partnoy is thus calling for a degree of self-reflexivity on the part of authors and publishers, then, which would acknowledge the draw of marketability in the creation of texts, and this is not acknowledged by Miró.

In addition to raising questions about Miró's reliability, the incongruences in her narrative also raise questions, in a broader context, about who can be relied on to tell the transnational adoptee's story if the adoptee herself is proven unreliable. This question cannot be answered simply, and is well beyond the scope of this project, however it mirrors a similar question in diaspora studies regarding whether or not diasporans can ever return "home." Miró finds that not only is the return journey impossible, but that the "home" she hoped to find in India, the "home" she had as a child, is no longer her own and that the life that she could have had can never be reclaimed.

It is beneficial here to turn once again to Rushdie, who writes that "when the Indian writer who writes from outside India tries to reflect that world, he is obliged to deal in broken mirrors, some of whose fragments have been irretrievably lost" (10-11). Applying this statement to Miró depends on understanding her as Indian, which is, in many ways, contestable, but it is nevertheless relevant for understanding her relationship with the India of her childhood that she attempts to reconstruct. Instead of accepting her memories as lost, Miró tries her best to reconstruct them, and ends up with what Rushdie refers to as the "shards of memory" (12), which Miró then markets as truth. Asha Miró and James Frey differ in many regards, but they share the similarity of having marketed as truth something that was later found to be fictional. On her visits to India, Miró finds that the memories she is attempting to put back together are too fragmented, and that she is not piecing together her actual past, but the reflection of it from her mind; she sees on first visit only what she wants to see to make herself feel whole, ignoring the potential significance for the missing pieces of her memory, and the refraction of truth that occurs when an image is reflected on over time. Ultimately, readers are left with an unreliable and potentially self-deceived narrator telling a heartwarming, if not implausible, story of relinquishment and reconciliation with her birth family. The text becomes simultaneously autobiographical, autofictional, and autoethnographic, and Miró is rendered both inspiring and untrustworthy, though her efforts to correct her error are not to be ignored.

As a narrative of transnational adoption, *Daughter of the Ganges* can be read as both optimistic and also falsely idealistic. Miró's story is primarily one of success. She not only finds her long lost family, but she finds out on her second trip to India that her personal truths are more positive than she ever would have thought possible; she was not abandoned three times as she was told on her first visit (126), and upon her return she was not only remembered but

welcomed with open arms. Unfortunately, Miró uses her own experiences to encourage other adoptees to seek out their families, largely ignoring how rare a case like hers is, particularly when writing about a time when record-keeping was not as rigorous as it is today and transnational adoptions were not nearly as common. Her encouragement towards other adoptees can be seen as an assumption of commonality and a claim of expertise, and both stances put Miró at risk of being misunderstood.

In *Daughter of the Ganges* Miró concurrently assumes the role of native informant and outside expert. Her memories have become fragmented, and she refuses to accept this fragmentation and tries to make whole again something that was very important to her, but of minimal importance to the sources she consults, which gives her the original skewed picture she paints for her readers. Although she treats those she meets with respect, she attempts to do too much; she tries to speak for (and in many ways to) herself, her sisters, individuals impacted by transnational adoption, and a broad Western readership. Her narrative invokes, quite literally, Benedict Anderson's concept of "imagined communities," as she imagines herself to have a claim to Indian identity, despite having lived in Spain for more than twenty years and having had no contact with India on a personal, familial, or political level.⁷³

Miró's text quite innocently provides her audiences with an example of what can happen when one tries to "write home" again. She tries to give voice to her biological sisters, who, as illiterate rural Indian women, do not have voices in the Western world, and also do not hold significant roles within their communities. That she presumes to be able to tell their stories, and that she presumes the right to instruct others to do the same, is indicative of the worldview with which she was raised. On her first trip, Miró and her companions speak frequently about lessening the frequency and degree to which they compare India to the West, however her entire text invites readers to see these comparisons front and center. Because of her adopted status and her history in both Spain and India, Miró assumes the privilege of straddling both cultures and attempts to speak for and to many groups of people. While she does not ignore the fact that she is fortunate to have had the opportunities that she has, she fails to note the socio-economic factors and global power inequalities that make her position possible. She instead notes that, "[i]n all stories of adoption there is an element of magic, of fate, of a predestined path, of choice, depending on each person's individual faith, which makes everyone unique and special" (209),

⁷³ Benedict Anderson's seminal text, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (1983) explores the ways that nationalist ideologies are founded on an imagined sameness. Most notable, in his introduction, Anderson asserts that "nationality ... [or] nation-ness, as well as nationalism, are cultural artefacts" (3). He defines the nation as "an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign" (4). Anderson thus hinges his concept on the idea that "the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members" (6).

in an attempt to justify her selection over others and downplay the various tangible forces in the circulation of children and power inherent in transnational adoption. She does not find a home in India, but locates a family, and turns and re-turns her past as a way to understand her self and her future.

2.4 Following Returnees in Sasha Khokha's *India: Calcutta Calling*: Routes and Roots Tourism

Having examined now the function of the adoptee return journey in Miró's memoir, Sasha Khokha's documentary *India: Calcutta Calling* provides an interesting point of comparison. As the only other non-fiction work considered in this project, *India: Calcutta Calling* is useful for examining the role that organizations and the tourism industry play when characterizing, planning, and executing returns to the birthland. Importantly, Miró also travelled to India as part of an organization and not alone, though her trip was not as part of an adoptee-centred group. In contrast to the fictional representations of adoptee return journeys, the trip featured in Khokha's film is undertaken with the intention of strengthening the bond between adoptees and their adoptive families rather than weakening it.⁷⁴ As previously mentioned, Khokha's film follows a group of families undertaking the trip with the organization *Ties*, which offers trips exclusively for adoptees and their families and prides itself on blending ideas of tourism, return, and search in its trips. This project utilizes Khokha's film as point of comparison for the fictional narratives of return, while at the same time further complicating the boundaries that are laid out between fictions and realities and an adoptive context, with the aim of linking the feelings and constructions of return to the notion of return from diaspora.

That the three teenage girls featured in the body of Khokha's film (Anisha, Kaylan and Lizzie), and the fourth girl included in the extra features section of the film (Minda) experience India for the first time as part of a group who shares their experience of being adopted from India to the United States, is significant, as is the very existence of organizations like *Ties*, which allow adoptees to access their birthlands on tours like the one featured in the film. Khokha's work therefore exemplifies the establishment of a market capitalizing on adoptee return, while at the same time preserving the unique and personal nature of each adoptee's story. The trip thus allows adoptees access to a broader framework of reference as they can process

⁷⁴ A thriving industry exists focusing on adoption and roots tourism with the purpose of taking adoptees back to their nations of birth. One such company, *Ties*, organized the trip featured in Miró's documentary. Information about their destinations and the nature of their programs can be found on their website (adoptivefamilytravel.com).

and understand their own emotions surrounding return with their adoptive families, social workers, and each other to guide them for support.

Continuing where the first chapter left off with an examination of how the girls construct themselves in relation to India and their respective families both before and after the trip, Khokha's film can also be used to highlight the ways in which the return journey symbolizes the completion of the grafting process for transnational adoptees. Drawing on the "roots" metaphor, this project examines the literatures surrounding adoption roots tourism and return journeys more thoroughly, and then apply the rhetorics of grafting to the adoptees, characterizing the return as the final step, the removal of the tape, in the adoptive process. Grafting, in a botanical sense, is the application of a branch or limb from one kind of a plant onto another. Following the metaphor of family trees, an adoptee is a branch cut from one tree and attached to another. At first, the bond needs to be supported by external forces, often grafting tape, but eventually the tape can be removed and the branch can grow alongside the others on the tree. If the initial grafting occurs at the time of adoption, one can suggest that the return journey signifies the removal of that supportive tape: it is only after seeking out the original source tree that the adoptees realize they are fully and wholly integrated into their new families. The grafted branch is sustained and integrated into the existing tree-structure, though it may bloom in a different colour or produce a different fruit.

Khokha herself identifies a connection with the adoption community in an interview with Sachi Cunningham hosted on PBS's *Behind the Lens*. Khokha tells Cunningham that her own parents intended to adopt from India before she was conceived, but her arrival prevented this from happening. As the daughter of an Indian man and an Irish-American woman, she associates with the adoptees in her film in some ways, and also faced some unique challenges in representing their experiences. She further expresses some disappointment with the way that the film turned out that she attributes to the nature of their itinerary. Khokha asserts that "[t]he girls were rarely able to get past the elephant rides, monuments and crowds of urban beggars that most tourists see. This experience both confirmed and challenged the girls' conceptions of India as a place from which they were 'rescued'." She likewise notes that she "had to reconcile the fact that [her] film may underscore Western notions of India as a place of desperate poverty. But as a documentarian, [she] had to remain true to the girls' experience" (Khokha). Thus, Khokha herself recognizes the ways in which her film problematizes constructions of India, as well as the ways that their "return" was produced for them as a very unique type of consumer. Significantly, she also recognizes her role in constructing the narrative of their return for an

external audience, as she notes the ratios of raw footage to documentary length, and the ways in which her footage selections shaped the entire story as portrayed in her film.

Khokha's adoptees, and indeed their adoptive families, utilize their journey to India to better understand the nation from which the girls come, as well as to bond as families. The organized tour provides privileged access to sites which solo-traveling adoptees may not be able to access (the defunct orphanage, the homes of some of the workers of the former orphanage, middle-class family homes), and ready access to social workers to help them work through the emotions they may experience on their return. The necessitation of this mediation constructs an adoptive process which is secretive and elite; it promotes an understanding that one's history can only be accessed through these avenues, and not on one's own, as Miró did. By perpetuating the idea that they foster a privileged space, adoption-tourism agencies have carved out a successful and viable market for themselves, which, in part, capitalizes on the fear of the unknown and the Other as a way to further their utility.

In the chapter "Going 'Home': Adoption, Loss of Bearings, and the Mythology of Roots," from Toby Alice Volkman's *Cultures of Transnational Adoption* (2005), Barbara Yngvesson considers the meanings and implications of "roots trips" in which adoptees return to their nations of birth. She writes that these trips "reveal the precariousness of 'I am,' the simultaneous fascination and terror evoked by what could have been, and a longing for the safety of home" (Yngvesson 28). She herself has accompanied roots tourism groups from Sweden to Chile, and has interviewed adoptees and families, similar to those featured in Khokha's film. She further writes that "[l]ike adoptive parents, for whom the journey to Chile was a way of placing their (unknown) child within themselves, for adoptees coming to know Chile was a way of connecting to an unknown part of themselves, a part that they weren't even sure was themselves" (Yngvesson 37). Thus, by experiencing the birthland together, parents and children come to better understand their respective relationships to the nation and family of birth, and to understand what the return might mean for each party involved. Where Miró and the fictional adoptees "go it alone," and undertake their returns as part of their larger explorations of the self, the adoptive parents who accompany Khokha's participants also gain understandings of their daughters' relationships with India, strengthening the adoptees' ties to the families and not an unknown and unknowable family in India.

Marita Sturken's work on "memory tourism" is also useful here to understand this relationship between knowing and experiencing without appropriating and to situate adoptee return journeys among other types of travel. The chapter "Pilgrimages, Reenactment, and Souvenirs: Modes of Memory Tourism," in Hirsch and Miller's *Rites of Return: Diaspora*

Poetics and the Politics of Memory (2011) “consider[s] memory tourism as a rite of mediated return through which tourists, some of whom may also be survivors, create an experience of memory” (281). While adoptee return is not the same as memory tourism, which involves visiting historically significant sites, there is some overlap between the practices, and with the desired outcomes. Sturken asserts that one’s position as a tourist does not lessen one’s potential for empathy (281), which bears reiterating in light of the comments made criticizing the touristic nature of the return undertaken by the adoptees in Khokha’s film.⁷⁵ Sturken further writes: “The tourist is a figure who embodies a detached and seemingly innocent pose. As tourists we visit sites where we do not live, we are outsiders to the daily practices of life in tourist destinations, and we are largely unaware of the effects of how tourist economies have structured the everyday lives of the people who live and work in tourist locales” (282). In the same way, the adoptees in Khokha’s film do not understand themselves to be part of the lives of the women they meet in India, but rather to be influenced by them. For example, when the girls are met by women who claim to have known them as infants and present them with baby pictures, they doubt that the photos are of *them* and the authenticity of the workers’ memories, but play along to appease the workers. They therefore acknowledge that whether or not the women are a part of their stories in the way that they assert is irrelevant; the broader work that the orphanage workers have done has had an influence on the lives of the adoptees or others like them. This understanding of the potentiality of influence is what is absent in the fictional narratives, where adoptees seek to re-insert themselves into pasts they may or may not have a claim to.

Sturken goes on to assert that “we often feel that we can ‘return’ to pasts that are not our own because we have experienced their effects through modes of reenactment, memorials, and images. ... The experience of return is invariably mediated, layered, and available to many” (292). This concept of return is central to the narratives of adoptee “return,” which is nuanced in Khokha’s documentary but nevertheless present, particularly as the young women meet with orphanage workers who construct false histories for them.⁷⁶ Instead of viewing roots journeys as trips back to the homeland in search of belonging, it is therefore suggested, via Khokha’s film, that the return is read as the final act of affirming adoptive kinship. The return journey in Khokha’s film allows the adoptees to understand their adoptive experiences in relation to other adopted young people, and to see where they came from without the risk of undertaking an

⁷⁵ As referred to in the previous chapter.

⁷⁶ In a noteworthy scene in *India: Calcutta Calling* the teenagers meet women the orphanage workers claim to remember them from when they were infants, and provide photographs as evidence, seemingly ignoring the fact that the dates do not line up, and the babies do not look like the baby photos of the girls that their adoptive parents have.

actual attempted return. They reaffirm their own Americanness, and benefit greatly from establishing and understanding a sense of commonality between them as adoptees and young women, rather than as people who claim to be Indian. Khokha comments on this in her interview when she concludes: “The girls met and bonded in India—and I think more of their connection was forged around being Americans in India.”

To conclude, one can return to the metaphor of grafting. This metaphor is not perfect. When grafting a tree, a branch must be cut from the destination tree to be replaced by the new branch, and this process is not necessarily invoked in adoptive contexts. In some cases, families may adopt because of the inability to conceive or because of the loss of a child. In these cases, the metaphor of grafting is a neater fit than in cases in which the family simply seeks to adopt for philanthropic reasons. In all three of the literary works considered, this is the case. Miró is adopted for both of these reasons: her adoptive parents are unable to conceive, and one of the children her parents initially intended to adopt dies suddenly before placement (Miró 55). Gowda’s character of Asha is adopted because her mother is unable to have biological children, and has suffered two miscarriages (Gowda 47), and Kirchner’s Meena is adopted to fill the void created by the death of her adoptive mother’s son in an Indian bus accident (Kirchner 86-87). However, it is not until the female protagonists return to India that they learn that their assimilation and integration into their new families is complete; they accept that they have become re-rooted. Not simply transplanted to another land, as may be the case in a typical diasporic context, but grafted onto a new family, with a new history. Still biologically linked to the birth family, and able to bear the cultural fruits of the birth culture, the adoptee grows strong: different from the tree on which it stands, but nurtured by the same root system. Through the portrayal of return as a family act, Khokha’s film captures the way that adoption, and an adoptees’ potential desire to experience the birthland, affects entire families. Understanding the return as the final step in the adoption process, as it is in these texts (though not necessarily in reality), allows it to be read as the removal of the grafting tape, the point at which the branch and those who witness it understand it to be an integrated part of the tree on which it stands.

2.5 Fictions of Return and Returning to and as Fiction in Gowda, Kirchner, and D’Silva

Just as the constructions of motherhood and maternal identity function as central themes within Gowda’s novel, so too does the theme of adoptee identity and self-construction make up a large portion of the text in all three of the novels considered here. As in *Secret Daughter*, return is central to the adoptees’ understandings of self in both Kirchner’s and D’Silva’s

narratives, as they feature women who go to India to learn about themselves, though both are older than Gowda's protagonist when they return. The act of return allows them to actualize an India that they had only previously imagined, and to situate themselves within it. Moreover, as works by diasporic Indian authors, return in these novels allows for an interrogation of the notions of settlement in the diasporic homeland without explicitly stating that the homeland will not be as remembered for ordinary migrants. They use the trope of adoption to allow for a closer examination of the politics of return as mitigated through characters for whom return is impossible due to their somewhat unique status of having few memories to return to.

Through the act of returning to India as a young adult, Gowda's Asha comes to terms with her adopted status and her relationships with the many families who have contributed to her existence. Her age at the time of her return—approximately twenty—means that her “homecoming” in some ways precipitates her coming of age, but in other ways returns her to her child-like status, which is evidenced by the concluding scene in Somer/Asha's narrative, where the Thakkar family flies back to the United States seated in the same way as they did when they retrieved the infant Asha for the first time (335). The purpose of Asha's first trip to India is a journalism scholarship—she intends to write an exposé on the lives of children in urban slums. However, the trip allows her to reconnect with her adoptive father's family, and eventually to seek out the orphanage from which she came. Until her trip to India and her reconnection with her past, Asha occupies a cultural no-man's land.

Asha's lack of exposure to Indian culture and her Indian biological and adoptive heritage are, unsurprisingly, most evident when she returns to India. Although she is more open-minded than her mother, she is “surprised by her own discovery that, although the food may be spicy, the clothes uncomfortable, and the beauty treatments painful, this place is starting to feel like home, and these people like family” (203). Of course, this statement ignores the fact that painful beauty treatments and uncomfortable clothing exist in the United States that Asha knows as home, reinforcing the false dichotomy of India=bad and America=good that she has been raised to believe is true. Until she comes to terms with all parts of her Self, Asha is neither hybrid nor singular because she is visibly “other” in both America and India—physically marked in one location and identifiable by her mannerisms and dress in another. The blending of cultures begins when Asha leaves the security of her mother's house, and it is from the safe distance of her dorm room that Asha is able to apply for the scholarship that allows her the trip to India she covets; going for any other reason would simply be unheard of. Her trip brings her Indianness to the foreground of her identity, and eventually leads to her adoptive mother accepting who

she has become. Asha, in turn, comes to see her relinquishment as a sacrifice on the part of her biological mother rather than the abandonment that she, and Somer, had previously conceived.

Likewise, through her adoptive grandmother, Asha gains access to India's past and Gowda narrates the traumas of India's Partition, inviting readers and Asha herself to envision her as part of both the family and the nation, rather than an outsider. This solidifies Asha's position as hybrid and destabilizes her American identity, reaffirming the fears her adoptive mother espoused before her departure. Prior to travelling to India, Asha treats her adoptive parents with disdain, and, as previously noted, her adoptive mother Somer lives in constant fear of India and the "Other" parents Asha has in India. Asha's trip to India allows her to understand her position in both the United States and India, to re-construct her own history, and to appreciate the role her adoptive and biological families have played in her life.

Asha's interactions with India and exploration of her Indian identity begin long before her trip, which can be seen as the culmination of her journey to self-understanding, as well as the beginning of a new journey. As a young child and teenager, Asha interacts with the few other Indians in her area, and is jealous of their relationship with India, which they assume she shares due to the fact that Krishnan is of Indian origin. Her interactions with her friend, Manisha, highlight firstly the sense of unity between the two girls in their predominantly white community, and secondly the ways that Asha's adoptive family has sheltered her from the traditions and cultural practices of her birth and paternal adoptive families. Framing the discussion around the notion of the exotic, Gowda first introduces a clique Asha refers to as "the perfect mirror girls" who tell Asha that her eyes are "*so exotic*" (133 emphasis original). This provides Asha a platform on which to discuss India with Manisha. Manisha highlights their unity when she tells Asha: "I hate that 'exotic' thing we always get from people" (133). Manisha then assumes that Asha understands all of her Indian cultural references, further alienating Asha, who "didn't know. About any of it" (135), and is just becoming aware of her own unique subject position.

Tension between Asha and her parents, and amidst them as a couple, builds and then multiplies when she leaves for college. It is also while away at college that Asha decides to apply for the scholarship that will take her to India for the first time, notably with her father's permission and not her mother's. Somer expresses her fears about Asha going to India to her husband, and he reacts to Somer's hesitations: "The way I see it, there are only a couple of explanations [for why Somer feels Asha should not go to India]. Either you have a problem with Asha getting to know my family, which is also her family, I remind you. Or you have a problem with her becoming a little bit Indian. In either case, Somer, the problem is actually

yours, not hers” (206). His suggestion that Somer might have a problem with their daughter becoming Indian suggests that he, like Somer and Asha herself, do not understand Asha to be Indian in spite of her birth there and Krishnan’s identifications with India.

Asha’s return to India, and towards Mother India and mothers in India, to harken back to the previous chapter, is as much a turn *away* from her adoptive mother and land as it is a turn towards India. Her concept of “home,” first, remains the United States, noting that in India Asha “does not feel like herself, and every aspect of her surroundings—the bread that comes wrapped in small squares, the newspaper the color of pale pink nail polish—reminds her of how far she is from home. She considers calling home for some comfort, but pride holds her back” (181). Moreover, she is not understood to be Indian by those around her, a point which seems to come as a surprise for her, much like it did to Miró on her trip when she learned from her colleagues that she was not understood to be properly Indian. Gowda’s Asha seems much more at ease with this, however, and this discovery is framed as far less traumatic: “Asha is no longer surprised when someone addresses her in English. Her cousins have explained that Indians can peg her immediately as a foreigner, with her Western-style clothing and shoulder-length hair ... Despite this, she enjoys the novelty of walking down the streets among a crowd of people who look like her” (183). Thus, what is shocking and traumatic for Miró becomes common and normalized for Asha. Her cousins’ explanations clarify for her that this is something normal for foreigners, which suggests that it is the case even for those who were not adopted but have spent considerable time abroad, normalizing Asha’s experience among the experiences of diasporic returns.

However, Asha’s construction of herself in relation to India shifts at some point during the novel, as she becomes accustomed to the lifestyle of her Indian family and gains comfort in her surroundings. When she first visits *The Times of India* office, she is given a pile of articles to read. Upon reading the newspaper clippings assembled to draw her attention towards the varied experiences to be had in Mumbai, Asha “wonders whether a sample of stories from the *New York Times* would inspire the same intensity of both shame and pride in her” (186). This comparison suggests that although she maintains strong ties to America, she is also beginning to feel a sense of ownership towards India. Her affinity for India becomes blurred with her common sense of humanity when she is overwhelmed in the slums and has a difficult time dealing with what she sees: “She didn’t expect to be so affected by what she saw here today, she thought she was prepared. But all the photos she saw had edges, the film clips were framed by the screen. Here, in Dharavi, the misery goes on and on ... [the] despair in these children’s lives has conjured up a deep sense of pity inside her” (226). Once again, in addition to

emphasizing the ways that Asha is acculturating within India and her growing sense of belonging there, this reflection also highlights the lack of integration into the Indian community in the United States, as spicy food and painful beauty treatments are readily available in major urban centres like the ones that the Thakkars inhabit.

Let us return here to Seemin Hasan's "The Dynamics of Repatriation in Shilpi Somaya Gowda's *Secret Daughter*," which was referred to in the first chapter, and consider for a moment the implications of the words "repatriation" and "expatriation." Hasan invokes expatriation as a point of comparison to mark repatriation, without discussing the political implications of the use of such a term.⁷⁷ The *Oxford English Dictionary Online* defines the term as "[t]he return or restoration of a person to his or her native country; an instance of this." In contrast, Hasan notes that "expatriation is recognised as an assertion of global mobility and privilege closely connected with economic benefits. Most narratives, however, focus on the experiences of the common man or woman who identified migration as a fundamental requirement for a global career" (143), so her application of the term in relation to Asha is even more complex; Asha did not assert her own mobility when, as an infant, she was relocated to the United States. In some ways, her migration mirrors that of an exile due to the fact that she was, for all intents and purposes, forcibly removed from her natal homeland.

Read another way, Asha is a good that has been transacted; a family in the United States expressed a need, which was fulfilled by individuals and organizations in India for a price upon the realization of certain terms and conditions.⁷⁸ That this "exile" or "transaction" has worked out in her best interests allows readers and adoptive parents to understand adoption as a positive movement, but complicates the status of the adopted individual, particularly when a return migration is attempted or undertaken. On the one hand, this return is an act of agency on the part of Asha, evidence that she is more than just a commodity moved from one place to another to fulfill a need. On the other hand, however, is the novel's conclusion which reiterates the concept that she can neither return nor be returned. She cannot go back to her "original" parents any more than she can remain in her "original" nation; her lifestyle and sense of self have developed and dramatically shifted during her time in the United States.

Hasan acknowledges that narratives of migration (which she deems expatriation) have long existed, particularly, it should be noted, in the steadily growing body of postcolonial and

⁷⁷ For example, a recent article in *The Guardian* by Mawuna Remarque Koutounin entitled "Why are white people expats when the rest of us are immigrants?" looks at the raced and classed lines upon which these terms are demarcated.

⁷⁸ These are outlined in the text as Somer goes over the requirements that she and Kris were forced to meet for the adoption agency (Gowda 51-53).

diasporic literatures. Comparing *Secret Daughter* to other works featuring migration, she asserts:

Shilpi Somaya Gowda ... establishes a reverse trend, namely, repatriation. The debates over belonging, community membership, citizenship, ethnic identity etc. have been affected by postcolonial state formation processes. Reclaiming lost identity at home and reintegration have become relatively easier in the last decade. ... Repatriation anticipates changes within the individual as well. The overseas experiences often result in perspective changes that may influence the repatriate's adjustments. (143)

Significantly, Hasan does not talk about patriation in the new home land. Although the OED reserves the use of the word patriation to refer to the "act or process of transferring a constitution or constitutional legislation from a mother country to a former dependency," if one is to talk about ex- and re- patriation, one has to interrogate the notion of patriation itself, much like a discourse of immigration to one place inevitably invokes a discourse of emigration from another, both of which are founded on a more or less agreed upon definition of migration. What can (and does) it mean to patriate oneself? Do any of Gowda's characters undergo an act of self-patriation? Without digressing too far from the focus of this chapter—Asha's travel to India in relation to her status as a transnationally adopted child—it is worth noting that the male characters also undertake interesting migration trajectories. Krishnan's migration to the United States is permanent. Migration, and indeed the notion of patriation, patriarchy, and national belonging are muddled in Gowda's novel, but Asha clearly discovers that her trip to India is as much a first trip as a return.

Throughout the novel, both Asha and Somer experience India for the first time, and it is clear that Asha has much easier time adjusting to the cultural and linguistic differences in India than her mother does. While the passage of time and Westernization of India also likely have something to do with this, Asha moves in to Indian culture and society with much greater ease than her mother, reaffirming the fact that although she is markedly less Indian than her cousins, she can still claim and semi-pass with an Indian identity, though not the one she thought she could reclaim. As Hasan rightly notes, one of the many dualities of India, the discrepancy between the rich and the poor, is central to Gowda's novel (152). This difference preempts Asha's realization that she is telling the wrong story with her documentary, and she rectifies the problem by focusing on hope; coincidentally, "hope" is the meaning of her name, and Asha, Sanjay, and her adoptive parents all reflect on this meaning at different points during the novel (Gowda 53, 212, 288). Asha reflects: "Over the past several months, she has envied Meena with

her great journalism career, and Priya with her salon and shopping lifestyle. But now it is evident to Asha that this would not have been her life. She would have been like Yashoda or her sister Bina—just one of India’s statistics, another little girl that nobody values” (286). Asha’s return to India, and her re-turn *from* India when she leaves with her parents to pick up her life in the United States are central to both the plot of the novel, and to Asha and Somer’s character developments as well as the relationship between them. Asha’s search for self in India instead delivers her an understanding of herself which is firmly rooted in the United States, and leaves with a newfound appreciation for her adoptive family both in India and at home.

In contrast to Asha’s complex re-turn, Bharti Kirchner’s *Shiva Dancing* contains, perhaps, the most simple return trajectory due to the fact that the main character, Meena, does have memories of her life in India, including memories of her biological family. Meena’s adoption came later in her life and as a result left her with a more clearly defined relationship to India. Unlike Asha, who does not know where to look for her family, Meena knows her village and the names of her parents and extended relatives, though she does not know how the years may have treated them. Her India was experienced personally, and her knowledge comes from being part of a community rather than just reading about one or viewing one on television. As such, she is also the most guilty of holding a frozen view of India. She leaves India at the age of seven and returns at the age of thirty-five, yet expects everything to be as she remembers it. When, on her return, her village is not as she hoped and remembered, she not only realizes that her adoptive mother saved her from an unfortunate future in India, but that her life in America is, for her, more desirable. It is important to note here that the term “unfortunate” is not related to Meena’s class status or even the status of Indian women, but the fact that she discovers, on her return, that she would have been shunned by her community and deemed impure after her kidnapping, despite the fact that no sexual assault occurred (Kirchner 262-263). Notably, it is also through a return to her past that she solidifies a future with her American lover Antoine Peterson, despite the fact that she sought to reclaim her Indian husband and take up the life she thought she should have had in India.

In the twenty-eight years that pass between Meena’s departure from India and her return, much changes in her life and her relationship with India shifts as her adoptive parents control her interactions with her nation of birth, as outlined in the previous chapter. However, upon her return, Meena reflects:

How foolish Meena has been to hope that her house would still be there, that she would be able to stand on the plot, to her the most precious on earth. She had been raised in a Western culture. Yet the invisible bond to her family and place

of birth was so strong that she had tracked both down after all these years—only to find that not a trace of her people or her house remained. (257)

This statement is somewhat ironic, as it immediately precedes Meena's reunion with her Auntie Teelu and many of the other women of her village, who would also have been considered "her people." The reunion, which also consisted of songs of welcome, allowed Meena to temporarily reclaim a space for herself in her community; "Meena hummed along at first, then poured her heart out. Her head swayed from side to side, her hand pumped the air. They helped her when she mispronounced the lyrics. For she has reestablished herself as one of the clan, bound by music, by culture, by blood. Her voice was in harmony with those of others, if not all her words" (261). Still, the pain and embarrassment at the realization indicate firstly that she expected her homeland to be frozen and secondly that it is not return when she realizes that she no longer belongs there, and is an outsider greeted by children in halting English and unable to communicate in the language of her biological family (261-263).

Near the end of her visit to her village, Meena is accused by her child-husband Vishnu's family of deserting him and ruining her family name by leaving him on their wedding day, despite the fact that she was kidnapped. She then comes to realize that she "couldn't have lived peacefully in this tightly knit community even if the Gossetts had brought her back ... she wouldn't have been accepted" at which point she forgives her adoptive parents and realizes that her life was made better by her adoption, not worse (263). Instead of re-claiming her past life, then, Meena decides to view India as a tourist with Antoine, who has left his fiancée to pursue a relationship with Meena and decided to write his next novel about India:

Not the India of Moghul kings of the British Raj but India as it was today, with a population of nearly a billion, [sic] people speaking hundreds of languages and dialects, four hundred tribes, a pantheon of religions, the second biggest railroad system in the world and the fourth largest army. India, the world's largest democracy, where grinding poverty and unimaginable wealth lived side by side, where goddesses and gods were worshipped with equal fervor. India, a land of constant ethnic strife, yet which gave the world Gandhi. (279)

This brief history lesson, and Meena's connection with Antoine's India, rather than Vishnu's, highlight the ways that the trip to India that she characterized as a return is not really a return. She understands that to the lower-class Indians who serve her in her hotel, she was no longer a poor Rajasthani girl; "Now that she carried a U.S. passport, she was someone to be deferred to" (283). Her reunion with Vishnu is equally bitter-sweet for her as she tells him: "I envy you, Vishnu. I've lost some precious things. My mother. My house. My Rajput self. I have lived in

the lap of luxury in San Francisco, yet I feel quite incomplete” (286). She frames these aspects of her identity as more central to her being than all that she has accomplished and become in the intervening years since she left India, but slowly begins to acknowledge the ways in which her life has changed since she departed. Thus, it is through her negotiations with Vishnu that Meena articulates her greatest losses (mother and home), tying India to the maternal and reinvoking the notions of Mother India discussed in the previous chapter.

Meena’s lamentations about the loss of her Indian identity continue for several pages in the novel, as she discovers again through her relationship with Vishnu all that she has lost. When she dresses up to go out with him she notes: “Even in a sari, she lamented to herself, she couldn’t blend with the crowd, couldn’t pass as a local product” (288). She realizes, rather late in the novel, that her return to her husband would not be possible because Vishnu would “expect her to take on the role of an Indian wife: preparing the meals, cleaning the floors, hanging up the wash, visiting relatives. She’d think of herself only secondarily” (291). Though this lamentation ignores the progress made by women in India in the years that she has been abroad and the fact that Vishnu is now accustomed to a more urban lifestyle, it is key to her construction of self. Up until her return to India, Meena still thought of herself as primarily Indian, over-emphasizing the importance of her first seven years of life and down-playing the impact that her time in the United States would have had. Kirchner clearly articulates this realization: “Meena knew that it was too late, that the gap between her and Vishnu was too great ... Her longings for Vishnu and India had been part fantasy and part voyage of self-discovery. Now that she had been here for a while, she knew her earlier assumptions about fitting into the Indian scene were mostly wishful thinking” (306). Meena’s return to India in Kirchner’s novel, like Asha’s in Gowda’s text, allows the adoptee to come to terms with the fact that her adoptive family did right by her, reaffirming her status as an American in a way that is not questioned by the young women in Khokha’s film. Through returning to India and seeking belonging, Meena learns that her place of belonging is with Antoine, first traveling and experiencing India as a tourist and then re-settling in her adoptive homeland. Her journey to India is integral for her to gain this understanding, and allows her to release her adoptive parents from blame, relinquish her child-husband to wed again, and understand her newly acquired outsider position within the subcontinent.

Renita D’Silva’s novel, *The Forgotten Daughter*, shares a lot of commonalities with the other novels examined in this chapter in that it features a transnationally adopted girl who, as a young woman, goes back to India for the first time. More than any of the others, it strongly asserts that the “home” of the adoptee is their nation of birth, and that a return is possible and

positive, challenging the conclusions of Gowda's and Kirchner's novels. Like Miró, D'Silva's protagonist was adopted as a small child, rather than an infant, and has memories of India, though they are suppressed until the death of her adoptive parents sparks their resurfacing. Moreover, D'Silva's character of Nisha does not even know she is adopted until her parents have died, and immediately sets out to return to India when she finds out that she has a twin sister. Her adoptive parents, scientists of Indian origin living in the UK, discovered Nisha as part of a project, "Nature vs Nurture" (23), and adopted her due to the fact that they felt she would have a better life in the UK where they could afford to fix her cleft palate. Drawn towards her because she is a twin being raised away from her sister *and* the fact that she is believed to have been cured by a miracle when sick with fever, her parents decide that instead of studying the child they will take her home with them. Incidentally, her cleft palate is also one of the reasons that her mother surrendered her to the orphanage to begin with; when both Nisha and her sister Devi were sick with fever, Shilpa had to decide which to keep and felt that she would be unable to provide for Nisha, particularly to provide enough dowry to marry her off in light of her abnormality. Unlike other adoptees, Nisha is raised to believe that her adoptive parents are her only parents, and the discovery that she is adopted shakes her sense of self, a self which has already been destabilized by the untimely accidental passing of both of her parents in a car crash.

Nisha's desire to return to India does not stem from a seeking of "home" but rather from a desire to know the exact circumstances of her origins; "[Nisha] would like to know the precise age at which [she] was adopted ... Memory is imperfect, facts are not" (136). Nisha therefore provides the reader with very little evidence from her memory, choosing instead to narrate the events of her present life as they occur. A testament also to the scientific and ordered nature of her life in her adoptive family, Nisha's desire for hard facts and proof simultaneously juxtaposes her biological mother's faith and reflects her penchant for recording her life in her diary, which D'Silva intersperses with recipes to connect with the act of nurturing. Like Gowda's novel, the text follows the lives of three women, albeit in this case it is Nisha, her sister Devi, and their birth mother Shilpa who are each given a voice in the narrative. Importantly, also, is the fact that Shilpa is on her deathbed (like Gowda's character of Kavita), and dies at the end of text, though not until she has been reunited with both of her daughters. Nisha's "homing" in India challenges the notion that adoptees belong to their adopted lands and families, and her transition from constructing herself as solely British to understanding herself as Indian highlights the power of trauma, collective memory, and repression in constructions of home and belonging.

Like Kirchner's Meena, it is the trauma of losing her adoptive parents that drives Nisha to seek out her past and her biological family. She returns to India convinced that she can find them, and is successful, despite there being no official records from that time, and the nuns who cared for her being old and ailing. Like the real life Miró, Nisha spent her early years in a convent which did not frequently house children, and this is one of the reasons that she is remembered. The other reason is due to the fact that the nuns believe her to have been healed by a miracle; she was so unwell upon her arrival that she was expected to die, but awoke from her fever when placed on the altar in front of the Virgin Mary (D'Silva 277). Incidentally, all of D'Silva's novels published to date focus on the experiences of Indians in or from Karnataka who live between the UK and India, and all of them deal with complex mother-daughter relationships that have been disrupted by globalization and migration in some way or another. Significantly, many of her works feature daughters in the UK and mothers or mother-figures who remain in India, rendering her work extremely relevant for a project such as this one, where generational concepts of home and belonging are being interrogated. Unknown parentage and the discovery that one might not be who one thinks occurs D'Silva's first three novels, though *The Forgotten Daughter* is the only one that actually features a transnational adoption.⁷⁹

More than the other novels considered in this project, D'Silva's work emphasizes spirituality and destiny as factors contributing to adoption; Nisha's biological mother relinquishes her to the nuns at the suggestion of a woman she refers to as the wisewoman (deemed "the madwoman" by the rest of the village) and all the while believes it is the will of the gods to take her child from her and to eventually bring her back. Importantly, although she is Hindu and prays to Hindu gods, she acknowledges when Nisha recovers from her fever that "Catholic God, he is so powerful" (341). When Devi marries a Catholic man, the same phrase is repeated (354), and the religiosity of her Indian family is a point of contrast for Nisha, who has been raised by scientists and has trouble believing in miracles. Religion, like return, is used to tie the daughters together, as they both leave their mother and Hindu faith for Catholicism, though Nisha's is due to the presence and power of the church as an institution (and the position of the convent in the community), whereas Devi's is due to a love match. Significantly, it is discovering religion and her origins that allow Nisha to reciprocate the love expressed towards her by her long term partner Matt, and to find a sense of peace within herself, though she never

⁷⁹ Her first novel, *Monsoon Memories* (2013), features the story of a young woman who longs to return to India, but has been shunned by her family due to the fact that she was raped by her brother-in-law. The rape resulted in a child, who is raised to believe that her biological mother's brother is her father. D'Silva's third novel, *The Stolen Girl* (2014), features a young protagonist living in the UK with her single mother whose life is disrupted when she her mother is accused of kidnapping her. The UK court system determines that she is the by-product of an illegal/unofficial surrogacy arrangement that her birth mother did not uphold.

outright links her feelings to God. This dramatic change in Nisha is evident when one examines the novel's beginning and conclusion. After opening with a list of facts about her parents, ostensibly an excerpt from her notebook, Nisha is introduced to the reader as emotionally unsettled: "Nisha is unravelling. She is the errant thread poking out the edge of a splendid tapestry, tempting, tantalizing. One yank creates an angry slash across the multi-hued drapery. A few more and the tapestry folds into itself, disintegrates into a chaotic jumble of yarn" (D'Silva 10). The concluding sentence to Nisha's narrative, "She has come home[.]" (379) marks the conclusion of her understanding of self in relation to other and the world around her, and is completely reliant on her return to India.⁸⁰ Nisha is homed and finds herself in India, despite her strong understandings of herself as non-Indian, in many ways subverting the notions of adoptee non-belonging present in the other texts.

Interestingly, Nisha's interrogation of her Indianness occurs primarily when she is in the UK. She asserts her Britishness more strongly than the other fictional characters assert their Americanness, and her construction of self is, prior to her trip, more in line with the way that Khokha's subjects see themselves. She even goes so far as to assert that "[s]he has never thought of herself as Indian or even as someone of Indian origin. Yes, she has brown skin, but as far as she is concerned, she is English. She never fills those forms that ask for her ethnic origin. She feels she would be lying if she ticks the 'British Indian' box. She is not anything Indian. She is British and that's that" (22). The difference between the way that she sees herself in relation to her ethnic heritage and the way that others see her is evident when she discusses her relationship with her partner Matt and gets defensive about the assumptions people make based on her appearance:

When she and Matt had first started going out, he'd said, 'Nish, shall we go travelling round the world? We could start with India. I cannot believe you've never been there.' She had been adamant. 'Why should I go there? Just because I am of Indian origin? I do not feel Indian, I am not Indian. I am as British as you are.' She has felt no connection, no pull to the place. Never wanted to visit.
(26)

Her change to viewing India as home, then, is constructed on understandings of home rooted in understanding of biological kinship as the ultimate foundation of belonging; her return to India is more homing than either her relationship with Matt or her career and physical home space in the UK.

⁸⁰ This is not the end of the novel; a short chapter featuring Shilpa's internal dialogue as she prepares to be reunited in death with her husband and her final goodbyes to her daughters follows, and the novel's penultimate conclusion is her arrival with her husband Manoj in the afterlife.

In addition to her displeasure towards her adoptive parents for keeping such a secret from her, Nisha is upset with herself for her inability to remember her life before her adoption. When she questions why she doesn't remember her past and feels guilty about it, Matt tells Nisha it is because she was "[j]ust a child. Lost and lonely. Torn between two different countries, straddling two lives—not wanting to be disloyal to the two strangers you were told were your new mum and dad. Your mind shut down, unable to cope. Trauma does that to a person" (315). The idea of trauma causing one to forget has also affected Nisha's sister, who has no recollection of her, though it is worth noting that they were separated long before Nisha's departure to the United States. Memory is also invoked in an interesting way when she meets the nuns at the convent and asks about her mother. The nun who greets Nisha, who remains nameless throughout the text but provides her with lots of information tell her of her mother: "Sister Shanthi couldn't remember her name. She said she'll call as soon as it came to her. None of us are getting any younger, child; our memory is not like it used to be" (279). Important, here, is her use of the plural possessive "our" to the singular "memory" rather than the more standard "her memory" or "our memories." Instead, "our memory" suggests one collective memory for an ambiguous group of people—presumably the convent inhabitants, but potentially also the broader geographic, religious, or national community. Memory is constructed as something that fails, and this is in direct contrast to Miró's text, where she relies on her memory above all else, even when facts seem to suggest otherwise.

Although her first reference to India is to "[t]he heat. Like a jealous lover who takes hold and doesn't let go, his slimy hands creeping everywhere" (251), Nisha quickly gets her bearings and becomes much more able to function and feels at home. She soon feels comfortable, rather than threatened as the comparison of the heat to a lover suggests. Arriving at the convent, Nisha "walks inside, into the dark, mildew-scented corridor, and her past welcomes her with open arms, her memories swoop, they dive, they clamour for attention. [she hasn't] lived here for in twenty-odd years, and yet this is so familiar, so right, as if [she is] coming home" (272). She invokes the concept of home again when she meets Devi for the first time; "we were both laughing and the dogs were barking and the crickets were singing and it was the sound of happiness, the sound of family, the sound of coming home after years of being lost" (371). India thus transitions from "a country she has never really given much thought to, a culture she has turned her back on" (221), to a place of home and homing. Nisha immediately ponders whether she will "adopt a way of life she did not know she knew intimately until

recently” (221), which then, in turn, causes her to reflect on her word choice: “Adopt. What an apt word” (221).⁸¹

In Renita D’Silva’s *The Forgotten Daughter*, the idea of return is therefore in many ways reaffirmed; where other texts seem to posit that a return to the nation of birth is simply not possible, D’Silva’s protagonist Nisha suggests that “home” can be found in both places, and that one can go “back” and reclaim one’s past life. Undoubtedly eased by her sister’s position of also living between the UK and India, Nisha finds home in the face of a stranger “with whom she shared nine months in the womb of a woman who is [also] a stranger” (221). Nisha’s return allows Shilpa to have peace on her death bed (much like the letter that Asha leaves on her return provides Kavita with comfort in *Secret Daughter*), while D’Silva’s positioning of Nisha as staunchly and solely British prior to her return would suggest that even those who feel they have rooted elsewhere are able to return to India and feel at home. D’Silva employs both faith and fate to support Nisha’s return, and to relinquish her birth mother of any negative constructions, thereby reaffirming ties to India that are lost not only by adoptees, but by many individuals living in Diaspora. Nisha’s transition from seeing herself as completely British (the way that Khokha’s interviewees see themselves as solely American) to understanding herself as Indian illustrates the model portrayed in other novels where adoptees seek to return to deal with a personal crisis in their adopted lives and are disappointed to find that they have changed and acculturated to the norms of their adopted lands and families. Nisha, instead, goes through the same motions of forgiving both sets of her parents, and presumably returns to the UK following the death of her mother, but does so feeling much more Indian than the other protagonists.

Nisha’s return in D’Silva’s novel invites comparisons to the notion of diasporic return in two ways. The first is through her gaining of compassion and the ability to express love on her return to India, as though the place is the one in which she is emotionally, if not physically, homed. The second is through D’Silva’s comparison between Nisha’s and her sister’s simultaneous return. Devi’s return to India is very simple; she left for her husband’s education, and is now going back to the place from which she came to care for her ailing mother and be present for her death. While it is worth noting that her departure was also precipitated by the fact that she married outside of her religious group (the family is Hindu and she marries a Christian), she was not forced to go, and her departure was very hard on her mother. By

⁸¹ This interrogation of the use of the term adoption becomes relevant again in the next chapter, when an examination of Bharati Mukherjee’s use of the term in relation to lands, languages, and places is undertaken.

paralleling this act of return with Devi's, Nisha's return is naturalized and normalized; children should return to their native land to care for their ailing parents, and this act is not uncommon.

2.6 Mythologized Birthlands, Fictions of Return

The two works of non-fiction and three novels considered in this chapter all feature one or more transnationally adopted children returning to the land of their birth. In essence, all of their returns function at the level of fiction, as they compel a writing and re-writing of the adoptees' past lives. Their returns necessitate multiple acts of cultural and linguistic translation, and require them to position themselves in relation to those they meet in their homelands. Thus, the act of return is central to their understandings of themselves in relation to their nations of birth as well as their adoptive homelands. The notions of adoptee return, diasporic return and second-generation diasporic return invoke the ideas of memory, post-memory, cultural memory, and the repression of memory through trauma, and these ideas are perpetuated in various ways throughout the texts. Whereas the non-fictional adoptees (Miró and the subjects of Khokha's documentary) travel to India for fixed periods of time in an attempt to learn (broadly) about the cultures and practices of the regions from which they came, the fictional adoptees seek a very personalized return, in which they hope to reconnect with their birth families and reclaim parts of their lost life. The differentiation, between trips of giving and taking, is not neat, as Miró also meets her biological family and attempts to insert herself into their lives, but this is not her intention at the beginning, as it is for Asha, Meena, and Nisha in the three novels. While Nisha's homing in India is more pronounced than the others, it is important to remember that she is a twin, and that it is her twin sister, who coincidentally now resides in the UK, with whom she will remain connected.

For most of the adoptees, the trip to India confirms their ties to their adoptive homelands and families, rather than to their birth lands, and acts symbolically like the removal of the grafting tape, which allows the adoptee to fully understand herself as attached to her new family. The young women develop understandings of themselves only when faced with "Others" in India, which forces them to acknowledge their own positionalities between nations, cultures, and families. Thus, the return allows them to re-turn to their lives in their adoptive lands with a better understanding of their sense of belonging and culture, regardless of their reasons for seeking belonging in India. The intentionally temporary returns of the non-fictional adoptees, and the attempted return migrations of the fictional adoptees produce the same results, as all inevitably leave India and embark on new life journeys with their families (both adoptive and self-made/romantic). Return, therefore, functions in all of the narratives, as a return to an essential

self, in which the status as an adoptee, the role of the homeland, and the role of the birthland all make up important and inextricable parts of each woman's narrative.

Because such is the power of horror: it subjugates, it gains a following, it creates sects. One begins by exploring it and ends up a believer. The passage becomes permanent, the thinking and risk that initially guided the line insidiously take shelter in perversion, dogmatism, marginalist ideology.

—Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror* (107-108)

Chapter Three: Atypical Adoptions, Abjection, and the Fictions of Bharati Mukherjee

3.1 Adoption and the Works of Bharati Mukherjee

Perhaps one of the best known contemporary Indian-American women writers, Bharati Mukherjee directly features transnational adoption in two of her novels, *Jasmine* (1989) and *Leave It to Me* (1998). Often examined for the representations of identity and hybridity contained in her works, Mukherjee employs adoption as a means to highlight the complex negotiations undertaken when families become hybridized and transnationalized. Moreover, her use of adoption in several of her novels challenges notions of diasporic identity construction through the way that non-adopted characters such as the adoptive or biological parents interact with their communities, as well as highlights the way that adoptees may resist assimilation into their new families and societies. By bringing adoption in Mukherjee's texts to the fore, the following analyses consider the constructions of familial relations, as well of the relationship between immigrant and hostland in both *Jasmine* and *Leave It to Me*. The constructions of nation and belonging in these works requires further negotiation as her adoptees resist classification in such a way that that the assertions made about other novels are insufficient. This chapter therefore works, in many ways, to challenge the assertions made in the previous two chapters, as Mukherjee's portrayals of adoption do not function in the same way, but is still necessary for understanding more broadly the ways that diasporic Indian women portray transnational adoption in their writing. Significantly, Mukherjee's darker constructions of adoption exemplify and parody some of the complex negotiations of power that occur within the other texts, and ultimately critique the idea that adoption should or does lead to more egalitarian and peaceful homes.

In *Jasmine*, the feelings of non-belonging ascribed to the adoptees mirror the protagonist's own negotiations of belonging/non-belonging caused by her complicated position as an undocumented immigrant in the United States. The protagonist is the adoptive mother, rather than the child, and the boy, Du, is adopted from Vietnam as a teenager rather than India as an infant or young child, rendering the text very different from the others considered in this project. *Jasmine* is the only text considered in this project in which the child is adopted from a

country other than India, and the only text in which the adoptee's negotiations of identity are not central to the plot. Nevertheless, adoption in *Jasmine* is relevant and adds a further layer of complexity to the ongoing conversations occurring in works by diasporic Indian women writers about the ethics and value of transnational adoption, as well as the discussion surrounding how adoption influences understandings of home, identity, and belonging.

In *Leave It to Me*, the protagonist, Debby, is an adoptee from India who was born to an American hippie vacationing in Devigaon. At the start of the novel, she lives in Schenectady, New York in an Italian-American family with an average, middle-class life, but the text follows her as she makes her way westward. Debby sets out across the United States to California in search of her birth mother and to discover the truth about herself and her past, leading to the disruption of the lives of both the adoptive and biological families. Throughout her journey, she discloses several details about her past to the readers and other characters she meets, and also learns a lot about herself through both the acts of her journey and from the private investigator that she hires. She is successful in locating both of her birth parents, but the novel's unsettling conclusion leaves both Debby and reader uncertain about her future safety, well-being, and sense of belonging. Ending with death, rather than reconciliation, *Leave It to Me* highlights the horrible, the abject, and the unhappy sides of adoption.

Both *Jasmine* and *Leave It to Me* follow a similar narrative of self-discovery, a literal westward movement, and an ending which features the transnationally adopted child reuniting with a member of their birth family in the United States. Although both markedly different from the other works being considered here, *Leave It to Me* contains representations of adoption more in line with the other texts considered in this project due to the centrality of the quest for birthparents, with the ending of the text being the major difference. Despite the differences between her texts and the others being considered in this project, Mukherjee's success as an author in the United States, as well as the popularity of her works internationally mean that her voice in a conversation about adoption in diasporic Indian women's writing cannot be ignored.

Mukherjee's portrayal of adoption *without* the realization on the part of the adoptee that he or she belongs with his or her adoptive family is what renders the texts most starkly different from Gowda's, Kirchner's, D'Silva's and Sundaresan's works, as well as from Miró and the adoptees in Khokha's film. This, of course, begs the question of why Mukherjee's constructions of adoptee experience are so different, and the implications of her constructions. The following two sub-chapters examine scholarly responses to Mukherjee's works, and analyze the representations of adoption in each of the texts featuring adoption. In *Jasmine*, this means looking at the protagonist in relation to the many pseudo-adoptions that she undergoes, as well

as her relationships with the adoptive children in her care, and her unborn child (who is not adopted, but occupies a complicated subject position as the product of in-vitro fertilization, particularly when one considers Jane's departure from Bud at the end of the novel). In *Leave It to Me*, the protagonist *is* the adoptee, so the focus is on how she identifies with her adoptive family, her birth family, and her American upbringing. Her descent into violence and crime, constructed as a product of her biological parentage, is central to this examination as the novel becomes the only text considered in which adoption is not idealized and in which the relationship between the adoptive family and child is not central.⁸² The works of Julia Kristeva and Judith Butler become integral in this subchapter to consider the ways that violence and abjection interact with and shape the adoptive condition.

As the only author considered in this project to have received marked scholarly consideration, particularly regarding the identity formation of her characters and/or autobiographical elements within her texts,⁸³ Mukherjee's canon becomes a lynchpin in an undertaking such as this. Mukherjee's works have been celebrated, criticized, and analyzed through a wide range of frameworks. In order to contextualize these works in relation to the rest of Mukherjee's writing, a brief overview of the nature and content of relevant works in her canon follows. In particular, much attention has been paid to the way that Mukherjee portrays the female diasporic subject, and the relationship between this construction and her own experiences as an immigrant in both Canada and the United States. While the autobiographical elements of her texts are not central to an analysis of her portrayals of adoption, their existence should be noted.

Wilfried Raussert's chapter, "Ethnic and/or Postethnic? Constructions of Identity in Bharati Mukherjee's *Jasmine*" in *Transcultural Visions of Identities and Images in Texts* (2008) provides a useful point of examination from both an autobiographical and textual perspective. Moreover, Raussert's work is useful for understanding the means through which many scholars and critics undertake autobiographical readings of Mukherjee's novels. Raussert identifies Mukherjee as "a writer who has experienced multiple border crossings herself, having lived in India, Europe, Canada, and the United States, and who declared the interrelation of migration and identity as one of her central writing topics[.] Bharati Mukherjee represents a major literary

⁸² In *Jasmine*, although Du is not entirely happy with his new American family, his adoption is still constructed as favourable, as it allowed him to escape persecution in Vietnam. Bud, Jasmine, and Du have all benefited from his presence, making it a positive experience for the characters involved.

⁸³ For example, Fakrul Alam's manuscript, *Bharati Mukherjee* (1996) is a complete biography of Mukherjee, and includes references to many of her works, as well as numerous reviews and interviews. A. S. Bagul's *The Fiction of Bharati Mukherjee* (2007) likewise contains a significant emphasis on the relationship between Mukherjee's lived experiences and her writing.

force for a close analysis of identity construction within the contemporary literary discourse” (251). He further asserts that the narrator’s multivalenced construction of self “corresponds to Mukherjee’s notion identity as fluid, multi-relational, and dependent upon mediating past and present experiences” (255). Raussert’s readings of Mukherjee’s texts therefore suggest a relationship between her own identity construction and that of her characters. Linking this back to the text, however, Raussert notes that within *Jasmine*, “Mukherjee shifts from communal to individualist perspectives of identity formation, as Jyoti becomes Jazzy, Jazzy turns into Jase, and Jase becomes Jane. These changes reflect the dismissal of an identifiable location in terms of community” (259). By comparing Mukherjee’s experiences and notions of identity to the transformations within *Jasmine*, he prescribes the violence of the text into Mukherjee’s lived experience in a way which I find to be somewhat dangerous, though his construction of a relationship between shifting identities corresponding with movements in and out of the text are sensible.

Over the course of her career, Bharati Mukherjee published eight novels, two collections of short stories, and several works of non-fiction. Each of her novels features at least one strong female protagonist and engages issues of cultural negotiation, and several of them oscillate between settings in India and the United States.⁸⁴ Only one of Mukherjee’s protagonists is a non-Indian woman—Beigh Masters in *Holder of the World* (1993)—and that work is separated from her others by genre as well, as it branches into the realms of both science fiction and historical fiction. Of Mukherjee’s works, *Jasmine* has received the most scholarly attention, and continues to be addressed frequently by scholars around the world, though the “Tara Chatterjee” trilogy (*Desirable Daughters* (2002), *The Tree Bride* (2004), and *Miss New India* (2011)) has also received considerable attention as it moves from India to the United States and back again.

Speaking of Mukherjee’s first four novels, Helena Grice highlights the fact that Mukherjee’s works “tend to depict new immigrant women who are forced to undergo a series of transformations before they can become fully-fledged, self-confident and self-aware members of American society” (87). In her article, “‘Who speaks for us?’ Bharati Mukherjee’s

⁸⁴ For example, Mukherjee’s first novel, *The Tiger’s Daughter* (1971) follows an Indian-born woman who has been living in the United States as she visits her family in India again for the first time. *Wife* (1975) follows the migration of an Indian woman to the United States, and her subsequent unhappiness and difficulties assimilating. *Jasmine* (1989), is described at length in this paper, and is set in both India and the United States, while *The Holder of the World* spans both time and space, oscillating between the contemporary United States, Moghul India, and the settler period in the United States. *Leave It to Me* (1997) brings readers back to the America, but features flash backs and a description of events in India, and the three most recent texts—*Desirable Daughters*, *The Tree Bride*, *Miss New India*—all follow the back and forth migrations of different generations of the same family, examining both generational and geo-cultural differences.

Fiction and the Politics of Immigration” (2012) Grice asserts of Mukherjee’s four most canonical works that:

[A]ll identify oppression predicated upon both gender and ethnicity. A further connection between these texts is the recurrence of particular thematic concerns, many of which overlap with more general themes of contemporary women’s writing, such as: a preoccupation with issues of identity; an objection to limitations placed upon women by patriarchal forces; a questioning of white male values and definitions of beauty and attractiveness; a sensitivity to the effects of violence against women and other trauma, such as sexual abuse; a recognition of the phallogentricity of history and other mainstream versions of the past; a suspicion of the state as a regulatory force in women’s lives; and an unease with the silencing of women’s voices. (82)

She further highlights the fact that in each text, the female protagonists “metamorphosed from one ethnic identity into another” (Grice 87), and that this change is usually paired with physical migration. The themes which Grice rightly identifies as common themes of contemporary women’s writing as well as common among Mukherjee’s work all suggest that the novels are best approached through feminist lenses, and nod towards the centrality of the heteropatriarchal family unit in each novel. Grice does not directly identify the constructions of the family unit or the functions of adoption as common themes within Mukherjee’s works, however her emphasis on patriarchy implies that relationships within the family as well as between genders are of significance.

Grice goes on to assert: “In each case, this transformation [of identity] is captured by a name change, as the female protagonist adopts multiple identities, each representative of a different stage in the process of adopting a new identity” (87). These name changes, as well as Grice’s somewhat ironic use of the term “adoption” when speaking of identities are especially relevant in *Jasmine* and *Leave It to Me*, as the women rename themselves in relation to those around them. In some ways, this act of self-renaming can be read as an act of assimilation into a new family, as well as a rejection of previous affiliations. By calling a shift in self-perception an “adoption” of new identity, the connotation of raising and nurturing a new self is open for exploration. Grice’s application of the idea of adopting identities resonates loudly throughout the two texts being examined in this chapter, and will remain salient throughout as identity formation is central to Mukherjee’s works, as well as many of the scholarly analyses of her oeuvre.

It is also important to note that although transnational adoption does not occur in Mukherjee's other works, adoption as a theme nevertheless makes interesting appearances. In *Desirable Daughters*, for example, a criminal posing as a nephew who was relinquished for adoption many years ago surfaces in the life of Tara Chatterjee claiming to be searching for his biological family. Tara's then partner, Andy, says of the boy: "If this kid's on the up and up, and you think he is and the father says he is, then just call up his mom and tell he's here and wants to see her. It's like an adoption case. Kid finds his birth mom and they fall in love, he forgives her, she welcomes him home. Or she refuses. Either way, end of story" (46). Andy's oversimplification of the adoption and reunification processes erases the possibility for trauma on behalf of both child and parent, and ironically undermines the very real threat that this "nephew" poses to their life. Similarly, his somewhat confused suggestion that this is "like an adoption case" foreshadows the fact that this nephew is found to be an imposter because if he were the relinquished son, it would not be "like an adoption case", but rather would actually *be* "an adoption case." The character of Tara also later narrates her experience watching a made-for-tv movie, featuring a birth mother seeking out the child she relinquished for adoption as a teenager. She finds herself strangely invested in the film, however she overtly notes that "[t]here were no parallels between the characters in the movie and [her] family" (64). However, she then questions her emotional reaction to the film as she "suddenly remember[s] the summer of 1974 when Daddy announced that that very week he was taking Didi to Switzerland to enroll her in a 'finishing school'" (64). By the conclusion of the novel, it becomes apparent that there really was a child relinquished for adoption, but that the imposter has murdered him in an attempt to access Tara's ex-husband's very profitable business. The actual adopted child, then, is not present in the text, however the inclusion of the threat of financial extortion at the hands of a relinquished child and the subsequent victimization and murder of the real son is noteworthy.

Moreover, the narrative constructed in *Desirable Daughters* is in direct opposition to that which occurs in *Leave It to Me*, where the adoptee is sought out by her biological father and becomes a murderer alongside him. This representation of adoption, as a catalyst for future unhappiness and a sort of "dirty little secret," both complements and complicates readings of adoption in the two Mukherjee novels considered in this chapter. The adoption which occurs in *Desirable Daughters* is not a transnational one and remains unconfirmed throughout most of the narrative. It is also not a central action within the text, and is therefore invoked here only as a point of comparison and to highlight Mukherjee's repeated but differing invocations of the act of adoption, which draws attention to the complex relationships between adoptees and birth

families. On the one hand, then, Mukherjee's inclusion of adoption as a trope which further complicates notions of identity and consistent juxtaposing of the adopted condition against the diasporic openly invites a comparison between the adopted condition and the diasporic condition. On the other hand, however, Mukherjee's rejection of the inscription of a diasporic consciousness onto the characters of Du and Debby is indicative of an understanding of an adopted identity which is radically different from that which is written by other authors.

Mukherjee's repeated utilization of the trope of adoption and the academic silence surrounding it becomes even more curious when one considers the vast range of publications which address Mukherjee's work. More interesting, still, is her application of the notion of adoption to languages and cultures. In an interview with Alison Carb (2009), Mukherjee speaks about adopting English as her language of writing, and about having adopted America as her home (Carb 27). Invoking the notion of custodianship, Mukherjee's use of adoption to describe language use can, in some ways be related back to notion of text-as-child, as outlined in the first chapter. By "adopting" English as the language of her writing, Mukherjee becomes, in some ways, a custodian of the language and claims to be at least partially in control of its usage. Likewise, by claiming to have adopted America, Mukherjee reclaims a position of power over the makeup of the nation; those who adopt necessarily have both power over and responsibility towards those who are adopted.

Mukherjee's claim to have adopted America also reaffirms her rejection of being read as an Indian author, though her work receives significant attention from South Asian scholars. One manuscript dealing with Mukherjee's writing to come out of India, Indira Nityanandam's *Three Great Indian Women Novelists: Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande and Bharati Mukherjee* (2000), pays considerable attention to *Jasmine* but remains silent on adoption. Nityanandam's work precedes Mukherjee's trilogy by several years, but notes that "[t]he female protagonists of Bharati Mukherjee's earlier novels are characterized by their rootlessness and their incapacity to belong; while even their attempts to find roots are either half-hearted or unrealistic" (Nityanandam *Three* 63). Presumably phrased to exclude Beigh Masters in *Holder of the World*, Nityanandam aptly captures the central conflict of all of Mukherjee's earlier novels, as well as the themes of roots and belonging that are central to her more recent works. Although Nityanandam seems vaguely critical of the lack of realism present in Mukherjee's novels, the very title of her book suggests that she awards merit to Mukherjee's work, and more importantly, that she celebrates Mukherjee as an Indian author, despite the sometimes less than ideal picture of India present in Mukherjee's writings and Mukherjee's current identification

with the United States as her homeland. This rootlessness and inability to belong, also ascribed to the adoptees in Mukherjee's work, remains constant throughout her entire body of writing.

A further brief essay by Nityanandam in *Indo-English Fiction: The Last Decade* (2002) compares the two Mukherjee novels focused on in this dissertation. In her comparative study, "Language and Style: Bharati Mukherjee's *Leave It To Me* and *Jasmine*—A Comparative Study," Nityanandam links the two texts through the presence of violence in them, arguing that "[i]t is the violence that Jasmine encounters both in India and outside that sets *Jasmine* as a prologue for *Leave It to Me*" (80). This reading of *Jasmine* as a prologue for *Leave It to Me* suggests a continuity of narrative that I find absent between the two texts, but nevertheless warrants further examination. Jyoti, who later becomes Jasmine, experiences and bears witness to violence at the hands of the Hindu rioters in her home town, and is later raped by a white man on American soil,⁸⁵ which confirms for readers that Jasmine's America can be just as violent and oppressive as her India. Debby, who later becomes Devi, is the product of a man rendered infamous for his propensity towards rape and murder. As an infant, her mother purportedly tries to kill her, and she later enters into a life of crime which becomes increasingly violent as she comes closer to reuniting with her murderous psychopathic biological father. Once again, patterns of violence follow the protagonist from India to the United States, however she plays a much more active role in the violence than Jasmine does. These patterns render Nityanandam's claims plausible but ultimately weak, as the two texts do not represent continuations of the same violence, but rather reflect a global culture in which violence breeds further violence.

More importantly, the acts of organized violence perpetuated in Jasmine's home village in India are not acknowledged in Nityanandam's claim that "[i]n *Leave It to Me*, the violence is presented as being more macabre, more planned and more deliberate" ("Language" 82).⁸⁶ That the two works, among the more violent of Mukherjee's oeuvre, also feature adoption invites an interesting comparison to the relationship between the two themes, as well as how they interact with the concepts of migration and diaspora. Although I disagree with Nityanandam's assertion that *Leave It to Me* is an extension of *Jasmine*, it is significant that violence features prominently in the two texts. Specifically, is the pairing of adoption with violence in these two works suggesting that removing children from their nation of birth and

⁸⁵ Half Face, Jasmine's rapist, is not given a nationality, but is described as both a Vietnam veteran (104) and a white man (112). These facts, combined with the familiarity with which people at the motel in Florida greet him on arrival suggest that he is to be read as an American (110).

⁸⁶ For example, to suggest that the bombing of the store which occurs in *Jasmine* is not planned or deliberate ignores both the description of the event within the text and historical knowledge about the time period and the repeated acts of violence that plagued both Hindu and Sikh communities.

expecting them to assimilate is a form of cultural genocide?⁸⁷ As questioned throughout this project, is there a relationship between diasporic identities and adoptee identities? And, finally, how can transnational adoptee identities be read alongside other adoptee and migrant identities? Nityanandam's comparison of the two novels thus raises more questions than it answers, but provides a useful jumping off point for considerations of the violence, horror, and abjection as they occur in these works.

Christine Kutschbach's *The Literariness of Life: Undecidability in Bharati Mukherjee's Writing* (2012) also contains a comparison of these two works. Kutschbach's work, as a whole, "introduces Bharati Mukherjee's biographical background and establishes a link between some of her aesthetic viewpoints and Jacques Derrida's conception of literature and 'responsible' reading" (20). The emphasis on Derrida thus remains central throughout the work, and Kutschbach's work applies various Derridean theories to each of Mukherjee's works. Kutschbach devotes an entire chapter of her work, entitled "Writing Life: Autobiographical Tracing in *Jasmine* and *Leave It to Me*" to examining the works considered in this project. To borrow from her work's conclusion, where she best summarizes her comparison on the novels:

I paired *Jasmine* and *Leave It to Me* together and termed them Mukherjee's 'Go-West' novels because they exhibit several parallels: They share i) a geographical East-West trajectory of their main protagonists, ii) an autobiographical narrative structure, iii) both protagonists experience and dispense violence, and, finally, they both defect from stable social set-ups in exchange for heterogeneous social structures brimming with risk and chance. (Kutschbach 248)

Glaringly absent from Kutschbach's list of similarities between the two works, then, is any reference to the centrality of adoption in the two novels, though she does later briefly mention the phenomenon in each novel. More interesting, still, is the fact that she considers the protagonists' renaming without significant emphasis on the conditions and relationship that necessitate this renaming, which is an avenue that will be explored in the coming two sub-chapters. Her focus on violence, which can be linked to Kristevian notions of horror and abjection, she instead links to the Derridean notions of "trace" and "ghostliness" (Kutschbach 141-143). Like Nityanandam, then, Kutschbach's comparison of the two novels posits them on something of a continuum, though she does not explicitly name it as such.

⁸⁷ Several scholars have noted that in the United States, the National Association of Black Social Workers (NABSW) call the adoption of Black children by white parents a form of "racial genocide" (Bartholet 124) or "cultural genocide" (Simon and Altstein), and this notion could further be extended to transnational adoptions in which the race or culture of the child does not match that of the family.

Further like Nityanandam is Jennifer Drake's analysis of Mukherjee's work, which also focuses on her earlier novels. In the article "Looting American Culture: Bharati Mukherjee's Immigrant Narratives" (1999), Drake examines Mukherjee's constructions of America. The article considers *Jasmine* and *Holder of the World*, as well as the short stories collected in *Darkness* and *The Middleman and Other Stories* (1988), and the non-fictional writings of Mukherjee and her husband Clark Blaise in *Days and Nights in Calcutta* (1977). Drake notes that:

To discover, create, and retrieve America's multicultural myths and histories, Mukherjee rejects the expatriate's nostalgia. She rejects the hyphen and the acceptable stories it generates—stories about immigrants struggling between two incommensurable worlds, finally choosing one or the other. Her immigrant characters are settlers, Americans—not sojourners, tourists, guest workers, foreigners. (61)

Certainly applicable to the main character of *Jasmine*, Drake's assertion that Mukherjee "rejects the expatriate's nostalgia" captures the way in which young Jasmine consumes American culture, and synthesizes the unhappiness she feels when she is within a community that does idealize the past life in India. At the same time, however, she asserts that Mukherjee's past and writing, like the pasts of her many characters, is still "filtered through a Hindu imagination—history as accident, the everyday as epochal, perspective as multifocal view" (Drake 77), running the risk of exoticizing a Hinduism which is, at least in the case of *Jasmine* flexible, ever-changing, and conducive to her life in America. This Hindu imagination becomes relevant again in a consideration of *Leave It to Me*, which contains several references to Hindu creation stories as Debby chooses for herself the name of a goddess.

Drake frames her work with an epigraph by Homi Bhabha and then begins with a quote from Mukherjee's "A Four-Hundred-Year-Old Woman," in which Mukherjee addresses the give-and-take relationship that immigrants have with their hostland, and the ability of each to transform the other (Drake 60). By analyzing Mukherjee's work in relation to her lived experiences as an immigrant author and considering her non-fiction writing as part of the same narrative journey, Drake suggests strong ties between Mukherjee and the characters about whom she writes which is not true when considering the adoptee characters, but is nonetheless noteworthy. The argument that in Mukherjee's works, "[a]ssimilation is cultural looting, cultural exchange, or a willful and sometimes costly negotiation: an eye for an eye, a self for a self" that Drake makes is astute, but characterizes the relationship between immigrant and new land as one in which there is a lot of "take" and minimal "give" (61). Mukherjee's portrayals

of adoption can be read in a similar manner; unlike the other novels where the families of adoptees become culturally blended, Mukherjee's adoptees instead take on characteristics of their new, American families without disrupting the family dynamics with significant foreign influence.

By grouping adoption, violence, and migration in her texts, Mukherjee openly invites a comparison between the three; the adoptee identity and the identities of the female migrant are framed with much greater similarity in *Jasmine* than in any other work.⁸⁸ Likewise, in *Leave It to Me*, Debby relates first most closely to Frankie Fong, a Chinese-American with whom she works, and later with a wide range of social outcasts in Haight before finally aligning herself with her violent and psychopathic biological parents and burning down Frankie's house without considering who might be inside.⁸⁹ When compared to the other works considered in this project, Mukherjee's texts construct a very valuable counterpoint to the portrayals of adoptees as comfortably assimilated and content in their adoptive families, and highlight instances where "nature" surpasses nurture in adoptee identity. By conducting a close reading of Mukherjee's adopted characters and comparing them to those portrayed in the other works analyzed in previous chapters, the following subchapters highlight the ways that Mukherjee caters to and complicates notions of adoptee-as-Other, the parent-child relationship, and the relationship between migration, violence, and adoption.

3.2 *Jasmine*, Adoption, and Identity: Constructing Mothers, Children, and Selves

Adoption in *Jasmine* is described in an article by Jill Roberts, "Between Two 'Darknesses': The Adoptive Condition in *Ceremony* and *Jasmine*" (1995), as a way to legitimate identities: "[T]he legitimizing properties of adoption emerge not in the reconciliation of a split identity or in the rediscovery of a lost self, but in the 'rebirth' of whole new beings" (88). Roberts' article, it is worth noting, was the only work located in the undertaking of this research project that focuses on the role that adoption plays in any of Mukherjee's works. The idea central to Roberts' argument, that adoption legitimates identity as a form of rebirth, disrupts the dichotomous construction of birth/adoptive families, lands, and mothers. That a "new being" is formed by the process of adoption simultaneously challenges the construction of adoptees as diasporic *if* that construction is founded on the concept of the looking backwards

⁸⁸ For example, although Gowda's novel portrays the transnational migration of Krishnan, his role in the text is fairly small and his self-discovery and settlement is juxtaposed against Somer's rather than Asha's.

⁸⁹ Devi finds out later from Ham that "some squeeze" of Frankie Fong died when she burned his house down (*Leave It to Me* 84).

toward the homeland exhibited in other works and at the same time accentuates the adoptees' potential for hybridity as they fully integrate with their new families, rather than being merely transposed upon them. *Jasmine* and *Leave It to Me* instead depict adoptees who are interested in their birth families and can easily cast aside their adoptive families. In the case of Du, this is somewhat justified by his age at the time of his adoption, however Debby/Devi has no such justification for her actions.

Despite the fact that many studies of Mukherjee's *Jasmine* have been published, absent from most of its many examinations is an in-depth study of the ways in which adoption and the adoptive family are portrayed and constructed. Adoption is present in the novel in three unique contexts: as Jasmine is adopted as an immigrant of America (to draw on Howell), as Duff is adopted first by the Hayes family and as she and Jasmine adopt each other, and as Du is adopted by Jane and Bud. This series of actual and perceived adoptions, which follow Jasmine's own adoptions of different names and identities, complicate understandings of family roles and the function of the American family in national discourses, as well as the role of the immigrant and diasporic subject in the broader national imaginary. Moreover, the ease with which the legal processes of adoption are portrayed, particularly in the transnational context of Du, exacerbates Jasmine's own illegal status, while the complex pairing of adoption and violence also invites further inquiry. Thus, the construction of both Jasmine and Du as racial and cultural "Other" in the Ripplemeyer household, Jasmine's unique relationship with maternity, and the simultaneous yet incomplete trajectories of adoption as migration shape and challenge readings of transnational adoption as a diasporic condition while at the same time reaffirming notions of home and homing in diaspora. Mukherjee's juxtaposing of Jasmine's acculturation to the United States alongside Du's adoption further support readings of the adoptive condition as comparable to that of the diasporic individual, as the novel supports reading the two situations as similar.

Many works featuring a discussion of *Jasmine* approach the text with the aim of analyzing identities, with a specific focus on the ways that Jasmine constructs and reconstructs herself throughout her processes of multiple migrations, and Jennifer Drake's is no different. In her reading of migration and culture in Mukherjee's work, Drake argues:

To read Jasmine only through the lens of assimilation ignores that when a goddess transforms, she doesn't lose herself: she is no singular self; she contains the cosmos. When a goddess transforms, she takes action, exerts great power. Hence 'immigration' is transformation in multiples, 'immigration' is a force of

nature as transformative as global warming; 'immigration' demands myth, imagination, metaphor. (63-4)

Framing her analysis on the relationship between Jasmine and Goddess Kali, whom she becomes when she murders the rapist Half-Face, Drake extends Jasmine's goddess-like state throughout the text, maintaining Jasmine as a Kali-figure, even as she changes from Jasmine to Jazzy to Jase to Jane and finally back to Jase to become an "unorthodox family" with Taylor and Duff (238). By asserting that Jasmine maintains a Kali-like status throughout the text, Drake inadvertently contradicts herself by suggesting that these reinventions are incomplete and that all of Jasmine's identities are manifestations of Kali, thereby denying the conclusion that Jasmine was successfully able to transform herself and become who she wanted to be. This, in turn, links Jasmine's transformations to some sort of divine power rather than assertive action.

As previously noted, the act of adoption in Mukherjee's novels has received minimal scholarly attention, but Roberts compares Mukherjee's *Jasmine* to Leslie Marmon Silko's novel, *Ceremony* (1977), and begins with a section analyzing adoption as a form of displacement in which she re-asserts that not all displacements are equal. Moreover, she invokes Chinua Achebe to "underscore the constructed value of culture as a benevolent fiction designed to define and sustain the self-affirming boundaries of an individual or community over time" (78), thus further underscoring the significance of boundaries in the construction of self, community, and family. Roberts draws heavily on Mukherjee's own understandings of self and belonging to draw a parallel between Jasmine (and her many pseudonyms) and Mukherjee herself (Roberts 86-88). Comparing author with character in terms of the ways in which they construct their identity (86-88), as well as the ways in which both women seem to be continuously relocating themselves (89), Roberts makes some highly relevant observations about all three of the adoptions in the novel outlined above. She notes that "adoption as a concept in each case underscores the subject's displacement even as he or she attempts to reconcile this 'betweenness,' the predicament of the 'post-subject' in contemporary fiction" (80). This association with adoption as displacement is poignant, and again marks the difference between Mukherjee's portrayals of adoption and the constructions by other authors as her adoptees are displaced by the very act that others might define as homing.

Roberts' readings rely heavily on the experiences of Mukherjee when analyzing the adoptions that take place in *Jasmine*, and one may instead choose to read them in relation to the other previously discussed adopted and adoptive characters, families, and individuals, with the aim of understanding Mukherjee's constructions of adoption in relation to those of other authors. In so doing, one must not discount the many ways that Mukherjee's experiences as an

Indian immigrant in Canada and the United States *might* have influenced her writing, but rather seek to identify how and why Mukherjee's conception of adoption, as a site of unfulfilled longing and failed assimilation, differs so greatly from the other representations.

While the protagonists in the other novels eventually come to identify themselves as at home in their adoptive lands, neither Jasmine nor Du is granted that privilege. Mother and adopted son remain "Other" in Baden, Iowa, and are ultimately unwilling and unable to provide Bud with the family he longs for and attempts to create through them.⁹⁰ As Roberts notes,

Adoption thus, on the one hand, holds in relief many universal identity issues; but, on the other hand ... the adoptive condition problematizes, specifically, cultural cohesion and hegemonic codes of belonging for the 'ethnic,' 'hybrid' or 'post-subject.' What exactly does it mean to 'belong' in a familial, communal or national context? What happens when 'consent' isn't bestowed? What happens when versions of subject identity conflict? Adoption can be a means to legitimize an identity or a mechanism for further dislocation, especially if an individual holds fast to a sense of self unexpressed or inexpressible within society's 'cultural matrix'. (94)

In the years that pass between Mukherjee's writing and the publication of the other novels considered in this project, the American society in which they are set no doubt becomes more diverse. These changes suggest that "the adopted condition," like "the immigrant condition" has become multiple adopted or immigrant conditions, but Roberts' assertion nonetheless rings true, as the cultural isolation that results from both Jasmine and Du's respective adoptions by Bud problematizes their senses of belonging and understandings of their own roles in the community and family.

If one reads the adoptees discussed in this project as a community unto themselves, Du remains very much anomalous. In addition to his sex, country of origin, and age at time of adoption, the means through which Du comes to be adopted by the Ripplemeyers also differentiates him from the other adoptees discussed in this project. Du's adoption is not the result of Jasmine, Karin, or Bud's desire for children, but Bud's sense of personal responsibility and desire to "make up for fifty years of 'selfishness'" after seeing a documentary on Thai prisons (14). From Vietnam, Du "has lived through five or six languages, five or six countries, two or three centuries of history; has seen his country, city, and family butchered, bargained

⁹⁰ Only once is it noted that Bud has two children from his marriage to Karin (14). Thus, his child with Jasmine can be read not as his desire to start a family, but as a desire to claim Jasmine through having a child with her and to legitimate their relationship. This is especially pertinent due to the fact that she refuses to marry him *and* that he wants her to marry him before the baby comes (7, 12).

with pirates and bureaucrats, eaten filth in order to stay alive; that he has survived every degradation known to this century” (214). Comparing him to herself, Jasmine further notes that Du’s success is due to the fact that “he has always trained with live ammo, without a net, with no multiple choice” (214). An obvious criticism of the way that children may be coddled, Jasmine attributes the instinctual self-preservation that both she and Du undertake to the fact that they have suffered and borne witness to atrocities. Violence is an integral and unavoidable part of Du’s past, and violence has pushed him to Iowa in the same way as it pushed Jasmine to America. Also like Jasmine, Du has known many names, and their likeness results in a closeness between the two that neither one of them shares with Bud. The narrator states with certainty that “Du is a Ripplemeyer. He was Du Thien. He was fourteen when we got him; now he’s seventeen” (13). Naming and renaming, referring to Du as an object that was obtained, Jasmine/Jane identifies a certainty about Du’s identity that is challenged at the end of the novel when Du leaves to rejoin his biological sister. It is unclear whether Du will remain a Ripplemeyer, but it becomes apparent that Jasmine will not. Though they are vastly different from each other, they find comfort in their similar positions as Other in the very hegemonic town of Baden, Iowa, and embark on similar journeys to California to be with the families with whom they feel they belong.

Jasmine’s multiple “adoptions” into different families in the United States and Du’s ultimate rejection of an adopted position render the text unique among adoptive texts. Where *Jasmine* portrays struggling Indian migrants in the United States, *Secret Daughter* portrays a very comfortable and well-aculturated Indian man. The class and gendered implications of this contrast cannot be ignored, as Krishnan comes from a wealthy Indian family, and is male. In contrast, Jasmine comes from a poor family and is, herself, “adopted” into wealthier families, always by the male head of the household and not by the female. The only female character with whom Jasmine forms a bond is Lillian Gordon, who treats Jasmine like a daughter as she teaches her to “walk and talk American” (134). The difference between this relationship and the others that Jasmine enters into is in terms of time; both parties enter into this relationship knowing it is temporary, whereas her relationships with the “adoptive” men in her life does not have such a temporal certainty; they are not understood to be for a fixed period of time, and have the potential for permanence. With complete awareness of the infantilizing potential of utilizing the term “adopt” to refer to Jasmine’s relationship with her employers and partners, the term remains useful as a way to understand the way that she shifts from the care of one patriarch to another. Like Du, she maintains her agency throughout her many re-locations, but still performs the role of an individual who needs the care and protection of dominant males.

Similarly, the adoptees in other works want to return to their birthlands, even if the places are unfamiliar to them, whereas Du and Jasmine are both thankful to have left those places. Trauma, adoption, and the rejection of previous identities are more prominent throughout *Jasmine*, though Du's return to his Vietnamese family further complicates this. Jasmine's second adoption, into the Indian family of her husband's professor, teaches her one way of being Indian in America. The Indianness of this household goes against the assimilationist nature of both her previous and forthcoming adoptive families, and Jasmine must learn her own way to balance her past and current understandings of self and otherness. In this case, as was the case in Lillian Gordon's household, Jasmine is adopted into the role of child, rather than mother. A combination of this infantilizing, as well as her own growing confidence and desire for independence, drive her away from the this family and into the role of mother in her next family.

The next family that Jasmine enters into is the Hayes family in New York, who hire her to work as a nanny to their domestically adopted daughter, Duff. Jasmine takes this role very seriously, nurturing the child as if her own, while at the same time relishing in the increased freedoms that stable employment and financial comfort offer. As one of two adopted children in the novel, Duff's narrative draws attention to the adoption market in the United States, as it is noted that Taylor and Wylie paid for her mother's tuition, suggesting that she was a very expensive acquisition for the family (170). Their class, evident throughout the text through their lifestyle (including the ability to hire Jasmine as a full-time live-in caregiver), renders them able to adopt domestically and to procure an infant, something that is increasingly difficult in contemporary America. At the same time, their use of immigrant labour to raise their child highlights a paradox in the contemporary adoption scene; namely, that those who can afford private domestic adoption in the United States are often those who do not have the time to commit to raising the children themselves due to the fact that they are an upwardly mobile and dual-income household. Thus, Duff comes to represent not only the disconnection between Taylor and Wylie Hayes as a couple, but also between the expectations embodied in "The American Dream" and the realities of their life.

The divorce of her employers and the discovery of her husband's murderer in New York are the catalysts that cause Jasmine to feel that she is no longer necessary and move on as a result. Taylor's affection for Jasmine, which could be either the result of or a factor in the dissolution of his marriage with Wylie, also highlights the way that her exotic otherness renders her desirable, as Taylor seeks to take care of her, re-inscribing gender roles in a way that is absent in his relationship with Wylie and reasserting the masculinity he may have felt lacking.

For Jasmine, this disintegration shatters the illusion of the American Dream, making her question the stability of all relationships. This results in her next move, to Baden, Iowa, where she gets a job at a bank and is eventually courted by Bud Ripplemeyer.

Jasmine initially enters into her relationship with Bud as a companion and coworker. The two teach each other about their respective cultures as farming culture is very different from the cultures that Jasmine experienced in New York. Jasmine is no longer helpless the same way that she was in either the home of Lillian Gordon or in the Indian household that first took her in, complicating their relationship and sparking Bud's sexual/romantic interest in her. Bud's initial interest in her is romantic and sexual rather than paternal and benevolent, which renders him different from the individuals in the other American households that she occupies. However, with the adoption of Du from Vietnam, and then Bud's injury (which renders him paraplegic), Jasmine's role shifts from lover to mother and caregiver; she adopts both Bud and Du. This transformation is the exact inverse of the way that her roles changed in the Hayes household, where she entered as caregiver and left as unfulfilled lover. At the same time, through his "tinkering," Du also becomes a stand-in for Jasmine's deceased first husband, and like the death of her first husband, Du's departure also causes Jasmine to set out in search of happiness, this time not traversing oceans and nations but simply crossing the United States.

Due to his unique origins and position as an older adoptee, Du, alongside both Duff and Bud's unborn child, complicates Jasmine's maternal position. As a "day mummy" (127, 177-179), a mother who is "younger than [a sister]" (224), and a mother who conceives via assisted reproduction as the insistence of her partner, Jasmine's relationship with maternity has many layers. On the one hand, her desire to mother is apparent and pronounced; she recalls a heated argument with her husband in India regarding her ability to bear children and his desire to wait until she was older and they had more money (77-78). She seems to relish her caregiving roles, and seeks them out actively. On the other hand, however, she resists being defined by these roles, and reinvents herself to fit into each homespace she takes up. Her final act within the novel, to leave Bud and set out to start a new life with Taylor and Duff, is a reclaiming of her role as "mummy" to Duff, and a complication of her relationship with Bud's unborn child growing in utero. Her desire to locate Du in California is also indicative of a strong maternal bond, however her departure from Baden and Bud also entails the removal of her unborn child from its paternal family and a complete disruption of the family structure.

Absent from the novel is any discussion of the rigorous assessments that contemporary would-be adoptive parents must go through. Notably, these screenings would likely draw attention to Jasmine's status as an undocumented immigrant and vastly alter the trajectory of

the plot, as her relationships with Du and Bud are central to the novel's conclusion. Addressed only briefly, it is noted that the adoption agency "hadn't minded Bud's divorce... The agency was charmed by the notion of Bud's 'Asian' wife, without inquiring too deeply" (14). The agency worker is introduced only as "chatty," having disclosed to Bud and Jasmine that Du's mother and brother were violently murdered shortly after they received visas to leave the refugee camp (18), but is not named, and is not identified as restrictive or invasive. This is in direct contrast to Gowda's novel (51), despite the fact that adoptions would be taking place in the span of only a few years.⁹¹ This dissimilarity speaks to both the differing significance of adoption to the plots and protagonists of the novels, but allows for Jasmine's character to be read alongside Du's in a way that is impossible in between Somer and Asha in Gowda's novel. Jasmine is happy to have Du, and deeply connected to him, but understands her relationship to him in a very different way than Somer constructs her relationship with Asha due to the fact that their relationship is born out of shared trauma rather than her benevolence or her innate desire to mother him.

Instead of presenting a typical parent/child relationship, Du and Jasmine are both read as hybrid characters and in some ways are both reflective of Bud's benevolence; he endeavors to save both of them but ends up instead relying on Jasmine and largely ignoring Du. Despite her reading of similarity between the characters of Jasmine and Du, Roberts also cautions against reading their modes of identity construction as too alike. She argues that unlike Jasmine, who assimilates more wholly in life in Baden, Iowa, Du has a "continuity of cultural identity" (Roberts 91). She cites Jasmine's assertion that "Blood is thick, I think. Du, my adopted son, is a mystery, but the prospect of losing him is like a miscarriage" (Mukherjee 221, Roberts 91). Roberts does not comment on Mukherjee's word choice here in relation to her complex negotiations with maternity. A miscarriage, the loss of a fetus, signifies not just the loss of a life, but rather the loss of potential and the loss of an imagined life. Like the miscarriages that occur in Gowda's novel, the metaphor of miscarrying Du signifies that he was never really there to begin with despite a real and physically notable presence. Regardless of one's opinions on where life begins, a miscarried fetus has no knowable identity outside of that which is constructed for it in the minds of others. Du is therefore not being miscarried so much as he is

⁹¹ In Gowda's novel, Asha is adopted in 1985 (Gowda 51). In Mukherjee's novel, the year is unclear. However, Jasmine states that she was born eighteen years after the Partition riots (44), gets married at the age of fifteen (77-78). After the death of her husband, she spends some time living with her mother, then makes the long journey to the United States, where she spends several weeks in Florida with Lillian Gordon before moving to New York with Professorji, where she stays for five months (142). Following that, she works for Taylor and Wylie for "nearly two years" (165). Considering this outline of the passage of time, it can be no earlier than 1983 by the time Du is adopted, suggesting that the circumstances and regulations would be similar.

refusing to be born into the life that they have constructed for him. Roberts aptly notes that Jasmine “views his adoption into their mid-Western home as she does her own: as a tenuous rebirth of self. Though he is a mystery, Du earns Jasmine's respect in his ability to forge a hybrid identity” (91), but he does so in a very different way than she does, and gains and executes his autonomy and independence at a much earlier stage than she is able to.

Whereas Grice argues that Du’s adoption of a hybrid identity mirrors Jasmine’s (Grice 91-92), and Roberts asserts that “Du earns Jasmine's respect in his ability to forge a hybrid identity” (91), it can also be argued that his ability, as a legitimate adoptee and as a male, to migrate legally into the United States also both complicates and complements the illegal nature of Jasmine’s migration. Juxtaposed against Jasmine’s undocumented entry into the United States, Du’s relatively seamless adoption, as well as the ease with which he is able to reach his biological sister in California, highlights the ways in which gender intersects with nationalism. Despite her best intentions, Jasmine is inhibited by her tenuous legal position, as well as her desire to nurture, which she demonstrates through her attachments to all of the families that she joins in the United States. Rather than liberate her, adoption and her American identity create a new set of cages for her that she only able to escape at the end of the novel when she pursues her own desires and set out towards California with Duff and Taylor.

Highlighting the significance of family structure and roles within the family in Mukherjee’s work, Nityanandam refers to *Jasmine* in relation to Mukherjee’s other works, noting that “[a]fter gender-role related titles of daughter and wife, *Jasmine*—the third novel—suggests a sea-change in the title itself. The protagonist rises above being merely a daughter or a wife. Faced with a loss of identity at each stage, Jasmine manages to evolve a new identity” (Nityanandam *Three* 76). While Nityanandam’s assertion is undeniably true, *Jasmine* follows the progression from Mukherjee’s two previous novels, focusing on the role of daughter and wife respectively, and shifts the focus to the identity of mother. Although the title does not define Jasmine by her maternal role, she consistently seeks out ways to be defined by it, relishing in the labours of caregiving even as she leaves Bud to the care of his ex-wife and departs with Taylor. If Tara in *The Tiger’s Daughter* faces complications in her own subject position due to her relationships with her father in her natal homeland and her husband in the United States, Jasmine’s character takes this complication one step further as her journey into maternity as the mother of three different types of American children (the blond “all-American” Duff, the hybrid and confused Vietnamese-American Du, and her unborn biracial offspring with Bud). Similarly, Dimple in *Wife* seeks fulfillment in her marriage in the same way that Jasmine seeks fulfillment in motherhood and rejects the role of devoted and subservient wife to Bud.

Moreover, Nityanandam acknowledges Jasmine's complex relationship with wifedom and motherhood, as well as the role of culture and tradition in shaping her views. She writes that after Jasmine's migration, "the traditional Indian-wife image is cast off and the taboos on Indian widows are shed... From a desire to become a 'Sati', she becomes a 'Kali'. The sanctity that is associated with marriage and child-bearing in her Indian past does not cast a shadow on Jasmine as she slides easily into Taylor's and later Bud's life" (Nityanandam *Three* 73). However, this statement ignores Jasmine's strong instincts towards mothering, and the conscious effort she puts in to conceiving Bud's child through artificial insemination. This act itself might, in some views, challenge the sanctity of child-bearing and heterosexual penile-vaginal sex as the means of conception, but it maintains a sort of sanctity of motherhood, as she pursues what she thinks is the most viable future for herself and her unborn child: a life with Taylor and Duff. In some ways, the act of leaving Bud, who is largely dependent on her, is selfish, but ultimately also mired in a sense of obligation as she seeks out Du and takes on the role of mothering Duff again.

Along the same vein as Nityanandam's assertions, Roberts' comments on Jasmine's relationship with Duff and Du address Jasmine's simultaneous positions as adoptive mother and kindred spirit of the children in her care: "It is no wonder that Jasmine forges her most meaningful relationships with the two 'legally' adopted children in this story, Duff and Du ... Jasmine becomes the surrogate mother of both these children, but her connection to each extends beyond a maternal sense to peer recognition" (Roberts 90). This peer recognition is logical in many ways, and Jasmine is "adopted" into the Hayes family to care for Duff, and is treated by Wylie like a sister (175, 178). If one accepts the rhetoric of child-saving commonly inscribed onto adoptive contexts, one can also read Jasmine as being similarly rescued by the same parents who save the children, though she also contributes to the re-structuring and "saving" of the lives of the men with whom she lives as well. Adoption in the context of Mukherjee's novel therefore not only draws attention to the class discrepancies between adoptees and parents and the interesting power dynamics that arise within the households, but also allows Jasmine to reclaim power and exert a benevolence equal or greater to that which she received as a new immigrant; it allows her to pay forward the kindnesses she received and fulfill the same role for Du and Duff as Lillian Gordon fulfilled for her. Her ability to host and welcome others, and to help Du to assimilate, indicates that she has come "full-circle" and achieved the American-ness she sought at the beginning of the text.

The novel's conclusion has the potential to invoke complicated emotions within the reader. On the one hand, Bud's plight evokes sympathy, because his disability renders him

unable to stop Jasmine from leaving, and could be read as her reason for leaving him. However, this is Jasmine's one act of defiance against the system which privileges Bud as a middle-class heterosexual white male of legal immigration status. By siding with Bud, a reader would be forced to concede that his disability negatively counters his otherwise hegemonic power over Jasmine. Moreover, a sympathy to the extent that one is critical of Jasmine's actions regarding privileging her own happiness over Bud's would deny Jasmine agency and the ability to control her own destiny, undercutting readings of the text that label it as markedly feminist.

That Jasmine ends up with Duff is also therefore noteworthy as it allows her to claim Wylie's place in the idyllic American family. Gently foreshadowed by Duff's reference to Jasmine as her "day-mummy" (177), it is fitting that Jasmine ends up with the first American family to legitimate her position as an adult and a mother—something she has longed for since her first marriage in India. Duff's reference to Jasmine's position as a mother also re-inscribes family norms, as Taylor's affection towards Jasmine grows and his feelings towards his Wylie. Each family that is created within the text strives to achieve some sort of institutionalized ideal, with Jasmine's final relocation symbolizing an act of rejection towards these norms and ideologies of family formation, even in an adoptive context, as she, Taylor, and Duff set out with Bud's unborn child to create a new kind of family.

Roberts' final remark in her analysis of Mukherjee's work offers two readings of the novel's conclusion in relation to the role that adoption and displacement play within the text. The first is that "[a]t best, Mukherjee uses displacement and a near-obsession with adoption as a commentary on the plight of the illegal immigrant in America whose only option is to embrace the freedom of their homelessness in the absence of a safe, affirming cultural context" (92). Roberts' identification of Mukherjee's "near-obsession with adoption" makes it all the more noteworthy that so few other scholars have examined this in their works, while her juxtaposing of the adoptee and the undocumented immigrant in relation to states of homelessness is profound. Her alternative reading that, "[a]t worst, Jasmine's final leap into her lover's arms signifies the schizophrenia of the uprooted identity, the extreme relativity of self that cannot rest" (92) is markedly darker, as it indicates that Jasmine may not be able to rest even as she has obtained that which she thinks she wants. Following this assertion, the label of her emotions as schizophrenic suggests that they are temporary and subject to change, and that Jasmine will therefore not stay with Taylor, leaving readers to speculate as to where she might end up next, and complicating the future of Bud's unborn child.

Adoption in Mukherjee's *Jasmine*, therefore, functions on a multitude of levels. Although the text features only one actual transnational adoption (which was previously

identified as the selection criteria for inclusion in this project), adoption and cultural negotiation permeate its entirety. Utilizing adoption as means to explore the feminist implications of the drive towards multiculturalism at the family level, *Jasmine* sets the stage for the later works to de- and re-construct the multicultural family. It further highlights the way in which the policies and politics surrounding adoption privilege one suffering over another through the implicit assertion that Du's status as a Vietnamese War orphan makes him more worthy of a legal and expedited migration into the United States than the victims of the violent clashes between Hindus and Sikhs in Jasmine's home village, and India more broadly. Though the two situations are vastly different, Mukherjee's positioning of Du and Jasmine as foils for one another supports this reading. Adoption, as both the legal process of obtaining children *and* that act of taking another's culture, is restructured and re-formed in Mukherjee's novel, while India and Indianness are cast aside, having little role in the process.

3.3 The Abjection of Adoption: *Leave It to Me*, *Murder*, and the "Adoptive Condition"

Mukherjee's later novel, *Leave It to Me*, also features a representation of transnational adoption that has received minimal attention, and moreover has not been compared to the trope of adoption in a broader context. Like Jasmine, the main character in *Leave It to Me*, Debby/Devi, also goes through a simultaneous act of reclaiming and renaming herself. Debby, a young adult throughout the bulk of the novel, was adopted from India as an infant by an Italian-American family. Bored with her average, middle-class life, Debby grows up quickly and sets out on her own, rendering the novel a sort of macabre bildungsroman. She becomes romantically involved with her boss (former martial arts master Frankie "The Flash" Fong), gains financial independence, and becomes aware of the lifestyles of the rich and famous. When her relationship with The Flash turns sour, she sets fire to his home and then sets out on a quest to find her birth parents with the help of a private investigator. She learns from her adoptive mother that her birth mother was an American hippie and that her adoptive family provided her biological mother with a plane ticket to San Francisco (51). Her search therefore takes her westward to California. En route, inspired by a license plate and her place of birth (Devigaon, India), she changes her name to Devi. Her feelings of non-belonging drive her towards a life of addiction and crime, which the novel suggests is in part due to the fact that her father is a serial rapist and murderer. The novel's gruesome ending, featuring several murders and the abject image of the severed head of the lover that Devi shared with her birth mother is at once shocking

and farcical, and suggests that not all adoptees associate with their adoptive families or identities.

Reading *Leave It to Me* through the work of Julia Kristeva on horror and abjection highlights the ways that Mukherjee's portrayal of adoption is not only unlike all of the others considered in this project, but that it also emphasizes the subversive potential of the adoptive condition, particularly in a transnational context. The notion of abjection directly refutes the notion of the adopted child as a gift to the adoptive parents by relegating them to the realm of waste. As the abandoned child of an American tourist in India, Debby's adoption to the United States functions on the level of a return commercial transaction. It can be read as an assertion that India, as a nation state, wants neither the by-products of cultural hybridity, nor America's waste. Kristeva's *Powers of Horror: Essays on Abjection* (1982) and *The Severed Head: Capital Visions* (2012) provide the most salient starting points for examining Mukherjee's work. Linking these concepts to the act of adoption and the condition of being adopted, a Kristevian reading of *Leave It to Me* invites readers to see the abject potential in all adoptive situations, which in turn necessitates a reimagining of adoptee/parent relationships, adoptee/state relationships, and adoptee/self relationships. In some ways, the adoptive condition as constructed in *Leave It to Me* requires a forgetting of the claims made in previous chapters, and for this reason it is worth noting that the text is actually among the earliest of those studied in this project, emerging prior to normalization of transnational adoption in American culture.

Leave It to Me functions therefore as commentary on both American Imperialism and transnational adoption through the situation of Debby as the undesirable by-product of a union between a sociopathic Indian man and a hippie woman. Throughout the novel, Mukherjee's adoptee and biological father become threats, alien to both themselves and the communities in which they reside, mirroring the oft-perceived threat of immigrants and diasporic communities in their new homelands. Unlike many of Mukherjee's other novels and the other works considered in this project, the ending to *Leave It to Me* is neither happy nor believable. *Leave It to Me* minimizes the "nurture" component of the nature/nurture debate by suggesting that one's biological family has greater influence over one's personality than one's upbringing. When the nature/nurture debate is extended to the quintessential debates about immigrant communities and segregation versus assimilation, nature can be understood as maintaining a certain degree of segregation, whereas nurture can be understood as complete integration with the host land welcoming and supporting the newcomers. Devi's failed integration, and indeed the failure of the nurturance of her adoptive family to overcome her sociopathic nature therefore parodies the fear of immigrants, while at the same time complicates the notion kinning and

belonging in a transnationally adoptive context. The inheritance rates of mental illness notwithstanding,⁹² the grossly exaggerated behaviours of Debby/Devi, coupled with the unlikely people that she meets parody the adoptee identity search, particularly when considered in relation to the semi-successful returns/reunions of the protagonists featured in the other works.

Whereas the adoptee/protagonists within the other works considered in this project find that they belong with their adoptive families, Devi, like Du, does not return to her adoptive parents. Though she remains in the United States rather than in India, it is uncertain at the conclusion of the novel where she intends to go and she gives no indication of returning to her adoptive family in Schenectady. Du's return to his biological sister in *Jasmine* evidences his strong ties to his family, while in Debby/Devi's case she is linked to her biological father by murder, madness and poor impulse control. By exposing the dark potentials of transnational adoption, Mukherjee simultaneously draws attention to an identified fear among adoptive or potentially adoptive families, as well as comments on the ridiculous nature of those fears and the broader American fear of the "Other." This begs the question of what role, if any, *Leave It to Me* plays in the broader field of adoption literature. Through an examination of adoptee identity, and the adoptee-parent relationships, the following considers the function and implications of Mukherjee's portrayal of transnational adoption in *Leave It to Me* as a narrative of adoption as well as a work of diasporic Indian women's writing.

As both a narrative of adoption and a narrative of the female reclamation of self, Debby/Devi's self-construction is crucial to understanding the ways that Mukherjee portrays transnational adoption and the transnational adoptee. A coming-of-age story, *Leave It to Me* features a protagonist who does not associate with her adoptive family after she learns the truth about her biological parents. In the opening pages of the novel, Debby/Devi interrogates her own identity:

For all official purposes, like social security cards and unemployment benefits,
I am, or was, Debby DiMartino, a fun-loving twenty-three-year-old American

⁹² Mukherjee's novel clearly suggests that Debby/Devi takes after her biological father in his murderous/violent tendencies. At times exhibiting symptoms of mania as well as antisocial personality disorder, their exact diagnoses are not clear, nor are they relevant. However, the very implication that Devi's behaviours are linked to her father echoes the idea that she has inherited these tendencies from him, despite being raised away from him. The inheritance patterns of mental illness are widely studied and vary by disorder, and are the subject of numerous studies. For example, Laura Lee Hall's introduction to *Genetics and Mental Illness: Evolving Issues for Research and Society* (1996) refers to the world of psychiatric genetics as a "heated battlefield" and outlines the difficulties facing researchers in providing conclusive statistics about issues related to inheritance of mental health problems (1). Robert Plomin's chapter in the same work, "Beyond Nature versus Nurture" also provides valuable insight, in which he argues that the "appropriate conjunction between *nature* and *nurture* is 'and'" (29). Hard data detailing the heritability of specific illnesses is hard to find and constantly shifting, but the general consensus is that there is a relationship between mental illness and inheritance.

girl. I was adopted into a decent Italian-American family in the Hudson Valley. That's the upside of my adoption. And believe me, I've approached this situation, *my* situation, from every angle. The downside is knowing that the other two I owe my short life to were lousy people who'd considered me lousier still and who'd left me to be sniffed at by wild dogs, like a carcass in the mangy shade. (10)

Here, Debby articulates an incomplete transformation; she is not sure if she remains Debby DiMartino after learning the truth about herself and embracing the violent, murderous, and self-serving tendencies of her biological parents. She recognizes that she was fortunate to be raised in a loving household, but ultimately sees Debby as a manifestation of a past she can no longer access, concurrently inverting and reaffirming the more common trajectory of the adopted identity replacing the one of birth. The self-questioning that Debby experiences is reflected in the narration of the text. As Mukherjee's narrator re-tells the past, she is simultaneously Debby/Devi, and *not* Debby/Devi; the narration oscillates between describing actions in the first person singular and in the third person, suggesting a transcendence and final transformation which remains unnamed.

Debby's comparison of herself to trash is also the first instance in which it becomes significant to consider the adoptee in relation to the abject. Not only is Debby, as a cast-away, an embodiment of the abject, her complex relationships with her biological parents also invokes notions of abjection. Debby's comparison of her infant self to a carcass immediately brings to mind Kristeva's assertion that the corpse "is the utmost of abjection. It is death infecting life. Abject. It is something rejected from which one does not part, from which one does not protect oneself as from an object. Imaginary uncanniness and real threat, it beckons to use and ends up engulfing us" (Kristeva *Powers* 4). Her difficult start at life and the framing of herself as "something rejected" is an understanding of the self from which she is unable to break free. She views her biological mother not as having done her a favor or acted in her best interests or to the best of her ability, but as one who thought very little of her and devalued her from her earliest existence.

Completely in line with Kristeva's notion of the abjection of the self, Debby/Devi perceives the initial rejection of the self that she experienced at the hands of her biological parents to be the defining feature of who she is. Kristeva comments on the fragility of the abject, which is echoed through Debby's emotional instability and desire to belong. She writes that "[t]he abject might then appear as the most fragile (from a synchronic point of view), the most archaic (from a diachronic one) sublimation of an 'object' still inseparable from drives. The

abject would thus be the ‘object’ of primal repression” (Kristeva *Powers* 12). Debby represses her feelings of non-belonging, and at the same time views herself as the object about which Kristeva speaks. She articulates this when revealing her adopted status to her much older lover and boss, Frankie Fong: “My voice sounded firmer, bolder ... Not *I was adopted*, but *I am adopted*, meaning I want you to know that we’ve both invented ourselves, you couldn’t have found another woman as much like you as I am if you’d taken out personals” (Mukherjee *Leave It* 33-34). Her articulation that adoption is a state, rather than an occurrence, invokes the sense of inaugural loss that Kristeva brings to the fore when she writes that:

The abjection of self would be the culminating form of that experience of the subject to which it is revealed that all its objects are based merely on the inaugural loss that laid the foundations for its own being. There is nothing like the abjection of self to show that all abjection is in fact recognition of the want on which any being, meaning, language, or desire is founded. (Kristeva *Powers* 5)

Debby/Devi’s loss of self, and construction of her infant self as worthless tints the lens through which she views all of her life experiences, as well as her own self-worth. The loss of her biological parents and the identity that she would have developed had she spent her life with them becomes the force which shapes her current manifestations of self-value and pushes her towards the destructive tendencies she adopts.

Kristeva dedicates a significant portion of the introduction of *Powers of Horror* to the notion of the abject child, a category into which Debby neatly falls due to both her history and her perception of that history. Kristeva defines abjection as “[e]ssentially different from ‘uncanniness,’ more violent, too, abjection is elaborated through a failure to recognize its kin; nothing is familiar, not even the shadow of a memory” (*Powers* 5), and refers to the abject child as one “who has swallowed up his parents too soon” (*Powers* 5). Debby recognizes neither of her parents when she meets them for the first time, encountering her mother as her boss and her father in drag as a psychic. She is unable to see herself as kin to anyone, including the adoptive family with whom she has spent the majority of her life. Kristeva asserts that “[w]hat [the abject child] has swallowed up instead of maternal love is an emptiness, or rather that is what he tries to cleanse himself of, tirelessly ... Put another way, it means that there are lives not sustained by desire, as desire is always for objects. Such lives are based on *exclusion*” (Kristeva *Powers* 6). Exclusion, as the force which shapes Debby’s life, is powerful in Mukherjee’s novel, and contributes to readings of Debby as an abject child, though she goes through several stages of differing associations with varying degrees of abjection. She feels excluded from both her

biological and adoptive families and communities, and therefore lacks an understanding of herself as part of a community. Her desire to fit in leads her through a complex range of self-constructions in which she renames and reclaims several identities for herself, ending in an uneasy resolution of association with the biological father.

Despite the fact that it is not central to Debby's character, the fact that her father first appears to her in drag is noteworthy. Devi first meets Ma Varuna at the airport where she picks her up as a client with Jess' media escort company (202). Described as "more an apparition than a touring author[,]," the reader is given no reason to suspect that this woman, though eccentric, is actually Devi's father (202). When interviewing Ma Varuna, Devi identifies feeling surprised by "her" "abs and pecs[,]," but still does not make any guesses as to her true identity (206). It is only when an interviewer refers to Ma Varuna as a "nice Jewish woman" that Devi confesses "she looked like some kind of ballet star, male or female [she] couldn't tell" (207-208). Devi's failure to recognize Ma Varuna as a man complicates the Freudian readings promoted by the application of Kristeva's work to *Leave It to Me* and further queers the kinship relations. Ironically posited as a mystic (though not a psychic, a distinction that Devi makes when commenting on Varuna's knowledge of her past (204)), Romeo Hawk's drag performance as Ma Varuna "fully subverts the distinction between inner and outer psychic space and effectively mocks both the expressive model of gender and the notion of a true gender identity" (Butler 186). Judith Butler's theories of the performativity of gender as outlined in *Gender Trouble* (1990), particularly as they relate to drag are salient throughout the text, while her reference to psychic space resonates within Mukherjee's novel. Moreover, the notion of a true identity, in Butler referring to gender and in Mukherjee referring to the adoptee, is mocked as is the idea of kin recognition.

Romeo Hawk as Ma Varuna is described as having "surprised [Devi] by taking off her clothes with the taunting efficiency of a professional stripper" (212), highlighting the performative aspects of both drag and the act of undressing, while positioning Devi as a literal spectator to the revelation of her father. As Butler further notes,

The performance of drag plays upon the distinction of the anatomy of the performer and the gender that is being performed. But we are actually in the presence of three contingent dimensions of significant corporeality: anatomical sex, gender identity, and gender performance. If the anatomy of the performer is already distinct from the gender of the performer, and both of these are distinct from the gender of the performance, then the performance suggests a dissonance

not only between sex and performance, but sex and gender, and gender and performance. (Butler 187)

Varuna's over-the-top style, accentuated with a pet monkey, perhaps makes it easier for her identity to be misread by Devi, until that moment of un-robing when she finds herself in the presence of "[r]uddy, roused male genitalia and silver heels [which] mocked [her]. The apparition worshiped at its own altar with a frenzy of ecstasy or impudence" (Mukherjee 212). Uncertainty on the part of the reader about whether the term "apparition" is referring to Varuna or the penis further complicates a reading of this passage, while the arousal Romeo/Varuna is experiencing also evokes some discomfort, as it is caused *either* by Devi, who is Romeo's daughter, or by the recently committed act of murder, which confirms the sociopathic tendencies exhibited by Romeo/Varuna; not only is he ready, willing, and able to commit acts of violence, but he also gets sexual pleasure from them. This, it turns, reiterates strong notions of abjection within the text, as well as challenging and queering Devi's attempt at kinning with her biological parents.

The acts of self-renaming and self-remaking, however, particularly through the claiming of "spiritual" identities, links Debby/Devi to her biological father in a unique way. He (in drag as Ma Varuna at the time), tells Devi that "Devi is not a name to find and choose. It has to find you" (204). This statement reiterates Debby/Devi's claim at the beginning of the text that her "real" life would one day find her (18). The fact that Debby/Devi has gone through a series of transformations further invokes an association between the character of Jyoti/Jasmine/Jazzy/Jas/Jane and Debby/Devi with her many names, however Jasmine's character eventually becomes settled, content, and assimilated in a way that Debby is unable to. Identified on her birth certificate as Baby Clear Water Iris-Daughter, Debby is first renamed Faustine by the Gray nuns who take her in, and then called Debby when she is adopted by the DiMartino's because Faustine "sounded so foreign" (51). That she was given a name by her birth mother in some ways refutes her earlier claim that her mother cast her aside like trash, but in actuality her history is only as real as her perception of it. That is to say, it does not matter whether or not Debby was perceived as waste by her mother so much as it matters that she identifies the treatment she received in her infancy to be indicative of such a perception. The nuns' act of renaming the infant serves to sever ties to the birth mother, while the DiMartino's act promotes assimilation into their family unit and community.

It is ironic, then, that a twenty-three year old Debby changes her own name something even more "foreign" than Faustine, thereby reclaiming and embracing both her foreignness and her autonomy. For example, when describing her time spent working in the Fong's

telemarketing business, the narrator notes that “Debby DiMartino’s body might have been stuck in a cubicle... but I felt I’d broken free of Schenectady” (21). This invocation of the third person strengthens the dissociation of Debby and Devi, which is then reinscribed through the use of the pronoun “I.” The notion of “breaking free” from Schenectady allows Debby as Devi to be read as a stronger, more individualized character. Identity, then, is constructed as fluid and Mukherjee’s narrator is constructed as unstable and uncertain of herself, as she ruptures her own identities and creates further uncertainties within herself as a character. Indicative of her later madness, as well as her ability to take on the identities of her birth parents merely by learning about them, Debby/Devi’s madness becomes linked to both her adopted identity and her biological parentage.

Later, the narrator once again refers to both Debby and Devi in the third person when describing her transformation from Debby to Devi; “Debby DiMartino died and Devi Dee birthed herself on the Donner Pass at the precise moment a top-down Spider Veloce with DEVI vanities ... cut me off in front of the Welcome to California Fruit Inspection Barrier” (62). The narrator’s use of the both first and third person pronouns to describe the occupants of her vehicle suggests that she was simultaneously present and absent; that Devi Dee “birthed herself” but that “I” (me) was cut off while driving suggests a dissociation of identity between not only Debby and Devi, but also Devi and the narrator. If Debby is dead, and the narrator does not associate Devi in the first person, this raises the question of who is narrating and how the narrator constructs herself in relation to the different identities that the protagonist takes on.

Physically, to the extent that a fictional narrator has a physicality, the reader is presumed to associate the narrative voice with the Debby/Devi character. However, the references to Debby in the past tense, and Devi in the third person, make it clear that the narrator has gone through a final transformation and now constructs herself as someone else. Readers are therefore left with the possibility that the narrator is Baby Clear Water Iris-Daughter, a fifth identity, or Faustine. It remains unclear whether a new identity was born upon the murder of her biological mother, or whether the pseudo-psychic Ma Varuna, who is also Romeo Hawk, Devi’s biological father, has caused a further renaming. Ma Varuna, who enters the text as a client of Jess’ media escort agency, is an elaborate ruse performed by Romeo to get to Jess, the owner of the agency and Debby’s biological mother. Despite the ridiculous coincidences of the novel and the abject and grotesque ending, then, *Leave It to Me* complicates all notions of identity and family relationships through its portrayal of adoptee identity and diverse narrative voices.

One particularly poignant example of Debby's self-construction occurs in the introductory chapter of the text. Following only a brief description of the myth of the goddess Devi and the village of Devigaon, the novel then proceeds with a description of a vision Debby has had of being abandoned in the desert, a fate that she assumes was at the hands of her biological mother. She immediately addresses her multiplicity as she notes that "my mothers... float towards me from the place where I was born" (9), with the plural form of mother already indicating a complex and reconstituted notion of family. She goes on to describe her current situation and notes: "The upside and the downside of being recyclable trash don't quite balance. Debby DiMartino is a lie. Whoever my parents intended for me to be never existed. That unclaimable part of myself is what intrigues me, the part that came to life in a desert village and had the name Baby Clear Water Iris-Daughter until it was Christened in a Catholic orphanage" (10). Using the word "it" to speak of her past identity, the narrator clearly distances herself from the infant found in the desert, but still calls it a part of herself, highlighting her fragmentary self-construction. Her acknowledgement that her past is unclaimable, differentiating her from the protagonists of other novels who attempt to reclaim their past, is ironic, as she eventually *does* reclaim her past and reunite with both of her birth parents on American soil. Still, it is worth noting that unlike Gowda's Asha or Kirchner's Meena, Debby reclaims herself as an American, on American soil, and neither seeks to nor physically does return to India.

Debby convinces herself that "[a]ll [she'd] have to do was be beautiful, be available, and [her] other life, [her] *real* life, would find [her]" (18, emphasis in original). This statement suggests that her adoptive life is not real, which highlights a disconnection between Debby's perceptions of realities and her family's, as well as points to the fact that she is not very well-adjusted in her current situation. She further laments: "I was a tall girl in a small school, a beautiful girl in a plain family, an exotic girl in a very American town... But I wasn't tall, beautiful or exotic enough to trust any of it, and so I made up my mind to find out if I was someone special or just another misfit" (16), and this promotes her relocation to the big city and then her further Westward journey. To justify leaving the family who raised her as their own and loved her, as well as her intense desire to locate her biological family she tells herself: "You're just on loan to the DiMartinos. Treat them nice, pay your rent, but keep your bags packed" (17). This statement suggests a temporariness of the relationship which goes against that which is commonly held regarding adoption (which is typically a life-long commitment, one of the facts that differentiate it from something like the foster-care system).

To conclude, an analysis of the final abject image in Mukherjee's novel is warranted. At the novel's conclusion, Debby/Devi sits on the houseboat of her lover with his severed head

in her lap. Kristeva's work on the severed head examines not literary representation of decapitation, but instead images as portrayed in visual arts throughout time. Nevertheless, her invocations of Freud to deconstruct the meaning of an historical near-obsession with disembodied craniums are useful for understanding the significance of Mukherjee's gruesome denouement. Drawing on Freud once again, Kristeva notes in *The Severed Head* that "[d]ecapitation, which is a symbolic substitute for castration, thus appears as vengeance against the loss of virginity" (78). In the case of *Leave It to Me*, that the decapitation of a lover occurs at the hands of the father renders this even more fascinating in both Freudian and lay contexts. Ham Cohen, who is lover of both Debby and her biological mother, then occupies the role of father-figure and lover for Debby, while his execution by decapitation at the hands of Romeo Hawk represents him symbolically reclaiming his position as patriarch *and* lover. Although clearly not in relation to virginity, it would be no stretch to read Romeo's actions as sexually motivated in the sense that he appears to derive satisfaction from killing that is akin to sexual fulfillment. His attempt to reclaim his daughter by assimilating her into his lifestyle functions as his way of reasserting his paternity and endeavors to establish a likeness between the two characters.

Sex with Ham also allows Debby to imagine her parents having sex in such a visceral way that she believes herself to be present for it when her "oldest past... suddenly surged forward" (230), thus validating the application of Kristeva's Freudian readings of decapitation as an act of vengeance if not against the loss of virginity than at least against sex with one's offspring; by murdering Ham, Romeo reclaims both Jess and Debby for himself, but fails to predict Debby's own angry retaliation towards himself. This once again causes Debby to reimagine her own abject past, and also to remind Ham of the time his own child with Jess (therefore half-sister to Debby) was cast aside via abortion (231). As the two most obvious solutions for unwanted pregnancies, Debby's assertion that things would be "better if [she] had been the fetus Jess aborted" (231) rearticulates her displeasure with her current situation, and challenges the idea that adoption is a kinder option for unwanted children. Although dramatic, this conclusion, coupled with Mukherjee's lack of tidy resolution at the end of *Leave It to Me*, highlights the darker alternative potentials for maladjustment and misidentification in an adoptive family.

Speaking once again of decapitation in art, Kristeva writes that "[t]here is something beyond death, the artistic experience says, there is resurrection: it is nothing other than the life of the line, the elegance of the gesture, the grace or brutality of colors, when they dare to show the human threshold. Decapitation is a privileged space" (75). Ham, thus privileged in both life

and death, becomes something to be celebrated as Devi cradles his severed head in her lap and awaits the police. Referring to horror in film but nevertheless relevant so such a work as Mukherjee's, Kristeva asserts that "the desire to preserve the head of a man just deceased adds the illusion of assurance. The man who has just barely crossed over into the abyss is not yet a corpse. If you can just capture that release, your art will verge on the placidity of the gods" (122). Debby's desire to preserve Ham, then, also stems from a desire to preserve her Self, as the death of Jess and Ham in many ways represents a death of Devi, as no one remains who knows her intimately as such. This is reminiscent of Kristeva's assertion that capital act (decapitation) is a "rational realization":

In opposition to the imaginary intimacy with death, which transforms melancholy or desire into representation and thought, lies the rational realization of the capital act. Vision and action are polar opposites here, and the revolutionary Terror confronts us with that revolting abjection practiced by humanity under the guise of an egalitarian institution of decapitation. (Kristeva *Powers* 91)

Evidence of his psychopathology, Romeo's cool demeanor as he repeatedly hacks at Ham's neck with a Chinese meat cleaver suggests the same sort of opposition; Romeo is cool and calm while the scene is utter chaos. Drawn in to the madness, Devi attacks Romeo with the same knife, becoming an animal she struggles to recognize and thereby reaffirming Kristeva's notion that "[t]he power of horror is contagious. It figures but it disfigures as well, the source of a resurgence in our representations that cut through the forms, volumes, contours to expose the pulsing flesh. From disfiguration to expressionism, to abstraction, to minimalism – and back" (103). Devi calms herself, and resists this chaos again long enough to call 911, thereby reassuring the reader of her loyalty to Ham, however her calm collectedness as she awaits police arrival is unsettling.

Leave It to Me turns the adoptee's search for her birth family in to something dark and dangerous. Shifting the danger from the emotional dangers of potential rejection or failure, Mukherjee emphasizes a very real, physical and literal sort of danger, as Debby/Devi's biological family becomes a threat to her and her community. Julia Kristeva's work on abjection and horror is realized, as Debby self-identifies as the abject, necessitating a re-thinking of the adoptee as gift rhetoric, while the presence of her psychotic biological father in and out of drag supports reading the text through the works of both Freud (vis-à-vis Kristeva) and Butler. Significantly, Debby as a hybrid is returned to the United States rather than kept in India and no explanation of this process is given, which undermines the many narratives about the

complexity of adoption in an Indian context. Despite having one American biological parent and being raised in an Italian-American household, Debby reclaims an Indian identity for herself, re-making herself in a manner similar to the way in which Jasmine does. Mukherjee's introduction of elements of Hindu mythology into this text, like in *Jasmine*, therefore recognizes the very sort of hybridity that Debby seeks to claim and that is rejected at other points in the text.

3.4 Mukherjee's Atypical Adoptions

As Roberts recognizes in her introduction, “[t]he phenomena of adoption retains ‘universal’ value as a means to adjust to or legitimize this transitional state of displacement. In other words, adoption is placement—placement outside the protective boundaries of ‘old’ cultural signifiers and within ‘new world’ arms and the maternal (or, perhaps more accurately, paternal) bosom of mainstream society” (Roberts 79). Mukherjee's use of adoption functions as a counter-point against all of the narratives that portray happily acculturated adoptees. Neither Du nor Debby are happily adjusted, and neither one of them identifies their adoptive family as the family with whom they belong; both seek out birth families and leave their new homes permanently. Despite the fact that Du and Debby lack the feelings of belonging present in other texts, however, they are also the only adoptees considered in this project who do not attempt to return to their originary homelands. Unlike the adoptees featured in other texts, they recognize the “pastness” of their former lives and look forward, rather than backwards, to find themselves.

As such, the two characters simultaneously reaffirm and challenge notions of adoptees as diasporic subjects, as they seek out kinship and family groups in their new locations rather than the old. In some ways, then, their desire to home and settle in their adoptive lands makes them more diasporic than their counterparts in other works, as they actively seek out those who are of their kin. This sentiment aligns Du and Debby with notions of community building and groupism that are inherent in some of the older definitions of Diaspora such as those laid out by William Safran and Robin Cohen. On the other hand, their lack of expressed interest to return to their land of birth would suggest that they are more “American,” and they do not fulfill the criteria of a desire to return that would also strengthen any claim to label them as diasporic. Notwithstanding the fact that Du has experienced great trauma in his birthland that would prevent him from returning and more than justifies his lack of desire to return, Mukherjee's

adoptees seem much more determined to find and make their lives within the United States than outside of them.

Like Gowda's Somer, Jasmine is very much shaped by her position of maternity, and the relationships that she forms with the numerous adopted children in the text is central to her identity. In contrast, Du and Debby do not define themselves in relation to their adoptive family. Debby, in her own way, resists any definition embodying the goddess of Devi in a similar manner to the way in which Drake suggests that Jasmine's character maintain her Kali-like status throughout the text (Drake 76-77). By writing maladjusted adoptees on to the contemporary American landscape and situating them alongside other unhappy characters, Mukherjee constructs a similarity of discontentment, thereby normalizing the transnationally adopted character amidst a motley crew of unfulfilled seekers of the American Dream. She casts them as equally unhappy and equally unfulfilled to their American and immigrant counterparts, uniting characters in misery and breaking down narratives of fulfillment and success, while leveling out the playing field for all those who seek economic and emotional success.

In the globalised world the human need for stability becomes more acute, and narrative becomes more essential as a means to turn worldly discourse into a coherent resonance, to help make sense of the world.

—Judie Newman, *Fictions of America* (2)

Conclusion: Diaspora in and through Adoption in Literature

Throughout this project, the concepts of diaspora and adoption have been interrogated through the act of adoption, the condition of being adopted, and the quest for “home” in narratives of adoption. The above quotation, from Judie Newman’s *Fictions of America: Narratives of Global Empire* (2007), succinctly and clearly describes the role of the works considered in this project in the broader context through its interrogation of the role of narrative in relation to globalization. While Newman’s analysis does not extend to any of the works covered in the preceding chapters, she considers the role of adoption and return in Emily Prager’s work (most notably in the novel *Wuhu Diary* (2001)). She also undertakes an analysis of Mukherjee’s *The Holder of the World* and *Desirable Daughters* to ultimately support her argument that in contemporary American literature “a narrative based on descent and filiation is replaced by a model which involves side connection, sibships, and horizontal or lateral moves” (1). Newman’s concurrent foci of adoption and the work of Bharati Mukherjee mean that her work is an interesting point of comparison for a project such as this one, though the conclusions reached are vastly different. Whereas Newman sees a turn away from patterns of filiation and towards horizontal movements, this project has demonstrated that narratives of adoption by diasporic Indian women emphasize a temporary turn back towards the birth mother and birth or mother land, but often conclude with an acceptance that one can only move horizontally and cannot truly go back.

Depending on one’s interpretation of diaspora, transnationally adopted children may be read as members of their own respective diasporas, a “Diaper Diaspora,” or as embodying a diasporic consciousness. Throughout this project, the concept of diaspora has been examined in writing produced by diasporic Indian women through the adoptees’ feelings of connectedness to a family and homeland, as well as through the notion of return. While the classification of adoptees as diasporic cannot be conclusively stated, it can be confirmed that authors writing about adoption use the challenges of transnational adoption to emphasize the struggles of non-belonging that commonly feature in narratives of immigration, and write a desire to return onto their characters which emphasizes an affiliation with their nations of birth.

All efforts were made to locate the majority of works dealing with transnational adoption by diasporic Indian women writers. In the introduction, an overview was provided

outlining why the selected texts were chosen while other works featuring adoption were neglected. The works considered span several mediums, and cover a period of over thirty years, but nevertheless contain representations of adoption which are both comparable and worthy of further analysis. By limiting this project to narratives of transnational adoption by diasporic Indian writers, it became possible to examine the relationship between adoption and gender; diaspora; and adoption and literature. Writing by men was not so much excluded from this study so much as it could not be found; the only male-authored works dealing with adoption addressed inter-family adoption or adoptions which were not transnational. Works featuring inter-family adoptions were excluded due in part to the fact that the movement of children among family members occurs in many different and complex ways. Thus, left with one short story, one memoir, one documentary, and four novels, all attempts were made to provide a comprehensive overview of works by diasporic Indian women writers featuring transnational adoption available at time of writing, though the completeness of this survey can never be confirmed.

In the first chapter, the concept of motherhood was examined in relation to adoption from India. It began with an overview of theories of mothering as conceived by scholars of gender studies, sociology, and psychology, and went on to consider the ways that adoption can be read as a symptom of post-feminist culture. Of particular note here was the relationship between adoption and genre, as the genre of “Chick Lit” (and its subgenre, “Mommy Lit”), are often understood to represent the epitome of postfeminism; the rhetoric of consumption is also embodied by at least one text examined in this project, as well as in noteworthy transnational adoption cases in the popular media. Readers were next provided with a brief outline of the concept of Mother India, as this relates to how the adoptive parents and adoptees themselves construct their relationship with their nation of birth. In order to better understand the relationship between adoption, “homeland,” and the diasporic Indian author, a theoretical intervention was proposed which suggested understanding the diasporic writing process as its own form of transnational adoption. Challenging the commonly invoked text-as-child/author-as-birthing-parent notion, this intervention allows the role of author-as-parent to be taken on more easily by men and allows for a rejection of hetero-patriarchal gender roles as it permits individuals of all genders to actively initiate the existence, growth, and publishing of a narrative.⁹³

Bearing both this theoretical intervention and the long and complex history of scholarship on the notion of motherhood in mind, the next sub-section went on to deconstruct

⁹³ It bears repeating that this is not always true when one is referring to the transnational adoption of a child, as some nations impose strict regulations on who can adopt, though adoption of a concept still theoretically allows any individual with the desire to become a parent to do so.

the relationship between mothers in Shilpi Somaya Gowda's novel, *Secret Daughter*. In Gowda's text, the adoptive mother in the United States (Somer) lives in constant, irrational fear that the biological mother in India (Kavita) will somehow disrupt the family that she has created and alter her relationship with her daughter, Asha. At the same time, the text parallels the lives of these two women and attempts to create a sense of unity among mothers, despite the fact that Somer's narrative is privileged (in terms of length and placement) within the text. The resultant narrative is one which celebrates adoption but rings hollow in its portrayal of birth mothers, and reinforces some of the very notions of patriarchal, western-dominated motherhood that it seeks to dispel.

The next subsection examines the ways that the white mothers in Gowda's novel and Bharti Kirchner's novel *Shiva Dancing* reject the notion of culture keeping as it is constructed by Heather Jacobson in her work *Culture Keeping: White Mothers, International Adoption, and the Negotiation of Family Difference*. Jacobson's work examines the ways that mothers work to preserve the birth culture of their transnationally adopted children in the new homeland and highlights the roles of various institutions such as heritage dance or language classes in the adopted homeland. The characters of Somer in Gowda's text and Abby in Kirchner's work not only reject the idea that their daughters should embrace Indian culture in their households, but actively work to prevent them from affiliating with other Indian children or families and prevent them from returning to India to explore their heritage until they are no longer able to stop them. This rejection allows Indian culture to remain exotic and Orientalized in the novels, while the daughters' resolutions that their mothers were right to keep them from India reinforces the idea that adoptees belong to their adoptive families and homelands.

The final sub-section of the first chapter examines constructions of motherhood in the two non-fictional works discussed in this project: Asha Miró's memoir, *Daughter of the Ganges*, and Sasha Khokha's documentary *India: Calcutta Calling*. Miró's memoir outlines her experiences as she returns to India first as a volunteer and later to film a documentary. She visits the orphanages where she lived prior to her adoption, and eventually tracks down her biological siblings. Her work also contains excerpts from her adoptive mother's diary from the time of her adoption until adulthood, therefore allowing readers to better understand the relationship between adoptive and biological parents, as well as how Miró constructs herself in relation to the various mother-figures in her life. Khokha's film, in contrast, depicts four young women who were adopted from India and now reside in Minnesota, USA returning to India for the first time. They utilize a tour provider who specializes in adoptee return travel, and their parents accompany them on the journey. They visit the orphanages where some of them lived

as children, experience life with middle-class Indian families, and visit some of India's most famous landmarks. *Khokha* allows the girls to form and voice their own opinions about life in India, and their reactions vary throughout the film. One poignant moment depicts the girls being told about their biological parents by a social worker, who makes disparaging remarks about their birth mothers. This instance is picked up on and heavily criticized and contested by responders on the PBS website, where a shorter version of the film is hosted online. The significance given to this scene brings motherhood to the fore of this otherwise well-balanced, adoptee-centred piece. As adoptee return tourism continues to grow, the field may present an interesting avenue for future studies across the Social Sciences and Humanities as adoptees and their family members develop and deepen understandings of the adoptees nation of birth and their complex subject positions. Read alongside Miró's text and the fictional pieces examined in this project, *Khokha*'s film complicates understandings of adoptive motherhood by featuring Indian women criticizing birth mothers and American adoptive mothers celebrating them, thereby inverting the narrative portrayed in the fictional representations considered. All in all, this chapter highlights the ways that parenthood, and specifically motherhood, are central to many of the decisions and discourses surrounding adoption. The chapter concludes with an examination of motherhood in Indu Sundaresan's short story, "Shelter of Rain." Sundaresan's story extends the definitions of motherhood to take in to account extended kinship patterns, while still suggesting that an adoptee can be well adjusted and content in their new home.

The second chapter of this project considered the form and function of an adoptee's return to India in the works introduced in the previous chapter, as well as in Renita D'Silva's novel, *The Forgotten Daughter*. That most of the texts considered in this project feature a return is noteworthy, as are the ways that the adoptees construct their return. In fiction, the fact that the adoptees seek not only to visit India but to actually relocate there differentiates them from the common patterns observed in non-fiction texts, and complicates notions of identity, nationality, and subjectivity. In my examination of Miró's return journey, I interrogate her use of memory and translation in the construction of her narrative. Miró positions herself firmly within her text as an advocate of transnational adoption, and at times speaks to and for other adoptees. She also compares the life she has had with that of her biological siblings and imagines herself in their lives. For this reason, the inaccuracies and inconsistencies within her narrative are not only noteworthy but also highly problematic. This is not a problem unique to her narrative, and I attempt to position her work in relation to other dis-proven works of life-writing such as James Frey's heavily fictionalized memoir *A Million Little Pieces*. It is therefore considered in relation to theories of both translation and lifewriting, and its position as non-

fiction makes it liable to be held to higher standard of “truth.” As Phillipe Lejeune notes in his work on the “The Autobiographical Pact”: “Confronted with what looks like an autobiographical narrative, the reader often tends to think of himself as a detective, that is to say, to look for breaches of contract” (14). Unlike Frey, Miró attempts again to tell a more accurate story with the re-publication of her work, making it unique within the genre, and unique as a narrative of adoption. Also unique is the fact that Miró is successfully able to reconnect with the birth family she lost many years before; this is portrayed as an impossibility even in some fictional works that are examined herein.

The protagonists in both Gowda’s and Kirchner’s novels attempt to relocate to India and seek out their birth families, only to find that they belong with individuals who are part of their lives in America and not with their biological relations. D’Silva’s protagonist, Nisha, only learns of her adoption after the sudden death of her adoptive parents, and begins having flashbacks to an India she does not remember and initially wants nothing to do with. Due to the fact that she is also a twin, however, she returns to India to learn her history and in hopes of connecting with her biological relations. Arriving to the hospital just in time to make peace with her dying birth mother, Nisha’s physical return to India also functions as a broader re-turn to the nation and culture of her birth and forces her to imagine herself in relation to India in a context which is simultaneously more complex, and more intimate. Adoptees such as Miró and Kirchner’s character of Meena make very literal returns to places that they remember, while the adoptees who were taken to the United States as infants challenge the very notion of return through their limited memories and affiliations with India. This necessitates the main theoretical intervention of this chapter: de(re?)constructing the notion of return in an adoptive context. I suggest that the adoptee return is, in some cases, more like the return of a second-generation migrant than that of a first generation diasporic subject. This further complicates reading the adoptive condition as a manifestation of Diaspora, and instead encourages reading adoptees as possessing a diasporic consciousness, which becomes magnified in literary representations by diasporic authors.

The final chapter contains an examination of the way that adoption functions in the work of Bharati Mukherjee. The most well-known author considered in this project, Mukherjee relies on adoption to further the plot of two of her novels, and refers to it in several of her other works. *Jasmine* is the only work considered in this project in which a child is adopted not from India but from Vietnam. The tie to India in that novel, instead, is through the adoptive mother—the protagonist—who is herself an undocumented migrant from India residing in the United States. Adoption functions on numerous levels, as Jasmine is “adopted” into many different families,

becomes a caregiver for a domestically adopted child, and later adopts Du from Vietnam. Mukherjee's later novel, *Leave It to Me*, features the adoption of an Indian-American child from India to the United States. Debby, who later renames herself as Devi, sets out across the United States in search of her biological mother, who she understands to have been an American hippie who visited India, became pregnant by an Indian man, and left the baby there in an orphanage. She ends up unknowingly working for her mother at a media escort firm, and is hunted down by her psychotic biological father who murders both her mother and her lover shortly after Debby is able to piece together her narrative. Debby/Devi is therefore successful in locating her biological parents, but is granted neither a happy reunion nor a happy ending, as the novel ends with her watching her lover's houseboat and body go up in flames.

Mukherjee's novels instead portray darker sides of adoption, with the notion of the abject being particularly relevant to *Leave It to Me*. Utilizing the work of Julia Kristeva, this chapter provides a deconstruction of the violent potentials within adoptive families. Neither Du nor Debby is content with their adopted identities, and both abruptly depart from the lives of their adoptive families to seek out their biological relations. In contrast to the other adoptees discussed in this project, they do not return to their adoptive families feeling as though that is where they truly belong, and are instead left to their own devices at the conclusion of the texts. This challenge to the other, more dominant narratives of adoption provides both a fruitful point of contrast and an exaggeration of the fears embodied in novels such as Gowda's, where the protagonist fears the biological parents.

Transnational adoption, as a concept, challenges and refigures notions of familial and national belonging. In the works considered in this project, the role of the mother is given precedence, and adoption is invoked as a way to examine mother-daughter relationships. The adoptees grapple with issues of identity, including the ways in which they identify with maternal figures and their birthlands. In many cases, the biological mother and the "Motherland" become interchangeable, as adoptees seek understandings of their mothers through India and India through their mothers. Shilpi Somaya Gowda's *Secret Daughter*, Bharti Kirchner's *Shiva Dancing*, Renita D'Silva's *The Forgotten Daughter*, and Indu Sundaresan's "Shelter of Rain" are all fictional narratives featuring young female protagonists who were adopted from India as they come to terms with their mothers and their pasts. The three novels likewise portray the protagonists' returns to India, as they negotiate their own identities in relation to India and their adoptive homelands, while Sundaresan's short story depicts an Indian mother-figure visiting the daughter in the United States. In Miró's *Daughter of the Ganges*, Miró travels to India from Spain to learn the truth about her origins, coming to terms with the

fact that although her Indian past is a part of her, it is a past to which she can never truly return. Khokha's documentary also follows adoptees as they return to India, and they also decide that they belong in their adoptive homelands, though they form strong bonds with each other as adoptees of around the same age.

This project has only just scratched the surface of the vast arena of literature featuring transnational adoption. Absent from the discussion were issues of religion and caste, and the focus on India necessarily means that there are many other representations of adoption from other nations still to be explored. Likewise, interfamilial adoptions, which were excluded from this project, are a fruitful avenue from which to approach literary representations of kin relationships, and also speak to the ways that different nations are imagined and constructed in relation to perceptions of opportunity. If one agrees with Novy that parenthood broadly, and adoptive parenthood more particularly, is founded on fictions (*Imagining II*), then the possibilities for examining representations of adoption remain endless. Likewise, in the field of Diaspora studies, where root and routes open up endless possibilities for further study, one is reminded of Jackie Kay's assertion that "[t]he land of adoption is fertile ground ... [because] everywhere you dig, there's a fresh gnarled root" (*Red* 153).

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