

## Where Is West Asia in Asian America?

### "ASIA" AND THE POLITICS OF SPACE IN ASIAN AMERICA

Sridevi Menon

In the weeks after 9/11, the white supremacist Mark Stroman shot and killed a store clerk from Pakistan, blinded a clerk from Bangladesh, and then, saying "God Bless America," murdered Vasudev Patel, an Indian immigrant.<sup>1</sup> These were not random acts of violence. Mistaken as being of Middle Eastern descent, many South Asian Americans/immigrants, along with Arab Americans/immigrants, became targets of verbal and physical assault, victims of racists avenging the assault on America. Sikhs who sported beards and turbans became especially vulnerable to hate crimes.<sup>2</sup> South Asian immigrant merchants took to placing American flags in their stores. Some South Asian men shaved their beards, while Muslim women were advised to stay indoors. For South Asian Americans/immigrants, the state of siege that had gripped the nation in the aftermath of the events of 9/11 took on a darker significance. Although several of the World Trade Center victims had been of South Asian descent, South Asian Americans/immigrants realized very soon that 9/11 was being scripted primarily as a Euro-American and Christian trauma. Any sense of collective grief and rage in which South Asian Americans shared the horror of the burning twin towers with the "American people" was preempted by the racial coding of 9/11. In the ruins of a smoking ground zero loomed the specter of the grotesque figure of the Muslim Arab terrorist.

Two days after the destruction of the towers and the damage to the Pentagon, in response to the violence against South Asian Americans, the Indian consul-general in New York, Satish Tripathi, advised Indian women in the United States to wear bindis to distinguish themselves from this phantom Arab. The blurring of the religious plurality of Indian Americans into a Hindu ethnicity enabled the consul-general to inscribe the bindi as a marker of *passing* in the United States. Thus an Indian woman wearing a bindi would be able to distance herself from Arab Americans/immigrants and, in doing so, inversely align herself with Euro-America. According to this logic, the difference asserted by the bindi protects the Indian woman from the violence and hostility directed against the Arab other, purportedly allowing her to pass as an unmarked American. Ironically, in the 1980s, a neo-Nazi organization in the Jersey area had seized on the bindi as the visible marker of South Asian otherness. Calling themselves the

Whereas India  
and West Asia  
are central  
conceptual sites  
of Europe's Asia,  
in America's Asia  
India occupies  
a liminal space,  
and West Asia  
is absent.

“dot-busters,” neo-Nazi youth had attacked South Asian immigrants and their stores. The irony of Tripathi’s suggestion was of course lost on the Indian consul-general.

Tripathi’s remarks reveal his naïveté about U.S. racial formation as well as the arrogance of a Hindu nationalist imaginary that equates “Indianness” with a Hindu ethnicity. The experiences of South Asian Americans and immigrants after 9/11 underscore the irrelevance of such endogenous assertions of ethnicity, particularly at a time of American national crisis. Moreover, the attempt to distance a Hindu ethnicity from a Muslim and Arab other draws attention to the precarious place of South Asians in the U.S. imaginary. At a time when Asian American difference was subsumed by the anxiety about the Muslim and Arab other, South Asians found that the Asian pan-ethnicity they had assumed and claimed as “Asian Americans” did not prevent the blurring of their identity with those of immigrants and American citizens of Middle Eastern descent. For Indian American Hindus who drew their sense of Indianness from Hindutva—an ideology that promotes anti-Muslim demagoguery—the violence against South Asian Americans pointed to the relative impotence of Hindutva in negotiating American racism. Neither assertions of an Asian identity nor ideological claims of solidarity with anti-Muslim agendas in the United States could preempt the blurring of South Asian and Middle Eastern ethnicities.

In this essay, the events following 9/11 serve as a point of departure for exploring the antinomies of South Asian American identities vis-à-vis “Asian” as well as “Middle Eastern” identities in the United States. I call attention to the blurring of South Asian and Middle Eastern identities to interrogate both the place of South Asian Americans *in* Asian America and of Americans of Middle Eastern descent *outside* Asian America. The ambiguity surrounding the figure of the South Asian American, I argue, rests in South Asia’s precarious place in America’s “Asia” and its assured location in Europe’s “Asia.” Drawing on the politics of South Asianness in the United States, I explore how Asia and Asian America are constituted in the United States. I delineate South Asia’s incorporation into the American imaginary of Asia as a contingent response to American national anxieties over Asian immigration in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, pointing to the divergently conceived spaces of Asia in European and American imaginative geographies. Whereas India and West Asia are central conceptual sites of Europe’s Asia, in America’s Asia India occupies a liminal space, and West Asia is absent. Here, I deliberately deploy the term *West Asia*, rather than the more commonly used Middle East, to emphasize European conceptions of the historical

and imaginative continuities between this region and South Asia and the absence of these imaginaries in the United States.

The Orient as the cultural terrain of Asia, both in Europe and in the United States, evokes distinct landscapes and different geographic sites while producing overlapping meanings of racial alterity. America's Asia, I argue, was consolidated in the nineteenth century through the figure of the Chinese immigrant, the quintessential American "Oriental." Fears of the imminent "Mongolianization" of America by Chinese immigrants rested on the identification of a race of homogenous peoples in China that was also extended to include the rest of East and Southeast Asia's populations. The race-ing of Asia as a land inhabited by "Mongoloid" peoples converges with nineteenth-century racial classifications while it excludes the rest of Europe's Asia—South and West Asia. The incorporation of South Asia into this topography in the early twentieth century extended the geography of America's Orient, thus challenging nineteenth-century U.S. race-ing of Asia, making the place of the South Asian in Asian America intrinsically fragile and potentially subversive. The gap between U.S. and European imaginaries of Asia thus is an important discursive site from which the ambiguous place of South Asians in Asian America as well as the simultaneous absence of West Asia may be explored.

In charting the disjunctive histories of both Asia in Europe and Asia in the United States, I also examine the relevance of European and American constructions of an Asian identity and the processes that racialize Asians in the United States. I argue that the emergence of the Middle East in U.S. geographies as a site marked by Islam (outside America's Asia) reconstitutes Europe's Asia while it coincides with colonial representations of West Asia as a distinct site in Asia. The racialization of West Asia by Islam in European and American orientalism produced convergent meanings but different geographies. Hence the absence of West Asia and the liminal place of South Asia in Asian America locate U.S. processes of racialization in these imperial topographies. U.S. racial formation, therefore, is informed by American imaginaries of Asia, while South Asian American efforts to mediate their racialization in the United States exploit the ambiguity of their place in it.

My essay is organized around the construction of "Asia" in Europe and the United States, the naming of the regions within "Asia," and the relevance of these identities within "Asia." I first focus on European orientalism to examine the sites identified within Asia and, in the next section, juxtapose it with "Asia" in the U.S. imaginary. This discussion is important to the next part of my essay in which I critique the racialization of Asia in the United States within the context of the historical and imaginative geographies of the West. The last section focuses on the delinking of West

Asia from Asia in the American imagination, the emergence of the “Middle East,” and the meanings of this reconfigured Asia for Asian America.

A few months before 9/11, a small group of Indian Americans joined the annual Salute to Israel parade on Fifth Avenue in New York City. A month later, in April, a group of Jews joined some Indians outside the United Nations as they protested the treatment of Hindus in Afghanistan. These gestures of solidarity marked an opportunistic and provisional alliance between two militant fundamentalist groups from Queens and Long Island—Hindu nationalists and the followers of Rabbi Meir Kahane.<sup>3</sup> The two groups have no histories of shared philosophical or religious conversations. For much of the post-1947 period, the nations that the two groups protect and promote have not had significant diplomatic relations. The Indian government’s relationship with Israel deteriorated beginning with the 1956 Suez War and significantly worsened in the 1970s as the Arab-Israeli conflict intensified and India allowed independent Palestinian representation in New Delhi. By 2001, however, the politics of nationhood had shifted in the subcontinent as the Hindu nationalist party, the Bharatiya Janata Party, supported by the muscle of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), came to dominate the Indian polity.<sup>4</sup> It is precisely at this historical juncture that Hindu nationalists in Queens and Zionists in Long Island “discovered” each other. In their languages of hate, their discourses of community and nationhood intersected to reveal a shared enemy: Muslims.

It is significant that this alliance was forged, and indeed made possible, in New York City. By extending their radical agendas to include *all* Muslims rather than just Indian, Pakistani, or Arab Muslims, Hindus in Queens and Jews in Long Island promoted their respective interests and forged new political relations. The leaders of both groups admit to being ignorant of each other’s history and ideology. Yet they have participated in several symbolic displays of support: when the Hindus’ Web site was closed down by their service provider, the Jews came to their aid by connecting them with their own service provider, and the site was up again within a few days; and members of the radical Hindu organization have written to Congress demanding the removal of the Kahane groups from the State Department’s list of terrorist organizations. Michael Guzofsky, who manages *Kahane.org*, said it was “a core issue of free speech,” rather than an endorsement of Hindutva, that prompted him to help the Hindus. Deploying the vocabulary of a democracy, Guzofsky points to the ways in which, in the United States’ racialized landscape, the distinctive ethnic and national agendas of radical Hindus and Meir Kahane’s followers intersect. As Guzofsky declares, “I definitely understand their pain even if I don’t

know much about their faith.”<sup>55</sup> Guzofsky’s empathy with Hindu “pain” is made possible by a mutual perception of victimization, either by the U.S. state or by institutions that attempt to undermine their activism, as well as the threat posed by the figure of the Muslim.

In redefining their common enemy as Muslims around the world, Hindus in Queens and Jews in Long Island resurrected an orientalist discourse that has acquired a pervasive ferocity in the post-9/11 United States. In the United States, however, the Hindu nationalist program is predicated also on an anxious reiteration of the “Aryan” roots purportedly shared by Indians and Euro-Americans. An Aryan genealogy is at the heart of the “recovery” of a glorious Hindu past: Hindu nationalists perceive it to be intrinsically embedded in an ancient Vedic culture that defines the Hindu nation. In an ironic gesture, where the rhetoric of Nazi Germany has been inscribed into Hindutva pogroms in India, the purportedly non-Aryan racial origins of Jews are deferred in the relations forged between its members in the United States and Rabbi Kahane’s followers. The hatred of Muslims provides the slippery grounds on which race is deflected and new allies made.

Framed in the context of the anti-Muslim bigotry of proponents of Hindutva in the United States, the Indian consul-general’s suggestion that Indian women wear bindis is not surprising. The bindi as the sign of Hindu nationalist ethnicity denies Muslims in India and the United States any claims to an “Indian” ancestry. Yet, as the events following 9/11 brought home, the consumption of orientalist discourses by South Asian Americans—Hindus and other non-Muslims—reinforces the location of these discourses in European and American imaginaries. Whereas the narratives of European orientalism appropriated by Hindutva empower a politically virulent Hindu nationalism in India, the power to script an orientalist Muslim otherness in the United States that subverts Euro-American notions of South Asianness eludes South Asian Americans. Racist imaginaries that produce two different geographies of the Orient determine how Hindu nationalists reproduce and consume Muslim otherness in India and the United States. Thus, in the gap between the discursive formations of “Asia” in Europe and the United States, Hindutva’s agency in India and in the United States may also be explored.

## Europe’s Asia

In Europe’s historical imagination, “Asia” is constituted of various archives of knowledge and fantasy. From the fables of antiquity, in which a marvelous Asia was located east of the river Indus, to the accounts

In redefining  
their common  
enemy as Muslims  
around the  
world, Hindus  
in Queens and  
Jews in Long  
Island resurrected  
an orientalist  
discourse that  
has acquired a  
pervasive ferocity  
in the post-9/11  
United States.

produced through the circuits of Greek and Roman trade with India in the Middle Ages, the earliest representations of Asia were of a legendary place of fabulous riches inhabited by peoples of peculiar habits and odd or even monstrous physiognomies. During the thirteenth century, the first Europeans to visit Cathay (China) were papal envoys and Venetian merchants, Niccolò and Maffeo Polo, and Niccolò's son, Marco. According to Donald Lach, Marco Polo's *Description of the World*, published in 1324, was the first "comprehensive and authoritative account of the East produced before 1550" in Europe and the first to acquaint Europe with Japan's existence.<sup>6</sup> However, despite travelers' accounts, until the sixteenth century, Europe's gaze for the most part did not extend beyond India. Asia as a defined geographic region did not emerge until the rise of European colonial expansion when imperial boundaries and notions of territoriality inscribed new polities. The Orient as an imagined landscape therefore predated "Asia" and was intrinsically the site that informed "Asia." On the one hand, in the European consciousness, Asia could not exist without the Orient, since the cultural meanings that informed this region were drawn from an archive that preceded "Asia." On the other hand, not until the conceptualization of Asia as a geocultural space by European imperial ambitions was the Orient's otherness increasingly narrated through discourses of race.

This shifting and blurred geography of the Orient, however, draws attention not only to the processes that constituted the Orient as the East but also to the production of the European "West." Historically, Russia's membership in the West, for instance, was uncertain. Russia had been tainted by an imaginative geography that had folded it into the Orient, since it was identified as inhabiting an ambiguous space, with its borders both in Europe and in Asia. Sara Dickinson argues that it was not until the late eighteenth century, when Russia discovered its own Orient in the Crimea, that its "Western pedigree" could be asserted.<sup>7</sup> A Russian imaginative tradition that absorbed the tropes of orientalism sought to validate its cultural identity as a European and modern imperial power through an exoticized distancing from the Crimea and southern Ukraine, lands acquired under Catherine II by 1783.<sup>8</sup> The "Asiatic" aspects of Russia were therefore deliberately located in territory incorporated into Russia, making them exogamous to imperial Russia.

It is also important to note here that while the Orient provided a cultural terrain for "Asia," different sites within Asia generated discrepant meanings in the pan-European imagination. Victor Savage's study, for instance, elaborates a "tropical Orient" located in Southeast Asia.<sup>9</sup> Lisa Lowe has identified West Asia and India as representing two different styles of orientalism on the grounds that the French and British colonial

experiences generated different oriental landscapes. While Lowe's study of the differences between the West Asian and Indian Orients is significant, I would argue that these sites represented two aspects of the Orient in a shared European archive that constituted West Asia as the "Muslim" Orient and India as the "Hindu" Orient.<sup>10</sup> The role of religion as crucial cognitive markers in the landscaping of the Orient more productively explains the domestication or demonization of various landscapes within the Orient. While these different places are located in the Orient and are produced by shared metanarratives of racialized otherness, colonial discourse generated and consolidated these various symbolic landscapes as Europe's material engagements with Asia intensified. Hence it is in the active negotiations and contingencies and in struggles for power that "Asia" and its regions were delineated.

In contemporary geographies of Asia, the generally uncritical consumption and reproduction of these regions point to the pervasive influence of imperial topographies as well as to their critical role in the capitalist world economy. As Ravi Palat points out, they depend also on the assumption that peoples in these regions have "unproblematically" absorbed this organization of their geocultural spaces.<sup>11</sup> Palat's elaboration of the diverse cartographic imaginaries within this continental space alerts us to the often insular meanings of the world without generated by various polities and parochial agendas. The implied assertion of a shared community and cultural sympathy between peoples of vastly divergent worldviews across a heterogeneously constituted continent in the designation "Asia" is often belied in their provisional, material, and experiential interactions. Thus Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir's call for Asia to stand up to the West conceives of an Asia forged through Muslim solidarity, while Lee Kwan Yew of Singapore valorizes Confucianism as the civilizational discourse that defines Asia.<sup>12</sup> Rustom Bharucha's observation that "Singapore needs Asia in a way that India does not" also reflects the limited value of Asia as "an ideal of communitarian togetherness," as well as its dependence on circuits of global capital.<sup>13</sup>

The significance of being Asian in Asia then is contingent on the histories and political alliances being forged among nations in the region and in the integration of these alliances in the capitalist world-system. As Martin W. Lewis and Kären E. Wigen have noted, a "profound ambivalence about membership in the supposed Asian fraternity" characterizes their negotiations of the Eurocentric division of the world.<sup>14</sup> This ambivalence, however, is limited to the indigenous intelligentsia. For the most part, political elites turned to indigenous and vernacular idioms as they sought to negotiate or consolidate power and privilege through nationalist and local agendas, thus precluding an "imagined community" that transcended the

nation. The notion of an Asian fraternity also did not have much appeal to intellectuals in independent states, since their engagements with the rest of the world were immediately dominated by the politics of the Cold War. The nonaligned movement speaks to a politics of location that drew countries outside discrete geographic zones and into a third space where professing ideological noncommitment rather than geocultural sympathies determined membership.

Perhaps the most significant conceptualization of a fraternal space in Asia comes from Japan. Stefan Tanaka's discussion of the fabrication of *Tōyōshi*, or oriental history, by Japanese elites in the nineteenth century provides a fascinating account of a counterdiscourse of orientalism rooted in Japan's sense of itself as a civilizing and unifying force in East Asia.<sup>15</sup> Since the conception of *Tōyō*, or the Orient, delineates a geographic space identified in Asia, it is possible to construe the Japanese as historically thinking about the region in pan-Asian terms. Japanese pan-Asianism posited Japan as the unifying force within Asia as well as the bridge between Asian and European civilizations. Prasenjit Duara cautions against dismissing Japanese pan-Asian ideology "merely as disguised imperialism," arguing that the 1920s conception of the Koryo nation in the site of the ancient Koguryo state (straddling the space between Manchuria and Korea) brought together Japanese and disaffected Korean elites in their shared antipathy to the West. He notes that a particularly "aggressive" pan-Asianism, based on the East versus West binary, was also forged after World War I in response to U.S. racial policies against Chinese and Japanese immigrants.<sup>16</sup> While the anti-Western impulse, rather than Japanese imperialism, may have provided a basis for Japanese and Korean elites to share a pan-Asianist ideology, the site of a trans-Asian civilization could be imagined only in the context of Japanese expansionism. Moreover, a transnational discourse that reinscribed Asia as a distinct civilization (ironically, an ideology rooted in the Enlightenment and notions of modernity), on the basis of anti-Western or anticolonial sentiments, was easily appropriated by imperial Japan. The convergence of Japanese military aspirations in the region with this imaginative geography therefore prevents any sense of shared fraternal sympathies. Thus, for instance, Japanese racialization of Koreans as inferior peoples and the painful memories of Japanese occupation in Korea make an unmarked Asian identity in Asia impossible.<sup>17</sup>

## America's Asia

If being Asian in Asia is an ambiguously constituted designation and often an irrelevant identity in assertions of community, what relevance

does “Asia” have for Asian Americans? The significance of an “Asian” identity in Asian America and the incorporation of the symbolic landscapes of Asia into new ways of belonging and forging community in the United States is located not only in Asia’s place in America’s map of the world but also in the gap between U.S. and European geographies of Asia. Interestingly, where India was a crucial space in Europe’s delineation of Asia, the American gaze stopped short of India as it bound Asia from the Pacific and across China. While in important ways America’s Orient converged with European imaginaries, the territorial space of Asia—although revealing America’s imperial desires—was more contingently produced in the United States in response to domestic imperatives and anxieties about the nation. Thus the designation “Asian” acquired its urgency and meaning as the state determined who could belong to the American nation rather than to a cartographic space elsewhere.

Prior to the 1850s, there is little evidence that Americans racialized Asians as a discrete people occupying a specific region of the world. Certainly, the East/West binary had cultural significance in the United States, but the landscape that located this difference drew on orientalist constructions of exotic otherness rather than imperial assertions of race.<sup>18</sup> Thus Asian Indian and Chinese sojourners in the United States were treated as curiosities to be exhibited and feted, exciting American wonder at the strange and mysterious worlds they represented. For the most part, until the mid-nineteenth century, American interests in Asia were essentially mercantile and cultural. Not until the arrival of a significant number of Chinese in California in the early 1850s did the specter of the Orient as an inherently subversive realm inhabited by a racially distinct people enter American popular imagination. Thus, while Europe’s race-ing of the Orient coincided with its imperial ambitions, America’s iteration of “Asiatic” racial difference emerged from the anxious identification of the Orient, in the figure of the Chinese immigrant, within the American nation.

The Chinese immigrant experience in the United States is therefore crucial in framing any discussion of the consolidation of Asia in the American imagination. In the 1860s the convergence of multiple sites of anxiety in the vilification of Chinese immigrants served to institutionalize a racist ideology that defined the Chinese as the yellow peril. During the first phase of continuous immigration (1850–80) from China to the United States, Chinese immigrants entered the nation at a time when adverse images of a China ravaged by the opium wars, famine, and civil unrest circulated in the American popular press. The foreignness of the Chinese, which had earlier signified the exotic East, came to denote the menacing Orient by the 1870s. Perceived as neither black nor white, Chinese immigrants threatened the racially defined social and economic structures regimenting

Perceived as  
transposed  
Chinese cities,  
Chinatowns in  
the United States  
became targets  
of virulent attacks  
in the popular  
press as well  
as the focus of  
civic authorities,  
particularly public  
health officials.

race, class, and gender relations in the United States.<sup>19</sup> For the first time, the Orient intruded into American consciousness as a force threatening the fabric of American life.

In the nineteenth century, yellow-peril discourses in the United States ensured that the Orient loomed as the “Asia” that threatened to colonize the nation from within and without. Pseudoscientific treatises that placed the Chinese at a lower stage of evolution also helped fan anxieties about the possible contamination of the “Aryan” gene pool. Such fears were compounded by anxieties about the “social mischief” that would ensue if large numbers of Chinese entered American society.<sup>20</sup> The perceived danger of cultural contamination was reinforced by the conviction that the Chinese could not assimilate and, instead, would persist in replicating their hoary traditions and manners in the United States. Echoing European orientalism that had defined Asian cultures as being “static,” orientalist images, derived from the discursive morphology of European orientalism, became an important means of negotiating Chinese presence in the United States. By locating immigrants from China outside the limits of American society and within well-defined ethnic enclaves, the illegitimacy of the Chinese presence in the United States was emphasized. The emergence of Chinatowns by the late nineteenth century epitomized the realization of the worst fears of exclusionists. Perceived as transposed Chinese cities, Chinatowns in the United States became targets of virulent attacks in the popular press as well as the focus of civic authorities, particularly public health officials. Nayan Shah points out how the Common Council’s investigation and surveillance of San Francisco’s Chinatown assumed that “the entire location had only one racial identity,” despite the presence of other racial and ethnic communities. While Chinese behavior was perceived as a menace to American civic life, Shah notes that the racial scripting of Chinese bodies as the “embodiment of disease” by public health officials easily served to shift the locus of racial difference to biological characteristics.<sup>21</sup> The association of filth and disease (especially cholera epidemics, leprosy, and syphilis) with the Chinese way of life and the body of the Chinese immigrant provoked fears that Chinatowns, if left unchecked, would expand and contaminate American society.

The “yellow-peril” hysteria of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, therefore, cannot be explained merely by representations of racial alterity. Such antagonism must be located in the dread of the Orient as a power threatening American society. The enactment of the Exclusion Act of 1882, banning the entry of Chinese labor to the United States, was the culmination of a long racist campaign that had sought to deny the Chinese the right to settle in the United States. From the 1850s, when they

first arrived in considerable numbers to the United States, the Chinese were systematically discriminated against, harassed, and abused. Thus, although the Chinese entered the United States as free immigrants, their struggle to survive and remain there was marked by violence. In accounts of the early reception to Chinese immigrants, historians point to the favorable attitude Americans held toward them.<sup>22</sup> Their inclusion in San Francisco's parades and festivities is seen as evidence of the apparent lack of hostility toward the Chinese as a race. Dressed in their "native" attire, Chinese merchants participated in the city's celebrations between 1850 and 1852 and were favorably commented on by the local media. This impression that the Chinese initially were welcomed as settlers (based on these few anecdotes) is misleading, since it fails to identify the early images of the Chinese as exotic, and therefore distancing, representations. Certainly, these Chinese were not seen as prospective Americans who could cultivate an affinity with the Euro-American sensibilities of the nation. Instead, more pertinently, these early images of the Chinese should be located in the discourses of the West that historically have narrated the Orient.

As a colonial discourse, orientalism is informed by subversive impulses that prompt the inversion of particular narrative regimes whenever colonial interests are threatened or undermined. This inherent instability points to the precarious counterpointing of discourse and colonial practice. Thus the favorable image of the Orient as a disarming and mythic land of sensuous pleasures could be transposed almost simultaneously into a treacherous and sinister realm whenever the Orient loomed as a dangerous force. In the United States, the "picturesque" Asian exhibited in city parades represented the lure of the mysterious Orient. Their presence in the United States, however, was symbolic of America's mercantile interests in Asia. The Chinese, who were accorded a favorable reception, were never seen as the vanguard of a new wave of immigrants who would assimilate into American life. When significant Chinese enclaves emerged after the 1850s, the sense of difference that earlier had defined the Chinese as exotic beings now served to recast Chinese immigrants as a menace to the nation. The swiftness with which the American welcome of Chinese immigrants dissipated reveals that these favorable images were embedded in a discourse that continuously reiterated the otherness of the "Oriental." Hence, despite their differing agendas and allegiances, various nativist interest groups could draw on a shared fear of the Chinese as "strangers" to shape an American idiom of the yellow peril.

## The Racialization of Asia in the United States

The reconstitution of European orientalism within the material contexts of the nineteenth-century United States is crucial to an understanding of Asian American racial formations, since it shaped the processes by which Asian immigrants entered and contested the space of the nation. As an “imagined community,” America had averred its Euro-American origins by effacing or deferring Native American and African American claims to the nation through narratives that domesticated their presence. The founding myths of the United States, however, posited an origin in the New World that ironically rested on the acknowledgment of Native Americans and African Americans. Through narratives of conquest and settlement, the violent histories of the nation’s beginnings had to accommodate, however cursorily, Native American and African American experiences within the ambit of the nation’s imagined space. Indeed, by the 1880s most Native American tribes had been defeated and confined to reservations, while emancipated African Americans were increasingly bound by Jim Crow laws. In contrast, Chinese immigrants were distanced from the origins of the nation, and from the histories of occupation and enslavement that disempowered Native Americans and African Americans while naturalizing European immigrants as Americans. In the national consciousness, the arrival of Chinese immigrants on the West Coast, and not on the Atlantic seaboard, meant that they neither participated in nor could make any claims to the nation’s defining movement from East (Europe) to West (the Pacific frontier). Such rhetorical distancing from the nation’s beginnings enabled the anti-Chinese movement to emphasize the illegitimacy of Chinese presence in the United States.

In Asian American histories, the Chinese immigrant experience frames how immigrants from Asia were inscribed outside and against American civil society. American orientalism in turn shaped the geography of Asia in the context of Chinese immigration and identified the Far East (primarily China and, in the twentieth century, Japan) as the subversive Orient. Delineating a particular geographic and cultural terrain, American orientalism deployed China as the signifying trope that determined, by the early twentieth century, the undesirability of *all* Asian immigration. This collapsing of national and cultural identities explains why immigrants from India, predominantly Punjabis, many of whom moved from Canada to the Pacific Northwest and California in the early twentieth century, were incorporated into yellow-peril discourses as yet another “oriental” threat to American civil society. The arrival of Indian immigrants in the United States at the turn of the twentieth century intensified yellow-peril fears of the coming of the “brown races” to North America. Coinciding with

Japanese and Korean immigration to the West Coast, the new arrivals from South Asia raised the specter of another threat to American society.

The Exclusion Act of 1882 had effectively contained Chinese immigration and relieved some of the fears of the anti-Chinese movement. However, between 1902 and 1906 almost thirty-four thousand Japanese workers were lured from Hawai'i to the Pacific Northwest and California to work for the railroad companies, the lumber industry, and in agriculture.<sup>23</sup> At the height of the hysteria about Chinese immigrants, the Japanese had escaped the negative images of the "Asiatic." Christopher Bentley's study of the "tremendous vogue" of Japan among New Englanders in the late nineteenth century points to American interest and delight in exploring the aesthetic traditions and artifacts of Japan.<sup>24</sup> However, during this period, Japan, whose centuries of isolation were broken in 1854 when Commodore Matthew Perry sailed into Yokohama Bay, served as the exotic American Orient. The incorporation of the Japanese into yellow-peril discourses occurred not when they were identified with a distant land but when their presence became discernible in the United States. Juxtaposed against Japan's emergence as a power in Asia after its defeat of China in 1894–95 and its successes in the Russo-Japanese War (1904–6), the increased visibility of Japanese immigrants in the United States heightened fears of another "Asiatic" invasion. In a communication to the Asiatic Exclusion League, an organization formed in 1905 in the wake of increased Japanese and Korean immigration to the United States, the Immigration Restriction League contended that "the brownish races are perhaps even more of a live wire than the yellow."<sup>25</sup> The distinction made between the "yellow" (the Chinese) and "brown" races (including the Japanese, Koreans, and Indians) appears to be based on the identification of a new phase of immigration rather than on considerations of material differences. The discrete cultural and historical moorings of these immigrants were thus ignored while they were absorbed into yellow-peril narratives as the new oriental threat to the United States.

The inclusion of Indians in this discourse, despite their limited and dispersed numbers, reveals the pervasiveness of anxieties manifested in the anti-Chinese movement.<sup>26</sup> Karen Leonard, in her pioneering study of the Punjabis who came to California in the early decades of the twentieth century and married women of Mexican descent, notes that the visible differences in their diet, language, and habits made the Punjabis, caricatured as "Hindoos," an object of local Anglo prejudices. The Punjabis' desires to lease and own land, rather than serve as migrant labor, heightened anxieties about the new immigrants.<sup>27</sup> In January 1909 the Asiatic Exclusion League, noting the presence of Indians in the Pacific Coast states, warned that "the flood [had] started again."<sup>28</sup> Here familiar images of

For nativists, the rapid growth of the Chinese community on the West Coast exposed the potential threat of a similar increase in immigration from India.

an Asia teeming with populations hungry for new lands to accommodate them deepened forebodings about Indian migration to the United States. For nativists, the rapid growth of the Chinese community on the West Coast exposed the potential threat of a similar increase in immigration from India. The Asiatic Exclusion League carefully monitored and documented the number of Indians entering the United States. Such vigilance points to the consolidation of a network of anti-Asian organizations in the wake of Chinese immigration and to the considerable resources they could bring to bear in implementing their mission. The “undesirability of the Hindoos” was determined by these associations on the basis of their origins in Asia rather than by their lived experiences in the United States. As nativists contended, all Asians brought with them “the odor of Asia.”<sup>29</sup> The Indians who arrived in the United States, therefore, reinforced existing stereotypes of “Orientals” and, in yellow-peril discourses, prompted the space of the American Orient to be extended to include immigrants from the Indian subcontinent.

The 1917 Immigration Act provided the cartographic coordinates of this Asia when it defined the Asiatic Barred Zone from which immigrants would be denied entry into the nation. A line was drawn from the Red Sea “to the Mediterranean, Aegean, and Black Seas, through the Caucasus mountains and the Caspian Sea, along the Ural River, and then through the Ural Mountains,” as the “Asian” regions of Russia were bound with an Asia that was mapped until the 160th meridian east of Greenwich.<sup>30</sup> Included in this space was most of Polynesia. Outside it lay most of West Asia.

The racial coding of Asia in the United States thus presents a peculiar geography. Classified under the category “Turkey in Asia” until the 1910 census, immigrants from the Ottoman provinces of Syria and Palestine were grouped with Greeks and Armenians. The ambiguity of Turkey’s territorial location at the turn of the twentieth century as a space that simultaneously inhabits Asia and Europe, however, raised the question of the racial origins of its Syrian and Palestinian subjects who were identified with its Asian terrain. Interestingly, the Syrian and Indian experiences converge here, since both groups in the first two decades of the twentieth century claimed a white ethnicity on the basis of their purported Caucasian ancestry. Sarah Gualtieri observes that prior to 1909 Syrians were granted American citizenship “without much deliberation.”<sup>31</sup> However, in the decade that followed, the racial origins of Syrians were contingently determined with various courts deciding the “Semitic,” “Caucasian,” or “Asiatic” origins of Syrians, and ruling on the whiteness of their racial stock. As Gualtieri argues, the racial prerequisites of naturalization came to hinge on “common knowledge and congressional intent.”<sup>32</sup> Thus the

1914 ruling of a South Carolina judge against the naturalization of Syrians declared that Syrians were not “that particular free white person” that the Constitution recognized.<sup>33</sup> This distancing of a Caucasian identity from the racial purity of a white identity is reproduced in the 1923 Supreme Court ruling in *United States v. Bhagat Singh Thind*, when the validity of the term *Caucasian* as a racial category was questioned. Arguing that *Caucasian* was derived from a linguistic root, “Aryan,” the court asserted that Asian Indians could not claim a white racial ancestry, since the terms *Caucasian* and *Aryan* “did not satisfy the common understanding that they are now the same or sufficiently the same.”<sup>34</sup>

Here, I suggest that the location of both groups in Asia inevitably racializes them and precludes their identification with an unmarked white ethnicity. The subsequent reidentification of Syrians as whites by the 1920s was made possible only when the state, through the 1917 Immigration Act, named the regions of Asia. The exclusion of Syria, Palestine, and most of Arabia from the Barred Zone meant that a region that historically had been tied to Asia in material ways, and which had critically defined Europe’s Orient, was now delinked from it in the American imagination. Thus, by the 1920s, Syrians could overcome their “Asian” identity, while Indians could not.

The 1917 Immigration Act therefore marks a critical gap between European and American delineations of the territorial space of Asia. U.S. state discourses, especially those of immigration and naturalization policy, had extended the imaginative terrain of Asia to meet the contingencies arising out of anxieties about the “brown” races in the United States while excluding what European orientalism had constituted as an integral part of Asia: the Muslim Orient. Thus, while European orientalism identified different sites within the Orient, such as a Muslim Orient in West Asia or a Hindu Orient in India, American orientalism figuratively split the Orient to exclude West Asia. In doing so, U.S. state policy incorporated India into the American Orient on the basis of purported racial difference that precluded the cultural and racial assimilation of Indians into American society.

Not until the post–World War II reconfiguration of the world and the shrinking of Asia to its East and Southeast Asian regions as it fell in line with the imperatives of American geopolitical and economic interests were Indians unmarked as Asians. The delinking of India from Asia, however, did not imply its reintegration with West Asia. Instead, the politics of the Cold War and American disinterest in the Indian subcontinent ensured India occupied a liminal space in the popular imagination. Simultaneously, the redesignation of most of West Asia as the Middle East dehistoricized its place in the region and marked it as a discrete space.

## Reconfiguring Asia and Constructing a Middle Eastern Identity

Clearly, the trajectories of Indian and Syrian identity formation in the United States ground an Asian identity in the state's shifting cartographic imaginary. Asian America, in turn, is inextricably moored in the history of this imaginative geography. Its inception in the civil rights movement does not deflect its affirmation of dominant representations of the space of Asia in the American imagination. Hence, as a place from which one can question the state's accommodation of its Asian immigrants, and as a site of activism, Asian America is inherently fragile. While East and Southeast Asian Americans are effortlessly absorbed into this designation, Indian Americans are burdened with the knowledge that they must actively assert their presence to belong in Asian America. Such strategic alignments, however, are unavailable to West Asian immigrants. Deferred from Asia into the Middle East, peoples from Iran to Palestine have been constituted as a separate political interest.

Martin W. Lewis and Kären E. Wiggen point out that the term *Middle East*, first used in 1902 by the military theorist Alfred Mahan, was conceived as an "arena of strategic operations."<sup>35</sup> Mahan identified the space "about Aden, India and the Gulf" as a buffer zone wherein a fortified British naval presence would secure its influence and dominance in the region while protecting critical shipping lanes between Europe and East Asia.<sup>36</sup> Roderic H. Davidson notes that the term *Middle East* was introduced at a time when the "Near East" as a distinct geopolitical site had gained currency.<sup>37</sup> The English archaeologist D. G. Hogarth in 1902 had delineated a "Nearer East" to qualify the distance of distinct sites within the East to Europe. According to Roger Adelson, the term *Near East* was first used by the French in the late eighteenth century to denote the Ottoman Empire. Adelson points out that the British began to use the term to distinguish between its different spheres of influence in the East as its imperial interests extended to and engaged China.<sup>38</sup> Thus, along with the Near East, the "Far East" emerged as a discrete site. The Middle East, on the other hand, was conceived in the wake of the Sino-Japanese War of 1884–95 and the destabilization of the Ottoman Empire as a strategic site from which the British could secure the "East."

While geopolitical considerations in the nineteenth century and at the turn of the twentieth century named these different spaces within the East, these sites were already marked in the cultural landscape of the Orient wherein they had produced distinctive discursive traditions and meanings. India, in this configuration, emerged as the East against which other "Easts" were located. The term *Middle East*, however, blurred the

location of this East, since it was used in different ways—either including or excluding India.<sup>39</sup> Thus the slippery terrain on which the Middle East rested pointed to strategic geopolitical interests that contingently produced a space that sometimes included even Albania and Greece or the Sudan and Eritrea.

Not until the end of World War II did the Middle East emerge as a distinct place from the West *and* from Asia. For the most part, countries identified as unambiguously being Arab were incorporated into the designation without much debate. While race may appear to provide the common ground, the role of European oil interests and the formation of the state of Israel are more critical signifiers in this mapping. Hence Iran was easily subsumed in this territorialization, while Turkey limned its boundaries. Turkish nationalism and the concerted efforts of the state to identify itself with Europe, rather than the Middle East, on the basis of its secular statehood and state-mandated westernization points to the precarious boundaries of the Middle East.

The consumption of this geography by nations identified as constituting the Middle East points to the extent to which it was affirmed from within. By the 1950s the emergence of a secular Arab nationalism in conjunction with Israel's assertion of statehood lent the Middle East a certain legitimacy as a space denoting a distinct configuration of peoples—albeit one identified by an intense sense of crisis. Such recognition, however, was predicated on geopolitical and national interests rather than mutually interactive processes of place making. A secular Arab nationalism that gained much of its relevance vis-à-vis Zionism and the presence of Israel hence necessarily occluded an affirmation of a common Middle Eastern identity that rested on a shared sense of place. Any such identity signifying cultural difference was therefore constituted in sites outside the Middle East and consolidated, as the Middle East became part of the nomenclature of European and U.S. policymaking. The ironies of a “Middle Eastern” identity therefore make it as relevant in the Middle East as an “Asian” identity in Asia.

### **American Orientalism, Asian America, and West Asian Americans**

Although American use of the term *Middle East* to designate a specific region outside Asia and Europe is tied to Europe's imperial project, U.S.-supported militarization of Israel, the Palestinian crisis, and the anxiety about oil served to maintain a keen American interest in this region. Hence it is ironic that while U.S. policy ensured the distance of the Mid-

dle East from Asia, by the 1970s American orientalism—which had for the most part been restricted to East and Southeast Asia—emphatically reframed this landscape within its discursive traditions. By the 1990s, in the American imagination the Middle East had become synonymous with the “Muslim” world. The cultural meanings that metaphorically located immigrants in the United States from the Middle East, especially during periods of national crisis, were (and continue to be) derived from an older European tradition that historically identified West Asia as the Muslim Orient and maintained separate archives of “knowledge” on it. This identification of distinct sites defined by religious ideologies within the Orient is especially significant in the 1990s and post-9/11 period.

For conservatives and fundamentalists across the world, discourses of otherness provide an uncompromising view of the world. Muslim and Christian fundamentalists mirror each other’s worldviews as they see the other as embodiments of evil. Here, the Hindu extremists’ easy reproduction of Western metanarratives of Islamic otherness points to the appeal of orientalism and its deployment in non-Western nationalist agendas. As convenient scapegoats, Muslims are now configured as a shared threat to all societies outside the Middle East, and Islam is seen as a “foreign” culture and ideology not only in India but also in Asia. Hindu extremists in the VHP deny Indian Muslims indigenous claims to the land and posit Asia as an essentially Hindu or Buddhist realm besieged by Islam.

The consumption of orientalist discourse by Hindu nationalists allows Hindu chauvinists in the United States to forge, without sharing their ideologies of nationhood and citizenship, their provisional alliance with Meir Kahane’s followers. It also provides the means for a strategic assertion of Hindu solidarity with U.S. policy interests and suggests new ways of belonging in the nation. By constituting Muslims in India as interlopers, Hindus in the United States believe they can share contemporary American narratives of Muslim otherness while inserting themselves into the American racial landscape as culturally sympathetic immigrants. In this distancing from West Asia and Muslims, Hindus in the United States can pretend that they are no longer racialized.

The affirmation in the U.S. Indian diaspora of what Thomas Hansen calls a “syncretic, nationalized Hinduism” that transcends “local religious complexities and politics in India” may be linked to Indian American/immigrant anxieties about American perceptions of the Indian nation.<sup>40</sup> While *Hindutva* abroad emphasizes select orientalist discourses that locate Hinduism in an ancient Indian past, it scripts the Hindu nation within narratives of modernity and globalization. Technologies of power—a modernized military, advanced space research programs, and nuclear weaponry—function as critical indexes in the Hindu nationalist

manifesto. Hindutva also claims its legitimacy as a national agenda chosen by popular assent and the democratic political process.<sup>41</sup> (Whereas, juxtaposed against the modernity of the Hindu nation, Pakistan is inscribed as an authoritarian and dysfunctional Islamic state.) For Hindu Indian Americans/immigrants in the United States, Hindutva is thus an extremely seductive ideology. On the one hand, it asserts the cultural value of Hindu nationalism as an intrinsically modernizing force that, as Hansen points out, promotes “a disciplined and corporatist cultural nationalism.”<sup>42</sup> On the other hand, Hindu patriotism is conceived as strengthening the nation’s sense of itself in the world. Hindutva’s apparent compatibility with U.S. values and interests thus helps deflect Hindu American/immigrant anxiety within the U.S. nation. Moreover, the new genealogies of high-tech Indian immigration to the United States in the 1980s and 1990s have reemphasized the intellectual capital of India, positioning it as a respected and respectable member of the global community, with the immigrants themselves bringing with them the modern Hindu nation. The presence of “Hindu Student Councils” in U.S. universities, and the emergence of Hindu youth camps in the United States run by the VHP of America and pro-VHP Hindu organizations, speaks to the significant sympathy and support for Hindutva in the United States. These organizations narrate Hindutva into Indian American/immigrant realities, reproducing national anxieties in transnational circuits of otherness. Thus VHP ascriptions of the fanaticism of Pakistani Muslims and Muslims in India, whose sensibilities purportedly resist the modernizing technologies of the state, converge on U.S. discourses of Muslim alterity.<sup>43</sup>

I suspect that the chauvinism of Indian Americans/immigrants who promote the VHP agenda in the United States, albeit an extremist position, is shared in varying degrees by other groups in Asian America. What kind of space, then, is Asian America for Asian Muslims? Can they speak from within not only for themselves but also on shared platforms as Asians? Or is Asian America such an uncomfortable space for Asian Muslims that they must assert a separate political interest outside it?

In 1993, when the Arab American Institute (AAI) proposed the term *Middle Eastern* as a new classification for the 2000 census, it suggested that the designation would allow Pakistanis to reclassify themselves thus. The proposed delinking of Pakistan from South Asia and its incorporation into the Middle East is intriguing, since it ignores the history of the subcontinent’s partition and the deep cultural and ethnic ties between Pakistan and India. Furthermore, the AAI’s assertion of a Middle Eastern identity in the United States comes at a time when most Arabs in the Middle East, as Michael Kramer argues, have rejected “Middle Easternism” as an identity, since “it is regarded as a framework that privileges

U.S. Hindutva's  
assumption  
of cultural  
sympathies with  
white Americans  
through the  
figure of the  
Muslim terrorist,  
therefore, is  
largely irrelevant  
in the face of  
U.S. racism.

Israel.”<sup>44</sup> While the AAI declared that the designation *Middle Eastern* would denote region rather than race, its extension of the designation to include Pakistan suggests that Pakistanis are being constituted as Muslims rather than as Asians. In doing so, was the AAI inadvertently affirming American orientalism? And could the affinity that Pakistanis presumably have for the classification Middle Eastern, rather than South Asian or Asian, be soon evoked to include Indonesian or Malaysian Muslims?<sup>45</sup>

Hindu nationalists would surely welcome the suggestion that Pakistanis be reclassified as Middle Eastern. However, American racism in the post-9/11 period makes such distancing difficult, not only of Indians from Pakistanis but also of Indians from West Asia. While extremist Hindus and Jews might find it mutually beneficial to support each other without compromising their respective ideological interests, the acts of violence perpetrated on Indian Americans and Indian immigrants in the United States point to the fragility of these alliances and the inescapable racialization of South Asian Americans. For Meir Kahane's followers, who can assume an unmarked white ethnicity, the anonymous South Asian American who purportedly looks like an Arab would be as easy a target of hate as the Arab immigrant. U.S. Hindutva's assumption of cultural sympathies with white Americans through the figure of the Muslim terrorist, therefore, is largely irrelevant in the face of U.S. racism. The gap between the agency of an Aryan nationalism in India and in the United States therefore becomes visible at a time of American national crisis. The demagoguery of the VHP in India draws from European orientalism's naturalization of South Asian Muslims as peoples of the “Muslim Orient” (and therefore of West Asian ancestry), and from colonial narratives of the Aryan heritage of Hindu India. In the United States, however, American orientalism's race-ing of the South Asian immigrant through the lens of whiteness, and naturalization debates of the early twentieth century, makes European narratives of India as an exclusively Hindu site irrelevant. For U.S. Hindutva proponents, an Aryan ethnicity is never secure. Indeed, the 1980s racist attacks on Indian Americans in the Jersey area by the dot-busters point to the gap between European constructions of Aryanism and U.S. ascriptions of an Aryan genealogy. Where, in the wake of 9/11, the consul-general of India had invoked the bindi as a sign of Indianness rooted in the VHP's idealization of a Hindu and Aryan nation, in the 1980s the neo-Nazi dot-busters had focused on the bindi as a sign of otherness that located Indian Americans/immigrants outside the U.S. Aryan nation.<sup>46</sup> Thus, without state-sponsored and ferocious popular support—either in the form of government apparatuses, the participation of the Indian bourgeoisie, or grassroots activism—that catapulted Hindutva onto the

nation's center stage in the 1990s, defining the empowered Indian as a Hindu Indian, U.S. Hindutva is ineffective in scripting an unmarked Aryan and Hindu identity in the United States. Where U.S. Hindutva is most productive is in the insular U.S. circuits of Hindu nationalism—in its seduction of the Indian American Hindu diaspora and the funds it raises for VHP activism in India.

## Conclusion

The blurring of South and West Asian identities in the aftermath of 9/11, as seen in the numerous incidents of racial profiling, harassment, and murder, point to the slippery terrain on which South and West Asian immigrants are racialized. While different communities within Asian America might strategically assert particular agendas and interests, the realities of a nation in crisis and “at war” reveal the need to articulate a new politics of community. The absence of West Asia in Asian America, indeed in America's global imaginary, is glaringly visible since 9/11. As a discursive site, this is a valuable place from which one can uncover the politics of race in the constitution of “Asia” in the United States; as a critical historical juncture in the reterritorialization of the nation's spaces, this is an important moment to scrutinize Asian America and its politics of membership. In a nation that does not discriminate between *some* Asians and Arabs post-9/11, should Asian America acknowledge and reclaim West Asia in Asia? Could dialogue between Arab America and Asian America affirm these overlapping spaces while interrupting dominant orientalist narratives? The alliance between extremist Hindus and Jews, as signified by the relations forged in New York City, clearly distances Indians from a West Asia that historically has been represented as the “Muslim” Orient. However, as Asian Indians, these Indian American Hindus are also inscribed into the nation, at least since the 1980s, as Asian Americans. Their ability to sustain separate ethnic and nationalist agendas, while forging a relationship of convenience with radical Jews through the figure of the Muslim other, points to the accommodation of anti-Muslim sentiment in certain sectors of Asian America without its imaginative geography and sense of peoplehood being disrupted. Who, one might ask then, belongs to Asian America? The silence in Asian America about anti-Muslim rhetoric raises the possibility of Asian Muslims being de-raced of their “Asian” origins, and the concurrent delegitimization of their place in Asian America. Moreover, this silence could also signal their deferment to a “Muslim Orient” that lies outside “Asia.”

These considerations would enable a more productive deployment of Asian America in forging political alignments between racialized communities and discouraging the co-optation of some of its constituencies into affirming national discourses of otherness. Racism and racist acts of terror in the United States urge a creative reimagining of the space of Asian America as well as a tactical repositioning of “Asia” in Asian America. Acknowledging the absence of West Asia in U.S. discourses of Asia, and the concomitant reproduction of this Asia in Asian America, draws attention to the uneven processes that territorialize an Asian identity as well as a transnational Muslim identity within or without “Asia.” This politics of reading makes evident that, in the days following the attacks on the twin towers, those who became victims of the white supremacist Mark Stroman avenging the “Islamic” assault on the American nation were also victims of the antinomies of U.S. and European orientalisms and the imaginative geographies of Asia. In their bodies are inscribed the pain of a race-d ethnicity in the United States and the post-9/11 realities confronting Asian America.

## Notes

This essay is dedicated to Jorge Fernandes (1968–2004), friend and scholar of rare intellect and generous spirit. An earlier version was presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association of Asian American Studies in San Francisco in May 2003. I am indebted to Ravi Palat for his valuable comments on drafts of this essay. I thank the *Social Text* collective for the critical feedback I received. Thanks also to Himanee Gupta for sharing with me her insights on Hindutva in the United States.

1. Robert E. Pierre, “Victims of Hate Now Feeling Forgotten,” *Washington Post*, 14 September 2002.

2. The national director of the Sikh Mediawatch and Resource Task Force (SMART) reported that four hundred hate crimes against Sikhs were recorded between September 2001 and August 2003. See Aziz Haniffa, “Sikh Body Adds to Reward for Culprits in Phoenix Hate Crimes,” *India Abroad* (New York), 8 August 2003.

3. Dean E. Murphy, “Two Unlikely Allies Come Together in Hatred of Muslims,” *New York Times*, 2 June 2001.

4. The Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) was established in 1964 by the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), a militant Hindu organization with neofascist ideological moorings. As Thomas Hansen observes, the RSS used the VHP to reach out to the religious establishment and recruit from its ranks “spiritual” leaders. See Thomas Blom Hansen, *The Saffron Wave: Democracy and Hindu Nationalism in Modern India* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), 101–2. By the 1990s the VHP had consolidated a religious nationalism that consciously

embraced Hindus in the diaspora while bringing into the mainstream an uncompromising and monolithic discourse on the nation.

5. Murphy, "Two Unlikely Allies Come Together."

6. Donald Lach, *Asia in the Making of Europe*, vol. 1, bk. 1, *The Century of Discovery* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965), 36–37.

7. Sara Dickinson, "Russia's 'First Orient': Characterizing the Crime in 1787," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 3 (winter 2002): 5.

8. Dickinson notes that Russia's Orient was fixed in a north-south axis (south of St. Petersburg) and was contiguous with Russia (*ibid.*).

9. Victor R. Savage, *Western Impressions of Nature and Landscape in Southeast Asia* (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 1984).

10. Lisa Lowe, *Critical Terrains: French and British Orientalisms* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991). See also Sridevi Menon, "Discursive Realms and Colonial Practice: Contrapuntal Studies of Race in Colonial India and the United States" (PhD diss., University of Hawai'i at Manoa, 2000), chap. 2. Drawing on Edward Said's identification of an insurgent Orient and an Orient that could be treated with "proprietary hauteur," I argue that British colonial discourse constituted West Asia and the Indian subcontinent as two distinctive symbolic landscapes—an insurgent "Muslim" Orient and a passive "Hindu" Orient. By locating Islam and Hinduism in distinctly separate sites, British orientalism deferred the "origins" of Muslims in India to West Asia, thereby inscribing the illegitimacy of Islam in India. In the United States, therefore, particularly in the post-9/11 period, both "unmarked" Americans and racialized non-Muslim Americans and immigrants are consuming narratives that draw on the imaginative geography of a Muslim Orient. For a discussion of the distinction between an Islamic Orient and India, see Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 74–75.

11. Ravi Arvind Palat, "Is India Part of Asia?" *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 20 (2002): 669.

12. Arif Dirlik, "Chinese History and the Question of Orientalism," *History and Theory* 35, no. 4 (1996): 109. See also Aihwa Ong's discussion of Malaysia's advocacy of a pan-Islamic nationalism that consolidates Southeast Asia as the site of an "Asian renaissance" (Aihwa Ong, *Flexible Citizenship: The Cultural Logics of Transnationality* [Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999], 225–29).

13. Rustom Barucha, "Foreign Asia/Foreign Shakespeare: Dissenting Notes on New Asian Interculturality, Postcoloniality, and Recolonization," *Theatre Journal* 56 (2004): 5.

14. Martin W. Lewis and Kären E. Wigen, *The Myth of Continents: A Critique of Metageography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 69.

15. Stefan Tanaka, *Japan's Orient: Rendering Pasts into History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

16. Prasanjit Duara, "The Discourse of Civilization and Pan-Asianism," *Journal of World History* 12 (2001): 111.

17. Ronald Toby's discussion of the iconography of Portuguese otherness in Japan draws attention to the long history of Japan's sense of itself vis-à-vis Asian others (the Chinese, Koreans, Mongols, Indians, etc.) that predate the arrival of Europeans on its shores. See Ronald P. Toby, "The 'Indianness' of Iberia and Changing Japanese Iconographies of Other," in *Implicit Understandings: Observing, Reporting, and Reflecting on the Encounters between Europeans and Other Peoples in*

*the Early Modern Era*, ed. Stuart B. Schwartz (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 323–51.

18. See Vijay Prashad's discussion "Of the Mysterious East," in *The Karma of Brown Folk* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 11–20.

19. Lisa Lowe points out that the significant presence of Chinese men in "feminized" jobs (such as the laundry and restaurant business) ensured that Chinese masculinity was racialized "in relation to white male citizens" (Lisa Lowe, *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics* [Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996], 11–12). Moreover, as David Eng's study of Asian American sexual and queer identities emphasizes, the Chinese immigrant's location in the Orient, an essentially feminine space, scripted racial difference onto the body of the "Oriental" through a schemata of sexual incompleteness and deviance as it simultaneously affirmed a normative white heterosexuality (David Eng, *Racial Castration: Managing Masculinity in Asian America* [Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001]).

20. Herbert Spencer to Baron Kaneko Kentaro, quoted in *Proceedings of the Asiatic Exclusion League, 1907–1913* (New York: Arno, 1977), 20.

21. Nayan Shah, *Contagious Divides: Epidemics and Race in San Francisco's Chinatown* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 25, 22.

22. See Ronald Takaki, *Strangers from Different Shores* (New York: Penguin, 1989), 80.

23. Sucheng Chan, *Asian Americans: An Interpretive History* (Boston: Twayne, 1991), 37.

24. Christopher Benfey, *The Great Wave: Guilded Age Misfits, Japanese Eccentricities, and the Opening of Old Japan* (New York: Random House, 2003).

25. *Proceedings of the Asiatic Exclusion League*, January 1908, 4.

26. According to the U.S. Department of Justice records, 269 Asian Indians entered the United States between 1881 and 1890, 68 between 1891 and 1900, 4,713 between 1901 and 1910, and 2,082 between 1911 and 1920 (U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service, *Statistical Yearbook of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, 1996* [Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1997], 26–27).

27. Karen Leonard, *Making Ethnic Choices: California's Punjabi Mexican Americans* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992), 45–47.

28. *Proceedings of the Asiatic Exclusion League*, January 1909, 5.

29. *Ibid.*, February 1908, 9; and June 1908, 18.

30. See Chan, *Asian Americans*, 55.

31. Sarah Gualtieri, "Becoming 'White': Race, Religion, and the Foundations of Syrian/Lebanese Ethnicity in the United States," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 20, no. 4 (2001): 32.

32. *Ibid.*, 35.

33. Helen Hatab Samhan, "Not Quite White: Race Classification and the Arab American Experience," in *Arabs in America: Building a New Future*, ed. Michael W. Suleiman (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1999), 217.

34. *United States v. Bhagat Singh Thind*, 261 U.S. 204 (1923).

35. Lewis and Wigen, *Myth of Continents*, 65.

36. Alfred Thayer Mahan, "The Persian Gulf and International Relations," *National Review*, September 1902, quoted in Roger Adelson, *London and the Invention of the Middle East: Money, Power, and War, 1902–1922* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995), 22–23.

37. Roderick H. Davidson, "Where Is the Middle East?" in *The Modern Middle East*, ed. Richard H. Nolte (New York: Atherton, 1963), 16.
38. Adelson, *London and the Invention of the Middle East*, 22–25.
39. See Davidson's discussion of the confusion surrounding the mapping of the Middle East in "Where Is the Middle East?" 13–29.
40. Hansen, *Saffron Wave*, 156.
41. See *ibid.*, 6.
42. *Ibid.*, 231.
43. See Hansen's discussion of anti-Muslim discourse (*ibid.*, 178).
44. Michael Kramer, "The Middle East, Old and New," *Daedalus* 126, no. 2 (1997): 101.
45. According to Gordon Trowbridge, the inability to reach an agreement over whether Jewish immigrants should be included in the designation "Middle Eastern" may have been one reason why a Census Bureau advisory committee in 1977 refused to endorse the category "Middle Eastern" (Gordon Trowbridge, "Arab Americans Lose Out in Census," *Detroit News*, 26 March 2001, [www.detroitnews.com/2001/census/0103/30/c01-204055.htm](http://www.detroitnews.com/2001/census/0103/30/c01-204055.htm)).
46. It is important to distinguish between the processes that indigenized a Hindu "Aryan" and those that reify an "Aryan" ancestry in U.S. neo-Nazi narratives. Even within the British Empire, as Tony Ballantyne's study of the Aryanization of the Maori reveals, Aryanism was forged within competing and complex "webs" of empire that circulated "knowledge" in and between the metropolis and the colony, and between various colonies, producing divergent racial theories. See Tony Ballantyne, *Orientalism and Race: Aryanism in the British Empire* (New York: Palgrave, 2002).

