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RECONFIGURING CITIZENSHIP

and National Identity *in the* North American Literary Imagination

KATHY-ANN TAN



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RECONFIGURING CITIZENSHIP *and* National Identity *in the* North American Literary Imagination

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CITIZENSHIP UNHINGED

Securitization, Identity Management, and the Migrant in Amitava Kumar's *Passport Photos*

Prevalent perceptions of undocumented or "illegal" migrants, refugees, asylum seekers,[1] stateless persons, exiles, and displaced subjects in dominant discourses on migration often misread them as *risky* subjects instead of subjects *at risk*. These precarious bodies are often misidentified in the public imagination as the *source* of the threat and instability that compromise the boundaries of the nation rather than the result of systematic processes of exclusion and marginalization due to political decisions made at national and international levels, and of complex bureaucratic procedures and lengthy processing times of applications for refugee or asylum status.

In 2013, the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) reported that the number of refugees, asylum seekers, and internally displaced people worldwide had, for the first time in the post–World War II era, exceeded 50 million people.[2] Giorgio Agamben's entreaty in his essay "We Refugees" (1995) to take the figure of the refugee, the "only imaginable figure of the people in our day,"[3] as the trigger for conceptualizing a new philosophical mode of "perceiving the forms and limits of a political community" in the twentieth (and twenty-first) century has therefore become all the more pressing.[4] Agamben's essay, which was a response to Hannah Arendt's article of the same title that she

published in the small Jewish periodical the *Menorah Journal* in 1943, takes up the condition of refugeeism as "the paradigm of a new historical consciousness," the starting point of a necessary "reconstruct[tion] of political philosophy" (114). Delineating the difference between "bare life" (*zoe*) and "political life" (*bios*), Agamben argues that the figure of the refugee "throws into crisis the original fiction of sovereignty" (115) because it uncovers the fiction that birth immediately leads to the concept of nation or, in other words, that birth is the very foundation of the nation-state's sovereignty (etymologically, the Latin word *natio* means "birth" or "origin"). Agamben's call to make the figure of the refugee the center of an alter-national model of historical and political consciousness and collective identification recalls Judith Butler's entreaty for a new theory of political reflection and deliberation based on vulnerability and injurability.

The rising number of refugees, asylum seekers, displaced, and stateless persons in the twenty-first century is also a reflection of the need to rethink the theory of "hard" borders, understood as concrete, fortified boundaries, including wire-fenced borders, walled borders, militarized borders, and checkpoints, put up to keep "illegal" intruders out of the country. Increasingly, therefore, the theory of "hard" borders has been substituted by a new concept of "soft" open and regulated borders, such as those at work within the European Union, that "rethink notions of sovereignty and democracy in the 21st century" (Mustov 2008, 1) and that effectively decouple "the linkage between membership in a particular national community and the rights and responsibilities typically associated with citizenship." As some critics have argued, a theory of "soft" borders envisions "democratic practices of social cooperation exercised through multiple and overlapping polities by individuals and groups with complex and fluid identities" (3).[5] Nevertheless, as the phenomenon of "Fortress Europe" has demonstrated, such a paradigm shift from hard border to soft border theory has nevertheless not yet adequately redressed the situations of precarious refugees, asylum seekers, and undocumented migrants who are still excluded from the rights of citizenship.

This state of exclusion from the rights of citizenship is explored by Hannah Arendt in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951). In the chapter "The Decline of the Nation-State and the End of the Rights of Man," Arendt argues that the figure of the stateless refugee (in this instance, the Jewish person of Eastern European origin) embodies the most serious critique of the concept of human rights, as delineated by the French Revolution's

Declaration of the Rights of Man (*Declaration des droits de l'homme et du citoyen*) in 1789. Arendt points out that the Rights of Man, "supposedly inalienable, proved to be unenforceable . . . whenever people appeared who were no longer citizens of any sovereign state" (1973, 293). This was the case, Arendt argues, with Jewish people who had to endure the loss of their jobs, their homes, their communities, their nationalities—and hence their status as citizens in their countries. This loss of legal status, or what Arendt terms "the deprivation of legality" (295), constituted a deprivation of the basic *right to have rights*. As Arendt summarizes, "Something much more fundamental than freedom and justice, which are rights of citizens, is at stake when belonging to the community into which one is born is no longer a matter of course and not belonging no longer a matter of choice" (296). The interruption of the continuity of what should be a given—in this instance, the understanding that a person born in a particular country has the right to continue living in that country without undue persecution—constitutes a dehumanization of the figure of the refugee.

Although Arendt was writing about Jewish people who were expelled from Europe during World War II, modern-day measures of control and regulation endorsed by refugee host countries in the West due to a perceived global "refugee crisis" demand closer scrutiny. Such modern forms of "identity management" (Muller 2004) and national securitization have, within a U.S. context, contributed to the dominant culture of fear and a rhetoric of "otherness," an "us" versus "them" mentality in the national imagination. This has generated what Margaret R. Somers terms "the contractualization of citizenship" (2008, 2), which "effectively collapses the boundaries that protect the public sphere and civil society from market penetration, [hence] distort[ing] the meaning of citizenship from that of shared fate among equals to that of conditional privilege" (2–3). Clearly, the subjecting of citizenship to the market forces of supply and demand, and to the constraints of exigency, is problematic.

In this chapter, I will perform a close reading of a literary text that challenges dominant practices of securitization and border control in U.S. migration law by placing the South Asian diasporic body—variously the Nonresident Indian (NRI) or the H-1B visa[6] worker, the undocumented migrant, the refugee, and the asylum seeker—at the center of its narrative and by deconstructing the stereotypical assumptions, generalizations, and categorizations that plague the immigrant experience. *Passport Photos* (2000), by New York–based Indian writer Amitava Kumar, is a multigenre work of literary

fiction, theory, poetry, popular journalism, cultural criticism, and photography organized in the structure of a passport that constitutes at once "a report on the immigrant condition" and a "search for a new poetics and politics of diasporic protest" (x). Through the use of irony, satire, mimicry, political invective, hybridity, and ambivalence, *Passport Photos* contests the theories of "hard" and "soft" borders in the form of national measures of identity management and securitization that have led to the regulation of the flow of human bodies that are marked as disqualified, dissident, or risky across national borders. Kumar's book thus represents a postcolonial counter-discourse, an act of "writing back" (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 1989); it constitutes the migrant's critical intervention into national discourses of identity management and securitization that dominate laws on immigration and naturalization in the United States. In particular, it explores the sites of resistance and slippage where "the information does not fit on the dotted line," where "the category, as with the question of nationality, splits," where "the rich ambiguities of a personal or cultural history . . . resist a plain reply or . . . demand a complex though unequivocal response" (xi).

DISQUALIFIED BODIES, SECURITIZATION, AND "IDENTITY MANAGEMENT"

The cover visual of Amitava Kumar's *Passport Photos* is a photograph depicting a woman of Indian or Pakistani origin posing for the camera, holding a toy model of the Statue of Liberty in her right hand in such a way that the photographer (Kumar himself) is able to capture both the model and the real Statue of Liberty behind the woman. The woman and the miniature tourist souvenir she is holding are captured in sharp relief, whereas the Statue of Liberty in the background on Liberty Island is blurred in comparison. In the larger inset of the photograph reproduced in the bottom half of the back cover, it is the miniature tourist souvenir that is enlarged, not the real Statue of Liberty. As one of the most prominent American icons, the Statue of Liberty is a colossal national symbol of the American ideals of freedom from oppression, friendship between nations, liberty,[7] democracy, equality, and justice. Together with Emma Lazarus's poem "The New Colossus," which was engraved on a bronze tablet and mounted inside the pedestal of the statue in 1903, the "Mother of Exiles," or Lady Liberty, as she is colloquially known, represents the United States as a nation of migrants, a land of opportunity for those seeking better lives.

The discrepancy between the American Dream and its "reality" is perhaps one of the most common of tropes in twentieth-century migrant literature. What the cover of Kumar's *Passport Photos* depicts, however, which is also conveyed in the woman's slightly tired, neutral facial expression as she poses for the snapshot, is the diminution of the Statue of Liberty to a cheap, mass-produced and mass-marketed commodity, a tacky tourist souvenir (probably made in China) that diminishes the original statue's grand scale as well as what it represents. The book cover also represents an ironic inversion of the lines "Give me your tired, your poor, / Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free" that the Statue of Liberty metaphorically "speaks" to the immigrants who encounter it as the first American landmark they set their eyes on. The cheap, tacky, pocket-sized Statue of Liberty souvenir thus symbolizes the marketing and contractualization of U.S. citizenship; the latter, and its accompanying American Dream, can be bought and sold, exported within the workings of a neoliberal market economy.

One last detail about the visual depicted on the book's cover is striking—there is a square with a thin white border drawn roughly over the woman's face, much like the kind that a digital camera's face-recognition software automatically positions over faces in portrait photographs. This gestures toward the central project of Kumar's book. *Passport Photos* was published in 2000, before the events of 9/11; yet it anticipates the heightened national security measures that event prompted, including processes of identity management and biometric authentication as well as a more restrictive tightening of U.S. immigrant law and policies.[8]

Parodying the information documented about an individual in a U.S. passport, *Passport Photos* is divided into nine chapters titled "Language," "Photograph," "Name," "Place of Birth," "Date of Birth," "Profession," "Nationality," "Sex," and "Identifying Marks." Each of these titles provides a thematic "trigger" for Kumar's critical reflections in that particular chapter, which center around how each one of these terms reflects existing power structures that, for the migrant, are a remnant of colonial histories and a reminder of neo-imperial practices in the present day. The first chapter, "Language," begins with the following passage:

> My passport provides no information about my language. It simply presumes I have one. If the immigration officer asks me a question—his voice, if he's speaking English, deliberately slow, and

> louder than usual—I do not, of course, expect him to be terribly concerned about the nature of language and its entanglement with the very roots of my being. And yet it is in language that all immigrants are defined and in which we all struggle for an identity. That is how I understand the postcolonial writer's declaration about the use of a language like English that came to us from the colonizer. (2000, 17)

Centrally, the chapter is a deliberation on how the word *passport* has different functions in different linguistic cultures. "For those who live in affluent countries," Kumar observes, "the passport is of use for international travel in connection with business or vacations." "In poorer nations of the world," he continues, noting the disparity, "its necessity is tied to the need for finding employment, mainly in the West" (2000, 20). The opening chapter of *Passport Photos* thus conveys the duality of the passport: it is a document that provides its bearer with access and entitlement yet at the same time represents the hegemonic structures of exclusion that marginalize precarious subjects. As Kumar encapsulates, "[If], on the one hand, the meanings of words like passport and visa are tied to dreams and fantasies, they are also, on the other, inextricably woven into the fabric of power and social prejudice" (21).

The first chapter of *Passport Photos* also cites various examples from other postcolonial writings that "return us to language as the terrain on which difference is constructed or resisted" (2000, 23). These include Sri Lankan Canadian Krisantha Sri Bhaggiyadatta's *Aay Wha' Kinda Indian Arr U?* (1997), a book of poems with a cassette featuring a forty-minute soundscape of epic poetry interwoven with South Asian and North American Indigenous music that satirically asks what it "means" to be a South Asian living on First Nations' land in Canada. Kumar's chapter quotes the following excerpt from Bhaggiyadatta's poem:

> am i the Indian wearing salwar or a sari, a turban or a pottu
> on the subway platform at 10 p.m. . . .
> am i the self-sacrificing monogamous Sita
> or am i the strong-willed and passionate
> revengeful polyandrous Draupadi . . .
> or am i the "we shoulda met earlier" Usha of Urvashi

am i the Indian who must submit to virginity tests
from immigration's con/insultants?
am i the sponsored Indian whose husband owns her
for ten years or else . . . (22–23)

These questions voice the different stereotypical categorizations of the female Indian migrant subject as seen through Western/Canadian eyes. These cultural stereotypes are reinforced by visual markers of difference such as the wearing of a salwar kameez, a sari, a turban or pottu, which makes the Indian migrant all the more conspicuous on the subway platform. The female speaker of Bhaggiyadatta's poem satirically challenges these stereotypes of "high" and "low" Hindu culture: the roles of courageous women from the Hindu Sanskrit epics, the *Ramayana* (that of the "self-sacrificing monogamous Sita"), and the *Mahābhārata* (the "strong-willed and passionate / revengeful and polyandrous Draupadi"), but also the vivacious character of Usha/Urvashi (played by Bollywood actress Smita Patil) in the film *Bhumika*, who tells her hunky costar Rajan, "We shoulda met earlier."

The opening chapter of *Passport Photos* thus draws on personal anecdotes[9] as well as quotes from works by migrant and postcolonial scholars, writers, and activists including Salman Rushdie, Upamanyu Chatterjee, Pankaj Mishra, Homi Bhabha, Guillermo Gómez-Peña, and Alfred Arteaga. Kumar also inserts his own photographs that depict how governmental policies on migration are accountable for discriminatory practices along lines of linguistic, cultural, and class differences. For instance, one of Kumar's photographs features a sign at the U.S.-Mexico border that depicts an immigrant family "illegally" crossing the border, presumably from Mexico into the United States. The sign reads "Caution" in English but "Prohibido" (not "Caución") in Spanish, hence concurrently targeting the two linguistic groups with two very different messages—Americans should be wary of "illegal" Mexican migrants trying to cross the border, and Mexicans should know that entering the United States "illegally" without proper documentation is prohibited. How can such processes of discrimination be reversed, Kumar asks, such that the English language become a tool of "creative appropriation" instead of "an instrument of cultural domination" (2000, 25)? Kumar also wryly comments on the hypocrisy surrounding second-language acquisition for native English speakers and the speaking of the non-English mother tongue for migrants in the United States—"[T]he class bias in North American

society . . . promotes bilingualism in the upper class but frowns on it when it becomes an aspect of lower-class life" (32). Citing two lines from Chicano performance artist, poet, and activist Guillermo Gómez-Peña's performance poem "Border Brujo" from the series *Documented/ Undocumented,* "I speak in English therefore you listen / I speak in English therefore I hate you,"[10] Kumar addresses the significance of language in the political undertaking of decolonization as well as its role in constructions of diasporic identity. Taking up Gómez-Peña's critical inquiry of how the English language can be turned around, wielded by the formerly colonized in the country of the colonizer, Kumar explores how it can be transformed from a "racial weapon in immigration" (32) into a "weapon of protest" (25) that contests the lines of discrimination and exclusion that immigrants and noncitizens face within a North American context.

The second chapter in Kumar's book, titled "Photograph," is an extended mediation on the passport photograph that serves the purposes of state regulation and immigration control. When *Passport Photos* was published in 2000, the United States had yet to introduce biometric or e-passports,[11] whereby a chip in the passport would contain information such as the photograph and personal information of the passport holder. Nevertheless, Kumar's book ironically anticipates several of the security and antifraud measures that the United States would adopt in the aftermath of 9/11, including the issuing of "high-tech counterfeit-resistant 'green card[s]'" that use "holographs, embedded photographs, thumbprints, and a wealth of electronic data making it easier for employers and law enforcement officers to tell whether an immigrant is entitled to live and work in the United States" (2000, 39). These security measures are, Kumar writes, part of a larger system of governmentality that utilizes "a technology that turns aliens . . . into lawbreakers, if not also terrorists" (40).[12]

As Benjamin Muller has convincingly argued in his article on identity management, "[B]iometric technologies are employed to conceal and advance the heightened exclusionary and restrictive practices of contemporary securitized citizenship." Muller contends that the introduction of biometric technologies reflects a "continued obsession with the preservation and regulation/restriction of specific rights and entitlements" (2004, 279) that has dramatically altered existing notions of political agency and citizenship politics. This paradigm shift from a politics of citizenship to one of identity management, Muller claims, effectively shifts the emphasis from notions of agency

and political membership to the issue of *authorization* and questions of who should (and should not) have access to the rights of citizenship, which becomes a contract and contractualized:

> Identity management vis-à-vis biometrics attempts to transform citizenship into a quest for verifying/authenticating "identity" for the purpose of access to rights, bodies, spaces, . . . thus (purportedly) stripping away the cultural and ethnic attributes of citizenship. By concealing such matters in the technological and scientific discourses of biometrics, the ethnic/racial characteristics of contemporary citizenship practice . . . are stripped away. Although knowledge of one's identity is critical, the question of "authorizing access," and thus, authenticating, becomes much greater in this epoch of "homeland security" and "domestic terrorists." (280)

The reduction of the citizen to a set of biometric data for the sake of ease in verifying and authenticating access to the rights and spaces of national citizenship reflects a larger stripping away, by practices of immigration and border control, of not only an individual's cultural and ethnic attributes but also the components of emotion and affect. As Lily Cho maintains in her essay "Citizenship, Diaspora and the Bonds of Affect: The Passport Photograph," the foreclosure of emotion in a biometrical passport photograph, where the subject, according to the U.S. Department of State's guidelines for passport photos, must have "a neutral facial expression and both eyes open,"[13] "expose[s] a citizen-subject caught and composed for identification purposes" (2009, 276). This "neutrality" of expression in the case of the diasporic subject's passport photograph is significant, Cho asserts, because "[t]he diasporic subject's difference challenges the homogenizing stipulations of national citizenship and illuminates *the contradictions of citizenship*. These are *contradictions that turn on feeling*. Citizenship is both bonded by affect and, in the instance of its visual manifestation through the passport photograph, hindered by it. The injunction against emotion in passport photos projects a fantasy of a passive, transparent, and readable national subject" (279; my emphasis).

It is this fantasy of the "passive, transparent, and readable national subject" that is shattered in the second chapter of Amitava Kumar's *Passport Photos*. Deconstructing the "passivity" and "legibility" of the biometric passport photograph, Kumar foregrounds the representation of the racialized subject,

which opens up a space of contradiction, overidentification, misrecognition, and interpellation. He writes, "[E]specially in a postcolonial context, an image will have to be seen as surrounded by other images, other words, and always, other worlds." The protocols of the passport photograph, its insistence on a "neutral" expression, is thus also a means of homogenization, of stripping the citizen-subject of her or his "home" context upon entrance into a foreign country. Challenging this enforced homogeneity and neutralization, Kumar calls for a reading of the immigrant's passport photograph as part of a larger system of "personal, political, economic, dramatic, everyday and historic"[14] components that "interrupt the authoritative discourse" (2000, 47) of securitization by the state and its classification, categorization, and disqualification of migrant bodies.

The subsequent chapters of *Passport Photos*, titled "Name," Place of Birth," and "Date of Birth," continue the author's search for a new poetics and politics of diaspora by deconstructing the triangulation between name, origin/place of birth, and identity: "In a very clear sense, the place of birth is a site, of memory, desire, what you will. It also becomes a site always under construction, seeking scrutiny and revision. . . . But there are also other questions, because there's always an elsewhere. That elsewhere recalls what has not been named and is, sometimes, unnamable." In order to illustrate the concept that "home" (place of birth) need not necessarily be the site of cultural or ancestral origin, which is, instead, deferred to an unnamable and unknown "elsewhere," Kumar uses the example of the descendants of Indian indentured laborers born in Trinidad. These Indo-Trinidadians perceive "in a particular vision of India their origin, their place of birth" (2000, 99), Kumar argues, yet this India is effectively an "imaginary homeland" (Rushdie 1991) constructed in the diasporic imagination. In other words, Kumar contends, although most Indo-Trinidadians identify as Indian and work to preserve "good Indian values," India is unfamiliar territory to them, being, in most cases, a land they have never set foot on.[15] In this sense, one cannot assume a direct relationship between one's place of birth and one's cultural identity.

Kumar cites another example of the complex relationship between the notions of "origin" and "identity" in the chapter "Date of Birth," namely, the artificial creation of the two distinct and separate nations of India and Pakistan in the historical event of Partition in 1947, which marked the end of British rule on the Indian subcontinent. As Kumar points out, Partition was not unequivocally a cause for celebration, nor did it represent the immediate

end of colonialism on the Indian subcontinent or the formation of two discrete national identities overnight. Rather, the enforced geographical division of the provinces of Punjab and Bengal led to the creation of ethnic and religious minority groups and large-scale displacement as well as death, rape, riots, and looting. Some 1 million people were killed and 10 to 15 million were forced to leave their homes as refugees. As Yasmin Khan has pointed out, as one of the first events of decolonization in the twentieth century, Partition was also one of the bloodiest (2007, 6). In line with Khan and other scholars who argue for a more expansive critical assessment of Partition that does not fetishize or monumentalize it as a "singular, painful event," therefore, Kumar argues for "a different process of remembering" (2000, 115), one that understands Partition as the culmination of a longer historical and sociopolitical trajectory of Indian nationalism and ideological divides as well as religious and communal conflicts on the subcontinent. Acknowledging that Partition played a key role in the requisite creation of Indian and Pakistani national identities that were carved out diametrically, in definition *against* each other (Khan 2007, 9), Kumar contends that the "problem" of the postcolonial citizen is "not so much being unable to choose between two homelands," between two nation-states, as "being expected to choose *only one*" (2000, 117; my emphasis). As Khan puts it, "[I]ndividuals were caught between the pull of two opposing nationalisms and had their citizenship settled or fixed as Indian or Pakistani" (2007, 10).

Those who sought to overcome or transcend this binary opposition by migrating to the West, especially to the United Kingdom and the United States, in the second half of the twentieth century are classified by the Indian government under the acronym NRI, or "Non-Resident Indian."[16] NRIs, who are permanently settled and residing outside India (excluding Pakistan and Bangladesh) for the purposes of education, employment, or because of family ties, have been eligible for Overseas Citizenship of India (OCI) since 2005.[17] OCI card holders do not, however, acquire the benefits of dual citizenship because of restrictions in India that include exclusion from the right to vote, from holding constitutional or legislative positions in the Indian government, from employment in the government of India, and from acquiring agricultural or plantation properties in India. OCI card holders also do not obtain an Indian passport.

Kumar's *Passport Photos* was published before the introduction of the Overseas Citizenship of India scheme, and hence the book does not address

the widespread criticism that has been leveled at this system.[18] It does, however, criticize the designation of the NRI as "a nominational type that was invented by the government of India to lure the capital of affluent Indians living abroad, mostly in the U.S. and the U.K." (2000, 131). Kumar notes that NRIs are subject to different income taxation laws than resident Indians, and are also conferred tax privileges and given cheaper, refundable airline tickets when they are on a visit "home" (2000, 117). Accordingly, the sixth chapter in *Passport Photos*, titled "Profession," contains a poem by Kumar titled "N.R.I.," wherein the speaker, himself a nonresident Indian in the United States, struggles with the definition of the term. The poem clearly takes to task and critiques the development of a class of privileged Indian elites abroad, which has led to an increasing discrepancy between the lives of two categories of NRIs: on the one hand, "those Indian women who linger / outside the toilets in Heathrow airport / with their brushes and brooms" (132) and, on the other, those "watching Hindi film-videos / in their bedrooms in London and Washington D.C. / their beds afloat in a sea of Scotch" (133). NRIs who fall into the first group, Kumar contends, are "stigmatized even while—or rather, *because*—[they] serve, through [their] labor, the ends of progress and the preservation of the status quo for the affluent mainstream" (137). It is this group of NRIs whose precarious employment renders them disenfranchised migrants in the host country.

Kumar expresses his solidarity with these immigrants in a long poem that he sets in the American embassy of Calcutta and dedicates to the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS). The speaker is an Indian man being interviewed by the INS official because he has submitted a H-1B work visa application. The poem contains various tongue-in-cheek responses to the questions asked by the immigration officer during the interview.

> "Do you intend to overthrow
> the government of the United States
> by force or fraud?"
> An old man who wants to visit
> a son in New Jersey
> wants me to help him
> with this question on the form.
> A friend tells me later of someone
> Who believing it was an either/or question

Tried to play it safe and opted
For the overthrow of the government
By fraud. (2000, 146)

This ironic humor deepens into a more serious critique and denunciation, in the second section of the poem, of the procedures of identity management and securitization to which the intending migrant is subject. Kumar clearly expresses his censure of the system in the sequence he relates wherein the visa applicant is asked the question, "Did you, the first time you went there, intend to come back?" The speaker's reply to the question is "Wait a minute . . . did you get a visa when you first went to the moon? Fuck the moon, / tell me about Vietnam. Just how precise / were your plans there, you asshole?" (147). The speaker's outrage at the arrogance and stereotypical assumptions of the presumably white U.S. official in the American embassy in this episode anticipates Kumar's own critique, in the next chapter of *Passport Photos*, of the tendency in the West to espouse simplistic and generalized categorizations of South Asian and Middle Eastern countries as misogynist and home to "repressive" cultures.

In the chapter titled "Sex," therefore, Kumar criticizes "the U.S. media's complete and arrogant separation of India from the West as a place where women are mistreated." "Among a host of other things," he writes, "what I find appalling is the repression of the complicity between oppressive, dominant forces in India and the U.S. Let's ask, for example, how U.S. multinationals like General Electric, with their marketing of ultrasound devices, profited from the heinous social practices in India. But the pious head-shaking by the CBS commentator ignores such complexities" (2000, 190). Kumar's thus criticizes American commercial broadcast networks such as CBS's reproduction of "neo-Orientalist Western imaginaries" (192–93) because they effectively mass-market cultural and ethnic differences as a commodity. It is not, however, only the U.S. media that is accountable for such actions but also, occasionally, expatriate Indian artists, too. Kumar notes, for instance, the extensive perpetuation of exoticized cultural stereotypes in the North American public imagination, critiquing Indian Canadian film director Mira Nair's otherwise bold and daring film *Fire*[19] for its "complicity with a neo-Orientalist paradigm of a woman on fire" and its problematic reproducing of a "monumentalized, mythical past" that is rendered in the film's opening framing shot of the Taj Mahal. In his critical assessment of the

film's indiscriminating mimetic representation of "the India familiar to the Western media-watching eye" (193), Kumar proposes an alternative perspective that challenges such cultural stereotypes. Engaging the question of viewership, he suggests reading the film through the gaze of an Indian audience, an audience that will not fall into the "trap" of consuming difference in an act tantamount to voyeurism. This shift in perspective, Kumar argues, opens up "a more enabling discussion of the way the film helps us think through the issues of cultural production freed from narrower identity politics" (194).

It is this attempt to sidestep "the limits and pitfalls of easy sympathy" (2000, 193) engendered by a narrow identity politics that motivates Kumar's reflections in the last chapter of *Passport Photos*, titled "Identifying Marks." In particular, Kumar seeks to break two cultural stereotypes that flourish in the American popular imagination: first, that of the hardworking, thrifty Indian migrant on an H-1B visa and, second, as the Western gaze travels East, the figure of the veiled Muslim woman. In response to the *Washington Post*'s headline proclaiming that "Indians outnumber other applicants for H-1B visas," Kumar, who himself initially traveled to the United States on this visa, reminds the reader that workers on H-1B visas are paid lower wages less than their American counterparts and often have to accept precarious conditions of employment. Writing of the "economy of transience and dislocation" and the precarious "conditions of earning, mobility and return" (200) in which the H-1B migrant is entrenched, this final chapter of *Passport Photos* challenges the stereotypical depictions of South Asian migrants in the United State as the diligent, self-sacrificing, and disciplined "model minority" (Petersen 1966).[20] Seeking instead to trace "the identifying marks of Indians in the white imaginary" back to historical perceptions of "Indianness" (2000, 198), Kumar recalls the exclusion of South Asian migrants in the United States for more than half of the twentieth century,[21] one premised on the discriminatory racialization of these groups as "non-white" (197).[22]

In Kumar's opinion, it is the same principle of the West's overriding inability to deal with difference, and hence its exclusion of the "Other," that presides over the controversy over the figure of the veiled Muslim woman, or what is often referred to in Anglo-American contexts as the "headscarf debate." In Canada, a regulation requires Muslim women who observe the custom of wearing the burqa and niqab to remove them before taking the oath of citizenship. According to a rule from 2011, citizenship judges "need to be able to ensure individuals are actually reciting the oath."[23] There is

no similar niqab or burqa ban in the United States because this would be deemed unconstitutional according to the First Amendment, which protects the right to freedom of religion and freedom of expression. Nevertheless, the irony is that the dominant perspective in the West is that the burqa and niqab are themselves the very symbols of masculine oppression and thus a denial of the woman's freedom of expression. In an attempt to cast the debate in a different light, Kumar asks, "What would it mean . . . to view the veil as a sign of unstable [rather than fixed] identity—and, by implication, the *feminine* as engaged in the struggle, a gendered struggle, within the postcolonial context but also between the East and the West?" Maintaining that prevailing Western perceptions of the veil as a symbol of patriarchal oppression effectively oversimplify the complexity of the issue, Kumar cites feminist writer Samira Haj's position in the debate: "the emphasis on Islam and tradition as the source of women's oppression results in a reductive, ahistorical view of women" (2000, 206). In a similar vein, Kumar suggests that instead of viewing the burqa as "a fixed mark of identification" (207), it can be regarded as "a field of meaning marked by varieties of conflict [where] gendered protest overlaps with other struggles" (207–8). "The veil," Kumar advances, "invites discussion as a sign, and hence its status as being open to contrary readings and caught in a struggle over history" (208).[24] Centrally, Kumar aligns himself with filmmaker, feminist, and postcolonial theorist Trinh T. Minh-ha's critical position on the issue: "If the act of unveiling has a liberating potential, so does the act of veiling. It all depends on the context in which such act is carried out, or more precisely, on how and where women see dominance . . . when they decide to keep or put on the veil they once took off they might do so to re-appropriate their space or to claim a new difference in defiance of genderless, hegemonic, centered standardization" (209, quoting Minh-ha 1988).

Similarly, *Passport Photos* encourages the reader to reflect on migrant acts as "transformative performances across a range of social sites" (2000, 225), as political interjections and interventions that disrupt, fracture, and call into crisis established definitions and understandings of citizenship, national identity, community, and belonging. The book is an attempt to engage with the complex reality of the migrant experience, of diasporic lives that are "shaped in the spaces between the pure appeals of home and adopted nation" (228) as well as an argument for "the possibilities of diasporic culture . . . that resist national wills and narrowly nationalist identities" (229).

It is this last call that constructs the alternative frame of reference posited by Kumar's book, one that demands not only a postcolonial but also a post-*national* reconfiguration of existing cultural narratives based on conventional understandings of the nation. These alternate paradigms demand both a destabilization of national frameworks and a critical reflection on the historical and contemporary processes of exclusion that reinforce "hard" and "soft" borders of citizenship and migration control. In this respect, Kumar's *Passport Photos* takes up Seyla Benhabib's call to, on the one hand, scrutinize the "practices and institutions regulating access to and exit from political membership" and their "rituals of entry, access, belonging and privilege" while, on the other, also considering how new forms of "disaggregated or unbundled" (2004, 1) citizenship[25] can decouple the ties between citizenship and nationality. It is these new forms of disaggregated citizenship that constitute new modalities of membership in an era of globalizing processes and mass migration, reflecting how identities are increasingly "shift[ing] and fractur[ing]" as "the relation of national identity to religious, gender, class, and ethnic identities blurs and re-forms" (Kerber 2009, 108).

By placing the various incarnations of the Indian migrant—the different classes of NRI, the diasporic person of Indian origin (PIO), the undocumented migrant, the refugee, and the asylum seeker—at the center of its multigeneric narrative, Amitava Kumar's *Passport Photos* thus proposes an alternative critical framework for political life that centers around interdependence, instability, and precariousness. The book acknowledges the importance of an "ethics of narration" that emphasizes accountability and is attuned to the conditions of precariousness, injurability, and vulnerability that migrants face. Centrally, the book raises the crucial question of how "those outside the nation—especially the members of a racialized diaspora—go about rewriting the nation" (2000, 161) or how the spaces of the nation are refashioned and reinscribed by migrant subjectivity. As the central figure in an age of postcolonial diaspora, Kumar argues, the immigrant demands a revision of established neoliberal Western understandings of nation, national identity, and citizenship. It is also high time, Kumar asserts, to challenge stereotypical racialized conceptions of migrants.

As a cross-generic literary work that deconstructs the structure and contents of the official passport, Amitava Kumar's *Passport Photos* documents the *un*official "experience of immigration—its pain as well as its silences

and contradictions," narrating the "quotidian lives and struggles that animate such existences" (2000, 166). Recalling the following words by Edward Said from *After the Last Sky*, Amitava Kumar's *Passport Photos*, too, embraces unconventional, hybrid, fragmentary forms of essayistic and discursive expression as part of a larger politics and poetics of diaspora: "Since the main features of our present existence are dispossession, dispersion, and yet also a kind of power incommensurate with our stateless exile, I believe that essentially unconventional, hybrid, and fragmentary forms of expression should be used to represent us" (Said 1986, 6). By combining fictional prose and poetry, personal anecdotes, theory, postcolonial critique, photographs, newspaper commentaries, and citations from the works of other literary and cultural critics, Kumar calls into question the authorities of the passport as a legal document and of "official" discourses and sanctions on immigration. To this end, *Passport Photos* represents not only a form of postcolonial activism in the genre of literature but also a diasporic articulation of the "fragmentary ways [in which] the nation is being reinvented" (168). Ultimately, Kumar's composite analysis of the condition of diasporic existence and the physical and mental concepts of home/homeland not only captures the indeterminacies, ambiguities, and contradictions that prevail in the spaces of the nation, it also deconstructs nation-based paradigms of political membership and belonging by critiquing the various forms of social exclusion, categorization, authentication, neutralization, and homogenization to which the nonnational migrant is subjected. By placing this figure of the migrant at the center, Kumar's narrative foregrounds the dynamic tensions produced by those who collectively resist and question (and thus call for a rethinking of) processes of assimilation to conventional practices of U.S. citizenship. These acts of contestation not only counter the ways in which modes of exclusion, marginalization, identification, securitization, and control have come to dominate the discursive framing, management, and allocation of spaces within the nation; they also suggest new forms of alter-national identities and processes of becoming that are embodied by an affective, racialized politics of diaspora. It is this poetics and politics of diasporic protest that calls into question the very structures of legalization, legitimization, and normalization that undergird contemporary registers of political membership and citizenship in the United States.

and exploited subaltern subjects" (234), be they the Indigenous Mi'kmaq, freed slaves, or socioeconomically disadvantaged black communities.

CHAPTER 6

1. The main difference between refugee and asylum status is as follows: in the United States, a refugee denotes a person who applies for refugee protection status from *outside* the United States. Once *physically present in the country*, a refugee (and her or his spouse and children) may be eligible for asylum. See www.uscis.gov/humanitarian/refugees-asylum. In Canada, the distinction is slightly more complex as there are two "classes" of "resettlement *from outside Canada*"—the "convention refugee abroad class" and "country of asylum class." The first denotes people currently outside of their home country who "*cannot return there* due to a well-founded fear of persecution based on race, religion, political opinion, nationality, or membership in a particular social group, such as women or people with a particular sexual orientation." The second denotes people who are "outside of their home country or the country where they normally live and have been, *and continue to be*, seriously and personally affected by civil war or armed conflict, or have suffered massive violations of human rights." The applications for refugee protection by people who are already *physically within* Canada are also classified as asylum claims. See www.cic.gc.ca/english/refugees/inside/index.asp.
2. The figure stands at 51.2 million and comprises 16.7 million refugees, 33.3 million internally displaced persons, and 1.2 million asylum seekers. If these 51.2 million people were to come together to form a nation, it would be the twenty-sixth largest in the world. See "UNHCR Global Trends," unhcr.org.au/unhcr/images/Global%20Trends%202013.pdf.
3. Agamben's comment recalls Salman Rushdie's contention in *Imaginary Homelands* that "the migrant is, perhaps, the central or defining figure of the twentieth century" (1991, 277). I will discuss Rushdie's comment later.
4. The twentieth century, according to Agamben, witnessed "the inexorable decline of the nation-state and the general corrosion of traditional legal-political categories" (1995, 114).
5. In *Soft Borders: Rethinking Sovereignty and Democracy*, Julie Mostov argues that the soft border approach "explicitly rejects the hard border approach of ethno-nationalism and is suspicious of nationalist arguments for hardening borders in the name of domestic and social solidarity [and] it does not deny the importance of associative obligations or special relationships and commitments among members of particular groups" (2008, 5). Mostov continues

that the "soft border argument envisions that rights and responsibilities of citizenship ought to be enjoyed by all people wherever they live and work on equal terms with others within (multilevel) political associations. Under these conditions, movement across borders would be unconstrained by nationality of ethnicity" (6).

6. The H-1B visa is a nonimmigrant visa that allows U.S. employers to temporarily employ foreign workers in specialty professions. H-1B visa holders must possess at least a bachelor's degree or its equivalent. They can apply for and obtain permanent residency (a green card) while still holders of the visa and are allowed to bring immediate family members (spouse and children under twenty-one) to the United States with them. When H-1B workers travel outside of the United States, they have to get a visa stamped in their passport for reentry unless they have already done so.
7. The statue's full name was originally Liberty Enlightening the World or, in the French, "La Liberté éclairant le monde."
8. These enhanced security measures included the introduction of the Patriot Act (Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism) of 2001, the Homeland Security Act of 2002, the Real ID Act of 2005, and increased detentions, deportations, heightened screening, and controls by Border Patrol along the U.S.-Mexican border. Anne McNevin provides food for thought when she observes in *Contesting Citizenship*, "According to the Department of Homeland Security, the number of immigrants living in the United States without authorization increased by 27 percent between 2000 and 2009, bringing the total number of irregular migrants close to eleven million. This increase occurred despite the dramatic upscaling of border-patrol agencies, budgets, operations, and technologies during the 1990s" (2011, 119). McNevin argues that the effect of increased border policing is not so much to counter the trend of migration flows across the border from Mexico to the United States but "to change the status of migrant workers to 'illegal immigrants' and to intensify the surveillance to which they are subject" (123).
9. One of them includes an ironic rendition of the common experience Indian migrants face while humorously making fun of the (presumably white) American's ignorance. Kumar writes, "When you turn to me in the bus or the plane and talk to me—*if* you talk to me—you might comment, trying to be kind, 'Your English is very good.' If I am feeling relaxed, and the burden of the permanent chip on my shoulder seems light, I will smile and say, 'Thank you' (I never add, 'So is yours'). Perhaps I will say, 'Unfortunately, the

credit goes to imperialism. The British, you know . . .' (Once a fellow traveler widened her eyes and asked, 'The British still rule over *India*?'") (2000, 23).

10. The accompanying stage direction for reading these lines aloud are "with thick Mexican accent, pointing at specific audience members." See Gómez-Peña 1991, 52.
11. This was initiated later by the Enhanced Border Security and Visa Entry Reform Act of 2002.
12. Kumar's argument calls to mind Alice Edwards and Carla Ferstman's concise observation in "Humanizing Non-citizens: The Convergence of Human Rights and Human Security" that in security paradigms where "notions of sovereignty, border control and citizenship are of primary importance, . . . the non-citizen is usually the first to be excluded, neglected or treated with suspicion as threats to the security of the state surface" (2010, 4).
13. See the U.S. Department of State's online guidelines for passport photographs, travel.state.gov/passport/pptphotoreq/pptphotoreq_5333.html.
14. This is a direct quote from John Berger's influential essay "Uses of Photography" (1978) in *About Looking* (1980, 63).
15. I will elaborate on the depiction of this topic in Shani Mootoo's novel *Valmiki's Daughter* in chapter 8.
16. The term NRI is also jokingly interpreted as "Neo Rich Indian," "Newly Respected Indian," and "Never Return to India." According to the Foreign Exchange Management Act (FEMA) of India, an NRI is defined as "a person resident outside India who is either a citizen of India or is a person of Indian origin (PIO)." PIOs are persons of Indian ancestry who may or may not be Indian citizens. See the Reserve Bank of India's Notification No. 5/2000-RB (dealing with various kinds of bank accounts) for the full definition of NRI and PIO: rbi.org.in/scripts/BS_FemaNotifications.aspx?Id=159.
17. For an empirical analysis of the impact of the Overseas Citizen of India scheme on applications for naturalization in the United States by persons of Indian origin, see Naujoks 2012. Naujoks argues that the introduction of the OCI scheme has led to higher naturalization rates (and hence acquisition of American citizenship) among Indian immigrants to the United States.
18. One common critique is that the OCI card is not a substitute for an Indian passport. Because of this grievance, many holders of the OCI card have complained that this document does not effectively confer "dual citizenship" despite the use of the term *citizen* in its designation.
19. The film depicts a lesbian relationship between Radha and Sita that outraged Hindu fundamentalists in India who attacked some of the movie theaters on

its opening day. The movie was banned in India and Pakistan on the grounds of religious insensitivity and the depiction of lesbian desire.

20. Sociologist William Petersen coined the term *model minority* in a *New York Times Magazine* article in 1966 to describe Asian Americans as ethnic minorities who, despite marginalization, had achieved considerable personal and financial success in the United States. Petersen's description of Japanese Americans' strong work ethics and family values is akin to the qualities commonly ascribed to the Indian "model minority." As Kumar notes, Shashi Tharoor has also described these qualities in his book *India: From Midnight to Millennium* as characteristic of dominant perceptions in the West of the nonresident Indian.
21. Kumar cites, for example, the Bhagat Singh Thind case: in 1923, an Indian World War I veteran's appeal for U.S. citizenship was turned down by the Supreme Court, which ruled that Indians were not "Caucasian" and hence not eligible for citizenship (2000, 197).
22. The exclusion of and denial of citizenship to Asian migrants in the United States stretches back to the Immigration Acts of 1882, 1917, 1924, and 1934, which excluded immigrants from Asia. The Immigration Act of 1917 even designated an "Asiatic Barred Zone," which was not abolished until the McCarran-Walter Act of 1952. Asian migrant quotas were not lifted in the United States until the implementation of the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965. A year later, as noted in the introduction of this study, Canada followed suit.
23. news.nationalpost.com/2011/12/12/niqabs-burkas-must-be-removed-during-citizenship-ceremonies-jason-kenney/.
24. Kumar's analysis of the headscarf debate can be read in conjunction with Seyla Benhabib's commentary on the "scarf affair" in France and Germany in the last chapter of her study "Democratic Iterations: The Local, the National, and the Global" in *The Rights of Others* (2004).
25. Benhabib proposes an alternative form of democratic, "disaggregated citizenship" whereby "individuals can develop and sustain multiple allegiances and networks across nation-state boundaries, in inter- as well as transnational contexts" (174–75).

CHAPTER 7

1. Feminist modernist scholar Jane Marcus lauds *Nightwood* for its "linguistic richness," its "abundance of puns and plays on words, its fierce allusiveness to medieval and Jacobean high and low art, and the extraordinary range of its learned reach across the history of Western culture" (1991, 163).