

Diasporic Sikh Masculinities in Ranj Dhaliwal's *Daaku* and Gautam Malkani's *Londonstani*

by

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## Abstract

This thesis will examine Sikh diasporic masculine identities in Gautam Malkani's *Londonstani* and Ranj Dhaliwal's *Daaku* and their operations as sites of critical investigation for the resignification of contemporary Sikh masculinities. In these two recent novels, Sikh diasporic masculinities are produced as young urban subcultural performances that are self-identified as *rudeboy* and gangster respectively. The naming and performance of subcultural youth identities in *Daaku* and *Londonstani* are important in that they convey the desires of young Sikh men to respond to hysteria surrounding racialized bodies in a post-9/11 moment where traditional *amritdhari* identification is no longer a viable option for survival.

The first section, entitled, *Performing Violence* discusses the operation of violence as a performative aspect of Sikh youth identity. In *Daaku* and *Londonstani*, intimacy is impossible except in the form of violence, and violence itself becomes an intimate act for young Sikh *rudeboy* and gangster masculinities.

The second section of this project, entitled, *Women/Space/Surveillance* examines how intimacy functions for young Sikh men in *Londonstani* and *Daaku*. The private comes to operate not as a space of intimacy, but as a site of state surveillance and heteronormative regulation. As such, this section examines how contemporary Sikh men construct themselves through representations of group identity that engage with homosociality because heteronormative forms of allegiance with British and Canadian nation-states are no longer viable options.

I conclude that the only intimacies that young, diasporic Sikh men can have are with each other and ultimately, they mandate betrayal in that they exceed the boundaries of both gangster masculinities and contemporary normative heterosexualities.

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## Introduction

The purpose of this project is to examine how diasporic Sikh male bodies are produced as texts that articulate colonial and post-colonial histories and stereotypes while simultaneously dismantling them. This complex process is the focus of two recent novels, Gautam Malkani's *Londonstani* (2006) and Ranj Dhaliwal's *Daaku* (2006), in which self-identified *rudeboy* and gangster Sikh diasporic masculinities are produced through urban subcultural youth performances. These identities operate as responses to violent representations of Sikh citizens in Western nation-states. The suburban settings of the novels, Hounslow, England and Surrey, Canada, respectively, have historically held fraught relationships to Sikh men. The reclamation and performance of these subcultural youth identities are important in that they convey the desires of young Sikh men to articulate themselves outside of the hysteria placed upon racialized bodies in a post-9/11 moment, in which the War on Terror has fostered "a cultural project that seeks to remake the terms of belonging, legality and otherness" (Bhattacharyya, 4). As Bhattacharyya further notes, "This is a project of the globalised era, highly mediatised, revealing the emergence of new and shifting relationships between regions, nations, and communities" (4). This thesis will examine Sikh diasporic masculine identity in *Londonstani* and *Daaku*, which operate as sites of critical investigation for the resignification of Sikh masculinities in the diaspora.

As Aaron Kahn writes in his article, "The Partition of Indian Britain," the hysteria surrounding the events of September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001 caused some young Sikh men who wore turbans to sport t-shirts which read "Don't freak, I'm a Sikh" (1). In the social and political context that *Daaku* and *Londonstani* are produced out of, traditional *amritdhari* Sikh identification is no longer a viable option for survival. Prior to September 11, 2001, South Asian youth in Britain

responded to white nationalist violence with solidarity; post-911, non-Muslim South Asians worked to distinguish themselves from being read as ambiguously brown and therefore ‘terrorist’ by using the post-partition rhetoric of their ancestors which separated Sikhs and Hindus from Muslims. It is in this climate of Western hysteria that the identity formation of young Sikh men becomes a meticulous process of incorporating and adjusting to the political climate of the present while simultaneously performing the residual past.

*Daaku* also offers a serious and harrowing portrayal of South Asian-Canadian gang violence that reproduces mainstream media stereotypes of young Sikh men through its in-depth descriptions of violence and brutality in the character Ruby, a 16-year-old boy who articulates the feeling of power associated with being a gangster:

I was building a name for myself among the Vancouver boys and I liked being recognized by some of the big-time guys. I had the look of someone with power, the whole Asian gangster image; with long hair just past my shoulder, leather jackets, gold earrings, necklaces and rings. I stood out and it brought me a feeling of being different. Here I was, this 16-year-old boy seeing fear in the eyes of men twice my age—what a feeling it was. (22)

While Dhaliwal’s depictions of young Sikh men coincide with Canadian mainstream media representations of racialized gang violence and the hysteria around young South Asian men, they also demonstrate the desires of young Sikh men to be identified with modernity (progress and capital) without erasing tumultuous ancestral pasts. Ruby is not just a gangster, but an ‘Asian’ gangster mixing Asian and Western cultural symbols. He keeps his hair long in accordance with the Sikh identifier of *kes* and wears gold jewellery, an Indian cultural marker for prosperity and wealth. Both of these juxtapose against his leather jacket which may not be an appropriate

material for Sikh cultural attire, but is an iconic symbol of belonging in Western gang masculinities. Young Sikh men are moving outside of traditional forms of Sikh masculinity that occupy the threat of being policed (such as religious dress) to urban ‘gang’ identities that hold a more acceptable reception in the post-911 West. In *Londonstani*, a hybrid language that mixes English, Urdu, Punjabi, and Hindi is deployed to mark *rudeboy* identity. As their former teacher Mr. Ashwood remarks to the *rudeboys*, “your use of English makes you lot look like you’re some kind of Asian mafia” (125).

With the Canadian and British nation-states being affected by and complicit in the US War on Terror, the American surveillance of South Asian diasporic men racialized as ambiguously ‘brown’ has also been normalized in Canadian and British cultures. As noted by Jeanne Theoharis in her horrifying account of a Muslim student’s incarceration, American surveillance strategies have including monitoring young racialized men who are “giving up cigarettes, drinking, gambling, and *urban hip-hop gangster clothes*; wearing traditional Islamic clothing; growing a beard; and becoming involved in social activism and community issues” (“My Student, the ‘Terrorist,’” emphasis mine). The style she describes is one available style for young South Asian diasporic men. Both *rudeboy* and gangster identities hybridize South Asian and Western clothing, embracing modernity. For both, urban hip hop clothing and the performance of a swagger becomes important to South Asian youth identification.

While the subject of masculinity has certainly been important in discussions on South Asian diaspora, these discussions have not met the particular conditions of contemporary Sikh masculinities. The scope of this thesis is specifically concerned with how young Sikh men respond to the complexities of post-911 identity crises by constructing themselves through performances that provide alternate identifications for diasporic youth.

This project is composed of two sections. The first section, entitled *Performing Violence* makes an argument for the operation of violence as a performative aspect of Sikh youth identity. In *Daaku* and *Londonstani*, intimacy is impossible for young Sikh men except in the form of violence, and violence itself becomes an intimate act. Such violence becomes vital in reconstituting an ancestral past that is specifically Sikh, rather than British or Canadian. *Daaku* and *Londonstani* both explore how diasporic Sikh men work to identify themselves apart from religious fundamentalisms, both Muslim and Sikh, while simultaneously identifying themselves as ‘correctly’ Sikh.

The second section of this project, entitled, *Women/Space/Surveillance* examines how intimacy functions for young Sikh men in *Londonstani* and *Daaku*. In both, the relationship that young Sikh men have with space is gendered. The private comes to operate not as a space of intimacy, but as a site of state surveillance and heteronormative regulation. Both novels depict an alternative relationship to spatiality where the roles of masculine bodies in public and private spaces get crossed. As such, this section examines how contemporary Sikh men construct themselves through representations of group (gang) identity that are homosocial because heteronormative forms of being are no longer viable options. As ambiguously raced bodies in flux, “Heteronormativity is out of reach, literally disallowed by the state, utterly untenable for these families, thus respatializing heterosexuality to the extent that it can no longer be, if it ever was, heteronormative” (Puar, 146). As such, heteronormativity as a form of desire becomes *impossible*. Heteronormative intimacies for racialized, young men are disallowed in both novels by nation-state constructions of heteronormativity. As such, Sikh youth perform alternate forms of sexuality in order to survive.

While the boundary between fictional texts and non-fictional Sikh masculinities has been



repeatedly elided in this thesis, I am reading *Daaku* and *Londonstani* as fictional social analyses that do not turn away from the discomforts of a non-fictive world. Both Dhaliwal and Malkani are deeply invested in how these fictions are taken up. As fiction is complicit in the making of social and political realities, they realize the risk of depicting young Sikh men in ways that have real ramifications for Sikh male bodies.

## Performing Violence

In *Precarious Life: The Power of Mourning and Violence*, a collection of responses to the attacks of September 11, 2001, Judith Butler asks this question, although with a different audience in mind: “How is it that radical violence becomes an option, comes to appear as the only viable option for some, under some global conditions? Against what conditions of violation do they respond? And with what resources?” (1). British imperialism has normalized violence as a part of Sikh cultural formations. With the more recent convergence of 9/11 and the 2006 London bombings, constructions of Sikh men have become further complicated with the “contemporaneous consolidation of new racial populations, a racialization of religion, implicating Arabs, Muslims, and South Asians and those mistaken for them (‘terrorist look-alikes’)” (Puar, 119). However, violence becomes normalized differently within South Asian *rudeboy* and gangster communities, in which it is both a response to a painful colonial past and a resistance to terrorist violences of the present. Moreover, *rudeboy* and gangster violences stem from a symbolic battle in the defense of nation and women, as well as over the ownership of commodities and women.

Both *Londonstani* and *Daaku* depict young Sikh men who respond to overt racism with physical violence. Violence becomes a performative act that concretizes Sikh *rudeboy* and thug identification. I begin this section by building a theoretical framework that concretizes violence as a performative act of memory reconstitution. I then examine how violence is deployed and performed for the goal of disidentifying with accusations of Muslim and Sikh fundamentalism in a post-9/11 moment where these misidentifications produce a violence of their own. Finally, I examine and compare moments in both texts where Sikh youth brutally and successfully respond to racially charged attacks; these moments, I argue, are insightful for drawing conclusions about

Sikh realities and fantasies. I argue that intimacy is impossible except in the form of violence, and that violence itself becomes an intimate act that reconstitutes an ancestral past that is specifically Sikh, rather than British or Canadian.

Where prior to the events of September 11, 2001, British South Asian youth responded to white nationalist violence with solidarity, non-Muslim male South Asians in the West have subsequently worked to distinguish themselves from being ambiguously racialized as this gets conflated with Muslim and therefore ‘terrorist.’ It is in this climate of hysteria that *rudeboy* and gangster identifications have become even more desirable. Violence becomes an important part of the solidification of *rudeboy* and thug masculinities. Central to my analysis of violence in *Daaku* and *Londonstani* is the idea that *rudeboy* and gangster identities are configured by temporally-specific ideologies such as post-911 hysteria and Islamophobia that stem from an overarching fear of unspecified bodies racialized as ‘brown.’ Memories of specific historical events such as the British colonization of India, the 1947 partition between Indian and Pakistan, and the 1984 anti-Sikh riots are used to explain these violent actions and the violence is consistently presumed to be justifiable due to colonial, neocolonial, and imperial injustices. However, violence is not a request for apologies or restitution, but an ongoing avenging process that is continually reconstituted through memory. The memories stick; violence is not seen as a process of payback or a catharsis, but a part of identity construction in a way that is about retaining and *claiming* the past because it cannot be done away with. It is in this sense that a reconstituted memory of the past and a continued and ongoing performance of its harrowing effects in the present become vital for archetypal *rudeboy* identification. Violence, then, becomes

a performance for the purposes of maintaining, enacting, and making claims to reconstitute a past that is often forgotten in the contemporary historical present.

In *Precarious Life: The Power of Mourning and Violence*, Butler advocates for a possibility outside violence: “There is the possibility of appearing impermeable, of repudiating vulnerability itself. Nothing about being socially constituted as women restrains us from simply becoming violent ourselves... But perhaps there is some other way to live such that one becomes neither affectively deaf nor mimetically violent, a way out of the circle of violence altogether” (42). However, what Butler is perhaps not taking into account is how violence is not only a response to the present, but also the past; the violences enacted by Hardjit and his *rudeboys* do not just stem out of the urgent imperialisms of the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, but also a Punjabi colonial past that invokes a different place and time, one that is outside the lives of the young *rudeboys* themselves, and has indelible effects on them, haunting their lives. Their disdain for men who refuse South Asian and South Asian diasporic music, culture, and language (what they refer to as ‘coconuts’) indicates a commitment to a temporal and spatial moment outside white British assimilation. Yet these boys are not interested in articulating orthodox religious Sikh identities. For them, religion becomes an identity to perform through commodified physical markers such as tattoos and colour-coded clothing that operate as signifiers of religious South Asian identity as well as shout outs to African-American ‘gang’ masculinities. Hardjit and his brethren refuse white British masculinities, instead allying themselves with black masculinities that enable them to form their own communities.

The support Hardjit gleans from black and Asian boys in the fight between him and his British-Pakistani Muslim rival, Tariq further indicates this desire to respond to contemporary

concerns about identity through the re-production of the Thatcher-era British history of anti-racist resistance:

It weren't just Muslims an Sikhs who'd showed up. Eddie Bishop was here, this black kid who lived near Brentford an had been tight with Hardjit since before school. He'd even brought some other guys I'd never seen before. Cos that's how big a deal Hardjit was round here: he got desis an black kids kickin round together again, just like it was back when goras still shouted the word Paki an black kids told them to watchit when they did. Wai Qwok-Ho, who was top a Hardjit's ju-jitsu class, had come down too an brought another Chinese face with him. Respect to Oriental kids, it's their turn now. Those guys are coming the way a black kids an desis, I in't lyin to you. In't nobody messes with em no more, an not just cos they kick ass at Nintendo. (99-100)

Hardjit is described as a catalyst for reproducing revolutionary moments of 1980s and 90s anti-racist solidarity. However, in this case the enemy is no longer the direct violence of white supremacy, but rather the violence that comes with being misidentified as Muslim. Sikh boys disidentify from Muslims in order to not be misidentified with them. This disidentification becomes a precise maneuver around race and embodiment. This approach towards Muslim men is not a straightforward mimicry of white racisms. Instead, they identify with a cohort of black, Asian, and (as we eventually realize at the end of *Londonstani*) white men, in ways that recall past solidarity struggles and alliances.

### *Anti-Racist Violence*

Both Ruby and Hardjit use the support of their counterparts to perform violences against legal systems through criminal acts that destabilize or ‘threaten’ the home country and aberrant white supremacies that forge new racial stereotypes. (I have qualms about articulating overt racialized violence as ‘aberrant’ but am attempting to trace the difference between the liberal subtle violences of ‘multiculturalism’ and overt forms of violence that are viewed as ‘aberrant’ or ‘spontaneous’ in the contemporary moment. A similar argument about what becomes ‘culturally specific’ and what does not is traced out in Uma Narayan’s *Death by Culture*). Within *Londonstani*, it is unclear whether overt racial slurs are actually used by a young, white boy, or whether Hardjit uses this excuse to beat him up. In *Daaku*, a young man who claims that his swastika tattoo was from his teenage years is subject to punishment by Ruby. Here, even police officers turn a blind eye and “under-the-table” violence becomes a kind of punishment for white supremacy. Overt racism is no longer acknowledged as an option for the operation of Canada as a nation-state even though it continues on an everyday level as a mechanism for the state to maintain normative whiteness. Thus, violence bestowed upon ‘excessive’ whiteness provides a means to maintain the illusion of Canada as a multicultural state that refuses racial violence. Ruby revels in the apparent permissiveness of the state while simultaneously being engaged by it. In this sense, male-male violence operates as a political maneuver that solidifies young Sikh men as excessively violent and in need of policing while also maintaining whiteness as normative.

While the reliability of the narrator is unclear in both *Londonstani* and *Daaku*, with Ruby, there follows a depth of thought about his violent response to a man with a swastika tattoo. Ruby questions the effectiveness of physical violence even though this does not alter his reaction:

I guess I'm no better than he is, but maybe he'll change his mind and stop the racism or maybe I've fuelled his anger and he's gonna hate even more. Hey, what can you do? I guess just talking to him would be the best thing and showing him how East Indians are nice, caring people would help him from his racist path. Or maybe not. All I wanna do is pound him for that swastika on his hand. (156)

Ruby is aware, but still chooses to do what seems to be a vital part of his identity. In fact, his inability to restrain himself or proceed critically becomes a part of the performance itself. Self-reflexivity disappears for Hardjit when he pounds a white boy for allegedly dissing his Mother. Restraint is not productive for *rudeboy* or gangster identification. In Ruby's case, he actively refuses non-violence as an available option. Visceral reactions to overt racism are part of how both Hardjit and Ruby maneuver themselves in order to produce themselves as über-masculine. Moreover, the coordination of such a visceral response enables the control and punishment of white supremacy. Hardjit and Ruby form their thug identities through meticulous, consciously-coordinated action that provides some level of control over how and when action occurs. The opening line of *Londonstani* starts with the linking of *rudeboy* identity to race and violence: "Serve him right he got his muthafuckin face fuck'd, shudn't b callin me a Paki, innit" (3). An intensely detailed description of Hardjit beating up the white boy who has called him 'paki' continues for ten pages. However, as we determine from the narrator later on, it is unclear if the boy said anything in the first place.

Hardjit is described as remembering partition better than his ancestors who lived through it: "Mr. Ashwood had taught us bout the bloody partition a India an Pakistan during History lessons. What we din't learn, though, was how some people who weren't even born when it happened or awake during the History lessons remembered the bloodshed better than the people

who were” (49). Jas articulates the difficulties Hardjit has in forgetting something that didn’t actually happen to him: “That’s the problem, man. How can Hardjit’ve forgot something he weren’t even around to remember in the first place?” (210). Hardjit reconstitutes the memories of his family and Asian immigrant experiences in Britain as offenses that he must avenge on those who were also not directly involved. Hardjit sees himself as a kind of guardian of the past, carrying ancestral memories of his family past into the present. Vital for this reconstitution is Hardjit’s *rudeboy* crew who function as a ‘cheering squad’ encouraging him and expressing their awe at his fighter abilities. In his requirement of an audience, Hardjit’s remonstrative procedures become spectacles for the *rudeboys*—ones that require their input. For figures like Hardjit, the ability to respond to overt offenses of the past through his identification with *rudeboy* group mentality provides an opportunity to perform his identity as well as to recreate the past. In setting up a group dynamic where they are able to coordinate their own violences, the ‘gang’ becomes a tool for navigating and negotiating political power.

Jas is not only in awe of Hardjit’s ability to violently beat up white boys but also his performance of a “designer desiness” and “linguistic prowess” (4): “For a minute, the gora’s given a time out as Hardjit stops to straighten his silver chain, keepin his metal dog tags hangin neatly in the centre a his black Dolce & Gabbana vest, slightly covering up the &. A little higher an he could’ve probly clenched the dog tags in the deep groove between his pecs” (4). The detailed attention to Hardjit’s appearance and Hardjit’s own self-reflexivity indicate Hardjit’s own investment in performing violence (beating up a boy) while dressed correctly. The violent and messy act of beating up a white boy is juxtaposed with how perfectly Hardjit’s outfit hangs on him, signaling that these two seemingly conflicting portions of the performance are both vital for *rudeboy* identity. While trying to move outside the bounds of colonial stereotyping through



his avenging of the trauma of the British colonization of India, Hardjit unknowingly occupies the position of ‘saviour’ or ‘warrior’ of his group. Jas’s precise description positions Hardjit as lustworthy both for how he is embodied (reinstating fetishistic representations of Sikh men as embodying an overt and excessive masculinity), as well as for the violence he is able to enact.

Similarly, in *Daaku*, Ruby beats up a young white boy who calls his brother ‘bunhead’—a racial slur that refers to the *pughri* that unbaptised Sikh boys often wear. Like *Londonstani*, the violence is detailed. Ruby views himself as the gatekeeper of a history of Canadian racism that must continue to be recalled:

For every punch he throws, you throw ten punches. He comes at you with a bat or a pipe or something, you demolish him with rebar or something. This world is full of racists and losers who don’t want to see anyone else advance or be successful. Like take that guy I thumped. He sees you with a nice bicycle and he sees our house. He thinks that all of this should be his because we are a bunch of immigrants to him. What he would like to think is that we were the ones who made him what he is (121).

Ruby articulates the stresses on racialized Canadian bodies. As Glenn Deer has clearly demonstrated in his work on the construction of Richmond, Canada, Asian bodies that occupy upper-class positions face a subtle form of Canadian racism that speaks to the resentment of their class status by normative, white, Canadian society. Ruby identifies and sees his role as defending his brother and the impending racisms his younger brother will have to face. Sikh martiality quickly becomes re-signified into a Canadian gangster: “‘Should I start carrying a pipe around too? In case someone tries to mess with me?’ I laugh and say, ‘No, that’s why you have me. All you have to do is call me and I’ll be there as quick as I can. I don’t see you having to get yourself

into fights though. You aren't a gangster and trust me, it's a tough world if you are'" (122). Similar to how Hardjit uses *rudeboy* identity, Ruby articulates the gangster as defending injustices toward immigrants. The criminal becomes a viable position for maintaining masculine hegemony or power while seeking to undo colonial and post-colonial violences. As such, the gangster operates out of previous stereotypes of Sikh masculinity, but circulates in a legible form in contemporary Canadian and British societies.

Being able to articulate the language of violence becomes a part of *rudeboy* identification for Jas:

But me, I hadn't added anything to either the physical or verbal abuse a the gora. To make up for my useless shitness, I decided to offer the followin carefully crafted comment: 'Yeh, bredren, knock his fuckin teeth out. Bruck his fuckin face. Kill his fuckin... well, his fuckin, you know, him. Kill him'...My fledgling *rudeboy* reputation redeemed, I was now ready to get the fuck away from there.

(9-10)

While Jas spends most of the chapter unpacking the need for authenticity, he must perform his *rudeboy* value as well in order to ensure that he maintains his position in the group. As such, while Jas might not entirely buy into the identity he performs, he maintains it in order to prevent being outside of it. In this sense, Jas views the *rudeboy* identity as more than a last resort—it is the top choice of masculinities that are available to him.

Jas's fascination with Hardjit's body speaks to the homoerotic nature of his fascination with the male body. As Patricia Tom notes in her work on American gang photography and outlaw masculinities, "the homoerotic can be suppressed beneath heterosexual machismo" (70). Jas's descriptions of Hardjit reflect the post-911 eroticization of brown bodies within the history

of British colonialism. The Sikh male body becomes a fetishistic site for Jas. Hardjit invites this behaviour through his narcissistic preoccupation with his own body, shaping it into the ultimate *rudeboy* icon by relying on a past of mixed martial arts through the recently re-popularized, and presumably South Asian, martial art, *kalaripayat*. Along with sculpting the body is the meticulous grooming of facial hair, tattoos of Sikh symbols, and wearing expensive designer clothing. Both the colonial stereotypes of Sikh male bodies as hyper-masculine, virile, and lascivious and the post-911 stereotyping of ambiguously racialized men as dangerous terrorists work in Jas's descriptions of Hardjit.

It is unclear whether or not Jas's depictions are homoerotic, to put it colloquially, if Jas wants to do Hardjit, be Hardjit, or both. The denigration of male-male love is clearly outlined in the text—Jas both speaks homophobic language and explains its importance to *rudeboy* identity. Yet it is interesting that the closest relationships in the text are among the *rudeboys* themselves in their constant service and support of each other. Hardjit cares for Jas, educating and supporting him in the ways of *rudeboy* culture; similarly, Jas's deep grief at Amit's brother's death is again indicative of a clear "bros before hos" attitude. Male-male love is not an option due to heteronormative regulation. Instead, the boys rely on each other and operate as a collective for economic benefit and self-protection. Similarly in *Daaku*, Ruby and his brethren spend more time with each other than with women. In fact, women are worn in the same way guns are worn. Ruby's relationship with other men is one of devotion, partnership, and reliance. In this sense, the gang operates as a homosocial improvisory space, where heteronormative, masculine, anti-colonial, and anti-neoliberal processes can play out with an alternate kinship system of man-man love.

### *Fundamentalist Other Disidentifications*

In *Daaku*, Ruby directly refuses Orthodox Sikh identifications. He has a disdain for what he identifies as hypocrisy: “These old temple guys are religious, but extremely corrupt. They pay us to beat the fuck out of people who won’t vote for them. Yeah, I learned a lesson in politics early in life. These old guys talk about religion, not cheating on their wives, and they give lectures about earning an honest dollar. But they are the ones I see cruising the hooker strip and ripping off temple funds” (72). Dhaliwal uses Ruby to identify what he views as hypocrisy within Sikh Orthodoxy; however, this hypocrisy stems not only from immorality, but also the use of women by men or, more specifically, a masculinity that lacks respect for women. Both Ruby and Hardjit consciously refuse older diasporic Sikh masculinities and articulate this conscientious refusal. These youths put their own hybrid (self-created) and entwined religious masculinities ahead of those of their elders. They have actually thought it out and think they have the ‘right’ form of Sikh masculinity.

Hardjit is able to alter his religious identity, but it must always function in a dialectical relationship with Muslim identity. The use of the colour orange and specific Sikh religious symbols such as the *khanda* to demarcate Sikh *rudeboy* identity is deployed in direct opposition to Muslim colours (green) and symbols. Hardjit sees his parents’ articulation of Sikhism as watered down and inaccurate. As Jas notes,

The homeboys a Hounslow an Southall should have two signals for Hardjit: an Om for when Hindus needed him an a Khanda for when Sikhs needed him. He always used to go on bout how Sikhs an Hindus fought side by side in all them wars. Both got beef with Muslims. Both support India at cricket. Both be listenin to bhangra, even though Sikh bredren clearly dance better to it. He says Sikhs

were warriors a Hinduism one time. But even though Hardjit said all this stuff, he din't like the way his mum had hung up pictures a Hindu Gods on their landing at home next to their pictures a Gurus. But then there in't no point trying to talk to your mum or dad bout religion, innit. They don't know jack bout religion. (81)

The pointed reference to the *rudeboys'* parents' apparent lack of knowledge about religion speaks to how what constitutes an accurate religious identity is a central part of *rudeboy* thought. However, while Hardjit disagrees with his mother's intermixing of Hinduism and Sikhism, his own reconstitution of Sikh history where Sikhs were the "warriors a Hinduism" is fully acceptable to him. While it is perfectly fine for Hardjit to ally with various groups in his fight against Muslim-Sikh or Muslim-Hindu intermixing, it is not alright for his mother to be similarly syncretic in the home. Hardjit denies the syncretism of his own actions. For him, they still maintain a specific Sikh identity that justifies violence in its defense of Hinduism against both British and Muslim conflict. At the same time, he repudiates his mother's syncretic gestures as the watering down of Sikhism into Hinduism. In reading this issue through Butler's paradigm of those cornered and indefinitely detained by the impasses of social and political moments, it becomes clear that performances of violence become entwined with assertions of religious 'purity', especially at a time when identifying apart from Muslims becomes important in the making of Sikh identity.

In Hardjit's performance of non-Muslim masculinity, religion becomes entwined with violence:

No way Hardjit could've done that damage with his bare fists. I weren't sure whether he'd used his keys or his Karha. One time when he sparked Imran I think, Hardjit slid his Karha down from his wrist over his fingers an used it like some

badass knuckleduster. Even though he was one of them Sardarjis who don't even wear a turban, Hardjit always wore a Karha round his wrist and something orange to show he was a Sikh. (9)

The use of the *karha*, one of the 5 k's or the five Sikh identifiers, as a weapon to beat people up speaks to a symbolic link to a community outside of Hardjit himself—a Sikh community that Hardjit uses to sanction the violence. It further indicates that these violences work to solidify a Sikh identity in the present. As with the tattoos he sports—one of a *khanda* and one of a lion—Hardjit melds the physical identifiers of American gang life with Sikh markers in order to produce a masculinity that achieves social and political maneuverability and power in his current context in which traditional religious markers of the *amritdhari* such as the turban and kirpan are ambiguously racialized and marked as 'fundamentalist.' As Butler notes, "In this sense, the framework for conceptualizing global violence is such that 'terrorism' becomes the name to describe the violence of the illegitimate, whereas legal war becomes the prerogative of those who can assume international recognition as legitimate states" (88). Hardjit works to combat the fear of being illegitimate/'terrorist' by performing, ironically, a different kind of violence that is acceptable and in accordance with the contemporary concerns of the British nation-state as well as the historical wreckage of the Indian nation-state: beating up Muslims. These forms of violence do not threaten the contemporary British nation-state—both Hardjit's interest in avenging the British race relations of the 80s and 90s and his reconstitution of memories of the partition of India and Pakistan through enactments of Muslim-Sikh violence stem from events that have now been acknowledged by the British government and placed into British history.

Samira's response to Jas's concerns about her parents further concretizes religious and cultural boundaries between *rudeboy* generations and their parents: "I told you in the car, Jas, my

three brothers are out of town. It's them you need to worry about, not my dad. He can be chilled” (251). Violence becomes mandatory not only for Muslim disidentification but also for *rudeboy* culture. This coordination of violence for their own measures becomes a vital aspect of their identities. Performances of violence in the quest to not be racialized as Muslim is a justifiable reason for syncretism and alliances across race and religion.

## **Women/Space/Surveillance: Public Power, De-private Intimacies**

### *Theorizing the Public/ Private Bifurcation*

The relationship that young Sikh men within the text have with women is often deadlocked due to the social and cultural impasses that monitor and regulate available methods of survival. While this project is about men, their relationships with women are an important aspect of *rudeboy* and gangster masculinities. The production of women as belonging to the private domain is a useful site for critical investigation into how Sikh men articulate *rudeboy* and gangster identities and how women are folded into this production.

The bifurcation of women as relegated to the home or ‘private’ sphere and men as wielding the outside or ‘public’ has been a central theme in South Asian and South Asian diasporic modes of feminist religio-social, historical, and political thought. Within this framework of post-colonial analysis, the home is figured as a space where women and women’s rituals, labour, and practices are produced and conserved. The ‘home’ is indexed to the cultural preservation of the nation, linking women to the guardianship not only of culture, but also of imagined communities such as those of the nation-state.

Recent queer, feminist, and diasporic analyses have reconfigured ‘home’ as a site from which one can be exiled, or a place that one might not have inhabited to begin with. These explanations ask: is there always an origin? And is the origin always home? The Western feminist critique of public space as masculine and therefore unavailable to women has produced responses by feminists of colour who have debunked the presumption that the private is available in the first place for those who have always had to work outside the home and for those who have worked in the homes of others. Home is deconstructed as a site that does not escape classed



and raced gender productions. In unpacking the inherent assumptions within these terms, the presumption of the private as a site of safety and intimacy is thoroughly questioned.

In her book *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times*, Jasbir Puar points to Western articulations of the private/public dichotomy as upholding romanticized notions of home: “[I]n liberalism, the private for women is theorized as a space outside of and untouched by (much-needed) state intervention, while the public is hailed as a space of recourse and a zone automatically lying outside an easily and singularly recognized ‘home’” (124). In this logic, home operates as a space in dire need of state regulation. Puar reexamines these spaces in terms of their relationship to Western state surveillance, and the control and regulation of marginalized bodies. The private can no longer be conceptualized as a space that conveniently houses domestic or feminized forms of labour, but instead must be seen as a place that mandates domesticity in order to regulate and enforce heteronormative behaviour.

Puar interrogates the assumption that everyone has access to ‘privacy’ within ‘private space.’ She writes, “The queer liberal interpretation of the relegation to privacy [is] a kind of confinement that is nevertheless a privileged void from state intervention... [it] illuminates the taken-for-granted access to privacy and raises many questions about the unacknowledged forms of privilege” (124). The assumption that the private is a space with no mandate, no procedure, and no control indicates how regulation operates subversively. The private functions as that which has already been surveilled and as such, is a vital part of a process in the surveillance and regulation of bodies. In our post-911 moment, with the rise of new regulative technologies and practices around the world, reporting on your neighbours for ‘bizarre behaviour’ is encouraged and the production of ‘race’ as a ‘bizarre behaviour’ generates the illegality of bodies:

This disidentification is a process of sexualization as well as of a racialization of

religion. But the terrorist figure is not merely racialized and sexualized; the body must appear improperly racialized (outside the norms of multiculturalism) and perversely sexualized in order to materialize as the terrorist in the first place. Thus the terrorist and the person to be domesticated—the patriot—are not distant, oppositional entities, but ‘close cousins.’ (38)

A telling example of this is the Bollywood film *Fanaa* where Zooni, a Kashmir-born Indian nationalist shoots her husband when she finds out that he is a Kashmiri independence terrorist. This film, produced in 2006, demonstrates a form of post-9/11 hysteria that takes place in India. One consequence of this fear is the Indian nation-state’s containment of terrorism through the surveillance of the private sphere by women. As Puar notes, “A claim to the right to privacy is not even on the radar screen for many sectors of society, unfathomable for whom being surveilled is a way of life” (124). In *Londonstani* and *Daaku*, the private is surveilled by those who inhabit it. Thus, how young Sikh men in *Londonstani* and *Daaku* are surveilled in private and how they maneuver public space to counter this control is a necessary question. Their response to control and surveillance involves maneuvering across public spaces through their interactions with women. Like *Londonstani*, *Daaku* explicitly depicts the desire among young Sikh men to surpass or cross normative conventions of public and private space in acts that symbolise an ability to wield power, however fraught it might be: “Ironically, South Asian queer diasporic subjects were and continue to be under even greater duress to produce themselves as exceptional American subjects, not necessarily as heteronormative but as homonormative, even as the queernesses of these very bodies are simultaneously used to pathologize populations configured as terrorist” (Puar, 169).

*Mothers: Private, Home, House Arrest*

Western stereotypes of Indian motherhood often entail over-attentive, hyper-feminized, loving women who value their sons over their daughters. While we do see remnants of this stereotype in both *Daaku* and *Londonstani*, mothers are configured in these texts as more complex. South Asian diasporic women are depicted in relation to a variety of diverging national, transnational, and familial linkages that critique stereotypical portrayals. *Daaku* starts out by reproducing these stereotypes. Dhaliwal offers an idealistic portrayal of Ruby's mother that derives from the mother as overarching guardian: "All I could see was this great angel standing before me. She was beautiful, with soft skin, dressed in a simple Punjabi suit, and she had an enormous warm glow to her. I wanted to be held by my mother right at this moment, but I knew that it would hurt because my body was in bad shape" (15). Ruby's mother is initially described as having soft features and humble, culturally appropriate attire—language that produces her as a stereotype of South Asian motherhood. This language shows South Asian women offering protection. South Asian mothers are envisioned as in codependent contact with their children. Dhaliwal also uses this reference to portray Ruby's connection to his mother. Ruby is a Mama's boy who is depicted as loving and devoted. Her treatment of him further solidifies this: "'*Mera raja puut,*' [My prince] she said warmly" (15).

Within both South Asian and Western modes of thought, home has been constructed as the primary site for domesticity, kinship, and care. More specifically, according to South Asian cultural values, the home becomes nationally constructed as a sacred space. As Gayatri Gopinath notes, "The gendered spacialization of the domestic sphere... mirrors and reiterates nationalist framings of space that posit the 'inner' as an atavistic space of spirituality and tradition, embodied by the figure of the woman, as opposed to the 'outer' male sphere of progress, politics,

materiality, and modernity” (171). The upkeep of the home becomes the responsibility of women. Their success in the proper maintenance of the home is an important contribution to the success of the members of the home. Gopinath indicates how this inner sphere can become a space of fantasy and political contestation that evokes non-heteronormative embodiments and the “reterritorialization of domestic and national space” (171).

In her work on cartography and India, Sumathi Ramaswamy notes that “embedded in these declarations of male devotion to and desire for woman and nation is a powerful tension between alternate traditions of spatially imagining ‘India’ as a geographical entity *and* as a somatic being embodied in the figure of Bharat Mata, Mother India” (97). This logic feminizes the state and speaks to the ways in which women become linked to the nation-state as protectors. The mother fashioned as the nation returns in diasporic situations in which the mother comes to be embodied as the guardian of Indian culture. In the contemporary moment, the increase in power of non-Western nation-states like India results in a remasculinization of the nation. As Bhattacharyya notes in her engagement with the work of Chandra Talpade Mohanty,

If the militarisation of [post-colonial and advanced capital] states entails a remasculinisation [of the state apparatus, and of daily life], then the terms of this masculinity are also undergoing significant renegotiation. Similarly, such states may ratchet up ‘patriarchal and colonizing processes’, but this involves a disciplining of male and female in a manner that combines familiar ‘patriarchies’ with the reworkings of the place and meaning of gendered bodies. (5)

This remasculinization also reworks the racialization and sexualization of bodies and the disruption of ‘private’ and ‘public.’ Coupled with this is a Western state discourse of security

that causes mothers (like nations) to keep an eye on their more petulant children (disobeying citizens).

In *Londonstani*, Gautam Malkani provides a variety of representations of South Asian motherhood. Hardjit's mother occupies a position of authority using her labour within the home as a form of capital that she can then wield to control her husband and the *rudeboys*. As she says, "Ravi, Jas, your mamas will be ashamed of you if they know what you do in my house. All the time playing the fool in my house. Always. Play the fool. Good, good, verry good. Fail your exams, live on the street. Verry good" (73). Hardjit's mother is not oblivious to her son's activities. She is entirely aware that the boys are not studying when they come over, instead using Hardjit's bedroom as an office for their illegal cellphone distribution activities. Malkani depicts her as providing the boys with snacks and space, while guiltting them when their actions don't match up with her beliefs.

In diasporic cultural contexts, the domestic power of mothers is complicated due to the fact that home is located outside of the homeland. The home becomes a fraught site in its linkages to multiple nations. The production of the illegal within the private becomes an inversion of the construction of the private as the feminine and the pure. Thus the cultural guardianship of motherhood in *Daaku* and *Londonstani* takes on the objective of bestowing both a remasculinized Indian cultural identity syncretized with post-911 diasporic ideologies of race, citizenship, and nation.

The mothers in *Londonstani* constitute a mass form of security that is used to surveil and control both the *rudeboys* and the women's husbands. Their relationships with each other not only organizes their own lives, but also the lives of their husbands:

They'd even tried to convince their husbands to go into business together one time, become one big happy family. Hardjit's mum figured his dad could make better bucks than he already did running nine twenty-four-hour local convenience shops in partnership with two of his cousins. Amit's mum thought her husband could do better than the aeroplane catering business he ran with his brothers in Heston. Things hadn't been the same since he lost the contract with Air India or whatever. In the end, though, both men stayed in their businesses by promising their wives rapid, five-year expansion plans. (74-75)

That Hardjit's and Amit's mothers coordinate the lives of the men around them is a source of humour, but also an indicator of how the drive for capital among South Asian men is intertwined with the surveillance performed by their wives. The pressure that Hardjit's and Amit's mothers put on their husbands to work together reflects their own investments in their friendships with each other rather than the traditional, patrilineal kinship of their husbands. South Asian mothers are portrayed as lording over their male family relations, suggesting the partial masculinization of South Asian womanhood in the context of Western locations.

This strain of over-control also runs through Amit's mother, who also does not fit the stereotype of the quiet and demure South Asian mother. While she allows Amit to drive around in her lilac Beemer, it is only with the caveat that he must be available via his cell phone and do basic household chores such as buying household supplies. These tasks come off as humorous when Amit ends up purchasing various women's products including tampons from an attractive female cashier at a pharmacy, leading to his emasculation. When Amit adds a box of Durex Avanti condoms to the basket in an attempt to balance the other products he is purchasing, his aunt, who happens to be behind him in line, exclaims in outrage, embarrassing him and his

friends. Diasporic women who have historically embodied feminine values as cultural protectors of the Indian nation are partially masculinized as agents of Western state surveillance of sexuality.

The way the *rudeboys* in *Londonstani* venerate Sanjay further demonstrates the gendered dimensions at the site of racialization and capital. Sanjay represents upward mobility and wealth to them. Jas and the rest of his group are fascinated with him—not only because of this, but also because he manages to still be ‘brown’: “The voice seemed surprisingly desified. I mean, don’t get me wrong, we’d been right bout this guy sounding like some posh perfectly poncey, coconut. Worse than my mum’s accent. Worse than Ravi’s mum even. But there was definitely a bit a Bombay in there too” (153). While not entirely fitting into the *rudeboy* scene, his wealth and knowledge make him appear more masculine than he would normally be considered. In Jas’s depictions, Sanjay is a cultural authority on how to meticulously perform high-class South Asian masculinity. In a sense then, it is fitting that Sanjay is likened to an Indian mother in the context of masculinized motherhood. The implication is that the ultimate symbol of masculine *desi* identity, is a man who is similar to an Indian mom: “Sometimes, when he’s givin you all these tips, Sanjay smiles in a way that reminds you a the way your mum used to look at you when you were practising piano. She was tryin to be encouraging, she said. You hated all them fuckin piano lessons anyway but apparently you din’t realize how lucky you were. You see, your mum’d always wanted to learn” (143). A kind of queer parenting permeates Sanjay’s role towards the *rudeboys* in that within the private space of his London condo, he dispels information via a kinship that resembles how mothers interact with their sons.

Being controlled in such a way by mother figures (or figures they view as ‘mommy’), masculinity is inevitably compromised for Amit and his *rudeboy* counterparts. In a sense, the

masculine production that emanates out of this anxiety is queer and emerges from multiple national and cultural sites. In their attempt to overcome private spaces that operate as sites of surveillance and emasculation, the boys instead embrace each other in homosocial performances of *rudeboy*. As Puar notes, practices of queer diasporic affiliation involve, “the reorganizing of national and transnational communities based not on origin, filiation, and genetics but on destination, affiliation, and the assumption of a common set of social practices and political commitments” (172). As such, productions of masculinity are challenged through these queer transcriptions.

Malkani’s depiction of Jas illuminates how young South Asian men are produced through complex mechanisms that involve multiple nation-states, as well as religious formations perpetuated through familial systems that are themselves shifting in an already fissured social and political climate. The surprise at the end of the novel is that Jas comes from a white, British family. This shock sends the reader a powerful message about contemporary British culture—that in order to transcend what he refers to as his “former state a dicklessness” (12), a white boy must seek to be a part of *rudeboy* counterculture. It becomes clear that various signs and symbols of race and racialization are crossed and passed around insofar as Jas, a “poncey” white boy, supposes that *rudeboy* identification (a racial identity) is an option for his own remasculinization. Malkani enforces the reader’s assumption that Jas and his family are South Asian by portraying Jas’s mother as the most stereotypically demure; of all the mothers, she inhabits the private sphere in the most domesticated and effeminized way in her attempt to produce what she perceives to be South Asian femininity, so as to please her son. When we find out he is white, it is clarified that Jas’s mother has worked hard to be like the mothers of his South Asian friends, dressing and cooking like them so that Jas will take some interest in his own family (Malkani,



340). Jas is extremely rude to his mother when her attempts fail: “As I’m putting the loafers on, I can’t help it. Something bout Mum’s ponciness an the way she’s sayin everything’s absolutely delightfully fine fucks me off big time an I end up havin a proper chat with the woman” (200). This rudeness stems from the anxieties around his own *rudeboy* identity, which become clear when he rants about his trousers and how they need to be hemmed properly. Jas expects his mother to be aware of how his dress affects his reputation and his masculinity: “I know it in’t fair to blame Mum, but you gotta understand how big a deal it is: when your slacks are too jack-up you look totally dickless but when they got too much slack it looks like you got big hard dicks stickin out your shins. Mum clearly don’t understand cos she’s lookin at me like I’d just fuckin slapped her” (201). In his attempt to perform *rudeboy* masculinity, Jas expresses the anxieties of having the perfect amount of slack in his pants. *Rudeboy* performativity revolves around not being entirely ‘dickless’ or having too much ‘dick.’ There is a perfect amount of ‘dick’ or phallic power to be achieved. The burden of this achievement is ironically placed on Jas’s mother, who must coordinate it by adjusting Jas’s pants.

Malkani provides us with mother figures who occupy positions of power by commanding ‘respect.’ These mothers are portrayed as quick to anger and overcontrolling. Hardjit’s mother often loses her temper when the boys disrespect her by making her look bad in front of guests. Similarly, Amit and Arun’s mother becomes easily angered when Arun’s fiancée (Reena) and her family do not respect her enough. While Arun spends time with his brother and the rest of the *rudeboys*, he is described apart from them: “Arun din’t normly use words like innit. An whenever he did, I weren’t sure whether he was makin fun a rudeboys or just tryin to be like us. He always seemed older’n two years older’n the rest a us. Trainee accountant for some company up in London Bridge” (188). Arun speaks differently and works in London. In a sense, Arun

occupies the position of normative *desi* identity—coming from an upper class, upper caste Hindu family and trying to follow the directions of his mother while also immersing himself into being a productive member of the diverse British urban elite. Arun is in direct identificatory juxtaposition with Hardjit who is followed by the rest of the *rudeboys*:

Fuckin steroids, man, Hardjit goes before any a us could actually say anything bout how bling the changing rooms were,— who’ dat muthafucka fink he is?... Hardjit was still sayin shit like, —I’m a muthafuckin hard muthafucka, when Arun put his hand on his shoulder an said, —Hardjit, you really need to chill. Anyway, us desis don’t need steroids anyway, we got enough anger and aggression from our families, innit. (188)

Where Arun exhibits a demeanor of diplomatic passivity, Hardjit is ultra-aggressive. Amit and Jas’s decisions to follow Hardjit in *rudeboy* performance speak to the preferences of young South Asian men. Where Arun comes to convey ‘coconut’ British urbanity mixed with the effeminate Hindu stereotype replete in colonial transcriptions of South Asian masculinity, Hardjit is produced as fusing Sikh martial representations with urban American masculinity in the formation of a *rudeboy* culture that is more productive for survival. While Hardjit manages to maintain some sense of separation between his own space and his mother’s, Arun’s mother lays claim to the private as her own space and puts large expectations on her son around being given enough respect. ‘Respect’ becomes a fraught term. As Jas constantly notes, one must ‘respect’ elders and this is loaded with the association of deference and a lack of defiance.

‘Respect’ becomes fundamental to motherhood and the successful functioning of private space but it becomes impossible for young men to meet its demands. Sons must ‘respect’ their mothers and respect must be performed in such a way that it is visible to houseguests. As Jas

continuously brings up, respecting one's elders is one of the important regulations of South Asian *rudeboy* code. Jas performs a racialized understanding of respect towards his friends' mothers: "A course, we all still made a point a thankin her again for the pakoras, samosas, chai an Coke. We were rewarded with just enough noddin to ruffle her sari. Scratch-scratch. Gotta respect your elders, innit" (Malkani, 78). In the attempt to be read as *rudeboy*, Jas collaborates in thanking Hardjit's mother for the snacks even after she has chastised him and his counterparts. Later, however, Jas begins to question 'respect,' instead telling Arun, who is having trouble managing his fiancée and his mother's expectations of an impending marriage, that 'self-respect' ought to come before 'respect' for one's elders: "Respect is one thing, but when people say you should always Respect Your Elders what they're really sayin is you should always agree with them. An how can that not be bullshit?" (244). When Jas makes the decision to stop upholding the notion of respecting one's elders, his performance of *rudeboy* is quickly undone. His failure to perform 'Respect' as a *desi* value is solidified when Amit tells him to stop making his brother into a coconut, implying that Jas's way of thinking is white-cultured (263). That Arun will be emasculated as a 'coconut' if he stands up to his mother's control over the maintenance of a South Asian kinship system or emasculated as 'dickless' by Jas's Western understanding of masculinity if he does not speak to the impossibility of his identity. That after speaking with Jas, Arun views suicide as his only viable solution to the conflict between his mother and his fiancée further conveys the dissonance between South Asian and Western forms of cultural power that *rudeboy* identity seems to avoid.

*Daaku's* production of South Asian women differs in that while they are presented as role models of proper behaviour and guardians of cultural purity who have the insight to see the

moral issues in Ruby's behaviour, they are also careful to not confront him about it. Initially, Ruby's mother is portrayed similarly to Jas's mother, in that both end up being complicit in their sons' gangster masculinity. Ruby's mother becomes the primary advocate for his jail release and must promise to watch him herself:

‘Can you take this boy home and make sure he stays out of trouble?’

‘I will try, Your Honour.’

‘Trying isn't good enough for this court, Ma'am.’

‘He is a big boy, Your Honour, I can control him though.’

‘Ruby,’ the judge looks over at me. ‘Will you stay at home with your mother and keep out of trouble?’

‘Yes, Your Honour, I will.’

‘You will abide by the laws of this country and the rules of your household?’

‘Yes, Your Honour, I will.’

‘I will release Ruby Pandher to the custody of his mother. He will be under 24-hour house arrest. Ruby is not allowed to leave his residence without his mother.’

(40)

While the passage implies a tone of relief regarding the judge's lenience, Ruby's options indicate the dismantling of the ‘public/private’ distinction; Ruby goes from being confined to the public institution of the Canadian jail system to the supposedly private space of his family home. That this verdict is hinged on his mother's assertion that she can maintain ‘control’ reinforces Ruby's need to be controlled. The judge's faith in Ruby's mother indicates the Canadian nation-state's faith in women as guardians of their families within the domain of the ‘private.’ Moreover, this

exemplifies Bhattacharyya's assertion that their failure to do so implies the failure of South Asian cultures to exist in the West:

The reworking of the idea of the underclass as a socially disruptive cultural corrosive combines with depictions of some cultures of minority migrants to the West, as destructive authoritarian and/or distantly impersonal and unable to build the successful affective relations that make families and good citizens. All strands lead back to the main allegation—bad parents with inadequate cultures make sick men (58).

In this context, diasporic South Asian women become responsible for the surveillance of the nuclear family, a task that further masculinizes them. Men must be controlled, if not directly by the nation-state, then by the women in their lives who operate as conflicted cultural guardians of both Indian traditional values and Western modernity. In the judge's mandate that Ruby abide "by the laws of this country and the rules of your household" (40) lies the assumption that the legalities of the Canadian state can be aligned with the prescriptions of family life. With this coupling of public and private spaces, the home is narrated as a site that is penetrated by mechanisms of the state. It functions as a space in need of surveillance in which South Asian diasporic mothers are expected to take part in the labour of schooling their sons in standard Canadian behaviour.

While Ruby's mother is initially located within the realm of the domestic (a space that Ruby is also confined to when he is placed under house arrest in her care), she must also leave in order to work and this requirement does not bode well for Ruby's incarceration. Monica, Ruby's sister, drives him around when he has no license and becomes his second caregiver: "Your

Honour,' Mom spoke up, her voice shaking. 'I work all the time. Could you please make it so he could go out with his older sister, Monica? She is very good and she can control him good'"

(40). The reality for most women of colour in the West has involved labour which calls for venturing into the public domain *and* maintaining the private. Motherhood in *Daaku* is produced with expectations on behalf of both Indian and Canadian multicultural norms.

Ruby's mother is put in the position of watchperson or prison guard, but she also tells white lies to the police on his behalf and advocates for his release on a number of occasions. In this sense the figure of the mother is partially dismantled, along with stereotypes that produce Indian motherhood in positions of victimization. While Ruby's mother is configured as devoted and pure, this does not come out as naïve with regards to her son's situation. Instead, she is aware in a way that is similar to Hardjit's mother's observations of the *rudeboys* in *Londonstani*. As Neelu Kang has noted in her recent work, while families within South Asia have altered their kinship system regulations in order to meet the changing global economy, Punjabi Sikh families within the diaspora often retain these traditions. The relationship between diaspora and homeland—one where the homeland's earlier values become fixed as identity markers in the diaspora—leads to a reversal in terms as progress and modernity mark Sikhs in India moreso than Sikhs in the diaspora. As such, the South Asian women in these two texts are positioned awkwardly in that they are described as romantic figures who cook beautifully and provide other household services within the private sphere, characteristics that fulfill both past ideals of Indian womanhood that come to be markers of Indian-ness in the diaspora, and Canadian multicultural ideals of immigrant women that place them into more gendered roles.

The home, then, becomes produced as a site of multiple conflicting and converging cultural identities rather than a private space for young Sikh men. This private has been invaded

by national investments in regulation, which are further embedded in the surveillance of bodies by the state. This is exemplified in *Daaku* when Ruby discusses his house arrest situation with a friend: “‘You gonna be home?’ / ‘Dude, there’s a cop sitting two houses from me. Of course I’m gonna be home’” (71). Ruby’s body is regulated not only by familial expectations, but also by those employed to maintain the Canadian nation-state. He is restricted from inside the home (by his mother’s expectations) and outside the home (by the police). Ruby is forced to stay home under the state-sanctioned ‘control’ of his mother, and he is also required to report to his parole officer. This works insidiously as there lies the conflicting assumption that Ruby can do whatever he would like in the home though, in actuality, he is being surveilled from within and just outside of it.

The home becomes constructed as impenetrable while the power of the state continues to penetrate it:

‘Its Const. Rutherford. You at home?’

‘What the fuck do you think?’

‘I’m just checking.’

‘How do you morons get jobs? Goodbye motherfucker!’ I hate stupidity.

DING DONG, DONG DING, my doorbell rings. I go downstairs and open the

door. Guess who? Yep, it’s that lousy cop I just hung up on.

‘What do you want?’

‘Look here, you little prick,’ Rutherford grabs me by the throat. ‘Don’t you ever talk to me like that again. I’ll snap your skinny little neck!’

I back out of his grasp. ‘Isn’t this police brutality?’

‘I’ll show you brutality, you little punk!’ (46-47)

It is not only Ruby's body that must remain within the bounds of what is respectable (within the home), but his words must also be appropriate. As such, the guardians of the law require censorship and full deference. When Ruby does not fulfill these requirements, Constable Rutherford enters his home and violates other legal restrictions to force control over both his mental and physical capacities. When Ruby articulates the situation to be police brutality, he is further threatened. While his response is laughter, this laughter does not infer great happiness, but rather both a critical and personal desire to defy state-inflicted fear. This becomes the response to an emasculating process that indicates refusal of a 'private' life. The family home is formed as an institution that works under the rubric of national restrictions, expected to police bodies that do not conform to national goals.

The responses to the state surveillance of the private also deserve some examination. Through a meticulously coordinated response to police surveillance, Ruby is able to enforce a form of counter-surveillance:

The gang squad is watching me practically 24 hours a day, but they are easy to lose. There is this family that lives a block away from my house and they, like me, have a view of practically every angle within a three-block radius. Two small boys and a girl live in the house with their parents. When I approach home, they run down the street to tell me where the undercover cops are sitting, how long they have been there and what the person in the car looks like. They even tell me about any suspicious cars that drive by. This is good, because I have a lot of enemies. (54)

Ruby responds to state surveillance with his own form of counter-surveillance. Dhaliwal further provides Ruby with his own support: a group of children who report to him on the position of his



enemies. This implies that the South Asian youth who live in his neighbourhood are in awe of him as a figure of defiance to the police and the state and can be wielded for the purposes of protection. Ruby uses the members of his home to further protect himself:

‘Little? I’m five inches taller than you,’ I say laughing. ‘Go on, get the fuck out of here before I call my lawyer.’

‘Lawyer?’ He steps toward me. ‘You go ahead and call your lawyer.’

‘Mom!’ I yell.

‘Yes?’ She calls from the kitchen.

‘I need a witness. This guy is trying to hurt me.’ I look at him and wink. My mom comes down the stairs and asks what’s going on. Rutherford and I just stand there silently.

‘Are you supposed to check and see if he’s home?’ Mom asks him.

‘Yes, ma’am, I am,’ he responds cheerfully.

‘He’s here, now you go!’ she says.

‘I’ll be back later,’ Rutherford turns to leave.

‘We will be sleeping,’ Mom says. ‘You come back in the morning.’

‘The police have a right to come back anytime,’ he says with authority.

‘I have a right to sleep and not be harassed,’ Mom responds.

‘Fine ma’am, I’ll be back in the morning.’ Rutherford leaves. (47)

The tone of this passage conveys Ruby’s resistance to police surveillance and state control.

When Ruby senses that the Constable is going to enter his home (against the law), he calls for his mother, deploying state witnesses to regulate the practices that even policemen must follow. In lieu of the threat to call his lawyer, Ruby instead yells for his mother indicating his knowledge of

her political and social position. Ruby seems to have the intuition that the policeman will not trespass the private when his mother (in her role as a ‘traditional’ Indian woman) demarcates it.

Ruby’s mother confirms the policeman’s role in assuring that Ruby follows his mandated curfew. Once she assures him that this has been achieved, she tells him to leave. The policeman insinuates that he will return in the middle of the night, but she is able to retain a level of control of her home and privacy by articulating herself through specifically constructed modes of embodiment and by claiming motherly authority over her home. The constable’s claim that the police have the ‘right’ to enter the home at any time is debunked by her firm declaration of her own right “to sleep and not be harassed” (47). In this situation, the rhetoric of rights is being contested; however, it is not Ruby’s rights that can be wielded against the rights of the police, but rather his mother’s. Dhaliwal portrays Ruby’s mother as a buffer between Ruby and the police. The mother figure is the arbitrator between her son and the state. However, this role must also be weighed against the protocol that South Asian mothers not betray their sons, demonstrating the manner in which diasporic, racialized motherhood is conflicted in its enactment of both Western and Indian states’ expectations.

### *Nightclubs: Crossing Into the Public, Gangster Codes*

Dhaliwal presents an alluring depiction of a young, South Asian man who embodies the goal of many young men in gaining sexual access to women. Dhaliwal’s depictions of ‘public space’ and the women who inhabit it encapsulate imaginary longings articulated by young South Asian men. Women fawn over Ruby due to his thug image: a power that is consolidated through expensive style, his ability to access urban space, and the wielding of militarized or ‘dangerous’ commodities. Ruby is able to walk into a nightclub with two women who may want him only in order to get into the club, but who are intimidated and in awe of his access to public/private

spaces that convey a degree of social status. It is Ruby's ability to maneuver public space that becomes a continual marker of his power.

Dance halls in *Daaku* operate as layered institutions that offer access to anyone who achieves cursory requirements such as age and safety (security checks that Ruby is able to transgress anyway) while privately policing mainstream ideals of gender, race, class, and sexuality. These sites work as spaces to perform the normativities that so many racialized and classed youth long for within the context of urban, upwardly-mobile Vancouver and Surrey. That going to the nightclub requires a great deal of preparation and even lengthy travel indicates the importance of such spaces for South Asian youth. Ironically, Ruby's performances of disinterest when he has "finally arrived" at the only "urban" site in the text demonstrate the importance of a meticulously constructed demeanor. Nightclubs are fantasy spaces for young, racialized men where embodied articulations of class mobility, racial equality, heterosexuality, and masculinity can be perfectly produced for a short period of time:

Shit, I've never been to a club that was this pumping. The ratio of girls to guys is three to one on the dance floor. The girls are mostly Punjabi, wearing everything from traditional saris to suits, short skirts, dress pants and tight jeans. Some are even wearing those snug dresses that emphasize the contours of their bodies. Most of the guys are standing on the sides, not dancing. So all you see is a packed floor of girls dancing and shaking their asses. If this was a club and they could get a turnout like this every weekend, this place would be a huge money-maker. (184)

The space of the dance hall is imbued with possibility and this is even clearer when Ruby references the financial possibilities of turning the hall into a club. The appeal of the dance hall is ultimately described through the women who inhabit it: mainly Sikh Punjabi, they are plentiful

to the point of excess as their dancing becomes a spectacle for the men who stand on the sides watching.

Such public sites offer possibilities for Sikh men to escape surveillance and confinement. But these public spaces are also full of criminality, sexuality, and violence. Dhaliwal eventually emphasizes not sexuality, but power. Ruby becomes desirable not for any of his physical characteristics, but rather due to his ability to transgress the regulation of public space. In contrast to private spaces, public spaces such as dance halls become distinctive markers of power and social mobility. Ruby's VIP-status is an indication of his ability to be welcomed into and navigate the social policing that occurs within these places.

Similarly, Jas's knowledge of a club like Vagabond, ironically the second club in the book "to name itself after homeless people," becomes a sign of *rudeboy* mobility (208). Jas himself seems to be aware of the absurdity of the name and the 'V-shaped ashtrays.' However, this knowledge of arbitrary details about the club becomes the ultimate way to impress women, including Jas's love interest, Samira. Depicting the disconnectedness of a place whose inhabitants are constantly moving, shuttling, and shifting, the novel conveys the events of Jas's date with Samira while periodically flashing back to Jas's education by Sanjay at the club the night before. Sanjay's education emphasizes how to impress Samira with knowledge of the intricacies of the nightclub, because such knowledge indicates power:

Jas, how do you know all this stuff? Samira asks, just as some drop-dead gorgeous waitress recognizes me from last nite an says, Good to see you again, sir. I weren't sure how long I could keep this up. Feelin like a badass VIP whenever some barwoman or waitress recognizes me from the night before, yet

praying none of them actually said something like, Hey, buddy, didn't we see you here just last night? What was that about? Dress rehearsal for the big date? (207)

Jas seeks to impress Samira with precise details about the specifics of the club, from how long it has been operating to what the ashtrays symbolize.

The description of the club uncovers the internal desires of gangster boys to have complete access to the public. This is clear in the description of the boys entering the club: "Amar is the doorman, so we ignore the massive lineup and just walk in. Some guys working with Amar want to be introduced so he brings them over. Two of them say that if we see them at any event we should walk right up to them and they will get us in. They apparently do concerts as well" (184). That Ruby and his friends acquire unbarred access to events around the city simulates their acceptance in normative Canadian public spaces. Further, that they seek to be revered indicates a desire to cross different public spaces, acquiring power in the process.

Moreover, these spaces are not simply constructed as party locales, but rather places of work for Ruby and his friends. Ruby conducts business conversations in the men's bathroom and outside the club. The club becomes a place where one's power is constituted and conveyed to other young men. The ability to access the club and be known within it becomes a marker of status within the codes of South Asian gangster masculinities. Ruby's friend and business associate, Deep, offers an example of this: "Deep spots me and I notice him because as usual he is surrounded by beautiful girls. He starts walking towards us and I stand still, watching his movements. You can tell how small he is from the way people keep getting in his way and him not being able to move around them. When the larger men see him, they let him pass because they know who he is" (185). Deep's reputation involves a gangster masculinity that includes women following him and men being in awe of him. The physical characteristics that might

destabilize his status (such as his diminutive height) are negated by this performance. The production of gangster masculinity allows him to bypass normative constructions of masculinity that would place him as weak or less manly based on physical and racial characteristics. When Deep is beaten up by an opposing gang, the fact that he is wanted enough to be beaten up and that his own gang responds to it, further produces him as a powerful figure. When he disappears from the dance floor for a moment, his crew becomes concerned, indicating his superior status. That gangster figures gain respect by having their own forms of protection offers a counterpoint to the nation-state's surveillance procedures that regulate or criminalize young men. Deep's crew enforces his ability to do what he wants while being mobile/ safe within public spaces that might otherwise be dangerous.

The carrying of weapons in public spaces infringes upon legal restrictions. While Ruby and his friends seem to have no interest in actually using their guns (they even hand them over to someone when they exit, and when Ruby gets into a fight, he doesn't bother to use gun), the ability to enter a dance hall with illegal weapons is the ultimate marker of access that can only be achieved through gangster homosociality:

The doormen take off, back to their jobs, and we walk around a corner where security guards are patting people down. They are using a hand-held metal detector. I immediately go back to Amar. Sukh follows me. 'Amar,' I point over at the security guards. 'Those guys are checking.' 'Are you guys,' Amar says looking down at my waist. 'You know—?' Sukh looks at me and I raise my eyebrows and give Amar a smile. Without any more questions, he grabs the tags from his friends' shirts, puts them on us and walks us past the detectors. We smile

and say hi to security and they greet us back. Amar takes the tags back and says he'll see us inside. (184)

Through their association with one of the bouncers, as well as the promoter of the event, Ruby and his friends bypass the restrictions imposed on the public, crossing the boundaries of what is permissible. This maneuverability plays out in *Daaku* as a performance of Sikh brotherhood, and masculine power. The smuggling of the guns is more important than entering the space itself. Further, the gun comes to symbolize male desire for phallic power: "I open my arms and he gives me a massive hug and feels my lower back. I check his as well, and he's packing. He backs up and gives me a confused look, so I look down at my crotch and he laughs" (185). That Ruby's gun is carried below-the-waist atop the male genitals suggests a link to the phallic site of patriarchal power. The gun stands in as the phallic replacement of the male genitals; to not be able to carry the gun into the club would be to lose one's masculine power.

### *Girlfriends: Intimacy, Interraciality, Heterosexuality*

In both novels, the love interests provide a lens into understanding how the young men seek to produce themselves as heterosexual. Relationships with women are vital for survival (aka responding to state surveillance) through the regulation of heterosexuality and the nuclear family. However, these relationships are also short-lived, indicating the impossibility of intimacy for young *rudeboy* and gangster men within the framework of heteronormative desires.

Throughout *Daaku*, women become a marker of access: "People look at me and whisper, mostly the girls. I enjoy the feeling. I am the new tough guy in school—the badass! I can't believe how the girls flock to me. I have the hottest girls sucking up as if I am some type of movie star. Anywhere I go the chicks follow me" (53). This kind of attention is coveted by Ruby

a form of power. But while Ruby seems to have easy access to women, Dhaliwal complicates this portrait:

I could take major advantage of this and fuck them all, but I don't. Being friends with them is one thing, dating is another. I haven't even been on a date and it scares the shit out of me. Even thinking of it. Besides, I don't want to give up all the adoration... Really, though, any one of them can have me. I am inexperienced and don't know how to treat a woman. In this case—girls. I think of them as women though: they have big tits, nice little waists and beautiful asses on them. These girls don't hide what they want either...I don't know if I'm being stupid not jumping all over these offers...Isn't that life though? Missed opportunities.

(53)

Ruby is initially depicted as sensitive and inexperienced, choosing not to have relationships with women even when they are fully available to him. The interest that women have in Ruby becomes a marker of his power. In fact, not engaging in sexual relations with them maintains this power whereas dating would cause the loss of “all the adoration.” It is in the harnessing of attention from women that Ruby gains power and credibility amongst his peers.

Ruby only has romantic engagements with white women. South Asian women are relegated to a private, sacred, domestic sphere and when they are not, they become tainted:

More and more girls are gathering around, giggling and talking to the boys. A few gaze at me as well. There is one that isn't bad, but she's brown and I really don't want to go down that road because of all the drama that comes along with them. Some of the drama is their parents. Brown parents are strict and try to keep the



girls home, but they don't succeed and these girls get out and they get seen. So they get a bad name for just being out, and that reputation lasts and haunts forever. I don't need a girl with a bad rep. (188)

Ruby eloquently explains how South Asian girls who go dancing get a bad reputation but he does not critique this inequality. Instead, he contributes to it by rejecting a girl with a 'bad rep.' While he and his friends gain power from their own criminal reputations, South Asian women are not given similar license. Ruby's judgment seems to come less from his own beliefs and more from a concern over the tarnished reputation that diasporic South Asian women who go to clubs will gain within the South Asian community. This indicates Ruby's investment in diasporic South Asian women as cultural guardians whose reputations are denigrated due to their presence in the club. That young South Asian women are entering this space threatens Ruby because these places are precisely where his identity is consolidated. In other words Ruby associates South Asian women with the private sphere, but needs to solidify his own presence in the public sphere.

In *Londonstani*, the discussion of the tradition of *rakhis*—a cultural process whereby South Asian women tie a bracelet around the wrists of their male relatives symbolizing a chaste relationship of trust—continues to operate in South Asian *rudeboy* realities in which South Asian women acquire value in the process of asserting *rudeboy* power:

In case you don't know, a rakhi is a special thread your sister ties on your right wrist, meanin you're their brother an you'll always do your duty to protect them, uphold their honour, that kind a thing. Lookin at my wrist now, you'd think I'd got nine sisters stead a none. That's a fuckload a honour to uphold. Thing is, any girl can tie you a rakhi these days, not just your sister. That's how you can end up

lookin like some big-bangled desi bride, the ones with red an white toilet rolls round their wrists... Last year, Hardjit's sister tied me a funky bracelet a beads an I thought, safe, I'll wear this till Diwali no sweat. Problem was nobody else realized it was a rakhi, stead they thought I'd become one a them batty boys... You see, the more rakhis you got, the bigger man you are, with loads a ladies under your brotherly protection. Out a the four a us, Amit'd always got the most cos he'd got so many second an third cousins an all their female friends. (176)

Within *rudeboy* culture, the *rakhi* becomes a symbol of *rudeboy* value to South Asian women. In this context, the *rakhi* tradition is shifted from blood relations to a more expansive symbol of *rudeboy* men as the protectors of diasporic Hindu and Sikh women. This is symbolic of how, within diasporic consciousness, a different imagination of the relationships or kinships between young South Asian men and women is being conceptualized. In a situation in which kinship ties have a long history of being contested, symbolic brother and sister bonds become even more necessary for the formation of cohesive imagined communities. Upholding the honour of women becomes an important marker of *rudeboy* cultural identity. As Jas notes, having a girl tie a *rakhi* around your wrist indicates the level of one's masculinity: "the more *rakhis* you got, the bigger man you are" (176).

While women may be dispersed throughout the club, they are not the end goal of the evening for Ruby and his friends. Dhaliwal's portrayal of Ruby is alluring to potential South Asian male readers in that Ruby has power over public space in a totalized way. Dhaliwal offers an omniscient narrator who is fully aware of the interest that the women have in gaining access to the club. Ruby is depicted as being conscious that he is being used:

Outside, we walk around the corner and a small group of girls are standing there looking upset. I ask, 'Is everything okay?'

'We can't get in. The line is too long and the guys told us that we're going to have to wait another half-hour.'

'Half an hour?'

'That's what those losers said.' She looks over at her friends... Deep's checking out one wearing a black bra under a see-through black shirt. 'Think we can get them in?'

I look at him. 'Are you serious?'

'I don't know. They'll have to stand out here forever.'

'Fine,' I say and tell the girls, 'Look, we have to go for a quick walk and if you're still here in five minutes, we'll get you in.'

'Thank you, thank you so much,' a girl in a tight skirt says with a huge smile. As we're walking away, we can hear them talking about how they knew that someone would get them in. I turn around and look at them and smile. They shut up because they know that I heard them. (184)

Ruby is portrayed as helping even those who pretend to have a sexual interest in him in order to get into the club. Ruby bolsters himself as a paragon of chivalry at the start, though he later admits to having brought in women that his friends will "prey" on. Ruby narrates himself as maintaining full control of the situation and lets nothing elude him, not even the fate of the women later on: "When I walk in the main room, the guys see me and start poking each other to look over my way. They seem grateful, like I just brought food or something. I guess these girls are gonna be harassed by my boys all night. Oh well, not my concern" (188). Likening the

women he transports into the club to food, Ruby's gentility quickly turns into complete apathy regarding their welfare. Dhaliwal constructs a figure who has little need for the women even though they fully need him. In fact, Ruby and his male friends are much more interested in their interactions with each other than they are with the women in the club.

Alongside Ruby's ability to get "any woman he wants in the room" is a performance of disinterest in them. When it comes to white women, it is this ability to be disinterested that might be most alluring to young South Asian readers—the disposability of white women for brown men. White women are come to signify trophies for the brown men; however, they are still not appropriate for long-term intimacy. As such, in *Daaku*, the inverse of *Londonstani* occurs: rather than diasporic South Asian women becoming conduits for the reproduction of colonial and post-colonial South Asian histories, white women are configured as disposable achievements of young racialized men and as a currency in Canadian gangster identity. When Ruby exits prison, Sukh is waiting for him with a white sex worker who is available to him all night: "Sukh opens his door and gets out and this busty blonde gets out of the front seat and comes to the back. She hops in and pulls her shirt off. Sukh tells me that she's mine all day and all night" (287). The sex worker is not only white, but also fits the normative ideals of white femininity: being blonde and busty. Even those white women who are disinterested in Ruby's 'bad boy' gangster identity (such as his parole officer) are also sexualized.

In *Londonstani*, similar distinctions are made between brown women and white women. However, where the gangster boys in *Daaku* view white women as the only available sexual option in the quest to maintain the purity of South Asian womanhood, the *rudeboys* of *Londonstani* refuse interracial and inter-religious relationships. Sex with women of one's own 'kind' is also refused. For Hardjit, Sikh women hold a complicated position—at times they are

sexualized, but ultimately their purity must also be maintained. As Jas observes, Hardjit's relationship with women is incredibly confusing and often conflicted:

Hardjit sometimes gets pretty vexed bout that kind a shit. Porn, hookers, slutty ladies. Other times, he'll be laughing along, actin like a pimp. I in't lyin, one minute he's talkin bout how he's gonna get inside some desi girl's lace kachhian an the next minute he's actin as if a girl's gotta be a virgin if she wants to be a proper desi. Fuck knows why sometimes he'll act one way an other times he'll act the other way. Could be he's only OK bout it when it's obvious we're only chattin bullshit or just fantasizing or someshit. Problem is, you in't allowed to fantasise bout Bollywood actresses cos he reckons they're s'posed to be all pure an everything. You in't allowed to fantasise bout someone real in case Hardjit thinks you're being serious bout them an you in't allowed to fantasise bout someone famous cos chances are they're a Bollywood actress. You in't allowed to fantasise bout blatant sluts like porn stars cos desi girls in't meant to be into that kind a thing. An you in't allowed to fantasise outside your own race... Those kindsa ladies get Hardjit so vexed that when he calls them bitches he don't just mean they're female. But right now Ravi's only fantasising bout fantasising. (53)

Hardjit's policing of how South Asian women ought to be treated becomes excessive and contradictory. While purity is maintained, a form of patriarchy re-enforced. Jas learns from Hardjit that while it is inappropriate to fantasise about South Asian women in ways that denigrate their purity, patriarchy must be maintained: "Indian women (I know I should say bitches stead a women to keep things proper but I'm still workin on it) are different" (57). Jas's language is policed by his *rudeboy* counterparts to achieve the perfect performance of *rudeboy*

masculinity, which involves the verbal denigration of women and gay men (though this may not necessarily what any of the *rudeboys* believe at all):

According to Hardjit, it don't matter if the proper word for something sounds fuckin ridiculous. If it's the proper word then it's the proper word... I wouldn't decide that the proper word for a deep an dickless poncey sap is a gay batty boy or that the proper word for women is bitches. That shit in't right. I know what other poncey words like homophobic an misogynist mean an I know that shit in't right. But what am I s'posed to do bout it? If I don't speak proply using the proper words then these guys'd say I was actin like a batty boy or a woman or a woman actin like a batty boy. (46)

Jas's explanation of his verbal confusion indicates that homophobia and sexism aren't beliefs of the *rudeboys*, but rather that the language becomes encoded into *rudeboy* belonging to the point where not articulating it risks being viewed as 'girly' or 'batty.' Further, Jas describes how within *rudeboy* culture, words that analyze homophobia and sexism are 'poncey' themselves so that the ability to self-reflexively critique *rudeboy* culture while still being considered a *rudeboy* is denied. Similarly, in *Daaku*, the performance of apathy is also required to sustain Ruby's privilege. In order for Ruby to maintain his political and social power, he must meticulously perform rites of masculinity including 'doing business' within the club and using flamboyant postures toward other groups of men.

*Bro-mance: Conflicting Compulsory Heterosexuality and Rudeboy Intimacies*

In both novels, young men have queer intimacies with each other that subtly introduce ‘homosexuality’ within gangster publics even though gay gangsters just don’t make sense within state understandings of sexuality. As Puar notes in her reading of homosexuality, sodomy, and homonationalism, “The terrorist body retains a connection to sodomy that renders it incapable *and* unworthy of the kind of intimate homosexual sex possible for proper homosexual national subjects, a distinction that projects its effects externally but also to subjects within the boundaries of US nationalism and citizenship” (140). In light of these restrictions, homosocial love indicates strong group alliances and affiliations that transcend relationships with women prompting the saying, “bros before hos.” The business that young South Asian men engage in with each other is replete with metaphors that suggest business of a homosocial nature. Further, the elevation of heterosexual intercourse as the only ‘sexual’ form of interaction speaks to the closeting of all non-intercourse as non-sexual. For Ruby and his community, sexual intercourse with women is the only form of sexuality, retaining all other kinds of intimacy with women as non-sexual: “We fool around a little here and there, but don’t do anything sexual” (54).

For someone who articulates himself as being preoccupied with the attainment of women, *Londonstani*’s Jas is obsessed with men. His mimicry of Sanjay’s words and actions in the nightclub are parts of this homosocial *rudeboy* behavior. Jas’s fascination with hyper-masculine Sikh male bodies is even more telling of his desire for Sikh male bodies in general and Hardjit’s body in particular. Hardjit operates as the perfected performance of the South Asian *rudeboy* figure. Jas’s narration meticulously describes Hardjit’s body, facial hair, and clothing choices. The Sikh male body as a highly sexualized site of virile masculinity is reproduced in Hardjit, a

teenager from Hounslow who has little experience with sex though he constantly claims otherwise. Hardjit's body has various symbols of Sikh religious authority tattooed onto it, including a *khanda*. These religious identifiers symbolize an identity that becomes important for transmitting ancestral memories of the past. Hardjit's re-presentation of a Sikh imagined community that needs him as their saviour is important during his fights. Hardjit's physical appearance is more important to him: he prepares to fight by dehydrating himself so that his body looks deceptively muscular. Jas's description of Hardjit's body and his physical characteristics are imbued with lust. What is even more interesting is that although the *rudeboys* have a constant banter about the women they've slept with, there is not a single description of actual women that Hardjit or any of the *rudeboys* have been with, other than Jas's experiences with Samira. The boys are more interested in their engagements with each other while continuously affirming their heterosexuality. In fact, what becomes the most homosocial of acts is the constant group affirmation that they are not gay.

In anticipation of a fight between Hardjit and Tariq, gender becomes a clear dividing line Muslim and Sikh women engage in friendly conversation throughout the fights. As Jas notes, "Today, I started thinking how weird it was that, even at a time like this, Sikh girls like Priya and Muslim girls like Samira'd got no problem standing next to each other. Like cricket fans who don't care whether India or Pakistan wins so as long as they see some good batting skills" (101). Pakistan and India become shifted onto bodies of Muslim and Sikh women, who in turn become the battleground upon which the partition of 1947 is continuously reiterated without regard for the actual truth, nor in-depth information regarding the contemporary situation. By contrast, South Asian men have the responsibility of carrying the historical trauma of this history. In this sense, the Sikh male body is conceptualized differently from Sikh female bodies in that the



former maintains power and masculinity through enactments of violence. Reproductions of past violences become about how men relate to men, inside heteronormativity (fighting for women's honour). For Hardjit, Sikh masculinity has very different codes of honour than Muslim masculinities: "[Tariq'll] b five more minutes. Had 2 go 2 some supermarket wid his mum, innit, help her carry da shopping bags. But hear me, bruv, if he finks dat'll make him look all sensitive n shit in fronta all a dese ladies then I'ma do da same shit. I'ma hang back here wid' chyuu, innit" (103). In Hardjit's use of Jas, a white British boy, as an accessory to demonstrate his compassion, Hardjit simultaneously reorients Sikh masculinity as the saviour of British masculinity, by further separating Sikh men from Muslim men. As such, this homosocial bond sustains contemporary modes of power.

For gangster boys, heterosexual intimacy becomes a privileged site that is not ultimately viable. South Asian *rudeboys* cannot have this intimacy due to their position outside the bounds of state-regulated heteronormativity.

Ruby is portrayed as a romantic, desiring an intimacy with women that transcends sex (while, of course, being able to access that if he wanted to). The intimacy he desires involves being cared for within the context of normative gender roles. In this sense, women function as markers of an 'appropriate' heterosexual lifestyle: "I like being taken care of; actually, I love being taken care of. The feeling of a woman tending to a man with her heart is one of the best feelings in the world" (102). However, this feeling conflicts with Ruby's identity as a gangster and the lifestyle that comes along with it. Similar to young Muslim men post-9/11, young Sikh men have also become disallowed by the state in that the possibilities for heteronormative relations are untenable.

For Ruby and his gangster friends, heteronormative kinship systems are not possible so long as they are engaged in the lifestyle at hand due to both the necessary adoration from many women as a demonstration of power and the impossibilities of maintaining a gangster lifestyle. Time for Ruby and his gangster friends is anachronistic—he moves against societally mandated lifestyle of daytime living and ritual existence. While both South Asian and Western concepts of heterosexual kinship encourage “family time,” Ruby and his family exist differently due to immigrant realities in Canada. His mother must work and Ruby is left to care for himself. As such, Ruby functions in his own time-zone—one that is privileged by gangster masculinities. His ‘high school years’ are spent in and out of youth incarceration and his primary form of employment does not require a Monday to Friday, 9-5 workweek. His eating is erratic to the point where he refuses to eat his mother’s food because it doesn’t fit into his schedule. Moreover, even when he does live with his girlfriend, it is not a relationship that is prioritized in terms of time, instead being secondary to Ruby’s gangster lifestyle. As Puar notes in her work on the regulation of Muslim bodies, certain “practices make heterosexuality a mandate while making heteronormativity impossible” (146). Ruby and his friends produce homosocial relations with each other and sexualize women, maintaining heterosexuality while failing at heteronormativity. This failure is very clear in the case of Ruby’s relationship with his girlfriend Claudia who eventually refuses to wait any longer for him to get out of prison and leaves him. As Puar argues, “[I]ntimacy is a crucial part of an affective economy within surveillance systems” (165) whether penal or heteronormative. Intimacy becomes not a private encounter between individual bodies but an assemblage that is produced from various state interactions such that there is “is no inside of intimacy to violate, penetrate, or disturb from the outside, no depth that is safeguarded” (165) as the conclusion of *Daaku* seems to argue. With the high stakes and mortality rates that makes

gangster lifestyles precarious, Ruby must put the maintenance of his gangster kinship system above heteronormative relationships with women.

## Conclusion: Mandated Betrayal

As I have argued, intimacy becomes impossible within *rudeboy* and thug cultures except in the form of violence. The ‘gang’ becomes a site for intimacies without the loss of masculinity. Violence operates as both a tool of hypermasculine presentation and as a method of reconstituting and maintaining an ancestral past. Hardjit and Ruby articulate desires to translate Sikh histories and identities into the present. Hardjit reiterates histories of colonization and partition through his engagements with Muslim boys and white men. Ruby speaks disparagingly of the violence of Sikh fundamentalism and hypocrisy. In a backlash against Sikh diasporic forgetting, Hardjit and Ruby form communities that recreate or reproduce memory through relationships with other Sikh men.

However, the intimacies that gangster boys have with each other lead to betrayal in that they do not fit with long-term gangster lifestyle and normative heterosexuality. The impermanence of these relationships is a part of their importance. Betrayal is, then, a requirement in the attempt to maintain heteronormativity. The positing of homosocial friendships as the opposite of rivalry is undone in these texts. Both Jas’s and Ruby’s obsessions with power spill out in erotic obsession. Ruby betrays many of his counterparts in order to get to the top of the South Asian gang chain. Power is ultimately threaded through the intimacies that young gangster boys can have, a point that is clear in Ruby’s final murder:

I look him dead in the eyes and ask, ‘You know I love you man?’

‘Yeah, I know that. I love you, too, Ruby, but I’m fucking wasted. Let’s go home.’ He gives me a big smile and then a hug. I turn around and we both walk towards the car. I fall one step back, pull out my piece and put it to the back of his head, BOOM! Manjeet’s knees buckle and he flops to the ground. Aiming at his

back, BOOM! BOOM! I look down on his limp body, BOOM! I take off back to Surrey, leaving his corpse on the ground. Afterwards, my stomach feels empty, my face feels droopy and my chest tightens up... I can't believe this just happened. I'm holding back the tears... Am I growing a conscience? I hope not because I can't have one in this life. I sure did love that guy though. (303-304)

These intimacies cannot last because they don't follow the trajectory of heteronormativity—they are fleeting because the ways that *rudeboys* and thug boys live and engage with each other and cannot conform with heteronormativity. Ruby *cannot* have a conscience, and cannot have intimacy without betrayal. The sexual implications of “packing” are, in the end, materialized as death, not sex.

In *Londonstani*, it is unclear as to who betrays Jas but he is abandoned by his *rudeboy* counterparts when they find out he has trespassed religious and social boundaries by dating Samira and providing Arun with opinions that eventually lead him to commit suicide. Hardjit cannot keep Jas as a friend because it affects his *rudeboy* reputation and Jas understands this: “You just don't do whatever it was I'd done to your bredrens. Especially seeing how much they'd done for me” (277). In order to mend the situation with the *rudeboys*, Jas tries to steal phones from his father's warehouse signaling the choice that eventually must be made between his *rudeboy* family and his nuclear family. Instead, Jas is beaten up by masked individuals and in his attempt to prevent incrimination he chooses to burn the warehouse down. In *Daaku*, Ruby betrays many alliances and friends to get to the top and is eventually betrayed by them as well. The most prominent friendships for *rudeboys* and gangsters are conceptualized through partnership for wealth but capital, along with power, is one of the main reasons for betrayal. Since the men cannot have loving homosexual relationships with one another, they must have

violent homosocial ones. At its most extreme, violent love produces death and betrayal; death is in fact, the greatest token of love the men can offer one another. Especially in Ruby's case, he loves his brothers, and the consequence of this love is death.

In both *Londonstani* and *Daaku*, the reader is left with questions as to what happens to the protagonist, and a strong sense that each of the main characters has been betrayed. Betrayal illuminates the impossibility of *rudeboy* and gangster intimacies. The intimacies that young Sikh men can access are not viable. Instead, they end in violence. Ruby must kill his best friend and Jas must be violently excommunicated from his *rudeboy* brethren. This functions as the ultimate signal of the impossibility of young, diasporic, South Asian masculinities to exist in long-lasting ways due to betrayals by the state, law, family, and ultimately, each other.

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