Imagineing Bombay: the Literary Representations of a Postcolonial City

by

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Abstract

This dissertation analyses Bombay novels written in English that construct the city through the narrative manipulation of time, space, and memory. I argue that these imaginative (re)constructions of the city emphasize the limitations of narrative agency as well as the multiplicity and competition between narratives that comprise Bombay’s identity. In the first chapter, I contend that the hegemonic narratives of postcolonial nationalism, British colonialism, and Hindu fundamentalism are reductive rhetorical strategies that limit interpretations of Bombay novels to singular conceptions of the city. I argue that the novels by Salman Rushdie, Rohinton Mistry, and Vikram Chandra reveal characters who actively struggle in different ways with the multiple and coexisting identity-narratives of Bombay that they encounter in their everyday lives. In Chapter Two, I argue that in Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* and *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* first-person narrators manipulate time, space, and memory from protected, private spaces in order to reclaim the endangered Bombay that is central to their individual identities. Chapter Three examines Mistry’s Parsi characters in *Such a Long Journey* and *Family Matters*, who have almost no power to exercise narrative agency and, consequently, must negotiate by other means the overwhelming crush of identity narratives that impinge upon their private spaces. They attempt to change these narratives...
through ordinary actions in their everyday lives. In Chapter Four, I argue that Chandra’s *Sacred Games* reveals how typically elided characters reinscribe themselves into Bombay’s spaces. The novel uses the threat of nuclear holocaust and the intricate political and economic relationships between mob bosses and police to sensationalize, and so represent very explicitly, characters’ engagements with hegemonic narratives. The versions of Bombay these novelists produce are at once nostalgic, utopian, and pessimistic, and my analysis provides a model for reading this city and these narratives in which characters struggle to make their voices heard amidst both the city’s dense population and its crowd of stories.
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Appendix A: Bombay Novels in English
Introduction

Since the 1980s, Mumbai has increasingly been the subject of novels written in English. These novels are most often set before 1995, when the city was renamed, and focus on imaginatively reconstructing Bombay.\(^1\) Authors of Bombay novels are particularly concerned with how post-colonial individuals, living in the wake of national and international political paradigm shifts, have been affected by the city’s local politics.\(^2\) The imposition of public identity narratives on personal spaces limits the control urban residents have over identity. In their depictions of everyday life, Bombay novels create the city’s spaces through the manipulation of personal memories and public histories and reveal a recursive narrative relationship between the identities of individuals and the identities of the city. Authors of novels are able to manipulate time, space, and memory in order to produce imagined versions of the city that intersect with the real. Novels thus present a clear illustration of the constructedness (i.e., the fictionality) of Bombay identities. In novels, this constructedness is emphasized by the role individual interiority plays in the

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\(^1\) The name “Bombay” remains a prominent signifier for the city in this body of literature and, for this reason, is also the dominant term for the analyses of this dissertation.

\(^2\) I use the hyphenated term “post-colonial” as an historical marker for the post-independence period(s) of decolonization, as per Ato Quayson’s helpful differentiation between ex-colonial societies and postcolonial studies in *Postcolonialism: Theory, Practice, or Process?* (1). Throughout my dissertation, I rely on the unhyphenated term “postcolonial” to refer more broadly to the theoretical and discursive engagement with the “process of postcolonializing” which considers both the historical events of decolonization and the ethical, aesthetic, and political constructions of identity in response to colonialism (Quayson 9). These constructions are the subject of debate in the field of study initiated by Edward Said in *Orientalism* and *Culture and Imperialism* and developed by Aijaz Ahmad in *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures*; Homi K. Bhabha in *Location of Culture*; Elleke Boehmer in *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature: Migrant Metaphors*; Partha Chatterjee in *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*; Ania Loomba in *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*; Achille Mbembe in *On the Postcolony*; Ato Quayson in *Postcolonialism: Theory, Practice, or Process?*; Gayatri Spivak in *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics: A Critique of Postcolony Reason: Towards a History of the Vanishing Present*; and Robert J. C. Young in *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture, and Race*; *White Mythologies: Writing History and the West*; and *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction*. 
creation of city-space. Through character perspectives, readers come to understand that the Bombay encountered in the city streets is always-already imagined. Thus, Bombay novels demand analysis that investigates both their narrative techniques and their content in order to understand the plural imagined Bombays that coexist within city’s space.

The idea of cities as imagined places has dominated urban studies throughout the twentieth-century. Jonathan Raban succinctly and clearly explains that all cities are comprised of two competing versions: “the soft city of illusion, myth, aspiration, nightmare, is as real, maybe more real, than the hard city one can locate on maps, in statistics, in monographs on urban sociology and demography and architecture” (2). The soft city is often considered the imagined city, while the hard city is conceived as the real. In Bombay, to a greater extent than most other cities, the imagined, soft city has dominated historical and political rhetoric without always acknowledging the narrative artifice implicit in the construction of the city’s identity. Gyan Prakash, in his investigation of Bombay’s historical development, argues that deeply flawed “narratives of change” about “the rise and fall of the city” dominate textual depictions of it: “Pick up recent novels on the city, read nonfiction writings, turn the pages in newspaper and magazine files, talk to people, and you will be confronted with a story that purports to tell us what the city was as Bombay and what it has become as Mumbai” (23). In Mumbai Fables, Prakash works to “unravel” the “fables” of how the city came to be (24). It is a significant, and long-overdue, postcolonial investigation of the city’s historical narratives that replaces the outdated and limited, linear histories of the city by Gillian Tindall and M.D. David. However, the investigation of Bombay narratives demands its own, nuanced, approach that delineates the literary techniques and narrative modes used to construct identities and city-space in Bombay novels in order to understand how these authors grapple with the question: how do you imagine

The idea of narrative as an intermediary between individuals and the world has been heavily theorized and I do not intend to imply that Bombay novels necessarily require a new theoretical approach to narrative or space. Rather, I argue that Bombay novels reveal the artifice and agency necessary to create the composites of personal and public (i.e. historical and political) narratives which comprise the city’s postcolonial identities. These public narratives often compete to create dominant authoritative versions of Bombay, while they simultaneously help produce plural Bombays. In the section “Writing Bombay” below, I delineate a variety of historical narratives by politicians and historians which both construct the city’s postcolonial identities and inform the context for Bombay novels. These hegemonic historical narratives are mapped in Bombay novels by readers who look to delineate the authenticity or mimeticism of the novels. For example, this tendency leads Meenakshi Mukherjee to accuse Vikram Chandra of pandering to western audiences by exoticizing eastern philosophy when he titles his short stories “Dharma”, “Artha”, and “Kama”. It validates Amitava Kumar’s categorization of Rohinton Mistry, V.S. Naipaul, and Suketu Mehta as authors of the same kind of literary realism

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4 According to Chandra’s reconstruction of his encounter with Mukherjee, she argues, that “ordinary people don’t think about such things as dharma, or use that kind of language, the titles couldn’t have arisen from the stories but were tagged on to signal Indianess in a Western context” (“Cult of Authenticity” 2). The accusation bewilders Chandra, who claims to see this active engagement and use of these philosophical concepts in “ordinary” India everyday.
when they recreate Bombay’s spaces in their texts. It also enables Nilufer Bharucha to conclude that Mistry’s *Family Matters* is “a quintessential Bombay book” because Bombay “is not so much re-created, as actually ‘created’, from newspaper reports, visits to the city and visiting friends and relatives from Bombay” (Rohinton Mistry 208). In these readings, Bombay novels are lauded for their ability to mimetically reproduce “the real” Bombay. This dependence on imitative reproduction or mimesis over narrative techniques or diegesis is also evident in historical criticism.

While the work of historians like Gyan Prakash and Arjun Appadurai have broken down the linear histories and hegemonic constructions of identity in Bombay, they inevitably revert back to referencing “the real” in a way that is not necessary in fiction. This dissertation seeks to question the body of criticism that reads literature in search of authentic, mimetic, or static representations of Bombay and/or Mumbai and its residents. I argue that emphasis on narrative techniques in Bombay novels creates imagined postcolonial identities for the city and its inhabitants which reveal the city’s multiplicity. They can be at once nostalgic, utopian, and pessimistic without relying on conceptions of the real as objective fact.

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5 Kumar revisits his privileging of realism in “Bad News: Authenticity and the South Asian political novel” a review of Aravind Adiga’s *White Tiger* published in the *Boston Review* (1 November 2008). Although he sees problems with Adiga’s novel, he is excited by its form—fictionalized news stories. He writes, “I have long subscribed to the idea that one of the novel’s primary tasks is to produce a map of the contemporary. By one definition, then, the province of the novel is what you read in your newspaper each morning or watch on your television at night” (n. pag). While Kumar acknowledges the importance of artistic aesthetics in literature, it does not prevent him from favouring authenticity in novels: “For a political novel to be successful, it may, in the end, have to betray its program. Art, like life, seizes us when it transcends a fixed purpose”, he concedes momentarily, but ultimately, he believes that “there is no escape from the yearning for the real” and writers cannot free themselves from the question of authenticity. I return to Mukherjee’s criticism and Chandra’s response, as well as Kumar’s article “Map of the World” in chapter four.

6 I use mimesis in the traditional sense of a representation or imitation of reality to emphasize the distance between reality and the mimetic constructions of Bombay within the diegetic frames of novels. My intention is to analyze how Bombay is imagined, rather than to measure or evaluate the novels’ authenticity or distance from perceived objective realities. This simple distinction is (surprisingly) necessary because, as I argue above, critics and authors insist on reading these novels as (in)authentic representations of “the real” Bombay. Thus, to prove this point, I set aside, rather than engage with, the long tradition of thinking about mimesis, mimicry, and Realism in literature.
My project studies the representations of Bombay’s local, regional, national, and transnational identities in the novels of three of the most prominent and widely-read authors of Bombay fiction: Salman Rushdie, Rohinton Mistry, and Vikram Chandra. These three authors are commonly lauded as “chroniclers of Bombay” because they depict the city in nuanced detail not often found in more generalized, English-language representations of the city, such as Siddartha Dhanvant Shanghvi’s *The Last Son of Dusk*. Shanghvi writes a narrative which confines the city to the background where it remains a symbolic trope indirectly related to the novel’s action. Rushdie, Mistry, and Chandra, however, depict Bombay in a way that foregrounds the role of the city in the everyday lives of characters. Their versions of Bombay are often written about by literary critics, but few compare the authors with the intention of identifying Bombay novels as a cohesive body of literature. For Rushdie’s, Mistry’s, and Chandra’s protagonists, Bombay is a powerful force that defines individuals and is recursively defined by them. This symbiotic relationship is of particular importance in a city where space and residents are bureaucratically categorized into rigid identity groups which tend to alienate residents from their home. Bombay novels reveal how individuals negotiate everyday life in the city and make use of spaces like Parsi *baugs*, Irani cafes, and illegal slums. These authors write Bombay in a variety of literary modes as they examine the relationship between individual agency and the city: Rushdie employs magic realism, Mistry uses realism, and Chandra combines the detective and crime genres to represent everyday life in Bombay in the novels under consideration in this project. In order to depict the specific forms of urban alienation experienced by city residents who identify with particular collective identity groups, each author also focalizes his novel(s) from a different religious perspective—Muslim, Parsi, Hindu, and

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7 This trend is changing with the work of Caroline Herbert (2006), Priyamvada Gopal (2009), and Roshan G. Shahani (1995).
Sikh. The portrayal of these different perspectives from a variety of literary genres reveals how characters use memory (individual and collective) and narrative to construct the city and their place in it. Thus each authors adds a particular framing perspective from which to consider the multiple identities of Bombay. Though their generic and modal approaches differ, all three authors share a similar struggle to imagine a city that intersects with the so-called real in order to present Mumbai to global reading audiences.

By tracing the narrative perspectives within novels, the movement of characters through the city, and the urban alienation they experience, I argue that protagonists continually rewrite their own sense of identity, personal history, and agency. As a result, these characters also reimagine the identities, the histories, and the power relations of the city they inhabit. We see this interplay with Bombay through Saleem Sinai in Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* as well as Rai Merchant in *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*; Gustad Noble in Rohinton Mistry’s *Such a Long Journey* and Nariman Vakeel in *Family Matters*; and both Sartaj Singh and Ganesh Gaitonde in Vikram Chandra’s *Sacred Games*. These novels all draw attention to the fact that the city is often read in rigid binary terms: either as a cosmopolitan utopia that represents India’s ideal, multicultural modernity, or as a parochial place that has succumbed to discriminatory and alienating communalism and so represents India’s provincialism. I argue that the narrative artifice of novels challenges these binary constructions of Bombay. Thus, the novels constitute a body of literature in which readers must try to understand Mumbai and its residents without reproducing the exclusionary identity politics that organize the city’s population into rigid collective identities. Through an examination of the narrative techniques that Rushdie, Mistry, and Chandra employ to represent everyday life, the city emerges as a complex and dynamic nexus of identities, political histories, and power relationships that defy binary divisions.
Rushdie, Mistry, and Chandra are among an ever-growing list of Bombay novelists including, but not limited to, Amit Chaudhuri, Dilip Chitre, Boman Desai, Farrukh Dhondy, Anosh Irani, Cyrus Mistry, Jerry Pinto, R. Raj Rao, Shashi Tharoor, Umrity Thurigar, and Ardashir Vakil. I focus on the novels of Rushdie, Mistry, and Chandra because their popularity with global audiences (proven by market sales and literary awards) has made their versions of the city dominant in the readings of Bombay. Their novels are thus the most logical place to introduce a reading strategy for Bombay novels, which I embark upon by elaborating in depth, rather than in breadth. When these novelists reproduce the city, they challenge readers to understand its inherent contradictory narratives—its colonial and its postcolonial features, its cosmopolitanism and its parochialism, or its poverty and its riches. Moreover, Bombay novelists call attention to the various historical and social conflicts that impact the city’s identity through the act of writing in English—a language that emphasizes the history and effects of British colonialism and the on-going struggle to define Indianness based on its modernity and tradition. They also all engage with the different forms of urban alienation that Bombay residents encounter and negotiate in their daily lives. The narrative techniques, perspectives, and themes within these novels reveal that the urban alienation experienced in Bombay is a function of the intrusion of local, regional, and national, political narratives into the everyday lives of individuals. This intrusion forces readers to recognize the discrepancy between the agency characters exercise (in the form of personal memory and movement through space) over the city’s and their own identities and their impotence against bureaucratic political control of the city. The oscillation between the personal and the political produces versions of Bombay that are at once nostalgic, utopian, and pessimistic.

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8 See Appendix A for a list of titles and additional authors.
1.1 Writing Bombay

In this section I delineate three of the most impactful historical narratives responsible for constructing the city’s post-colonial identities. These historical narratives inform the contexts for Bombay novels. The first is post-colonial Indian nationalism, which offers an urban/rural binary for understanding the role of cities in the future of the independent Indian nation.

Bombay novels often challenge this binary by subsuming the rural within the urban and thus eliminating the geographical distance between Indian modernity and Indian traditional culture.

The second hegemonic narrative that I consider—the colonial construction of the city—is the historical precursor to post-colonial nationalism, but is a logical transition from the more generalized discussion of the Indian urban to the specific city of Bombay. Examining the historical growth of the city with respect to colonialism reveals how the name “Bombay” became conflated with ideas of the city’s modernity and capitalism. Bombay novels tend to invoke this narrative through their depictions of the city’s cosmopolitanism and economic opportunity.

Third, I examine the motivations behind the city’s name change in 1995, which reveal a hegemonic narrative focused on (re)claiming a linear history for the city that is an alternate for British colonialism. The fundamentalist narrative that produces Mumbai as an alternative to Bombay exposes the violent competition between hegemonic historical narratives that has come to define Bombay in the twentieth century. This narrative tends to be vilified in Bombay novels through the parodic and/or one-dimensional representation of the Shiv Sena. The last historical narrative that I examine below is neither political nor hegemonic, exactly, but it is a significant factor in the unique position Bombay holds in the Indian imaginary: the history of the city in
Films have created a ubiquitous image of Bombay as an always-already imagined place with which authors of Bombay novels cannot help but engage.

In Mumbai, groups of individuals are often alienated from their environment by political pronouncements which interfere with the daily experience of living in the city. A number of writers in disciplines as varied as anthropology, sociology, and cultural theory have written about the complexities of Bombay’s political landscape. In addition to Appadurai and Prakash, Sujata Patel, Alice Thorner, Jim Masselos, Jane Jacobs and Rashmi Varma are among the critics and theorists who try to unpack the binaries by which the city is so often categorized. They do so by examining the ways that journalists, planners, writers, artists, filmmakers, and political activists have all engaged with and helped to construct the city’s identities. The difficulty, Prakash so eloquently explains, is that “Mumbai’s everyday practice rejects history written as a linear story and presents it instead as a tapestry of different, overlapping, and contradictory experiences, imaginations, and desires” (Mumbai Fables 348). The city that politicians, filmmakers, and authors of both fiction and non-fiction try to understand through their writing is at once a place of overwhelming urban growth and decay. As the capital of the film industry and home to a wide variety of manufacturing, finance and service industries, it is a beacon of opportunity and attracts large numbers of immigrants who harbour dreams of prosperity. This is the city typically identified by the name “Bombay”. The large population of migrants and minorities have made it

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9 By “Indian imaginary”, I mean both the imaginations of Indians and the imaginative construction of India.

10 Jacobs, for example, specifically investigates the architectural “cultural politics of place” in World Heritage sites such as Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus, which exemplify the colonial influences that continue being transformed and transforming postcolonial places (9). In fact, the entire Fort district has been locally registered as a heritage site, making the spaces in the district “inherited artefacts but [ones that] gain an active influence in the present by way of the various popular meanings and official sanctions ascribed to them” (35). Ian Baucom presents an insightful reading of the polyvocality of Victoria Terminus in Out of Place, identifying it as an architectural site which forces the recognition of the fact that “the Victoria Terminus reveals that it has become what it was built to erase”, namely the distinctions between Englishness and Indianness (83-86).
a culturally-diverse, cosmopolitan city that is paradoxically a breeding ground for violent fundamentalist politics. Thus the city of promise has an alter ego defined by parochial politics, corruption, and poverty. These aspects of city life are often signified by the name “Mumbai”. While the variety of writers listed above all construct identities and city-space, narrative writers in particular engage with how these binary opposites coexist and produce plural Bombays and Mumbais.

1.1.1 Postcolonial nationalism and the Indian urban

Politicians and activists embroiled in the struggle for independence were forced to reconcile the emergence of the modern Indian city alongside the traditional Indian village as they try to define India as an independent, post-colonial nation. By and large, nationalists, including Mohandas Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru, looked to the village to define Indianness and did so while inventing a new idea of the Indian urban which reclaimed cities from the stronghold of British colonialism (Khilnani 108). While Gandhi sought to rebuild the city based on the cultural legacy of ancient Indian villages, Nehru envisioned modern Indian cities which would radiate modernity and sovereignty out to the rest of India and would be based on ancient Indian cities. Gandhi claimed that “the blood of the villages is the cement by which the edifice of the cities is built” (qtd. in Khilnani 127). Meanwhile, for Nehru, well-organized, well-planned, industrial urban centres would radiate modernity out towards the villages, where most Indians lived (and continue to live). He hoped cities would be “an effective engine to drive India into the modern world”
In both cases, the construction of the Indian urban depended upon its relationship to the village.

Despite Gandhi’s and Nehru’s messages of inclusion and sovereignty, the transformation of their ideas into bureaucratic public policy often yielded troubling results because the anti-colonial nationalist movements scripting the Indian urban relied on the same philosophy of difference and myth of linear history which defined colonial erasures of indigenous cultural identities. According to Partha Chatterjee’s reading of South Asian nationalism in *The Nation and its Fragments*, the institutions and ideologies that constitute the local government and the colonial government—the Nation State and the Colonial State, respectively—depend upon a philosophy of difference in their treatment of history, women, peasants, and outcasts. The Nation State and the Colonial State define Indianness in negative terms: Indians are not Moghul conquerors, for example, nor are they British colonizers. This negative definition depends upon the creation of Others within local communities, who too often are translated by politicians into

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11 Gandhi and Nehru here stand as representatives of the more complex debate over Indian nationalism occurring in the early twentieth century. These debates include the stratagems of the aforementioned as well as those of Subhas Chandra Bose, B.R. Ambedkar, and Muhammad Ali Jinnah. Each man was constructing Indian nationalism, modernity and the Indian city in different ways and complex ways, which deserve much more attention than I can give them here. I use Gandhi’s and Nehru’s examples of nationalism here, not to construct monolithic versions of Indian nationalism, but rather to point towards the complex of nationalisms which contributed to the construction of an urban/rural binary, even when those two signifiers stand for a variety of meanings.

12 Etienne Balibar defines “the nationalist myth of a linear destiny” as “[t]he myth of origins and national continuity, which emerged with the end of colonialism, but which we have a tendency to forget has also been fabricated over recent centuries in the case of the ‘old’ nations, is therefore an effective ideological form, in which the imaginary singularity of national formations is constructed daily, by moving back from the present into the past” (“History and Ideology” 88, 87). Additionally, Edward Said identifies this struggle between nativism and nationalism in his discussion of Yeats, an author sometimes celebrated as exemplifying Adorno’s negative dialectic (1993, 227-8). “We are left the paradox” Said explains, “that Soyinka himself articulates, that (he has Fanon in mind)...while it is impossible to avoid the combative, assertive early stages in the nattivist identity...there is a good deal of promise in getting beyond them, not remaining trapped in the emotional self-indulgence of celebrating one’s own identity” (229). In moving beyond nativism, Said concludes, we do not have to be limited by nationalist chauvinism and can instead embrace “the possibility of a more generous and pluralistic vision of the world....In this phase, liberation, and not nationalist independence, is the new alternative” (230).
an “enemy within” who must be guarded against.\textsuperscript{13} So while the wave of nationalism led by Gandhi and Nehru sought to remodel the British colonial cities of India as bastions of a new democratic Indian modernity, their construction of the Indian urban opened the door to exclusionary definitions of who counted as Indian and who could claim power over the cities.\textsuperscript{14} Bombay, then, is not unique with regard to its exclusionary political atmosphere. The result is that “India’s cities have not quite fulfilled the nationalist expectations”, explains Khilnani, because “their modernity is not of a pure and happy kind, but a split and discontented one, full of darker, mixed potential. They have become spawning grounds for contrary conceptions of what India is: on the one hand an hyperbolic parochialism, a bleached cosmopolitanism on the other” (110). In other words, the political conceptions of Indian cities created an atmosphere that made them sites for the manifestation of conflicting narratives of Indian modernity. When Bombay is defined by nationalism and read as a contested symbolic representation of national ideology, all members of the city are contributing to a definition of inclusive Indian identity (ideally). From this point of view, Bombay cannot be very different from other Indian urban spaces. Bombay, Delhi (old and new), Lucknow, Pune, Varanasi all contribute to the idea of an Indian urban which, taken alongside the Indian rural landscape, creates and supports a unified nation-state. However, the narratives set in these other cities cannot be easily transplanted into Bombay. Aravind Adiga’s \textit{White Tiger}, for example, loses some of its political impact if the protagonist is

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{13} Arjun Appadurai’s \textit{Fear of Small Numbers} develops this idea in relation to political rhetoric after September 11, 2001.
\item \textsuperscript{14} This politics of exclusion can be seen on a national level through the government’s definitions of and protections for identity exemplified by the reservation system of Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Classes. The reservation system attempts to protect the political, educational and economic rights of underprivileged communities. Within this system, a citizen’s participation in the government and in government programs depends on his or her identification with a Hindu caste defined within the Constitutional schedule. The result is a system of discrimination (privileging low-caste Hindus over other minorities) that persists in India as the country continues trying to define itself and its people. For comprehensive explanations of the reservation system and the difficulties the system causes for India’s minorities see Gerald James Larson’s \textit{India’s Agony Over Religion} and Marc Galanter’s \textit{Competing Equalities: Law and the Backward Classes in India}.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
not a chauffeur to a businessman bribing government officials in the nation’s capital, Delhi. Furthermore, when we approach the literary imaginings of the postcolonial national urban, Bombay begins to stand out from other Indian cities.

The publication of Midnight’s Children in 1981 has been called the beginning of an age of Indian writing in English focused on urban rather than rural settings. Since the 1980s the number of urban novels has continued to grow, in part because of the rapid growth of Indian cities in the twentieth century. Like the nationalists imagining India in the 1930s and 1940s, prior to the 1980s, many authors of Indian literature in English depended upon the juxtaposition of the rural and the urban to develop definitions of Indian nationalism and Indian cultural identity, or “Indianness”. This literature, exemplified by Leonard Woolf’s Village in the Jungle (1913), positions the perceived simplicity and innocence of village and rural settings against the modernity and corruption of urban centres. Rural settings are depicted as the pastoral source of Indian culture and religion, and cities are portrayed as the source of globalized, economic modernity and social, secular cosmopolitanism which threatened the traditional rural Indian identity.

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15 Sociologist Giri Raj Gupta identifies 1941 to 1951 as the period of greatest urban growth in India (vi). In “Bombay’s Urban Predicament”, Sujata Patel details Bombay’s growth specifically:

Except for the plague years at the end of the nineteenth century, the city witnessed a steady but modest increase in population. In sharp contrast, the mid-twentieth century was a time of phenomenal expansion. In the 30-year period between 1901 and 1931, the population had increased by about 40 per cent. With the wartime economic boom followed by the influx of refugees from districts allotted to Pakistan, the decade from 1941 to 1951 chalked up a rise in population of 76 per cent. Comparable figures for the next three decades were respectively 40, 44, and 38 per cent. Between 1941 and 1971, two-thirds of Bombay’s inhabitants had been born outside of the city. (xv-xvii)

16 This, of course, is only one trajectory in the history of Indian literature. Chelva Kanaganayakam argues for a multi-linear Indian literary history in Counterrealism and Indo-Anglian Fiction (2009).
One of the defining works of Anglophone Indian literature in the twentieth century which employs this model is Raja Rao’s *Kanthapura* (1938). The novel depicts the conflict between traditional, religious values and modern (i.e. anti-colonial), political ideas in the years preceding Indian independence in one south Indian village. Throughout the novel the village is depicted as a nuanced site for the complicated negotiation of national identity, while the city remains a trope signalling the abstract sources of political ideology. Rao refers to Bombay as little more than a metonym for different types of Indian nationalisms and/or modernities. While his novel positions the rural and the urban in opposition to one another, it also breaks down the binary as an insufficient approach to India’s space. Rao, of course, is focused on presenting a nuanced depiction of Indian village space, and some would argue is irrelevant to the argument at hand regarding the representation of Bombay in novels. However, Rao’s novel and the work of literary critics like Raymond Williams and the recent, Indo-centric work of Anupama Mohan offer correctives for reading the manifestation of the political rural/urban binary of post-colonial nationalisms in literature. Williams approaches the binary in literature through a socio-economic lens to elaborate on the country/city divide in British literature, while Mohan examines the intersection of political narratives and rural spaces in Indian and Sri Lankan literatures.

17 Modernity, in this case, refers specifically to the development of Indian nationalism and anti-colonial politics in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It is an historical marker and not a comprehensive reference to modernity’s many definitions.

18 Located in the eponymous village, Rao’s novel portrays villagers protesting colonial rule via Gandhi’s *satyagraha* and struggling against customary caste politics which exclude minority members of society from becoming political actors. In his exploration of India’s changing political landscape, Rao restricts the novel’s action to the village and the nearby coffee estate; the city functions as an unseen source of modern political thought, but is distanced from the everyday village life. This is exemplified by the fact that Gandhi’s methods of protest are brought to the village by a city-returned, English-educated Brahmin who leads villagers in their protests against colonialism. The future of village life is doomed by this spread of urban politics into the pastoral space: by the novel’s end, the village is destroyed by the colonials of the coffee estate and the land is encroached upon by the city, or at least by the idea of it. Rao’s narrator reports, “there’s neither man nor mosquito in Kanthapura, for the men from Bombay have built houses on the Bebbur Mound” (259).

Raymond Williams charts a very similar binary approach to the rural and the urban in English literature in *The Country and the City* (1973), a seminal text in the literary criticism of urban fiction. Williams argues that English literature manipulates the rural/urban binary to depict social and economic changes associated with the development of capitalism in England. He works to debunk the binary divide between the rural and the urban by revealing the nuances in both rural and urban life in England. With regard to the history of Indian literature in English, Anupama Mohan’s recent book, *Utopia and the Village in South-Asian Literature* (2012), recovers the representations of Indian village and rural life from the rural/urban binary through her critical examination of works such as Rao’s *Kanthapura*. She argues that the rural Indian settings and the literary engagement with Gandhian politics in the novels create interstitial zones of contact and negotiation which are more nuanced than suggested by the binary oppositions between rural/urban, utopian/dystopian, or national/marginal. Mohan’s argument is an important elaboration on the rewriting of Indian identity in Anglophone fiction through the depictions of rural sites, but she does not have the space to recover the complicated identity of the Indian city from the simplification of the urban/rural binary.

Perhaps the most even-handed approach to the village and the city in Indian literature is Ashish Nandy’s *The Ambiguous Journey to the City: The Village and Other Odd Ruins of the Self in the Indian Imagination*. Nandy examines the myth of the journey to the city throughout Indian literary history, beginning with the *Mahabharata*. He contends that this journey has always been significant to the narrative depictions of spiritual awakening in Indian literature. However, he argues, the reversal of the rural/urban binary to focus on urban rather than rural spaces and the subsequent disconnection between authors and rural life has changed the meaning of the journey to the city as a trope in Indian literature. The journey between the village and the city in South Asia, he explains,
has become a journey from a disowned self to a self that cannot be fully owned up. The inner contradictions and tensions of the city-as-self, which trigger the painful journey back to the village, are often the exact reverse of the inner contradictions and tensions of the village, which triggered the fateful journey to the city in the first place. If the journey to the city was once an escape from oppressive sectarian and community ties, the demands of ascribed status, and the denial of individuality, the attempts to escape from the city are also often powered by dreams of an idyllic community and escape from hyper-competitive, atomized individualism. (24)

He remains focused on the significance of the journey itself and the city remains an abstract symbol for Indian modernity, rather than a nuanced site in which everyday life is acted out. For Nandy, authors’ disconnection from the rural has meant that the journey is now more psychic and metaphorical than physical and literal. His investigation of the journey trope helps elucidate the movement of characters within the city of Bombay. I argue that the journeys characters make within the city reveal how postcolonial nationalism and rural Indianness are inextricable from Bombay’s landscape.

1.1.2 Colonial regimes imagine Bombay

A second influential hegemonic narrative implicated in the fictional imaginings of Bombay is the colonial development of the city from a small village to a booming metropolis. Although waves of immigration and colonization dominate Bombay’s historical development, British colonialism is distinguished as one of the most significant influences on the architectural, economic, industrial, and cultural features of Bombay.
The city we know today was originally a Koli fishing village spread across seven islands. Governance of the area was traded non-violently between indigenous tribes until it became part of the Maurya Empire under Emperor Ashoka in the third century. During the decline of the Maurya Empire in the ninth century, the region came under Siláhara rule. It was also during this period that the first Parsis arrived in India (settling mainly in present-day Gujarat and gradually making their way down to Bombay). The region began to develop into an urban area in the thirteenth century when Raja Bhim (variously referred to as Bhíma Rája, Bhim Raj, Bhimrao, and Prince Bhimdev) took possession of it. Raja Bhim saw the same possibilities as the later Portuguese for creating a large trading center on the west coast of India and thus encouraged his subjects to come from present-day Gujarat to settle on the northernmost island of Mahim, eventually making it the capital of his empire (G. Narayan 64-65). The history of colonization in the region continued after the decline of Raja Bhim’s dynasty: in the mid-thirteenth century the Delhi Sultanate annexed the islands, which they controlled by appointing the Muslim Governors of Gujarat, who ruled for half a century before the independent Gujarat Sultanate took over (David 1973, p.14). They reigned over the region for nearly one hundred years.

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20This historical overview provides a brief summary of a complicated series of colonizations and waves of migration that destabilize any monolithic versions of Bombay. A more nuanced exploration of the historical transitions that helped develop the multicultural, transnational character of Bombay falls outside the purview of the current project, which remains focused on literature in order to analyze how Bombay is imagined in novels. The above summary has been compiled from the detailed examinations of Bombay history by Amrita Abraham in “Bombay’s Promised Land” (2010); Teresa Albuquerque in Bombay, a history (1992); Joseph G. Da Cunha in The Origin of Bombay (1900; rep. 1993); M.D. David’s Bombay, the City of Dreams: a History of the First City in India (1995), History of Bombay, 1661-1708 (1973), and Urban Explosion of Mumbai (1996); W.R. Davide in “The Development of Bombay” (1924); W.S. Desai in Bombay and the Marathas up to 1774 (1970); Mariam Dossal in Imperial Designs and Indian Realities: the Planning of Bombay City, 1845-1875 (1991); James Douglas in Bombay and Western India: a Series of Stray Papers (1893, rep. 1985); Sharada Dwivedi in Fort Walks (1999); Sharada Dwivedi and Rahul Mehrotra in Bombay” The Cities Within(1995); Amar Farooqui in “Urban Development in a Colonial Situation: Early Nineteenth Century Bombay” (1996); A. Gosh in The City in Early Historical India (1973); Thomas Blöm Hansen in Wages of Violence (2005); Suketu Mehta in Maximum City (2005); Partha Mitter in “The Early British Port Cities of India: Their Planning and Architecture Circa 1640-1757” (1986); Govind Narayan in An Urban Biography from 1863 (2009); Derek O’Brien in The Mumbai Factfile (2003); Gyan Prakash in Mumbai Fables (2010); Gillian Tindall in City of Gold: the Biography of Bombay (1982); and the essays collected by Sujata Patel and Jim Masselos in Bombay and Mumbai: the Biography of Bombay City: The City in Transition (2003), as well as by Patel and Alice Thorner in Bombay: Metaphor for Modern India (1996) and Bombay: Mosaic of Modern Culture (1995).
and fifty years before they ceded control to the Portuguese in 1534 when the Treaty of Bassein was signed. Urban development stalled under Portuguese feudal rule, which helped the region progress based on the personal penchants of local landlords with little central organization. Thus, the region decayed from “the island of the good life” to “the Cemetery of the Europeans”, a reputation that was only reversed again under British rule (da Cunha 102). In the mid-seventeenth century, the Portuguese bequeathed the colony to Charles II as part of Catherine de Braganza’s dowry in 1627.

Charles promptly leased the islands to the East India Company, who helped raise Bombay’s importance as an international trading port. Initially, the British spent much of the seventeenth century fending off attacks from the Mughal Empire followed by the Maratha Empire, leaving little time for urban development beyond the construction of a fortified town within which British citizens could live protected from attacks. The British concentrated their attention on the development of the southernmost islands of the region—near the growing ports—in order to build the city’s reputation as an trading and banking center. Gyan Prakash explains that this area “became a well-defended walled town. It had fortified gates, a bastion that could mount several cannons, a marine force to defend the dockyard, and St. Thomas Church, where the Europeans could pray” (35). This section of downtown Bombay is still known as the “Fort district.” It remains one of the primary centres of cultural and economic activity in the city and is a frequent focus of fiction and nonfiction narratives.

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21 The Maratha empire was led by Chhatrapati Shivaji Bhosole, who consolidated power and fought to overtake most of the South Asian continent from the Mughals in the second half of the seventeenth century. He succeeded and ruled over most of the subcontinent, though he never was able to take Bombay from the British. As I explain below, the history of Shivaji is mythologized by the Shiv Sena. Detailed histories of the Maratha Empire can be found in the three volume A History of the Maratha People by Charles Augustus Kincaid (1918) and A History of the Mahrattas [sic] by James Grant Duff and Stephen Meredyth Edwardes (1921). Thomas Blöm Hansen offers a contemporary historical view of the Maratha Empire and Shivaji’s rule which he contextualizes with the mythology of the Shiv Sena in Wages of Violence.
The series of land reclamation projects which created Bombay’s landmass and the inaccessibility of Bombay to the rest of Indian contributed to the British colonial conceptions of Bombay as a blank slate. Unlike Delhi, Lucknow, Ahmedabad, or Pune, Bombay seemed not to have a precolonial urban past that needed to be erased by British colonizers. The land on which they built their colonial buildings was, perhaps more than any other colonial city, a blank slate for the East India Company to develop for financial profit.22 In “Urban Development in a Colonial Situation: Early Nineteenth Century Bombay”, historian Amar Farooqui argues that the British building of Bombay, literally from the ground up was driven by their capitalist desire that saw “no initial appropriation of space” and thus “it was possible for the colonial rulers to take up the most favourable locations” (2747). The land reclamation projects began with the Hornby Vellard embankment at Worli, named after Governor Hornby during whose tenure it was constructed. The exact time frame and cost of the project is unknown, but it “changed the fortunes of Mumbai” explains Govind Narayan, because it “did not just stop the ingress of sea-water into Mumbai” but it also provided for the city’s first sewer system (77). The isolation of Bombay and its dependence on sea trade helped foster this narrative of Bombay as blank space. Although it provided one of the largest ports on the west coast of India, the Sahyadri mountains made it largely inaccessible from the mainland. The fact that the Maratha Empire controlled Salsette to the north of Bombay until the 1770s also helped keep Bombay isolated from overland trade routes. Additionally, Bombay’s dependence on sea trade for everything including basic necessities helped foster its “extrovert” or transnational character (Farooqui 2747). This

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22 The myth of empty land or blank space is a common myth in the British colonizations of South Africa and Australia. It is based on the British legal dictum of terra nullius. J.M Coetzee addresses the twentieth century white South African poets’ relationships to this myth in White Writing: The Culture of Letters in South Africa (Massachusetts: Yale UP, 1989, Chapter 9). See also Anne McClintock on colonial mapping in Imperial Leather, Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest (London and New York: Routledge, 1995, pg 27) and Kate Darian-Smith, Liz Gunner and Sarah Nuttall’s “Introduction” in Text, Theory, Space: Land, literature and history in South Africa and Australia (London and New York: Routledge, 1996. Pg 4-5, 12).
isolation may have initially hindered trade and economic development, but it also presented the East India Company with a protectable blank space on which it could build its headquarters.

Even as they imagined the city into being, the British did not necessarily want to erase the population already living in the area. In order to develop a capitalist economy, they depended on “private, particularly indigenous, enterprise” and could not completely erase the presence of the Indian population from their colonial city, like they did in Delhi: “a live economic and administrative contact with various indigenous groups was vital for the East India Company. Hence it was not feasible that the non-indigenous part of the city be completely detached and separate, permitting no interaction” (Farooqui 2747). While the British walled themselves into Bombay to ward off attack, they simultaneously inspired migration into the city by promoting the town “as a commercial center by encouraging merchants from Gujarat to migrate to their settlement” (Prakash 35). This is not to say that the British imagined building a fully integrated city, far from it.

The building of the Fort exemplifies the implementation of exclusionary and prejudiced policies that fostered lopsided development between classes based on hegemonic identity narratives. Kalpana Sharma explains,

Under colonial rule, the best facilities were reserved for those areas where the British lived. These included the southern part of the island and areas like Malabar Hill and Cumballa Hill, which offered residents a salubrious green location with a view of the Arabian Sea. By way of contrast the native town extending north and east of these locations remained unplanned and poorly serviced. (6-7)

The Fort also helped provide the structure and organization necessary to develop Bombay into an urban environment. “Within the walls of Fort was a castle surrounded by a settlement of
residential and commercial houses, shops, churches and temples”, explain the authors of *Fort Walks*, “and a wide stretch of level open space around the western periphery, known as the Esplanade, provided a clear range of fire to defend the Fort from possible invaders” (10). This area remains home to the Oval Maidan—one of the largest open spaces in the city outside of Sanjay Gandhi National Park—and the site of constant cricket-playing. The Fort also houses some of the most architecturally prominent remains of the colonial British presence, including many of the most well-known images of Anglo-Indian architecture: the Taj Mahal Hotel, the Gateway of India, Flora Fountain, Crawford Market, and Victoria Terminus Station (now Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus). The Raj intended to protect its British subjects from foreign invaders and from the local population by excluding Indians from living within the spacious Fort. Moreover, the colonial city planning (or lack thereof for the Indian residents) propelled the current housing crisis in Bombay. According to Mike Davis, “In colonial India, the tightfisted refusal of the Raj to provide minimal water supplies and sanitation to urban Indian neighborhoods went hand in hand with a *de facto* housing policy that relied on the greed of local landlord elites, who built the horribly overcrowded, unsanitary, but highly profitable tenements that still house millions of Indians” (*Planet of Slums* 34). The housing crisis produced by British colonialism may not be unique to Bombay, but it is exacerbated to exceptional levels by the city’s incredible population growth and static geographic size. In other words, inland Indian cities can expand in ways that Bombay physically cannot because it is surrounded by water on

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23 For an examination of the relationship between cricket and postcolonialism in Mumbai see Arjun Appadurai’s article “Playing with Modernity: The Decolonization of Indian Cricket,” in *Consuming Modernity: Public Culture in a South Asian World.*

24 Jane Jacobs in *Edge of Empire: Postcolonialism and the City* and Ian Baucom in *Out of Place: Englishness, Empire and Locations of Identity* provide readings of these buildings as architectural symbols of British colonialism and examine the ways India has claimed these buildings as its own. The architecture becomes representative of the blurred lines between British and Indian identity as they attempted to divest themselves from one another. In other words, the more they struggled to separate themselves, the more they became implicated in the other’s definition.
three sides.\textsuperscript{25} Thus, the “organizing” forces of British imperialism created as many problems as they solved: transcribing laws into books and “writing the rules” for India went hand in hand with keeping the local constituents unorganized and unable to produce or participate in the new bureaucracy.

The disconnection between space and narrative that guides many studies of Bombay is revealed by some of the current examinations of the Fort district. This section of the city remains a focus for investigations of the residual colonial influences on Bombay, as this walled-fort-turned-business-district has expanded west towards Nariman Point and south towards Colaba. The juxtaposition of the spacious architecture of the Fort and the overcrowding and dilapidation of housing in its outskirts epitomizes the physicality of the social marginalization of the Indian population under the Raj. Vadana Desai uses the example of the Fort to suggest that Bombay strives to recreate a Western business model in this downtown district in order to compete in the global market: “The noisy crowded Western-style Central Business District in the south of Bombay is a modified replica of the city of London, complete with imposing public buildings in a variety of Western architectural styles and red double-decker buses” (98). Gillian Tindall, in her often-cited but problematic work \textit{Bombay: City of Gold}, walks her readers through the Fort—from Khali Goda and the Oval Maidan to Carnac Road—in order to create a visual image of the space and once again draw a distinction between the uses of space in the Fort versus the surrounding neighbourhoods:

South of […] where we have been walking, lies British Bombay, Imperial, Municipal, Big Business and still today Governmental Bombay, the Bombay of the banks and the Stock Exchange and the other prestigious giant buildings, new

\textsuperscript{25} Attempts to expand the city on the mainland with the township of Navi Mumbai (established in 1972) have failed to relieve the housing demands in Mumbai.
and old, the Bombay of western road systems. But north of Carnac Road you pass, abruptly, into another Bombay, and one which is immediately recognisable as such: the Bombay of the bazaar, the small workshops, the stalls, the rag-trade, the temples, the mosques: the Bombay of the people. (35)

Here, the cramped spaces and temples of the bazaars mark it as the city-space of the people: “real” Bombayites, for Tindall, can be identified by their crowding and places of worship. The observation of the overcrowded bazaars serves an important function in representing the legal neighbourhoods and dwellings that represent the inadequate chawls in which more than half of the city’s population live. Tindall’s orientalism refuses to acknowledge the Raj’s responsibility in the way these neighbourhoods were created. More importantly, Tindall ignores the “real people” in the slums and chawls, by removing them from the downtown—reinforcing the residential segregation developed under the Raj without offering any postcolonial critique of that situation. Tindall, like Vadana Desai above, conveniently ignore the way pavement dwellers and sidewalk vendors encroach on to the streets and sidewalks in every section of Bombay. Their encroachment is a way of claiming power over public space in the Fort and negating any claim that this area strictly models itself on Western examples or that the city is only overcrowded in certain neighbourhoods.

The erasure of the poor from downtown Bombay reoccurs in Suketu Mehta’s Maximum City: Bombay Lost and Found, and reinforces the need for a reading strategy that investigates the narrative constructions of Bombay. When Mehta describes his struggle to find his first flat when he returns to Bombay after living in New York, he explains that the only apartment building in

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26 Referencing Urban Development and New Towns in the Third World, Davis explains, “In Mumbai, the typical chawl (75 percent of the city’s formal housing stock) is a dilapidated, one-room rental dwelling that crams a household of six people into 15 square meters; the latrine is usually shared with six other families” (34).
which he could first find a home for his family is located in the south-west (not east, where the Fort is) of the city in Tardeo. Although the southwestern peninsula of Mumbai houses one of the most exclusive neighbourhoods in Mumbai (Malabar Hill, where Rushdie’s characters live), the housing for someone in Mehta’s income bracket (well-off in New York, but now “a pauper in Bombay” [18]), is incredibly overcrowded. And so the Dariya Mahal apartment complex represents more of the legal but inadequate housing available to middle-class Mumbaikers, who, as in the case of the bazaars, are located outside of the Fort. Mehta elaborates on the conditions:

It is hemmed in by large buildings all around. People walking below or standing on their balconies in the buildings opposite can peep into every corner of my flat, watching us as we go about cooking, eating, working, sleeping. There are twenty floors in the building and ten flats on each floor. Each flat will have an average of six residents and three servants; their allocation of incidental support staff (watchmen, construction workers, sweepers) will be one per flat. That makes two thousand people in this building. Two thousand people live in the building adjoining this, and another two thousand in the one immediately behind. The school in the middle has two thousand pupils, teachers, and staff. That makes eight thousand human beings living on a few acres of land. (20) I cite at length here for the same reason Mehta might include such a description in his narrative: although located in one of the wealthiest sections of the city, the living standards for the upper-middle class appear superior to the slums in their ability to stack houses on top of one another. Although living within permanent structures, their lives share the lack of privacy experienced by
people living in slums (where, arguably, lives are public to other slum dwellers and slum tourists/activists/reporters but ignored by the majority of upper and middle class individuals).  

However, such a reading—by us of Mehta, or by Mehta of the housing situation—erases some of the fundamental differences between the types of overcrowding found in Mumbai. Although the residents of Dariya Mahal may be tightly-quartered, they do not have to force themselves into view as legal residents or even visible members of the neighborhood. Additionally, missing from this image are the settlements that inevitably appear beside every complex in the city. While Mehta suggests that there is no room for additional people in-between lives in Dariya Mahal, Arjun Appadurai elaborates on the ability of the poor to squeeze themselves into the very smallest of open spaces (they do not need the open green spaces of the Oval Maidan) and simultaneously explains why authors like Mehta and Tindall would ignore the presence of the poor in these areas:

Even in the apartment buildings of the rich and upper middle class, especially in the commercial core of South Bombay and in the posh areas of Malabar Hill, Cuffe Parade, Worli, and Bandra, there is a constant pressure from the house poor. The poor set up house anywhere they can light a fire and stretch out a thin sheet to sleep on. As domestic servants, they often have small rooms in the large apartment buildings of the rich, and these servants (for whom such housing is a huge privilege) often bring friends and dependents, who spill out into the stairwells, the enclosed compounds, and the foyers. The official tenants, owners, and landlords wage a constant war against this colonization from below, but it is frequently lost because—as in all societies based on financial apartheid—one

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wants the poor near at hand as servants but far away as humans. (“Spectral Housing” 637)

This quotation also emphasizes how the language of colonization continually reappears in the discussion of land and housing rights in Bombay (i.e., not just who gets to live there, but who gets to claim that they live there and get recognized in the stories about the place). For Mehta and Tindall then, the attempt to elide the poor from view in order to create pure, legal housing spaces emerges out of this continuing class struggle. And thus, Mehta takes his readers outside of downtown Mumbai (where he lives) to investigate the squeezing in that happens in the Jogeshwari slum in the north of the city (where he can acknowledge that the slum dwellers or “house-poor” live, unlike, for example, the slums located in downtown Colaba), revealing that the need for squeezing in is permitted and exacerbated by the slum dwellers themselves.

I do not introduce this idea to keep us mired within the Fort walls of the former British Empire, but rather as a prime example of a space in which certain groups are elided from the city history through the hegemonic narratives attempting to control Bombay. The city gained its independence along with the rest of the subcontinent with the departure of the British from India in 1947, at which point new hegemonic narratives of the city’s space were needed. The Fort remains an important influential neighbourhood in Bombay, which many (if not most) Bombay novels reference in their depictions of the city. Rushdie and Mistry in particular use the spaces within the Fort to establish the economic privilege of their characters as well as their engagement with narratives of British colonialism. When the name “Bombay” is used synonymously with colonization and with the city’s modernity and financial prosperity because of the role imperial rulers played in developing the city, it constructs a linear history of the city’s development and fails to express the overlap and interconnectedness of the waves of colonizers and immigrants who have helped to shape the city.
1.1.3 Creating Mumbai

When the city was officially renamed in November 1995, it was the result of the Indian federal government’s approval of a request by the Maharashtra state government to change the name of its capital city. The request was put forward as a seemingly benign part of India’s complex national project of decolonization and the change marks a bureaucratic attempt to excise the city’s colonial legacy from its present incarnation. The wave of decolonization that swept the nation after India gained independence in 1947 is defined by similar attempts to develop a post-colonial identity for the Indian nation by reclaiming national spaces previously defined by the British Empire, often through renaming these spaces.\(^1\) Like many such renamings around the world, the name change “impose[d] [its] own brand of postcolonial hegemony and regional chauvinism” by privileging one particular indigenous cultural history over all others (Nilufer 15). This new brand of postcolonial hegemony is not simply the work of Hindutva politicians; anti-colonial nationalists, defining India’s postcolonial nationalism discussed above, also contributed to the alienating atmosphere.

On the most benign level, the 1995 name change solidified two particular definitions of the city—an English colonial city signified by the name Bombay and a Marathi anti-colonial city signified by the name Mumbai. The name “Bombay” is believed to have derived from the British pronunciation of the Portuguese phrase *bom bahia*, meaning “good bay”, while the name “Mumbai” refers to the post-colonially reclaimed Marathi city. When the Portuguese arrived in

\(^{28}\) Sunil Khilani describes the “second baptism” as nationalism combined with an “excess of commemorative zeal” (108). For an in-depth study of the development of postcolonial nationalism in India see Partha Chatterjee’s *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World* (1986), in which he separates colonial Indian history into three critical moments linked to public political figures: departure (Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay), maneuver (Mohandas Gandhi), and arrival (Jawajarlal Nehru). In *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (1993), Chatterjee challenges the scholarly tendency to depict national history as linear and to impose a unified, cohesive history on the development of a nation. Using Bengal as a representative example, he concludes that political nationalism should not be equated with nationalism as such and must be separated from culture.
the sixteenth century the region was little more than a port—a literal gateway into India which had previously been governed by a series of conquerors. Govind Narayan, in his Marathi biography of the city written in 1863, also attributes the name to the Portuguese: “It is said that there is no other place in all of India which has a harbor more amenable to trade and handling ships. In the Portuguese language, ‘Bom’ means good and ‘Bahia’ means harbor. It is commonly believed that ‘Bombay’ was given as a descriptive name by the Portuguese because of this very same harbor” (59). 29 “This is the city most often written about by historians as the city of dreams and gold because it is a beacon of opportunity that attracts large numbers of immigrants who harbour hopes of prosperity.” 30 These immigrants and their minority communities have contributed to the culturally-diverse, cosmopolitan identity of the city; they are also the reason the city has been a breeding ground for violent fundamentalist politics. The name Mumbai is derived from the goddess Mumba Devi, worshipped by the Koli fishermen who were early inhabitants of the islands that became Bombay. 31 Officially created in 1995 by the renaming of Bombay, Mumbai is a place that thrives on the traditional and the local. Some politicians have capitalized on this and privileged a specifically Hindu Marathi tradition that fosters an environment which breeds ethnic and religious violence in order to gain political capital.

The driving force behind the official name change—the Shiv Sena—intended to reclaim from colonizing forces Maharashtra and its capital city for indigenous Hindu Marathi residents, regardless of their tenure in the city (or, for that matter, the tenure or size of other communities

29 Narayan’s book was not translated and published in English until 2009.

30 See, for example, the titles of Gillian Tindall’s *The City of Gold: The Biography of Bombay* (1982) and M.D. David’s *Bombay, the City of Dreams: a history of the first city in India* (1995).

31 The original islands were known as Bombaim or Bom Bahia, Mazagaon, Parel, Worli, Mahim, Colaba, and Old Woman’s Island (“a corruption of the Arabic name, *Al-Imani*, after the deep-sea fisherman who ranged up to the Gulf of Oman” (S. Gupta “The Seven Islands” n. pag)). Many of these names still refer to specific neighbourhoods.
living within the city). The Shiv Sena is an organization founded in Bombay by Bal Thackeray in the 1960s which typically espouses Hindu fundamentalist politics. The group aims to protect indigenous Hindu Maharastrians from foreign colonizing forces. Similar to the national Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), the Sena bases its platform on a call to an originary Hindu Indianness as a rallying cry for Indian nationalism, known as Hindutva and based on V.D. Savarkar’s 1923 tract of the same title. In his in-depth study of the Sena’s rise to political power, social anthropologist Thomas Blöm Hansen explains that “[t]he change of the name was a rather straightforward assertion of the nativist agenda of claiming Bombay and all its symbols of modernity and power to be the natural property of local Marathi speakers”, a move which “efface[s] the fact that most Marathi speakers were as alien in the city as everybody else” (3). According to the Shiv Sena, Mumbai and Maharashtra are the rightful possessions of the Maratha people because they are descendants of the warrior Chhatrapati Shivaji, who battled with the Portuguese and the British for control of the region in the seventeenth century. Ultimately unsuccessful in his military attacks, Shivaji’s efforts did shape the architecture of downtown Bombay as the British built large military forts from which they could defend their territory. The name change thus evokes the history of the Kolis, but it also elevates the Marathi and Gujarati name Mumbai above the Hindi Bambai and the Tamil Bambaai, which were used just as commonly by city inhabitants as the names Mumbai and Bombay (Appadurai “Spectral Housing” 644; S. Patel “Bombay and Mumbai” 4). Since these various versions of the name have always been used, some proponents of the 1995 change argued that it was less a rewriting

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32 As I explain below, the Shiv Sena and BJP are most often depicted as political parties with villainous agendas, but the Indian National Congress, for example, has also been accused of inciting riots for political gain. Although many political parties are guilty of making pronouncements about the city and its population that misclassify the daily experiences of living in the city, the Sena and Indira Gandhi most often appear in novels as the one-dimensional political forces responsible for the urban alienation characters experience.
of the city’s identity and more a vernacularization of the spelling: “The only novelty was [...] the vernacular pronunciation of Bombay in Marathi, one of the city’s two main languages, was now properly spelled in English” (Hansen 1). However, the separation between indigenous and colonial names becomes less clear when we consider the region’s history of immigration and colonization detailed above.

When read in rigid, static binary terms rather than as coexisting narratives, the competition for dominance between the two conflicting identities of Bombay and Mumbai manifests as a violent struggle over identity formation. Each signifier of the city invokes a potentially pernicious signified—either at the cost of tradition and local culture for the sake of progress and modernity, or at the cost of multiculturalism and cosmopolitanism for the sake of localism and provincialization. “While ‘Bombay’ invoked the world of the colonial and the British-influenced, liberal, post-colonial middle class,” summarizes Amit Chaudhuri, “‘Mumbai’ signifies the Post-Modern, contradictory city in which xenophobia, globalisation, extreme right-wing politics and capitalism come together” (“Light, Colour and Real Estate” 16). The mapping of these static terms back onto “the real” city-space is why social theorists like Arjun Appadurai and Rashmi Varma view Mumbai with pessimism, skeptical about the possibilities for this city’s future.  

Appadurai pinpoints 1956 as the “moment when Bombay became Mumbai” when the city “was made the capital of the new linguistic state of Maharashtra […] after intense rioting in Bombay over the competing claims of Gujaratis for Bombay to be in their own new linguistic state” (“Spectral” 628). He argues that this ethnicization of the newly formed state allowed for

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33 c.f. Appadurai’s “Deep Democracy: Urban Governmentality and the Horizon of Politics” (2002) and “Spectral Housing and Urban Cleansing: Notes on Millennial Mumbai” (2000); Varma’s “Provincializing the Global City: From Bombay to Mumbai” (2004). This skepticism is also evident in the introductions to the volumes on the city written by the editors Sujata Patel, Alice Thorner and Jim Masselos: *Bombay: Metaphor for Modern India; Bombay: Mosaic of Modern Culture;* and *Bombay and Mumbai: The City in Transition.*
and encouraged the growth of the Sangh Parivar (or coalition of Hindu chauvinist parties) throughout the region. The Sangh Parivar is based on a platform that “combines language chauvinism (Marathi), regional primordialism (a cult of the regional state of Maharashtra), and a commitment to a Hinduized India (Hindutva, the land of Hinduness)” (628). He categorizes the rise of Sangh Parivar as “decosmopolitanization” and finds the growing power of the Shiv Sena incredibly disheartening. Similarly, Rashmi Varma terms the rise of fundamentalist politics which gave birth to Mumbai, “provincialization”. Thus, while Appadurai and Varma work to nuance the Sena’s rhetoric and the implications of their political narratives, the need to map their own terminology back onto an objective reality demands a narrative singularity (or at least rigidity) which eclipses any hope for a coexisting hopeful narrative for the city’s future. Pitting Bombay against Mumbai as Appadurai and Varma do, creates a false binary which suggests that cosmopolitanism and progress have ended completely (or rather, have been reversed, hence Appadurai’s term “decosmopolitanization”).

Appadurai’s and Varma’s arguments are reinforced by the fact that in the twenty-first century the city has become a target of terrorist violence aimed against modern ideals of multiculturalism and inclusivity. Consider, for example, the bombings in 2008 which targeted icons of financial globalization and tourism—the Taj Mahal Hotel, the Oberoi Trident Hotel and the Café Leopold—as well as the more localized communal violence which targeted city residents (as opposed to foreign tourists) such as the 1992-3 riots and the July 11, 2006 bombings of commuter trains. The objective reality of this violence reinforces the dangers of singular narratives of a place, but also the fact that places are often read through rigid, dominant

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34 This history of violence represents the violent nature of Hindu fundamentalism as well as the Muslim retaliation. The 2008 bombings reinforce the fact that these acts of violence are not founded in religious ideological differences, so much as they mark the cultural conflict between religious tradition and global modernity.
narratives. After all, it is hard to argue that the cosmopolitan utopian Bombay still exists in the face of this violence, and yet the terrorists would have no targets if it did not. Novels distance us from these objective facts and provide critical distance that can comprehend the simultaneous existence of multiple imagined Bombays. The alienation and threats to individual safety force characters to confront the schism between the Mumbai in which they live and the Bombay which they remember. Reading the city—in novels or in history—strictly as a metonymy for the struggles of the nation obscures the unique social geography of the urban landscape. It also privileges one singular narrative over the multiple coexisting narratives which nuance the representations of the city in Bombay novels. The depictions of Bombay in the novels of Rushdie, Mistry, and Chandra recuperate the complexity of the city’s history by refusing to reproduce the binary representations of the urban as modern and the rural as backward. The ability to reimagine the imagined city is inspired by the impact film has had on contemporary perceptions of the city.

1.1.4 Imagined Bombay immortalized: fact, fiction, and the movie screen

In the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, the era of a newly imagined urban India, Bombay holds a special place, in no small part because it is the center of one of the world’s largest film industries—Bollywood. The burgeoning motion picture culture of the early twentieth century prioritize[d] the imagination of cities over village settings. “Hindi cinema stood for Bombay, even if the city appeared only fleetingly on-screen”, explains historian Gyan Prakash (4). In his book

35 “The Indian entertainment industry at the beginning of the twenty-first century is worth three and a half billion dollars,” explains Suketu Mehta in *Maximum City*, which is “a minor part of the global three hundred billion dollar entertainment industry. But it is the world’s biggest movie industry when it comes to production and viewership. The thousand feature films and forty thousand hours of TV programming and five thousand music titles that the country produces are exported to seventy countries” (376).
Bombay Cinema (2007), filmmaker and critic Ranjani Mazumdar examines the cinematic myths that became central to the new narratives of Indian postcolonial nationalism in the modern era and argues that Bombay cinema serves as an allegory for India. Mazumdar explains that Indian nationalists “invested in the imagination of the village as one of the secure sites of citizenship, reflecting the social base of anti-colonial mobilization”, while Indian cinema has been dominated by urban landscapes (Bombay Cinema xviii). The fact that the most prolific film studios have always been located in Bombay and rely on the city as a setting and as a set means that it is not just urban India in general, but Bombay in particular, which has captured imaginations. Bombay is thus not just unique among Indian cities, it is unlike American film cities like New York and Los Angeles, which may hold similar positions in the minds of their film audiences as iconic locations, but the films mythologizing these cities are not always filmed on location.³⁶

The continual depiction of Bombay in movies made it a beacon of promise and possibility, a place that stands out among other Indian cities: “Kolkata (Calcutta), Chennai (Madras), and Delhi are also major Indian cities,” writes Prakash, “but unlike them Mumbai flaunts its image as a cosmopolitan metropolis by transcending its regional geography” (10). Suketu Mehta elaborates:

Through the movies, Indians have been living in Bombay all their lives, even those who have never actually been there. The wide sweep of Marine Drive, the beach at Juhu, the gateway to the West that is Andheri airport—all these are instantly recognizable in Kanpur and Kerala. And Bombay is mythic in a way that Los Angeles is not, because Hollywood has the budgets to create entire cities

³⁶ On the other side of this equation are cities like Toronto, a city whose identity is constantly masked in films and presented as some other (usually American) city.
on its studio lots; the Indian film industry has to rely on existing streets, beaches, tall buildings. (377)

In other words, Bombay dominates the imaginations of film audiences as both a mythic setting for melodramatic stories and a real place for economic and social opportunities. The projection of Bombay’s image to national and transnational audiences makes the city unique among Indian cities: audiences do not just dream of moving to Indian cities, they dream of, and often move to, Bombay.

This mythologizing of the city is evident in numerous narratives about Bombay. Suketu Mehta opens his biography of Bombay with a description of keeping his love for the city alive by watching Hindi films in Queens, New York and Prakash echoes this sentiment that films created a desire for the city. Prakash writes, “I was born more than a thousand miles away in a small town […] Mine is not an immigrant’s nostalgia for the hometown left behind, but I have hungered for the city since my childhood. Its physical remoteness served only to heighten its lure as a mythic place of discovery, to sustain the fantasy of exploring what was beyond my reach” (4). According to Mazumdar, the lure of Bombay created by films has dominated discussions of the Indian urban. What is important to know for our current discussion about the narrative construction of Bombay is that novels cannot escape this filmic mythologizing of Bombay. Rushdie, for example, continually incorporates references to Bombay films throughout his novels.37 However, unlike filmmakers constricted by the availability of filming locations,

novelists are able to reproduce the city imaginatively and thus emphasize the importance that the manipulation of time, space, and memory plays in the construction of Bombay’s identity.  

1.2 Bombay Novels: plan of the present work

Like many city novels, alienation is a dominant theme in Bombay literature. However the specific combination of cultural, geographical, political and historical marginalization experienced by its residents—the various personal and hegemonic narratives competing for dominance within its space—set Bombay and its residents apart. Bombay novels offer an opportunity to read the city and its inhabitants as plural and fluid. Their narrative artifice, which manipulates time, space, and memory, presents a clear illustration of the constructedness of Bombay identities. They contain numerous voices and scenarios which, read side by side, reveal the possibility for conflicting narratives to coexist in Bombay without necessarily erasing one another.


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38 The limitations on filmmakers’ depictions of the city are exemplified by the 2012 film of Midnight’s Children. Unable to obtain permits, director Deepa Mehta was forced to film in Sri Lanka instead of Bombay.

39 See also Roshan G. Shahani’s “Polyphonous Voices in the City: Bombay’s Indian-English Fiction”, Vidyut Bhagvat’s “Bombay in Dalit Literature”, and Shirin Kudchedkar’s “Poetry and the City” in Bombay, Mosaic of Modern Culture, edited by Sujata Patel and Alice Thorner (1995). Shahani’s and Gopal’s essays define the Anglophone Bombay novel as a genre by going on to summarize constitutive texts by Rushdie, Mistry, Manil Suri, Anita Desai, Shama Futehally, Kiran Nagarkar, Firdaus Kanga, and Shashi Deshpande. However, given the brevity of their pieces, Shahani and Gopal are limited to summarizing novels, rather than providing in-depth critical analysis.
Gopal argues that, unlike other Indian cities, Bombay is a unique source of inspiration for novelists because of its particular make-up of traditionally marginalized individuals:

Though all Indian cities can claim a certain constitutive diversity, Bombay is distinguished by the presence, in significant numbers, of a variety of minority or marginalized communities from Parsis, Muslims, and Jews (of different denominations), to Protestants, Roman Catholics, and Dalits. Their complex relationship to the larger project of ‘India’—at once integral but often sidelined—generates unique stories which can evince critical questioning attitudes to both nation and community. (117)

This is not to say that minority communities do not exist all throughout India, but rather that there is a unique combination of minority and marginalized communities which encounter each other on a daily basis in this modern city and that this everyday interaction directly affects, and is in turn affected by, local and national historical and political narratives.

The multiplicity of narratives within Bombay is exacerbated by the extreme overcrowding in the city. Khilnani explains the situation in Bombay from a socio-economic perspective:

Bombay’s different types of wealth have colonized different parts of the city. The enclaves of the rich—the old commercial and industrial money set amidst the gardens of Malabar Hill, the opulence of the film world emblazoned on Pali Hill, and the newer professional wealth stacked up in the ugly towers of Cuffe Parade—where all the amenities are concentrated—are set apart from the chawls and slums. But Bombay’s congestion makes it impossible for the rich to flee the
poor, and the contrasts of lifestyle are vividly adjacent (the population density in the city, at around 17,000 people per square kilometre, is about fourteen times higher than that of London) […] The result is a city that blisters with the aspirations, disappointments and anger of the poor and the lower middle classes. Condemned to desperate conditions, they have had to put up with governments and politicians who chatter in the language of equality while acting and conniving in quite opposite ways. (138-39)

One objective of Bombay novels is to use individual experiences to make central to the identity of India and definitions of Indianness the liminal groups located within a geographically-liminal city. The novels and their marginalized characters “assimilate the ‘outside’ while laying claim to a home ‘inside’ the nation”, as Gopal puts it (116). Authors are able to use Bombay’s plurality to escape from essentialist views of the nation, even when the narrative perspectives presented in Bombay novels in English are limited (often to upper or middle class, English-educated residents). Authors and characters use these limitations to express the city’s diversity. The jump from the unique experiences of everyday life in Bombay to the abstract conceptions of the nation is a move made more often by readers and critics than characters.

Individual characters are confronted by powerful political hegemonies (colonial and postcolonial) when they attempt to exercise agency over the construction of the city’s identity. As a result, there is a continual struggle in Bombay novels to defend an individual’s love for a city which alienates and threatens its residents. The pessimism in these novels emerges not only from the violent politics experienced in Mumbai, but also from questioning whether or not a

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40 Suketu Mehta identifies this struggle between the individual and the urban crowds as “The Battle of Bombay” (580).
more welcoming Bombay ever really existed. Thematically, each character’s relationship to this city is a dominant concern in the depiction of urban everyday life and often supersedes questions of national belonging. Instead, characters continually try to reconcile the Bombay that lives in their memories with the Mumbai they experience every day. The discrepancies characters experience between these two places create a city defined by contradictions.

In both fiction and non-fiction, the inherent contradictions found in the city are often mapped onto its two official names and thus create distinct alter egos for the city: “Bombay” is often identified as a place inhabited by modern cosmopolitans whose memories of the city are dominated by nostalgia, while “Mumbai” is a city defined by fundamentalists whose violence and alienating political agendas are the source of pessimism regarding the city’s future. The competition between these identity narratives and the affects of this struggle on individual residents are themes central to Bombay novels. These novels depict the city as a place defined by the inherent contradictions between its magical possibilities and its harsh realities; its extreme riches and extreme poverty; its industry and disease; and its service and inefficiency. The conflict over the city’s name exemplifies in microcosm the complex histories that engender the city’s binary features. In the following chapters, I examine in detail how Rushdie, Mistry, and Chandra each engage with this particular conflict over the city’s name, but for now, this overview of the tension is helpful for understanding the complex nexus of history and politics that contribute to the city’s identities.

1.2.1 Salman Rushdie and Bombay’s Cosmopolitanism

Because he is so often placed at the beginning of the trend of urban Indian literature, I begin my examination of Bombay novels with Salman Rushdie. His novels are certainly not the first to
depict Bombay, but critics and reviewers have made his work central to discussions about the postcolonial Indian urban in Indian literature written in English.\textsuperscript{41} Rushdie rejects the rural as the defining feature of Indian identity and instead emphasizes urban individuality and alienation as the primary components of Indianness. In his novels the urban landscape is privileged as a model for the Indian nation even as his narrators reveal their marginality and subsequent limited agency over national identity. His depiction of Bombay in \textit{Midnight’s Children}, \textit{The Ground Beneath Her Feet}, and, to a lesser extent, \textit{The Moor’s Last Sigh} creates an alternative model to the rural/urban binary in literature. For Rushdie, Bombay is a simultaneous source of utopian cosmopolitanism and pessimistic alienation defined by alienated migrants in the city. It is a dynamic place in which people live, rather than simply a static symbol of urban ideals. Like Rao’s Kanthapura, Rushdie’s Bombay is the place where national politics are implemented by local bureaucrats and manipulated by the everyday lives and imaginations of residents, but unlike Kanthapura, Bombay is also the site where these hegemonic political ideas are conceived. His use of experimental, magic realist forms and first-person narration endows his characters with agency over the creation of identity. Thus, Rushdie’s Bombay is an integral component of personal identities, the source of political histories, and the stage on which power relationships are acted out. His emphasis on the difficulty of defining the city and its residents throughout his corpus of work challenges the rural/urban binary that reduces the city to a one-dimensional symbol. Though his nuanced depiction of the city fails to rescue the village from one-dimensionality, Rushdie nonetheless disrupts the binary opposition and instead portrays the idea of cosmopolitanism as a feature of, rather than an anathema to, Indian nationalism.

\textsuperscript{41} The work of Mahadeo Apte, A.K. Ramanujan, and Eleanor Zelliot in \textit{Urban India: Society, Space and Image} (1970) as well as Ashis Nandy in \textit{Ambiguous Journey} are notable exceptions of work trying to make sense of the literary portrayals of the Indian urban in literature written in Indian languages other than English.
As a literary-philosophical concept, cosmopolitanism is a theory of universal belonging in the world which enables an individual to transcend particular and contingent ties to local and/or national settings in favor of a global humanity. Cosmopolitans are thus often read as borderless individuals who stand in opposition to nationalism and regional particularism. It is an idea central to eighteenth-century French philosophies and was initially intended to espouse the ideals of universalism and cultural tolerance. The definition of the term was derived from Immanuel Kant’s philosophical emphasis on “man as citizen of the world”. Pheng Cheah points out that Kant’s tract was written prior to the “era of the nationality principle” (22). He argues that the idea of a universal cosmopolitanism which considers cosmopolitans to be part of all places and yet not necessarily from any particular place is used to counterbalance the rise of nationalism in the nineteenth century. According to this definition, urban cosmopolitans in Bombay surrender their claims to Indian identity when they pledge allegiance to global culture.

Theories of cosmopolitanism have since developed to identify the importance of locally-situated cosmopolitanisms, in which each manifestation of cosmopolitanism is dependent on its own historical and geographical contexts. This is the cosmopolitanism found in Rushdie’s novels when he rewrites Indian nationalism from a metropolitan perspective; many of Rushdie’s

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43 With the aim of elaborating on vernacular cosmopolitanisms, Robbins and Cheah edited the collection *Cosmopolitics*. Additionally, in “Cosmopolitanisms” the introduction to a special issue of *Public Culture* which was later published as a book 2000; 2002), Sheldon Pollock, Homi Bhabha, Carol Breckenridge and Dipesh Charkabarty co-author an argument for the existence of a plurality of cosmopolitanisms that must remain located within specific historical times and places and reveal the potential limitations of these vernacular cosmopolitanisms. Pollock et al. warn that these vernacular cosmopolitans can become trapped within the boundaries of their nation-states if descriptions of cosmopolitan cultural exchange are limited to meetings of nationalities. Thus, paradoxically, this identification with a national community can prevent cosmopolitans from transcending the language of nationalism, no matter how global or multicultural they become.
cosmopolitan characters refuse to renounce their attachments to Bombay or to India. Kwame Anthony Appiah argues that cosmopolitanism need not be diametrically opposed to nationalism. He writes,

> the cosmopolitan patriot can entertain the possibility of a world in which everyone is a rooted cosmopolitan, attached to a home of his or her own, with its own cultural particularities, but taking pleasure from the presence of other, different, places that are home to other, different people. The cosmopolitan also imagines that in such a world not everyone will find it best to stay in natal patria, so that the circulation of people among different localities will involve not only cultural tourism (which the cosmopolitan admits to enjoying) but migration, nomadism, diaspora. (91-92)

Cosmopolitans can thus be defined by their embrace of world cultures and traditions as well as by their everyday lives rooted in a specific time and place. This is particularly important to residents of a city like Bombay, which is itself defined as a cosmopolitan city. According to Appiah’s definition, Bombay and Bombayites can be both cosmopolitans and part of the definition of Indianness. Rushdie’s characters thus elucidate the narrative of cosmopolitanism through their constructions of the city.

Throughout his oeuvre, Rushdie depicts characters who are rooted, urban cosmopolitans who define themselves as Bombayites first and foremost, as Indians second, and men of the world third. In Chapter One, I argue that Rushdie’s portrayal of cosmopolitan migrant nostalgia for the city creates a recursive relationship between protagonists’ identities and Bombay’s identity. The Bombay Rushdie depicts is created through memory, personal history, and agency and is characterized by disruption, fragmentation, and alienation. The limitations of individual
agency and memory are visible in characters’ conflicts with local and national histories and bureaucracy. It may be limited and flawed, but Rushdie’s Bombay is a modern, cosmopolitan, Indian utopia. In my first chapter, I examine how Rushdie’s novelized Bombay becomes more than just a mythic source of modern political ideas; it is instead a nuanced, cosmopolitan utopia struggling against the limits of identity politics. I argue that Rushdie’s narrators subvert the hegemonic definitions of Indian national identity and redefine the nation through the multicultural, chaotic city at its centre. Their narrative agency, however, does not translate into the ability to navigate the city’s streets as pedestrians.44

1.2.2 Rohinton Mistry and Communal Bombay

Rohinton Mistry’s contribution to the category of Bombay literature focuses on the portrayal of the Parsi community. This diasporic community arrived in India in the seventh century and contributes to the culturally-diverse, cosmopolitan identity of Bombay. Despite this long tenure and the community’s contributions to the historical development of Bombay, the Parsis remain an alienated group of outsiders. The characters in Rohinton Mistry’s Bombay novels are defined by their struggles between community ties (to the local Parsi community as well as the national Indian community) and their individuality. Their experiences in Bombay reveal the existence of

44 Narrative agency refers to the ability of Bombay characters to express control over the narrative constructions of their identities and the identities of their imagined city. I use the term “narrative agency” to distinguish between a character’s power to narratively construct identity and his ability to create identity through action in everyday life. I argue that Bombay novels draw attention to the extent to which characters have the ability to narrate their own actions. While both narration and action are products of the novel, the artifice of first-person storytelling within Bombay novels empowers characters to reveal how Bombay might be imagined by individuals in the real world who have little or no power against the hegemonic definitions of identity. My point is that, as a genre, Bombay novels do not merely show us the world of Bombay, they expressly articulate how the stories about that world are imaginatively constructed and how characters gain power from both this articulation and their everyday lives.
traditionally rural communal identities—marked by tradition, backwardness, and an animosity towards change—as features of urban life as dictated by Parsi elders trying to preserve the exclusive community identity, rather than characteristics restricted to village settings. The everyday lives of Mistry’s characters are intruded upon by the same national and regional politics that Rushdie’s characters confront. However, Mistry’s focus on Bombay Parsis creates a hopeless image of individual agency over identity. His characters lack the ability to protect their communal identities or provide hope for the city’s secular future, but they often retain the power to alter and move through physical spaces and thus reclaim some level of agency.

All three novelists examined in this dissertation depict forms of pernicious communal politics which disenfranchise inhabitants from their cosmopolitan metropolitan home. Mistry’s depictions of Bombay’s Parsi community in particular present an alternative version to the fear-based communalism so often found in the city. His novels require a nuanced understanding and terminology for collective identities in order to avoid subsuming Parsi communal identity under the same heading of communalism that identifies the fear-mongering, violent politics of communal fundamentalists. Historian and founding member of the Subaltern Studies project, Gyanendra Pandey explains that the term communalism often signifies the organized political movements that use pernicious identity politics to alienate and discriminate against other identity groups based on religion. He writes:

In its common Indian usage the word ‘communalism’ refers to a condition of suspicion, fear and hostility between members of different religious communities. In academic investigations, more often than not, the term is applied to organized political movements based on the proclaimed interests of a religious community, usually in response to a real or imagined threat from another religious community
(or communities). It denotes movements that make sectional demands on state policy for a given share of jobs, education and legislative positions, leading on in some instances to demands for the creation of new provinces and states. (6)

His project, *The Construction of Communalism in Colonial North India*, charts the history of communalism and the historical construction of Indian society in order to understand the social, economic, and political issues currently underlying Hindu and Muslim struggles in South Asia. The term is not often applied to Parsi communities because they have not been the targets of sustained, political alienation. “Communalism” is used most often to refer to *Hindutva*, the Hindu fundamentalist platform derived from V.D. Savaarkar’s 1923 eponymous tract. *Hindutva* is the primary justification for the activities of the Shiv Sena in Bombay as well as the BJP and the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) throughout India. According to these groups, one must be Hindu to be an Indian. This conflation of national identity with religious identity precludes certain inhabitants of the Indian nation-state from ever claiming their status as Indian. Partha Chatterjee explains that the translation of communalism into national politics has secularized “Hindu-ness” and created a nearly all-encompassing category of inclusion for those groups that meet the criterion. The criterion for inclusion or exclusion “is one of historical origin. Buddhism or Jainism are Hindu because they originate in India, out of debates and critiques that are internal to Hinduism. Islam or Christianity come from outside and are therefore foreign” (110). As a diasporic community exiled by religious persecution, the Parsi community fits the definition of outsider, but their long-tenure in India and their contributions to the historical development of Bombay should protect them from this alienation. Mistry’s depictions

\[45\] Gerald James Larson elaborates on the formation of these political parties in *India’s Agony Over Religion*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1995 (132).
of the city are focused on the clashes between different types of religious communalism—the violent, fear-based Hindu fundamentalism which has encroached upon Bombay politics and the non-aggressive, isolationist community-building traditions that define the Parsi community.

The association of communalism with Hindu and Muslim fundamentalist politics means that it is helpful to think of Mistry’s Bombay communities in terms of collective or categorical identities in order to clarify the plural identity narratives manifest in his novels. Literary critic Patrick Colm Hogan (who specializes in cognitive psychology) defines categorical identity as one’s self-reflective identity or self-concept. It is defined by a set of categories, prominently including gender, race, ethnicity, religion, and so on. Categorical identity produces in-group/out-group divisions. (Empire 8)

Categorical identity is distinguished from practical identity, which refers to ordinary habits or practices; it is “the entire complex of habits, expectations, abilities, routines that integrate one’s daily activities with those of a community” (“Kashmir” 518). The separation of India’s population into religious communities, whether out of fear and malice or out of tolerance and a desire for equality, makes use of categorical identities based on how Indians self-identify. Hogan’s terminology is useful for considering the construction of identity groups without imposing ideological judgments or hegemonic definitions of communities. His explanation of the ambiguity and complexity of identity also reinforces the fact that a character’s categorical identity does not provide a complete picture of his or her person. The battle between individualism and communalism faced by Mistry’s characters is the difference between practical and categorical identity. Their particular struggle provides a nuanced look at one of the many forms of alienation experienced by Bombay residents. In chapter two, I focus on the narrative techniques and modes Mistry employs to construct Parsi categorical identity as a narrative that
competes with the hegemonic public narratives which his characters encounter and negotiate in their everyday lives.

In *Family Matters* and *Such a Long Journey*, national, regional, and local politics continually intrude upon characters’ private family spaces and threaten their place in the city. Mistry depicts members of Bombay’s Parsi community confined within exclusive apartment complexes (*baugs*). The walls around these complexes separate residents from the rest of the city both literally/physically and metaphorically/psychically. This self-exiled community is further alienated from the city by the rising tide of regional communalism and religious fundamentalism that has continued to gain political power in Mumbai since the 1950s. Mistry’s protagonists struggle to remain connected to this insular community while also exploring their modern individuality. Their individual everyday lives are thus shaped by the narratives of Parsi elders, of Bombay bureaucrats, and national leaders.

Mistry, like Rushdie, presents the city as a nuanced site produced through the interactions between memory, personal and public histories, and power relationships. However, Mistry’s use of literary realism emphasizes the limitations of individual agency and presents Bombay as a decaying, unwelcoming place defined by pessimistic nostalgia. His characters lack Rushdie’s narrators’ power to create narrative, but they are more often depicted negotiating through the streets and thus gain limited power over the creation of the city’s identities. The depiction of Bombay in Mistry’s novels exemplifies the tenuous nature of individual narrative agency over personal and urban identity as well as both the alienating and the restorative consequences of communal politics. In my second chapter, I argue that Mistry’s Bombay is a crowded, alienating place where personal memories are powerless against the hegemonic definitions of city-space and residents. Unlike Rushdie’s cosmopolitan Bombay, the diversity presented in Mistry’s
novels does not produce a harmonious cosmopolitanism. Rather, he exposes Bombay residents’ struggles to reconcile their individual identities with their identification with collective, local, and national identity groups. Bombay is still central to the identity of his characters, but the conflict between their memories of Bombay and the political agendas which govern Bombay’s current spaces produces a pessimistic narrative of the city.

1.2.3 Vikram Chandra and Criminal Bombay

While Rushdie attempts to encapsulate cosmopolitan Bombay within his novels and Mistry focuses on Parsi Bombay, Vikram Chandra attempts to expose Bombay’s criminal underbelly in his 2006 novel *Sacred Games*. Chandra’s novel uses the threat of nuclear holocaust and the relationships between mob bosses and the police to explore the ways that Indian nationalism, religious communalism, and individualism interact within the city in the everyday lives of characters who are not confined to the downtown Fort District. Like other authors of Bombay novels, Chandra’s portrayal of Mumbai depends upon the depiction of the city’s inherent contradictions. While Mistry and Rushdie focalize their stories through conventionally privileged members of society (upper and middle class, educated families), Chandra depends upon the perspectives of individuals marginalized by their relationships to crime. His sensational characters and plots depict the illicit experiences of the city’s gangsters and police officers and reveal the particular set of Bombay narratives that they create and engage. Chandra’s novel also presents a non-traditional range of characters who make significant contributions to Bombay culture—gangsters, bar girls, film personalities, and slum dwellers. These members of Bombay society are often rendered invisible by politics and public policy that relegate them to the
margins of society by declaring their activities and/or residences illegal. In his portrayals of their everyday life, Chandra reveals a side of Mumbai rarely depicted in literature written in English before 2005—its slums and its gangsters.

Sacred Games publicizes the transnational networks that emerge in Bombay as gangsters are shown living in city slums and working both within the city and across national borders. The novel depicts how slum dwellers and gangsters struggle equally against national and metropolitan citizenship regulations that segregate Bombay residents from one another based on a bureaucratic narrative of illegality to describe homes, individuals, and activities. Chandra’s characters manipulate time, space, and memory through their complex relationship between narrative perspective, movement through the city streets, and the physical construction of homes. His characters transgress borders between visible and invisible (rather than strictly public and private) and thus reveal otherwise inaccessible features of Bombay—prisons and slums, rather than just the downtown Fort District. Chandra’s gangsters and slum dwellers are not confined to their local, isolated communities, rather his characters expose how transnationalism re-empowers invisible urban residents.

Sacred Games presents the transnational currents that affect local social dynamics between slum residents and gangsters and the government bureaucracy which regulates their everyday lives. Within India, Mumbai may often be read in light of the rural/urban binary, but

46 These figures are also represented in the more recent non-fiction works depicting these members of Bombay society: Katherine Boo’s Behind the Beautiful Forevers (2012) and Sonia Faleiro’s Beautiful Thing (2010), which I discuss in my conclusion.

47 Chandra’s characters may visit and (for a time) reside in Mumbai’s slums, but they are not economically disadvantaged. Thus, his novel still belongs to the category of privileged, urban elite writing about the city. Alternatively, Anosh Irani’s The Cripple and His Talismans (2005) and The Song of Kuhunsha (2006) portray the slums as well as the homeless communities of Bombay. Vidyut Bhagwat argues that the tradition of Dalit literature depicting Bombay presents the biggest “rebellion in life as well as in letters against the white-collared Hindus who had up till then [the 1960s] monopolized cultural expression” (113).
internationally, it is frequently explored either in terms of its globalization or its postcolonialism. This discussion limits the city to a rigid global/local binary in which local activities (such as domestic life, commerce, and political resistance) are juxtaposed against global forces (such as international trade or economic and cultural imperialism) in ways which do not acknowledge the intersections between these activities. Chandra’s novel helps illustrate the subtle difference between cosmopolitanism and transnationalism.

The cross-pollination of cultures which occurs under the heading of “rooted cosmopolitanisms” continues to rely on centre-periphery divides between places: culture moves from the periphery to the (now many) centres of cosmopolitanism. Alternatively, transnationalism “draws from the processes by which individuals are making inter- and intra-national connections across the networks of global exchange” (Dobson & McGlynn 5, 6). The transnational “is not bound by the binary of the local and the global and can occur in national, local, or global spaces across different and multiple spatialities and temporalities” (Lionnet and Shih Minor Transnationalism 6). In practical terms, this means that transnationalism occurs both deliberately and unintentionally as individuals move across or between national borders. Rooted cosmopolitanism then, could be read as a kind of deliberate transnationalism which does not necessarily demand an erasure of national borders, but often requires a certain amount of privileged access to participate in cultural tourism. Since transnationalism suggests the movement of forces that takes place across or between national entities without the ethical attitude required by cosmopolitanism, it offers a non-hegemonic way to read the movement of Chandra’s characters and their creation of city-space.

In Chandra’s novel, Bombay is a haunted city inhabited by lonely, nostalgic characters whose communal ties are often produced by the very criminality which alienates them from the
city. His characters use their power and manipulate their invisibility to move through the city streets in ways that Rushdie’s and Mistry’s characters cannot. Unlike Rushdie’s characters, Chandra’s protagonists have few opportunities and limited ability to exercise narrative agency over identity—Sartaj’s sections are narrated by a third-person omniscient narrator, while Ganesh narrates his life story posthumously. However, through his depiction of character movement through city streets, Chandra reveals how characters without narrative agency can exercise other forms of agency as they engage in the recursive relationship between individual identity and Bombay’s identity. By reading Chandra’s protagonists through the lenses of Walter Benjamin’s flâneur and de Certeau’s Wandersmänner, I argue that the perspectives of streets in Sacred Games draw attention to the unique, isolated, often criminal qualities of everyday life in Bombay’s crowded streets and endows these marginalized individuals with agency over identity.

1.3 Conclusion

The city of Bombay houses tens of millions of people from every class, ethnicity, and creed; it is idealized as India’s centre of cosmopolitanism, and yet it is consistently depicted as not being a welcoming home to characters who reside within the city’s limits. Based on my readings of Bombay in the novels of Rushdie, Mistry, and Chandra, I conclude that the urban dweller in Bombay is alienated not by his anonymity amidst the crowd, but by the conflict of hegemonic narratives over his everyday space. Rushdie’s, Mistry’s, and Chandra’s characters reimagine Bombay based on their own identities, personal histories, and agency. Like characters in many urban novels, characters in Bombay novels seek to assert their individuality and distinguish themselves from the anonymous urban crowd. The narrative perspectives presented in these novels foreground the possibility for individuals to exercise agency over their own identities in
the face of powerful political agendas which otherwise disempower them through the production of hegemonic definitions of Bombay and its residents. The stories of Bombay told within these novels are the stories of urban residents who are pushed to the margins of society because of their religious identities or their criminality. In their struggle for individual recognition, narrators in Bombay novels reveal the ways that politicians and bureaucrats continually subdivide Bombay’s population into social categories based on class, religion, occupation, sex, ethnicity, quality of housing, etc, and use these categories to systematically alienate and marginalize residents. Characters are thus fighting not just against the anonymity of the urban crowd, but also for the right to claim the city in which they live as a home.

Bombay novels imagine postcolonial identities for the city and its inhabitants based on the recursive relationship between the identities of individuals and the city. They produce an image of the city defined by alienation, isolation, and extreme overcrowding. By tracing the narrative perspectives within novels, the movement of characters through the city, and the urban alienation they experience, I argue that protagonists continually rewrite their own sense of identity, personal history, and agency. The artifice of these narratives written in English reveals the minority, marginalized perspectives of history, historiography, exile, decolonization, cultural complicity, and ambivalence that comprise Bombay’s postcolonial identities. In his examination of counterrealistic writing, Chelva Kanaganayakam explains that this is true of most Indo-Anglian writers: “[t]he vision they project is marginalized, but nonetheless ‘Indian’ and relevant. What distinguishes this tradition is, in addition to its internationalism and experiment, a mindset that refuses to accept totalizing positions—schemes that tend to fix the nation in self-sufficient and unambiguous paradigms” (Counterrealism 23). Thus, through their emphasis on the recursive relationship between individuals and the city, Bombay novelists undermine the readings of their novels as producing synecdoches for the nation which universalize the
experiences of everyday life in India. Instead, they reimagine the identities, the histories, and the power relations of the city they inhabit and produce images of postcolonial Bombay that are at once nostalgic, utopian, and pessimistic. And they demand reading strategies which reveal the nuanced manipulation of time, space, and memory necessary to imagine Bombay.
Chapter 2
Salman Rushdie’s Cosmopolitanism in Childhood Bombay

In order to discern the character of Bombay as it is depicted in literature, it is helpful to begin with an examination of the work of Salman Rushdie, whose significant contributions to the categories of Anglophone Indian, contemporary British, magical realist, postcolonial, and postmodern literatures have made him one of the most critically-examined, highly-prized, and notorious figures writing Indian fiction in English.¹ Published in 1981, *Midnight’s Children* in particular is credited with changing the face of Indian literature in English and is undoubtedly an important contribution to the literary postcolonial identity of India. The book was celebrated throughout India with record sales and its international acclaim was confirmed by the Booker Prize committee both in the year of its publication and with the Best of the Booker prize award in 1993 and again in 2008.² Prior to the publication of *Midnight’s Children*, many Anglophone Indian novels focussed on representations of villages and rural life in order to define India and

¹ His books sales and celebrity alone indicate his importance to the literary world. Rushdie’s significance is confirmed by the long list of literary prizes his novels have been awarded. *Midnight’s Children* (1981) won the Booker Prize as well as two “Best of the Booker” prizes, the James Tait Black Memorial Prize for fiction, an Arts Council Writers’ Award and the English-Speaking Union Award. *Shame* (1983), *The Satanic Verses* (1988), *The Moor’s Last Sigh* (1995) were all shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize, while *Shalimar the Clown* (2005) and *The Enchantress of Florence* (2008) were long-listed. *The Satanic Verses* and *The Moor’s Last Sigh* won the Whitbread Novel Award. In 1996, the translation of *The Moor’s Last Sigh* was awarded the Aristeion Prize for its contribution to contemporary European literature. *Shame* won the French Prix du Meilleur Livre Étranger (Best Foreign Book Prize). *Shalimar the Clown* won the Vodafone Crossword Book Award and was a finalist for the 2005 Whitbread and his most recent memoir, *Joseph Anton*, made the long-list for the 2012 Samuel Johnson Prize. As an author, Rushdie has been honored with a number of lifetime achievement awards, honorary degrees, “author of the year” prizes, and received a Knighthood in 2007. At the same time, the *fatwa* declared against him by Ayatollah Khomeini in 1989 after the publication of *The Satanic Verses* made him a notorious figure—his daily activities written and talked about more than his texts. “The Rushdie Affair” dominated discussions about his work throughout the 1990s (See Appignanesi and Maitland [1989] and his recent memoir, *Joseph Anton* [2012].)

² The prize was awarded to celebrate the 25th and 40th anniversaries of the Booker Prize. Regarding the sales of *Midnight’s Children* in India, Shyamala Narayan writes, “Publishers claim that the novel has sold 4,000 copies in hard cover and 45,000 in paperback (in addition to the pirated editions); these sales figures are unprecedented for an Indian-English novelist” (79).
“Indianness”. For Rushdie, however, “the defining image of India is the crowd, and a crowd is by its very nature superabundant, heterogeneous, many things at once” (IH 32). His plural, hybrid, metropolitan India presents an alternative to the village-centred visions of the nation that define Indianness through a linear narrative of historical and cultural traditions.

At the centre of Rushdie’s India is not just any urban crowd but, very specifically, Bombay’s diverse urban population. *Midnight’s Children* is Saleem’s bildungsroman, a Sinai family history, and Saleem’s personal interpretation of historical events. The city of Bombay is so tied to individual identity in *Midnight’s Children*, that Saleem cannot define himself without expressly naming Bombay. The very first words of the novel establish his story as a fairy tale that may be temporally ambiguous, but is never geographically uncertain: “I was born in the city of Bombay...once upon a time” (7). He begins to negate this temporal ambiguity almost immediately, eventually clarifying the exact time of his birth (although it takes him the remainder of the first paragraph to decide that the precise time is, in fact, worth delineating); he never wavers about the setting, however. Saleem’s identity is so tied to the city that when he forgets this connection, he suffers total amnesia. As an adult, he finds himself in the Sundarbans working as an army dog; he literally does not know his own name, let alone the name of the city he is from, and remains lost in the jungle until he recovers these identity markers. This is one of the few points in the novel when he is defined by others (the army) by his physical attributes (his nose) because his amnesia renders him unable to define his own identity. For Saleem, the Sundarbans are an unreal place which he describes as a nightmarish, “historyless” jungle where life is an “absurd fantasy” and “time follows unknown laws” (458, 462, 467). Karachi does not offer him a home either. In Pakistan he feels “exiled once more” because he “never forgave Karachi for not being Bombay” (360, 390). Saleem’s inability to call any other city home is rooted in his nostalgic love for Bombay, compared to the hopelessness he perceives every place
else. Karachi is a place of acquiescence, powerlessness, and “fatalistic hopelessness” where inhabitants have “only the slipperiest of grasps on reality, and were therefore willing to turn to their leaders for advice on what was real and what was not”, rather than write their own realities (390, 391). Thus, despite all the places he has lived, his nostalgia for “the highly-spiced nonconformity of Bombay” dominates his definitions of his own identity. The importance of naming the city in Saleem’s narrative evokes the Bombay/Mumbai debates and the hegemonic struggle to name the city. For Rushdie’s characters trying to assert their own dominant identity-defining narratives, there can be no ambiguity in the naming of the place to which they attach their identities.

Similar to Saleem, Rai Merchant in *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* cannot define himself without specifically naming Bombay. He announces that he is “a Bombay chokra through and through” and always identifies himself and his friends as Bombayites no matter where they are living (78). Moreover, he ties his identity to a specific version of the city, so he tells us to “Forget Mumbai. I remember Bombay” (158). Throughout the novel he compares every place he goes to the city that he abandoned. In fact, in one of his last conversations with Vina he tells her: “the day doesn’t pass when I don’t think of India, when I don’t remember childhood scenes” (416). *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* takes a more international scope than *Midnight’s Children* as it recasts the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice in twentieth-century India. Umeed “Rai” Merchant narrates the story of Ormus Cama and Vina Apsara, Indian rock stars and his best friends since childhood. The dislocation that Saleem experiences is precisely the moral of Vina’s story as Rai presents it. In her quest to make herself a global star, Vina loses herself. The novel opens with her physically disappearing from the world in an earthquake, but even before her death, she had become “the very archetype of the wild rock goddess halfway down the road to dislocation and ruin [...] disoriented and off balance most of the time” because of her “loss of
the East. And of Ormus Cama, her sun” (5). While Ormus and Vina depend on one another for stability (and do so without ever gaining power over narrative space), Rai depends upon his connection to Bombay to define his own identity. He may deride Bombay as a “hick town, a hayseed provincial ville”, but it remains a central, defining characteristic of his story (100). Rai may spend his life dreaming of New York City, but he compares every place he goes to Bombay. Thus, when he finally gets to New York, he sees it as “our little Bombay writ large” rather than a place with an unique identity (78). Rai’s love-hate relationship with the city reveals it as a place that he cannot escape, no matter how far away he travels. Bombay in this novel is not just the center of postcolonial India, it is the source of culture for the entire world. The Bombay Rai insists he always wanted to flee is defined by its cultural impurity: it is a cosmopolitan place “where West, East, North and South had always been scrambled, like codes, like eggs, and so Westernness was a legitimate part...a Bombay part” of himself and his friends. Ormus, with Vina and Rai as witnesses, claims to invent rock music because he “heard all the songs in advance, two years, eight months and twenty-eight days before anyone else. So [...] we Bombayites can claim that it was in truth our music, born in Bombay like Ormus and me, not ‘goods from foreign’ but made in India, and maybe it was the foreigners who stole it from us” (96). The narrative perspectives of Rushdie’s cosmopolitan characters are thus defined by their

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3 Rushdie also presents this idea of the worldwide pervasiveness of Indian culture in The Satanic Verses. Saladin Chamcha argues the nuances of Indian hybridity with a friend and presents a definition of Indianness that is not restricted by national borders. He tells his friend and author of the book No Good Indian, Zeeny Vakil:

The earth is full of Indians, you know that, we get everywhere, we become tinkers in Australia and our heads end up in Idi Amin’s fridge. Columbus was right, maybe; the world’s made up of Indies, East, West, North. Damn it, you should be proud of us, our enterprise, the way we push against frontiers. (54-55)

Saladin’s argument is with Zeeny’s location of Indianness strictly within the borders of the nation-state. By suggesting that “Columbus was right”, he is not necessarily making an argument about the colonial subjugation of Indians, but rather is claiming that Columbus was right to see the influence of Indian culture throughout the world. Saladin sees Indianness originating everywhere in the world, not just within national borders of India. Thus, he demands she recognize Indians who do not share her limited list of place-bound, identity-defining experiences. The
relationship to their childhood Bombays and the narrative artifice employed to reconstruct their memories of the city.

Bombay is more than a one-dimensional setting for the everyday lives of Rushdie’s characters, it is an integral component of their personal identities, the source of political histories, and the stage on which power relationships are acted out. The magic realism and minority perspectives Rushdie uses to depict Bombay emphasize the roles of memory and imagination in the construction of Bombay identities. His narrative techniques and formalistic choices encourage readers to understand the city as a complex and dynamic nexus of identities, political histories, and power relationships that defy the binary divisions so often used to define Mumbai. His emphasis on the importance of Bombay to the identity of his characters challenges the rural/urban, national/marginal, and collective/individual binaries which might otherwise dominate the definition of his characters’ and India’s identities. In *Midnight’s Children* and *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*, Rushdie’s nostalgic depiction of Bombay in the 1950s and 1960s suggests that his urban cosmopolitans are not universal “men from nowhere and everywhere” because they are produced by very specific versions of Bombay—versions that they simultaneously produce. His characters present opposition to hegemonic narratives of Indian nationalism and to alienating Indian communalism (particularly the Hindu, fundamentalist communalism of the Shiv Sena). In *The Moor’s Last Sigh*, Rushdie’s pessimism regarding the city’s utopian future reaches its apex and Mumbai replaces Bombay. This novel in particular reveals how Rushdie’s narrators portray the multiplicity of narratives defining the city by fact that she authors this perspective in a published book reinforces the role written narratives play in constructing Indian and Bombay identities.
producing their own singular, dominant narratives. Throughout his novels, Bombay manifests as a remembered place captured within, and viewed through confined dark spaces. The feelings of agency and power gained from these spaces enable Rushdie’s characters to establish Bombay as a home, even as they embrace their changing migrant identities.

2.1 Nation-City-Self: The individuals narrating Rushdie’s India

Georg Simmel, in his seminal essay on urban studies, “The Metropolis and Mental Life” (1903) establishes the importance of how an individual thinks about the city in which he lives. He argues that “[t]he deepest problems of modern life flow from the attempt of the individual to maintain the independence and individuality of his existence against the sovereign powers of society, against the weight of the historical heritage and the external culture and technique of life” (11). Since the nineteenth century, the city’s expanding capitalist economy has intensified urban life and, Simmel argues, the chaos and turmoil caused by the constantly changing urban environment.

My dissertation focuses exclusively on the narratives of male characters because Rushdie, Chandra, and Mistry all rely on male protagonists in their identity-defining narratives. Rushdie in particular has been criticized for the lack of strong female characters in his oeuvre. Marlena G. Corcoran tries to recuperate the perceived misogyny of Rushdie’s texts arguing that he does not underestimate the force of repressed femaleness, whether in the monster of Shame, or in the banished goddesses of the “Satanic verses”. His male characters are constantly faced with the consequences of a system that, from the outside, looks as though it gives men great power over women. Women can be veiled to the eyeballs, locked in the house, and expunged from the official record, and yet one comes away from these novels with the impression that these repressed women are the driving force of the world. (163-64)

While this may be the case, Rushdie, Mistry, and Chandra all fail to depict strong female characters who possess narrative power over identity and space. Throughout my discussion of the Bombays depicted by these authors, I include an examination of domestic spaces, in which women play a larger role at least, even if they do not narrate. Unfortunately, the lack of female protagonists throughout the novels of Rushdie, Mistry, and Chandra means that women will (by and large) remain repressed throughout my examination of Bombay space and identity. The relationship between gender and space is examined more thoroughly from a geographical perspective by Doreen Massey in Space, Place, and Gender. For an exploration with a narrative focus on female characters crafting space see Minrose Gwin’s The Woman in the Red Dress: Gender, Space, and Reading. Although Gwin’s book focuses on American literature, hers is one of the few works to explicitly examine the role that gender plays in the intersections of history and space in literature.
environment requires individuals to create a rational, protective barrier between themselves and the over-stimulation of urban life. As a result of this protective barrier, modern metropolitan individuals are freed from the kinds of prejudices and boundaries typically felt in political or religious communities and characteristic of rural life. Simmel’s theory of urban life posits that power is gained from an individual’s ability to distance himself from the everyday life in which he is entrenched. The postcolonial modernity of Bombay depicted by Salman Rushdie reveals individuals who must take advantage of their alienation from the city in order to establish this powerful distance between themselves and everyday life. But while Simmel stresses economics and capitalism, Rushdie engages with history and nationalism as the powerful forces against which individuals must assert themselves through the construction of narrative.

In *Midnight’s Children*, Rushdie weds his protagonist’s life story to the birth and growth of independent India by setting Saleem’s birth at the precise moment of independence—midnight, 15 August 1947. Saleem is quite vocal about being “handcuffed to history” and “indissolubly chained” to the nation’s destiny (7). Thus it comes as no surprise that many critical readings of the novel focus on Saleem’s story as an allegory for India’s postcolonial nationalism. In this vein of scholarship focused on nationalism, Rushdie’s India is read, celebrated, and criticized for being depicted as a nation written by outsiders. His portrayal of hybridity, cosmopolitanism, myths of authenticity, and questions of identity have made him a poster-child for postcolonialism. Ania Loomba, for example, christens Rushdie the “high priest of post-coloniality” (153) and Deepika Bahri deems him the “poster child for a certain formulaic postcolonialism” (159). Rushdie’s own description of his novel *The Satanic Verses* (1988) in his

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5 Simmel’s essay has served as a foundation for many of the theorists in urban studies studying modern capitalism, in particular Walter Benjamin uses the work of Simmel and Marx to understand the city in terms of the commodification of everyday life. I come back to Benjamin in the next two chapters.
oft-cited essay “In Good Faith” presents a kind of formula for postcolonial writing: the novel “celebrates hybridity, impurity, intermingling, the transformation that comes of new and unexpected combinations of human beings, cultures, ideas, politics, movies, songs. It rejoices in mongrelisation and fears the absolutism of the Pure” (*Imaginary Homelands* 394). In *Salman Rushdie and the Third World: Myths of the Nation* (1989), Timothy Brennan helps set the tone for Rushdie criticism through his examination of Indian nationalism in *Midnight’s Children* and English nationalism in *The Satanic Verses*. Brennan argues that Rushdie rewrites national identity based on migrancy and cosmopolitan feelings of homelessness. Homi Bhabha’s *Location of Culture* (1994) solidified Rushdie’s place at the center of discussions of postcolonial nationalism as an identity defined by mimicry, hybridity, and migrancy. Rushdie’s significance to the development of theories of postcolonial nationalism should not be underestimated. Josna Rege offers a succinct contextualization of Rushdie’s contribution to the definition of national identity based on the perspectives of cosmopolitan outsiders:

the publication of *Midnight’s Children* preceded the contemporary critique of nationalism and the social and political fragmentation of the large universalizing nation-state. It preceded the worldwide explosion of ethnic and religious nationalisms, from the Punjab to Bosnia. It also preceded the end of the Cold War, and the rise of the New World Order and the global economy of the nineties.

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6 Pranav Jani explores the limitations of the literary criticism which privileges Salman Rushdie’s depictions of cosmopolitanism and nationalism as the only model of postcolonial writing in the Indian novel written in English. His book, *Decentering Rushdie: Cosmopolitanism and the Indian Novel in English* (2010) posits a reading of the postcolonial complexity of Indian literature and film in the post-independence which has often been marginalized. These novels, he argues, “can be read as manifestations of cosmopolitan practice” because “their diverse and multiple explorations of Indian life are at once self-representations and communiqués, demanding that their English-educated readers also reflect on their own identities and relationships to the nation” (6).

7 Brennan’s argument relies on the problematic division between “First” and “Third” World nationalism vehemently contested by Aijaz Ahmad in his debate against Fredric Jameson’s reading of Third World literature as national allegory.
And as for scholars of nationalism and postcoloniality, in 1981 Partha Chatterjee, Eric Hobsbawn, Benedict Anderson, and Ernest Gellner had not yet published their works on nationalism, colonialism, and the nation-state. Fredric Jameson and Aijaz Ahmad had not yet begun their now famous debate about whether the Third World novel is necessarily a national allegory. Still years away from its now-widespread ‘dissemination’ was Homi Bhabha’s *Nation and Narration*, and scholars were not yet speaking of nations as acts of the collective imagination and ‘India’ in quotation marks. (344)

In this context, Rushdie’s creation of India in *Midnight’s Children* heralds in an era of nationalism that develops postcolonialism as a theoretical approach to identity and comes to define India’s postcolonial identity. However, if we privilege Rushdie’s construction of the Indian nation over and above other forms of identity—reading Rushdie’s Bombay merely as a synecdoche or symbol for the nation—we do so by erasing much of the nuance of Bombay’s specific histories and politics because the language of nationalism necessarily disconnects from the experience of everyday life in order to imagine a larger, national community.  

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8 Reading Rushdie’s novels as defining India also privileges literature written in English above the many indigenous language texts. Literature written in English was, and still is, often criticized as elitist because of the perception that it descended from British colonialism rather than Indian tradition. See, for example, Meenakshi Mukherjee’s *Twice Born Fiction* and Subha Rao’s *Indian Writing in English: Is There Any Worth in It?*. For literary critics like Mukherjee and Rao, the literary landscape was shaped by the language debates of the 1950s and 1960s as much as by the emphasis on the rural over the urban in novels. In his monograph response to Rao, *Counterealism in Indo-Anglian Fiction*, Chelva Kanaganayakam explains that the crucial factors in critiques of Indian fiction written in English focused on the “hegemonic status of the language, its historical role in the process of colonization, and its declining popularity as a language of everyday speech” (2). Kanaganayakam presents an alternative literary history which recuperates the authenticity of literature written in English by recognizing it as one of the many coterminous veins of the Indian literary tradition. Writing in 1976, Subha Rao criticizes Anglophone writing calling it “unindian” because it is written in “‘the language’ of the urban rich and the educated classes” (pg. 12, qtd. in Kanaganayakam 2). In other words, education, wealth, and the urban lives of novels and their authors precluded individuals from claiming their status as Indian. When *Midnight’s Children* “burst upon the scene” at a time when fiction written in English had lost much of its popularity, it revitalised the tradition of Anglophone Indian literature and reclaimed the Indian urban as a central component of Indian national identity (Desai 1995 vii-viii). It’s
Rushdie depicts individuals who must negotiate an interactive layering of different identities that are created by narratives. His characters construct and describe their identities based on the complex relationships between individuals, the city, and the nation. Neil ten Kortenaar offers a reading of Rushdie’s construction of national identity in his book-length critical examination of *Midnight’s Children, Self, Nation, Text in Salman Rushdie’s Midnight’s Children*. He reads Rushdie’s India as a composite of hybrid elements understood through their relationships to each other and he concludes that the plurality of Bombay is the plurality of India. “Precisely because it is made up of so many parts,” he argues, “Bombay can be a synecdoche of the hybrid nation: not just one part among many, but the part that expresses the whole” because: “[s]elf, city, and nation repeat each other: self is to city as city is to nation” (147). Alternatively, Stuti Khanna argues that Rushdie imagines the nation as an inclusive, culturally-diverse place through his depiction of Bombay, but it is a representation that maintains Bombay’s unique identity because Rushdie refuses to “substitute the city for the village at the centre of the nation”. Khanna argues that Rushdie’s Bombay is less a symbol of the nation and more a model for the nation (402). In other words, Bombay is not a one-dimensional, utopic symbol for modern Indian, postcolonial nationalism; Rushdie’s migrant narrators may all be concerned with their relationships to Indian national identity, but their connections to Bombay are of even greater importance to each man’s sense of self and influence the narrative techniques they employ to construct their Bombay stories. Thus in each novel, Rushdie produces one narrative, significant contributions to the postcolonial literary history of Indian writing in English is not in spite of this criticism, but because Rushdie and his characters embrace their position as outsiders within India.  

9 Ten Kortenaar references the fact that Sujata Patel and Alice Thorner call Bombay a “metaphor for modern India” (the title of their volume of essays on Bombay).
but through its artifice, he reveals the constructedness of all the other narratives with which his narrative intersects. His particular narratives engage with Indian nationalism and ideas about the relationship between the individual and the nation (Saleem, after all, posits Indira Gandhi as his mortal enemy), but his narratives also explicitly posit themselves as Bombay narratives.

Kortenaar’s study is an important contribution to the field of Rushdie studies because of the time he spends unpacking the novel and Saleem’s relationship to India. Ultimately, however, he is focused on *Midnight’s Children* as one particular type of narrative—an allegory for the postcolonial nation. Read as a synecdoche and allegory, Bombay is acknowledged as one part of the nation which can be used to represent the whole nation: Rushdie’s India, like Bombay, is a place composed of many hybrid, cosmopolitan parts. In this reading, Indian villages must be subsumed within the urban landscape. His discussion uses the city as a stepping stone for understanding the relationship between the individual and the nation, rather than as the centre around which these identities orbit.

The rural does exist outside of Bombay in Rushdie’s depiction of India—it is very clearly a place to leave behind. Rushdie’s characters continually reproduce the topos of journeying to the city found throughout the history of Indian literature, but he manipulates this trope in order to emphasize the recursive narrative relationship between individuals and Bombay. Ashis Nandy provides a helpful summary of the changing trope of the journey to the city. While “cities were centres of commerce and politics”, he argues,

the ultimate prototype of the journey from the village to the city was probably the journey to a pilgrimage town. This involved the imagery of a hazardous, self-testing, spiritual quest with a built-in routine of return to the village with a less-than-routine consciousness. The fascination of the new journey to the city was
that it allowed the hero to discover, at the end of it all, that the city’s promise of freedom also camouflaged a certain heartless, inhuman impersonality, casual cynicism, and a persistent quiet violence. The return to the village was, therefore, never routine. Life in the city had to include a dream of return but, as in any diaspora, the dream’s haunting quality came from the tacit realization that it had to remain unfulfilled. (*Ambiguous Journey* 72-3)

Then, in the early twentieth century according to Nandy’s reading of Indian literary history, “Indian creativity gave a new epic status to the old journey from the village to the city—from the seemingly familiar, uterine, even if routinely oppressive, narrow fantasy life of the village to what looked like the liberating anonymity and non-traditional vocational choices of the colonial city”. In these texts, the city offered opportunities to defy “conventional, pre-formatted life and experiment with new cultural experiences and with refashioned or extended selves”. They were, in other words, places to experience non-traditional ways of life. This reading of the city as a place of cultural and economic opportunity is not necessarily specific to Bombay, but it demonstrates that in 1981, Rushdie is already writing into a tradition with a complicated rural/urban binary. His focus on Bombay’s chaotic narrative plurality challenges the conception of the binary even further. He creates characters who journey to several places before settling in Bombay and thus reveals the uniqueness of Bombay’s impact on narrative constructions of identity. Through his depiction of journeys to the city from rural locations, Rushdie emphasizes the city at the heart of his India.

At the centre of many of Rushdie’s novels are migrant families who move to cities. The Muslim Sinai family in *Midnight’s Children* move from Kashmir, to Agra (stopping for a short time in Amritsar), to Delhi, to Bombay, and then to Pakistan. In *Ground*, Rai abandons Bombay,
the city in which he was born and raised, to move to London and then New York. In Moor, Moraes Zogoiby, a Jewish Christian Indian, moves from Cochin, to Bombay, and then to Spain. He descends from Portuguese traders who settled in Goa (on his mother’s side) and from Spanish Jewish exiles (on his father’s side). In each case, like typical urban immigrants, the narrators’ families leave rural villages defined by backwardness and arrive in Bombay in search of fortune and a place to belong. Saleem’s grandfather, for example, returns to Kashmir in 1915 after attending medical school in Germany and feels stifled and alienated: “Instead of the beauty of the tiny valley circled by giant teeth, he noticed the narrowness, the proximity of the horizon; and felt sad, to be at home and feel so utterly enclosed. He also felt—inexplicable—as though the old place resented his educated, stethoscope return” (MC 9). Rushdie thus invokes one traditional narrative of constructing India in order to contextualize his character’s personal history. The Bombay narratives, which reference the topos of the journey to the city and of the narrowness of rural life, frustrate any desire to read the stories of Rai’s, Moraes’, or Saleem’s ancestors as part of a simply binary pattern. Bombay imposes itself between the rural journey narrative and each character’s sense of self.

Rushdie’s invocation of the many narratives that inform Bombay narratives extends to other cities. Rural villages are not the only locales snubbed by his characters’ families looking for homes. Aadam Aziz, Saleem’s grandfather moves his bride, Nasreen, to “the holy city of Amritsar [which] smelled…of excrement” (MC 37). In this crowded city, buzzing with flies, and smelling of shit, Aadam “does not feel Indian” in the midst of the 1919 anti-colonial uprisings

10 Rushdie pokes fun at the traditional texts which depict the rural as the defining image of India, like the film Mother India. Moraes describes the movie as “that glutinous saga of peasant heroism, that super-slushy ode to the uncrushability of village India made by the most cynical urbanites in the world” (Moor 137). Vijay Mishra gives an in-depth critical reading of the film (and Rushdie’s portrayal of it) in Chapter Three: The Texts of Mother India in Bollywood Cinema: Temples of Desire.
because he does not identify with the Indian fight against British colonialism, “Kashmir, after all, is not strictly speaking a part of the Empire, but an independent princely state” (38). He may not call himself an Indian at this point, but he chastises the traditional values of his wife who wishes to keep purdah. He wants her to “[f]orget about being a good Kashmiri girl. Start thinking about being a modern Indian woman” (40). Aadam is unable to use the city of Amritsar as a site of unification for these competing definitions of identity and he has trouble crafting a narrative which could encompass his imagined national community, his traditional religious identity, and his modern everyday experience. His frustration is perhaps a product of his inability to distance himself from the chaotic clash between politics and everyday life. He literally finds himself crushed beneath the weight of other urban residents fighting against colonialism when he leaves Nasreen isolated in their room to walk through the city streets and finds himself in the middle of the 1918 Amritsar Massacre (41-42). His experience in Amristar exemplifies the fact that, regardless of his own political agenda and personal affiliations, his everyday life is intruded upon by violent politics over which he has no power.

Unlike Rushdie’s Bombay narrators, Aadam cannot exercise power over identity because he is unable to define himself as attached to a specific place or time. The narrative jumps forward some thirty years and we next see Aadam in 1942 and once again in the middle of national political history, but this time living in Agra and trying to imagine himself as an Indian, not a Kashmiri. He tells his friend, “I started off as a Kashmiri and not much of a Muslim. Then I got a bruise on the chest [in Amritsar] that turned me into an Indian. I’m still not much of Muslim, but I’m all for Abdullah. He’s fighting my fight” (MC 47). Mian Abdullah is the leader of the Free Islam Convocation—a thinly-veiled fictionalization of Jinnah and the Muslim League. Aadam lacks perspective and distance from his everyday experiences and so cannot imagine that his support for Abdullah actually makes him a Pakistani. Saleem, on the other
hand, defines his identity based on his nostalgia for Bombay. He manipulates his position as a migrant outsider to gain critical distance over his experiences, the identities of himself and of the places he lives (i.e. Bombay and India). Aadam’s inability to tie his identity to a place emphasizes the significance of Saleem’s, Rai’s, and Moraes’ identification of themselves as Bombayites: Bombay anchors their identities like no other landscape in Rushdie’s novels. Their Bombay identities are thus inextricable from their Bombay narratives. The relationship between their individual identities and that of the city is produced by the agency they exercise over personal memories and public histories. This agency is a product of the freedom and distance they have from the city, gained from their position as migrant outsiders.

2.2 The Power of Migrant Storytelling

Rushdie’s Bombay novels are exercises in characters wielding and learning to wield complete narrative control over spatial and personal identity in the city. In the chapters that follow, I argue that Vikram Chandra’s and Rohinton Mistry’s novels are exercises in restraining and limiting characters’ narrative control, but offering characters greater ability to navigate the streets as pedestrians. Midnight’s Children and The Ground Beneath Her Feet help us understand Bombay as dialogic space—a place comprised of multitudinous voices crafting spatial identities and competing for dominance in space that is, in Rai’s words, filled with a “crowd of stories through which all of us, following our destinies, had to push and shove” (52). His novels foreground the act of storytelling as the source of power characters wield in order to shape spatial and personal identity. Their reliance on magic and fantasy suggests that individuals cannot narrate their everyday Bombay lives without escaping the confines of literary realism.
Rushdie’s dependence on magical realism has also been used as the basis for critiquing his novels (and similar urban texts by Indian authors writing in English) as exoticizing India for Western consumption. Pankaj Mishra complains that novels suffering from this “Rushdie-itis” are “blithely liberated from such considerations as economy, structure, suspense, irony, plausibility of events, coherence of character, psychological motivation, narrative transitions: in short, everything that makes the novel an art form. (“The Emperor’s New Clothes,” 43). “The intrinsic strangeness of India,” Mishra worries in another essay, “provides easy fodder for colorful tall tales; and these novels, along with much other writing in English, abound in freaks and freakish incidents. They play up the most exotic imaginings of India in the West, and they work, for their predominantly Western readership, at a simple level of escapist fantasy” (“A Spirit of Their Own” 11). However Mishra’s approach to the argument depends upon the evaluation of these urban narratives concerned with individualism as less authentic than rural narratives focused on independence. Such an evaluation of Indian writing in English suggests that globalized urban cosmopolitanism is a trait foreign to Indianness and systemically excludes Bombay literature from the category of authentic Indian fiction. This is a danger similar to the approaches to Rushdie that read his Bombay novels as representatives of a kind of uniform postcolonial nationalism. For his part, Rushdie counters that Mishra and other critics who rely

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11 The exoticization of India has been well documented (seminal, book-length works on the exoticization of India for the Western publishing market include Edward Said’s Orientalism [1978] and Culture and Imperialism [1993]; Graham Huggan’s The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins [2001]; and Sarah Brouillette’s Postcolonial Writers in a Global Literary Marketplace [2007]).

12 Literary scholar Chelva Kanaganayakam avoids these extremes by taking into account both literary and socio-economic factors in his discussion of Anglophone Indian writing in Counterrealism in Indo-Anglian Fiction (2002). Kanaganayakam argues that the decision to write in English “immediately places an author in an awkward situation” because it is an alien language and Anglophone writers “have, often unconsciously, slipped into essentialisms that distort the reality of the ethos they depict” (7). Kanaganayakam works to recuperate the historical and cultural critiques in Anglophone Indian literature by placing them firmly within the tradition of Indian fiction’s counterrealism. In short, it is not necessary for Mishra to denigrate novels written in English in order to emphasize the value of novels written in regional languages.
on accusations of “Rushdie-itis” fail to engage the literariness of his novels: “For the most part, they do not deal with language, voice, psychological insight, imagination, or talent. Rather, they are about class, power, and belief” (2003, 150). I would add to this that the critics do not engage with the Bombay-ness of the novels either.

Taking flight in magical realism enables Rushdie’s narrators to privilege their narratives of themselves and of the city over and above the narratives written by others who share Mumbai’s geography. As a genre, magic realism offers a narrative form which allows competing narratives to coexist, while drawing attention to the narrative artifice employed in the construction of identity. The genre depicts hybrid worlds in which “opposite conflicting properties coexist” (Wilson 220). Rawdon Wilson argues that the hybridity of magical realist space depends upon the genre’s juxtaposition of realistic and fantastical events side by side by a narrative voice which normalizes all the events. He contends that the limited narrative control or “narrative restraint” which precludes fantastical events from entering into the narration of everyday life is a defining characteristic of realism: “Realism’s typical limpidity arises from the muscular suppression of narrative potential. [...] The actual world’s diversity is canceled, cropped, or brushed out in order to create fictional worlds of great intensity, but narrow semiotic potential” (226). Wilson goes on to focus on the intertextual “stereographic” space created by magical realist texts, arguing that in literature, “one space can contain other spaces”, (or, I would argue, other narratives of space), but his comparison of realist and magical realist space helps recuperate magical realism from Pankaj Mishra’s critiques that it is a genre which depends on the exoticization of India. Alternatively, realist portrayals of everyday life limit the privilege of narrative power by confining characters’ control over narrative to the private space of memory. In Sacred Games, Family Matters, and Such a Long Journey, for example, characters’ attempts to control the definition of identity outside their memories are continually frustrated by external
forces crafting public policy and political definitions of group identity. The literary realism in these novels serves as a device for emphasizing how difficult it is to exercise agency in the crowded city of Bombay. Their realism as a literary device for limited narrative agency is thrown into relief through the magic realism and narrative agency of Rushdie’s Bombay narrators.

The power Saleem and Rai exercise over identity is also a product of their nostalgia and their migrant identities expressed through their narrative agency. Rushdie’s novels position migrant storytellers as the creators of the city’s and the nation’s identity. This emphasis on storytelling forces readers to understand the Bombay depicted in *Midnight’s Children* and *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* as fictional constructions of an imagined place, rather than mimetic representations of an objective reality. The nostalgia and migrancy of his characters mirror his own experiences and blurs the lines between fiction and reality. Many of his characters follow the author’s own migrations: immigrating to, or emigrating from, Bombay and never appearing to be at home anywhere else. However, he acknowledges that the places he creates are fictional. In his essay collection *Imaginary Homelands*, he articulates the inspirational role his personal memories played in his fictional recreations of India. He writes, “I, who had been away so long [...] had a city and a history to reclaim” and since “I come from Bombay, and from a Muslim family, too. ‘My’ India has always been based on ideas of multiplicity, pluralism, hybridity” (“Imaginary Homelands” 10; “The Riddle of Midnight” 32). At the centre of Rushdie’s novels

13 His recent memoir, *Joseph Anton* (2012) which details his life after the publication of *The Satanic Verses* and the declaration of a *fatwa* by Iran’s Ayatollah Khomeini, also elaborates on many of the specific examples of how and when he fictionalized his personal life in his novels. His characters mimic and fictionalize Rushdie’s own migratory patterns. Like his protagonist Saleem Sinai, Rushdie was born in Bombay in 1947 and raised in a house on Warden Road in Breach Candy by his Muslim parents (who, like both the Sinais and the Merchants in *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*, immigrated from Kashmir and eventually moved to Pakistan). Rushdie moved to Warwickshire, England at the age of thirteen to attend boarding school—a move recreated by Saladin Chamcha in
are urban, cosmopolitan, migrant families whose sons are constantly trying to claim their place as Indians. His novels reveal that Rushdie cannot tell the stories of his past and migrations without the fictional break from reality that magical realism affords his narratives.

In *Midnight’s Children*, the Muslim Sinai family move from Delhi to Bombay, and then to Pakistan. Their son, our narrator, Saleem is born and raised in Bombay but his ancestral roots are in Kashmir (where his story begins). Saleem’s Kashmiri roots, Islamic heritage, and Independence Day birth make him an outsider struggling to fit in as well as the voice of a plural nation (at least according to his own delusions of grandeur). While the movement of characters in *Midnight’s Children* is confined to South Asia, *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* takes a more international scope. Rushdie’s 1999 novel recasts the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice in twentieth-century India. Umeed “Rai” Merchant narrates the story of Ormus Cama and Vina Apsara, Indian rock stars and his best friends since childhood. Rai tells the story of their love affair by describing their childhoods in Bombay in the 1950s, their move to London in the 1970s, and then to New York in the 1990s. Rai is an adult when he leaves Bombay to follow Ormus and Vina to London, and career pursuits eventually take Ormus and Rai to New York (Vina disappears in an earthquake in South America). Rai may have been born and raised in the city,
but he too is an outsider in the city because of his Muslim identity. In *The Moor’s Last Sigh*, Moraes Zogoiby, a Jewish Christian Indian, moves from Cochin, to Bombay, and then to Spain. He descends from Portuguese traders who settled in Goa (on his mother’s side) and from Spanish Jewish exiles (on his father’s side). Unlike Saleem, whose multicultural identity and illusions of grandeur give him the confidence to speak for the nation, Moraes questions his ability to represent India: “Christians, Portuguese, Jews, Chinese tiles promoting godless views; pushy ladies [...] can this really be India?” (87). Thus these migrant narrators unequivocally define India as a conglomerate, plural nation composed of diverse, hybrid individuals. From this outside position, Saleem and Rai gain critical distance over the places they lived and recreate in their memories.

The overlap between Rushdie’s nonfiction writing and his novels tends to obfuscate the divide between fiction and reality necessary for understanding the narrative construction of the city depicted in his novels. Many critics limit their interpretation of Rushdie’s migrant characters by focusing on Rushdie’s own commentary about the importance of the migrant point of view. Rufus Cook, for example, argues that Rushdie’s emphasis on fragmentation and

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15 His Uncle Piloo harasses Rai for being an outsider: not only Muslim, but “worse”, a convert. “Religious conversion,” Piloo chides in his lisped, ungrammatical English, “it is like getting on a train. Afterwards, only the train itself is where you are belonging. Not departure platform, not arrival platform. In both these places you are totally despised” (*Ground* 70).

16 The idea of India as a plural, conglomerate nation is by no means unique to Rushdie. A number of attempts to define Indianness rely on defining India as a collection of co-existing identities, rather than a singular, historically-linear identity. The nation-state of India is plagued by a history of colonization that seems to erase all hope of identifying a pure, originary Indianness. In *The Idea of India*, Sunil Khilnani argues that parallel self-definitions of region and nation contribute to the “distinctive, layered character of Indianness” (153). Indeed, any investigation of the Indian population reveals a multitude of self-definitions based on the various distinctions of religion, language, region, caste, class, etc. Most often, Indianness is defined as a conglomeration of these co-existing identities, though discussions are often couched in the binary language of inside vs. outside (whether it be in religious terms of Muslims vs. Hindus, economic terms of rich vs. poor or educated vs. uneducated, colonial terms of Mughal or British vs. Indian British, or geographic terms of rural vs. urban). Salman Rushdie uses these binary divisions to foreground the role of the individual in the construction of place identity—both at the level of the city and the nation.
revision in migrant memory is a call to an objective reality that exists outside novels. Regarding Saleem’s many digressions in *Midnight’s Children*, Cook argues,

> Even if Rushdie’s main purpose in telling such stories is to emphasize the difference between art and reality, however—even if he is interested primarily in the ‘off-centering’ or ‘defamiliarizing’ effects of the artistic imagination—it is still the case that, every time he interrupts his narrative with one of these illusion-shattering, self-reflexive asides, he is directing our attention back to the real-life sources of his work, reminding us that, for all his talk of ‘fairylands’ […] his book is still basically mimetic or referential in nature. (27)

Cook employs the words of Saleem Sinai to conclude: “Formally, in fact, all of Rushdie’s novels can be read as an acknowledgement that reality takes precedence over art, that ‘the unchanging twoness of things’ can never be reconciled to ‘the universe of what-happened-next’, to ‘the narrow one-dimensionality of a straight line’” (28). The danger of Cook’s reading is that it privileges Rushdie’s voice over the voices of his narrators and therefore encourages a reading of the city in the novels as one that can be experienced by readers just as it can (or has been) experienced by Rushdie. If we allow Rushdie’s characters to speak for themselves instead (as Rai and Saleem try to do very loudly within their respective novels), then the spaces depicted in novels neither overshadow, nor are they swallowed up by the experiential realities or the constructed narratives of other Bombay inhabitants. Such a reading of Rushdie’s Bombay allows a variety of Bombay narratives to coexist without having to erase the multiple Bombays or Mumbais. In *Midnight’s Children* and *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* the versions of the city presented are the products of Saleem’s and Rai’s memories and imaginative reconstructions of themselves and the city in which they grew up.
Revisiting Bombay after years abroad, he writes, “Bombay is a city built by foreigners upon reclaimed land; I, who had been away so long that I almost qualified for the title, was gripped by the conviction that I, too, had a city and a history to reclaim” (“Imaginary Homelands” 9-10). Thus, he posits the power to colonize Bombay as a product of physical distance from the city. Having lived so long abroad, Rushdie wants to claim the same power over Bombay and India exercised by the British colonizers—the power to build it from the ground up, to name the city, and to write its history. The parents of the narrators in *Midnight’s Children* and *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* dabble in land reclamation and architecture projects, but are ultimately described as impotent by their children. Saleem’s father literally suffers from frozen testes after he tries to invest in Dr. Narlikar’s tetrapod scheme, and Rai’s mother is an architect building skyscrapers throughout the city, while his father undermines her work digging for archeologically treasure buried throughout Bombay. Their sons are far less capable of physically changing Bombay’s landscape, but the narratives they compose are far more powerful than any of the parents’ construction schemes. Rai and Saleem create Bombay as a dynamic and complex nexus of identities, political histories, and power relationships that defy binary divisions.

The narrative power Rushdie’s narrators exercise over space emphasizes the constructedness and interrelation of personal and spatial identities. Their narrative perspectives and the depths and limits of their agency play significant roles in establishing Saleem’s, Rai’s, and Bombay’s identities. Through their first-person narrative construction of Bombay, we can understand the city as both physical artifact and mental phenomenon which is always understood and experienced through individual interiority. Rushdie’s narrators thus align themselves with traditional theoretical approaches to urban studies. They (or at least Saleem) may break ground in terms of India’s postcolonial identity—presenting a plural, secular, cosmopolitan nation
constructed by individuals with ambiguous identities where one had not existed before in Indian literature in English. However, in so doing, they also construct Bombay in much the same way that western, non-postcolonial cities are written. More specifically, each individual constructing a story is seen to engage with and negotiate between two versions of the city—the “hard” concept city of planners and architects (like Rai’s parents) and the “soft” of illusion city. This concept, common to the field of urban studies, argues that the city is defined by perceptions of it. The discrepancy between these two places mapped on to the same urban space contributes to a city’s ultimate incomprehensibility. This approach to city-space reveals that the crowds, the cacophony, and the incomprehensibility Rushdie’s narrators depict is not unique to Bombay, but it demands that we understand how narrators in Bombay literature order the city’s chaos into readable texts. Characters in Bombay novels gain power from their ability to control the telling of events.

The first-person narration in these novels emphasizes the importance of each character’s voice and the narrative artifice employed to depict their voices. The overt acts of storytelling reveal each man’s attempt to exercise agency over the construction and manipulation of his identity and that of the city. *Midnight’s Children*, *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*, and *The Moor’s Last Sigh* are narrated by Saleem Sinai, Rai Merchant, and Moraes Zogoiby respectively, whose first-person perspectives colour their views of events and establish the narratives as limited and lacking objectivity. In *Midnight’s Children* and *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*, the self-conscious narrators reveal the relationship between identity-construction and myth-making as a central tenet of their stories: Saleem and Rai tell their experiences of the city by establishing themselves as oral storytellers of fairy tales and myths. Both narrators combine genre conventions with personal experience to blur the lines between fiction and reality and in so doing reveal the intentional constructedness of their identities and the spaces they inhabit. They also
suggest that the everyday experiences of Bombay and the “soft city of illusion” can only be understood through magic and myth. Through the power of authorship, they gain control over the geographical space and the political/social landscape of Bombay from which they are otherwise alienated or made invisible.

In *Midnight’s Children*, Saleem positions himself specifically as an oral storyteller by reading each chapter aloud to Padma and directly addressing unnamed and unseen readers. His diction explicitly and firmly establishes his role as an oral storyteller by employing fairy tale genre conventions to tell life story. He may not end his tale with the words “and they lived happily ever after” but he begins with the phrase “once upon a time” and thus positions himself within the tradition of fairy tale storytellers (7). Typically, a fairy tale is a short story intended to entertain and instruct readers through its presentation of the theme of good versus evil. Walter Benjamin elaborates on the genre definition and explains that the function of fairy tales is to counsel audiences by dispensing fears about the world:

> Whenever good counsel was at a premium the fairy tale had it, and where the need was greatest, its aid was nearest. This was the need created by myth. The fairy tale tells us of the earliest arrangements that mankind made to shake off the nightmare which the myth had placed upon its chest. (102)\(^7\)

Saleem aims to do just this—to give meaning to his life and counsel his audience—through the narrativization of his experiences before he loses the ability to do so (in his words, “before time runs out”). In pressing upon his audience the importance of his narrative, Saleem compares his

\(^7\) For more a more in-depth evaluation of the defining characteristics of the fairy tale genre see Jack David Zipes’ *The Oxford Companion to Fairy Tales* (2000). I specifically engage with Benjamin’s definition here because his theories about storytelling and space, specifically *flânerie*, are central to my argument in the following chapters.
narrative style to a classic model of oral telling: “I must work fast, faster than Scheherazade, if I am to end up meaning—yes, meaning—something. I admit it: above all things, I fear absurdity” (*Midnight’s Children* 7). On the one hand, his bildungsroman presents a complicated social morality for readers to consider through the intricate assemblage of relationships he engages.

He also writes certain characters in unambiguous terms, like a fairy tale and thus diminishes the power politicians exercise over Bombay through the creation of hegemonic narratives. Saleem describes Indira Gandhi, for example, as a green witch whose hatred for Saleem and his fellow midnight’s children is inextricable from her ambition. Instead of putting the kingdom to sleep for one hundred years, Gandhi imposes a national state of emergency and pursues a malicious campaign of forced sterilization in order to prevent the members of the Midnight’s Children Conference from producing descendants who might further threaten her reign over India.18 Through his own exercise of narrative agency, Saleem renders her a one-dimensional villain rather than depict her as the most powerful woman in the country in control of the categorical identities of all Indians. She, like Raman Fielding in *The Moor’s Last Sigh*, embodies the pernicious communal politics which alienate certain identity groups from the imagined communities that comprise Bombay’s cosmopolitan population. The power of imagination is what gives Saleem agency over the identities of himself, his family, his neighbours, his city, and his country. Too long to be strictly considered as a fairy tale, Saleem’s narrative also resembles the cycles of myths that define mythology genre conventions. Like mythological tales, Saleem’s narrative aims to explain cultural and religious understandings of

18 The politics behind the Emergency, however, were a far more complicated (though not necessarily less pernicious) attack on India’s lower castes and classes. There is a vast amount of literature written about the Emergency in India written by journalists and critics of Indira Gandhi. Gyan Prakash provides an analysis of the Emergency specifically as it pertained to Bombay in *Mumbai Fables* (291-294).
humanity and the history of the world (or, more specifically, the history of India). While Benjamin separates fairy tales from myths, Saleem unites the two in his narrative in order to exercise agency over the creation of the identities in his memories and thus foreground the narrative artifice of his Bombay narrative.\(^{19}\) The fabulous nature of Saleem’s life does not necessarily divorce his narrative from reality as much as it reinforces his ability to craft narrative and exercise agency over identity.

In *Midnight’s Children*, Saleem’s position as an outsider in Bombay does not prevent him from imagining a grand future for himself tied to national and urban histories. Instead of writing a story that reproduces his social marginality, Saleem adopts the role of storyteller so that he can give meaning to his life as well as rewrite the historiographies of the city and the nation.\(^{20}\) He frankly asserts that life in 1947 Bombay “was as teeming, as manifold, as multitudinously shapeless as ever…except that I had arrived; I was already beginning to take my place at the centre of the universe; and by the time I had finished, I would have given meaning to it all” (160). He “gives meaning to it all” through the narrative he writes and reads to Padma, but within his story he also places himself in blatant causal positions—his descriptions depict the meaning of space and history, and his actions cause meaningful events. For example, he tells one anecdote of himself at the age of nine trying to impress a girl with his bike riding, but Evie Burns is too focused on watching a Samyukta Maharashtra Samiti Marathi language march

\(^{19}\) In his extensive close-reading ten Kortenaar also reads the novel as one that combines multiple genre conventions. He writes, “Not for [Saleem] any notion of a degree zero of writing, where writing would give transparent access to events. The truth of writing is instead a question of appealing to and imitating the well-springs of narrative in folktale and myth” (21).

\(^{20}\) Thus, he fulfills Sir Walter Raleigh’s imperative to “make history”, which is presented to Saleem in the form of the painting over his bed. I examine this painting in more detail below; see also Neil ten Kortenaar’s thorough analysis of the painting in his discussion of mimicry in *Midnight’s Children* (171-189).
happening on the street below them to pay attention to him.\textsuperscript{21} When Saleem tries telepathically invading her thoughts, she pushes him down the hill straight into the crowd of demonstrators who taunt Saleem in both Marathi and Gujarati, neither of which he speaks well. Saleem responds by telling them a rhyme he has heard school bullies use, which then becomes “the war song” of the demonstration-turned-riots that end with fifteen people killed and three hundred wounded. “In this way”, he tells his readers, “I became directly responsible for triggering off the violence which ended with the partition of the state of Bombay, as a result of which the city became the capital of Maharashtra” (244).\textsuperscript{22} His marginalized social position—reinforced by Evie’s ignoring him and the protestors mocking him—does not prevent him from narratively taking credit for one of the defining historical moments shaping Bombay.\textsuperscript{23}

Through his narrative construction of this event, Saleem teaches his audience that the ideological marginalization of communities does not prevent individuals from constructing stories that redefine the city based on their own perceptions and actions. He makes this connection between the power of narration and the power to cause events explicit again later in the novel when he explains, using the third-person, the relationship as a paradox contained

\textsuperscript{21} The Samyukta Maharashtra Samiti is the organization that demanded the creation of a Marathi-speaking state in the 1950s. Thomas Blom Hansen provides a history of the emergence and the policies of the SMS in Wages of Violence (41-45). These marches are the beginning of the polarization of communal politics which Rushdie villainizes in the doomed vision of Mumbai he presents in The Moor’s Last Sigh.

\textsuperscript{22} To the demonstrators he recites the following rhyme, providing a translation for his readers: “Soo ché? Saru ché? / Danda lé ké maru ché! How are you?—I am well!—I’ll take a stick and thrash you to hell!”, which, to Saleem is “a nonsense; a nothing; nine words of emptiness” (243). For all his narrative power, Saleem cannot immediately recognize the power of language in the hands/mouths of other people.

\textsuperscript{23} His social marginalization in this particular moment is not a result of his Muslim identity so much as a result of his English education and economic privilege. The language march segregates his “kingdom” from the rest of the city: in February 1957, “Methwold’s Estate was cut off from the city by a stream of chanting humanity which flooded Warden Road more completely than monsoon water, a parade so long that it took two days to pass” (117, 241). Saleem’s affect on the march suggests that Methwold’s Estate be read as a “city on the hill”—a beacon of cultural and moral ideals, rather than an estranged domicile. Saleem’s self-importance makes Rushdie’s novel easy fodder for criticism that opposes any celebration of the British influences in India.
within himself: “I’ve been the sort of person to whom things have been done; but Saleem Sinai, perennial victim, persists in seeing himself as protagonist” (301). In other words, he can only be both the powerless victim and the powerful event catalyst, if he is also the meaning maker. The power he wields as a narrator is the agency that saves him from the powerless position of victim, or that of the silenced subaltern, even if his authority is called into question by the errors he makes. In other words, he does not have to be a good, or accurate, storyteller in order to gain power from storytelling.

In his story, he has agency over all the stories that come into contact with his own, even if his control is threatened by his fragmented and faulty memory. Saleem continually draws attention to the fact that he is an unreliable narrator of history. He has trouble recalling the exact day Resham Bibi died, for example: “It was—or am I wrong? I must rush on; things are slipping from me all the time—a day of horrors. It was then—unless it was another day—that we found old Resham Bibi dead” (526). This and other mistakes in Saleem’s historical accuracy are often discussed by critics as proof of Rushdie’s inability to write an authentic narrative. But Saleem acknowledges that these mistakes are part of his “desperate need for meaning”, he is “prepared to distort everything—to rewrite the whole history of [his] times purely in order to place [him]self in a central role” (Midnight’s Children 211-212). Upon discovering an error in his historical account, he wonders, “Does one error invalidate the entire fabric? Am I so far gone in my desperate need for meaning, that I’m prepared to distort everything—to rewrite the whole history of my time purely to place myself in a central role?” (211-12). His answer is apparently “yes”, because he leaves the error. The divide he helps establish between narrative and reality

24 Critics have also drawn attention to Saleem’s unreliability and Rushdie himself addresses these critics in “Errata’: or, Unreliable Narration in Midnight’s Children” (Imaginary Homelands 22-25).
emphasizes the constructedness of identities: “Reality is a question of perspective,” Saleem tells his readers (211). In other words, Saleem’s Bombay reality is the narration of his social and physical perspective.

This emphasis on Saleem’s interiority means that his imagined Bombay is hardly ever experienced at street-level. Rather than navigate the city streets as a pedestrian, Saleem often uses figurative descriptions of moving through the city to propel his narrative. His non-linear movement through Bombay’s crowded streets is mirrored in his non-linear storytelling. He anticipates Padma’s adverse reaction to his non-linear narrative while whisking his readers across the city’s geography:

And now she’s about to get even more frustrated; because, pulling away in a long rising spiral from the events at Methwold’s Estate […] I am flying across the city which is fresh and clean in the aftermath of the rains; leaving Ahmed and Amina to the songs of Wee Willie Winkie, I’m winging towards the Old Fort district, past Flora Fountain, and arriving at a large building filled with dim fustian light and the perfume of swinging censers…because here, in St. Thomas’s Cathedral, Miss Mary Pereira is learning about the colour of God. (MC 128-129)

Saleem’s description of “winging over the city” reveals very little about the landscape he passes over, but gives the impression of Saleem’s movement through the city as uninhibited and unrestrained. Similarly, he imagines himself becoming the Kolynos Kid while “exiled” to his aunt and uncle’s apartment “overlooking Marine Drive” where “there was a balcony from which I could drop monkey-nut shells on to the heads of passing pedestrians” (305). The Kolynos Kid

25 See also his description of the road to Methwold Estate (117), which I revisit below.
is a “gleemtoothed [sic] pixie in a green, elfin, chlorophyll hat” who “proclaimed the virtues of Kolynos Toothpaste” from a billboard overlooking Kemp’s Corner at the bottom of Warden Road. When he imagines himself transforming into this Pakistani-green sprite, he becomes as “one-dimensional, flattened by certitude” as the children who ride the bus with him and pass beneath the billboard (195). His narrative agency, of course, prevents him from actually being read as one-dimensional and the only certainty for Saleem’s identity is the elevated perspective from which he views it. He often describes himself looking down upon the city from atop Malabar Hill, from his bedroom or the Clock Tower which overlook Breach Candy Pool. When he does move through the streets, he is forced to adjust his definitions of both the city and himself.

Saleem’s crowded memories of urban chaos dictates how he moves through the city—the streets themselves are too crowded to navigate and so he must fly over them and give his readers a bird’s eye perspective. This perspective implies that he is much more comfortable creating a narrative historical overview of the city, than walking through its streets. Saleem’s Bombay, witnessed from clock towers on Malabar Hill over-looking Breach Candy swimming pools in the shape of British India, is a city that must be understood as a place where time collapses all of the historical identities of the place into the same space. Thus his narrative manipulates time, space, and memory in order to produce an imagined version of the city that intersects with other narratives of Bombay history. His agency over identity combines with the magical realism of the story and reveals the unreality/unbelievability of everyday life in Bombay. His repeated insistence on the power of his storytelling and his control over historical events has the opposite affect for readers however. It exposes the limits of his agency and suggests that his story is, ultimately, unbelievable (not just unreal).
The city of Bombay continually appears in *Midnight's Children* as an uncontrollable force that requires Saleem to adjust his perspective. The city, in other words demands a recursive relationship between its identity and Saleem’s. His childhood nostalgia for the city, his migrant outside perspective, and his economic privilege all combine to give Saleem a privileged perspective on the city. However, he struggles to make their outside, fragmented view of Bombay comprehensive. For example, Saleem uses the divide between insiders and outsiders to explain the difficulty of walking through crowded city streets. He describes his mother as having “lost her ‘city eyes’” as she ventures to see a fortune-teller in Delhi and finds herself overwhelmed and embarrassed by the individuals who compose the crowd in the streets. Saleem tells us: “When you have city eyes you cannot see the invisible people, the men with elephantiasis of the balls and the beggars in boxcars don’t impinge on you, and the concrete sections of future drainpipes don’t look like dormitories” (100). The spectacle of the city assails her and she thinks, “It’s like being surrounded by some terrible monster, a creature with heads and heads and heads, but she corrects herself, no of course not a monster, these poor poor people—what then? A power of some sort, a force which does not know its strength […] ‘I’m frightened,’ my mother finds herself thinking” (100-101). His intention is to show his mother’s fear and weakness by emphasizing his own ability to erase (or at least ignore) the poor and disfigured crowd clogging the streets (later, in the ultimate expression of the recursive relationship between the city and individuals, Saleem himself becomes this “many-headed monster” when he gains the power of telepathy).

His celebration of “city eyes” as a powerful perspective that can brush aside the city crowds is much more limited against Bombay’s crowds than it is in the previous example from Delhi. “City eyes” may enable him to ignore the crowds, but he cannot avoid them nor can he erase them entirely from his narrative in Bombay. After being pushed into the crowds at the
language march, the next time Saleem describes himself in the streets of Bombay, he is hiding in the trunk of his mother’s car. Invisible to everyone, he is once again in a position of narrative power from which he can view the scene. Despite his invisibility and telepathic powers, Bombay’s geography proves ultimately unknowable and he “rapidly became disoriented and was then obliged to admit to [himself] that [he] was lost” (MC 273). At his mother’s destination, she is once again surrounded by a swarm of beggars. She cannot ignore them, but he can: “Clusters of children assailed my mother as she descended; she, who could never shoo away a fly, handed out small coins, thus enlarging the crowd enormously. Eventually, she struggled away from them and headed down the street.” More self-possessed than she was in Delhi, Amina moves through the crowd and heads to the Pioneer Café. Saleem waits until “all eyes turned to watch the passing of a second car, just in case it, too, stopped to disgorge a lady who gave away coins as if they were nuts” and then escapes from the car without being seen. “Setting [his] lips grimly, and ignoring all outstretched palms, [he] set off in the direction [his] mother had taken” and he watches his mother enter the café, where he remains a literal outsider—peering through the window to watch her rendezvous with her former lover. No longer hidden within a washing chest, a clock tower, or a trunk, Saleem is visible and thus powerless against “the curious glances I got—because my whites, although boot-stained, were nevertheless starched; my hair, although boot-rumpled, was well-oiled; my shoes, scuffed as they were, were still the plimsolls of a prosperous child” (274). Thus, his economic-privilege which gives him access to

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26 In many Bombay texts, Irani cafes like the Pioneer serve as a symbol for the city’s cosmopolitanism. The most famous is perhaps Nissim Ezekiel’s poem based on the instruction boards found in these cafes, “Irani Restaurant Instructions.” In Shantaram, Gregory David Roberts also continually depicts his characters eating in the most famous Irani café, Leopold’s. The fact that Saleem cannot enter this café where everyone is welcome exacerbates his outsidersness in this scene.
so much power in Bombay, makes him an outsider to both the Bombay crowds and the “repository of many dreams” that is the grimy Pioneer Café (274).

The crowds which continually emerge and cause Saleem to reflect on the inadequacies of his education or the quality of his clothing are also what establish his narrative as a quintessentially Bombay story—crowded and isolated. The fantastical elements of his story (particularly his psychic connection to the other “midnight’s children” born in the hour India gained independence from British imperialism) reveal Saleem’s personal history as inextricable from the stories of other people. It also reinforces the importance of his role as the teller and narrative creator of their stories. Saleem explicitly connects his story to the city’s cacophony. As he begins his narrative, Saleem warns his readers that his life story is inextricable from other people’s stories: “there are so many stories to tell, too many, such an excess of intertwined lives events miracles places rumours, so dense a commingling of the improbable and the mundane!” (Midnight’s Children 8). The stories crowding Saleem’s personal space are a specifically urban experience in India, which is not an overpopulated country. In fact, India’s population density is lower than both Belgium and the Netherlands (S. Mehta 16). Bombay, however, has one of the highest population densities in the world:

Singapore has a density of 2,535 people per square mile; Berlin, the most crowded European city, has 1,130 people per square mile. The island city of Bombay in 1990 had a density of 17,550 people per square mile. Some parts of Bombay central have a population density of 1 million people per square mile. [...] Two-thirds of the city’s residents are crowded into just 5 percent of the total area, while the richer or more rent-protected one-third monopolize the remaining 95 percent. (S. Mehta 16).
Saleem’s home may be in this less-crowded ninety-five percent, but he cannot ignore the city’s crowds. His privileged place on Malabar Hill provides Saleem with a room of his own (in a clocktower) from which he can view and narrate the stories of the city and its inhabitants. His privilege means that he need not directly address the fact that Bombay is “choking” because its “infrastructure, public transportation, solid waste management, provision of affordable housing and ecologically sustainable development” cannot keep up with the needs of its population (Pasricha v).27 As a storyteller though, Saleem cannot just put on his “city eyes” and ignore the crowds completely. Instead of sharing the same physical space, he opts to share his psychic space—to become the “many headed monster” that is his beloved city through telepathy.

When he first acquires his telepathic gift, he thinks of himself as just a receiver of stories: he is “All-India Radio”, an impotent transistor who cannot control the stories he hears (212). But as he learns to control his telepathic gift, to hone in on the voices and stories he wants to hear, he starts to think of himself as “The Bomb in Bombay” (222). This is the same image with which he ends his narrative: “I am the bomb in Bombay, watch me explode, bones splitting breaking beneath the awful pressure of the crowd, bag of bones falling down down down, […] only a broken creature spilling pieces of itself into the street, because I have been so-many too-many persons” (589). The violence of this image reveals the power required to control Bombay stories—to make one’s voice heard in the crowd. In his non-fiction memoir and biography of the city, Maximum City, Suketu Mehta relies on similar imagery for his conclusion. He explains that in order to survive in “the mad rush of Bombay” a person has to choose between becoming an anonymous member of the crowd or retaining his individuality (580). “The Battle of Bombay”,
he writes, “is the battle of the self against the crowd. In a city of fourteen million people, how much value is associated with the number one?” Saleem’s anxiety to tell his story is the desperation of an individual too easily lost in this crowded city. Thus Saleem sets himself up as both an author and an actor in a story as crowded as the city streets of Bombay, and which is composed of the everyday events of his life translated into a mythic fairy tale through the agency he exercises when he crafts stories based on his memories. That these are relationships which develop in mental space highlights the importance of imagined connections between individuals—Saleem’s community ties are based on invisible, theoretical shared space not just on encounters in visible everyday space.  

Saleem’s Bombay is so crowded, that he even has to struggle to make room for his family’s identities within their home in Methwold’s Estate. Saleem Sinai’s childhood home is an upper-class housing complex built to house members of the Raj and remains crowded by the ideologies of the British colonial state. The conditions of sale impose colonial ideology onto the space in an absurd attempt to prevent individual everyday lives from reappropriating the homes. Named for the British owner of the estate, William Methwold, the four “large, durable mansions”, are each named after a European palace and “built in a style befitting their original residents (conquerors’ houses! Roman mansions; three-storey homes of gods standing on a two-storey Olympus, a stunted Kailasa!)” (Midnight 117). Similar to colonial buildings throughout Bombay, like Victoria Terminus and the Gateway to India, the houses will stand as architectural vestiges of the departing British Raj. The conditions of sale acknowledge the ideological importance of the structures and attempt to preserve it. Methwold demands “that the houses be

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28 The meaning of his story connects his narrative with the ideas about the isolating nature of modern urban life lived among anonymous crowds put forth by Simmel.
bought complete with every last thing in them, that the entire contents be retained by the new owners; and that the actual transfer should not take place until midnight on August 15th" (the moment India gains independence from Britain) (118). His conditions attempt to wed the physical structures to the hegemony of the Raj so that the ideological legacy of British colonialism perseveres even after the colonials withdraw from the county.

For Methwold, the British colonial legacy in India represented by his houses is purely positive: “Hundreds of years of decent government, then suddenly, up and off. You’ll admit we weren’t all bad: built your roads. Schools, railway trains, parliamentary system, all worthwhile things” (119). Thus, Methwold demonstrates how physical objects are imbued with hegemonic narratives of progress and modernity. Through his conditions of sale, Methwold refuses to allow local residents to control these spaces and reappropriate them through their everyday lives. He may sell the house to the Sinais at a bargain monetary price, but the intellectual, emotional price to be paid is far greater. Only Saleem’s mother recognizes the absurdity of the situation. Lamenting the state of the house, she tries to talk Ahmed out of buying it: “‘But my God, the paint…and the cupboards are full of old clothes, janum…we’ll have to live out of suitcases, theres’ nowhere to put one suit!’”. Amina recognizes that the everyday life of her family will conflict with the ideological limitations imposed upon the house by Methwold, but neither Ahmed nor Methwold acknowledge her protest (a reminder that women in this novel have no narrative agency). They do not admit that everyday life takes up space—that there literally is not room for Methwold’s ideologies and the Sinai family’s everyday life to coexist under the same roof unless the family can make changes to the shared space. In other words, a recursive relationship must be established in order for these competing narratives of space and identity to coexist. His life firmly mired in a colonial site in the exclusive site of Malabar Hill located in southern Bombay, adjacent to the Fort District, Saleem’s sense of history and his view of the city
are significantly influenced by British colonialism, but as he tells the story of the city, he learns to rewrite history and make room for himself.

2.3 Narrating Bombay

In his quest to establish his personal narrative history and his privileged perspective from above, Saleem constructs a long history for Bombay—a history much older than the nation that was born on the same night as himself. Saleem acknowledges the changes in the city throughout its history, but that does not prevent it from functioning as a source of stability and consistency in his narrative, which the new-born nation cannot provide. Saleem reconstructs the city in his own words, starting at the very beginning of the city’s history. Saleem’s story features a number of new beginnings and restarts. There are, for example, two new beginnings on the first two pages of the novel: the opening lines of the novel, “Once upon a time” leads to “the point at which it [his life] really began, some thirty-two years before anything as obvious, as present, as my clock-ridden, crime-stained birth” (7,8). When he turns his attention to Bombay he reproduces this narrative technique of starting his stories at a much earlier point in time than his physical arrival in space. This is, by Saleem’s accounts, Padma’s biggest complaint about his storytelling, as she is constantly “bullying [him] back into the world of linear narrative” (26, 36, 44).

He restarts his story once again when his parents move to Bombay just before his birth and he prefaces his historiography of the city with a short declarative sentence: “The fishermen were here first” (114). After this nod to the Koli fishermen as the original residents of the city, Saleem launches into a sweeping historical and geographical overview that sets the stage for his entrance into the world. His summary begins with references to the stories that precede his birth (on which he has already elaborated over the previous hundred pages), but switches mid-sentence to the elements of Bombay’s growth that have are independent from his life story:
Before Mountbatten’s ticktock, before monsters and public announcements; when underworld marriages were still unimagined and spittoons were unknown; earlier than Mercurochrome; longer ago than lady wrestlers who held up perforated sheets; and back and back, beyond Dalhousie and Elphinstone, before the East India Company built its Fort, before the first William Methwold; at the dawn of time, when Bombay was a dumbbell-shaped island tapering, at the centre, to a narrow shining strand beyond which could be seen the finest and largest natural harbour in Asia, when Mazagaon and Worli, Matunga and Mahim, Salsette and Colaba were islands, too—in short, before reclamation, before tetrapods and sunken piles turned the Seven Isles into a long peninsula like an outstretched, grasping hand, reaching westward. (114)

The fact that these details—Dalhousie, the East India Company, the original geography of Bombay—are united with the previous clauses about his own biography by a semicolon reveals Saleem’s attempt to exercise agency over the city’s historical identity. These historical references are contained within the sentence summarizing Saleem’s life story, making them dependent clauses in his own narrative. However, the crowded list of details belies Bombay’s influence on Saleem and thus establishes their recursive relationship. He also indicates Bombay’s cosmopolitanism as a feature of its original geography: the city is “an outstretched grasping hand, reaching westward”. The outreached hand gathers culture and individuals from the west, but it also reaches out and keeps Bombay connected to its migrants around the world.

For Saleem, Bombay’s influence on his childhood is inextricable from the British colonial forces that helped define the city. Although he brings readers to the beginning of Bombay’s history before British colonialism, the language of his descriptions reproduces the
language of colonization. He tells us, “in this primeval world before clocktowers, the fishermen—who were called Kolis—sailed in Arab dhows, spreading sails against the setting sun” (114). These fishermen “who were here first” are Bombay’s original alienated community—pushed to the margins of the city’s social and geographical landscapes.\(^\text{29}\) His reference to the tribe of fishermen who originally settled the island of Colaba alludes to his later description of the painting in his bedroom which features a fisherman telling stories to a young Sir Walter Raleigh and pointing out towards the sea. The painting is first mentioned on the opening pages of the novel and as a frame for Book Two, “The Fisherman's Pointing Finger”.\(^\text{30}\) Saleem describes the painting as the object which hangs above his crib and links him both to British colonization (represented by Raleigh) and Indian independence (symbolized by his letter from Nehru):

In a picture hanging on a bedroom wall, I sat beside Walter Raleigh and followed a fisherman’s pointing finger with my eyes; eyes straining at the horizon, beyond which lay—what?—my future, perhaps; my special doom, of which I was aware from the beginning, as a shimmering grey presence in that sky-blue room, indistinct at first, but impossible to ignore...because the finger pointed even further than that shimmering horizon, it pointed beyond teak frame, across a brief expanse of sky-blue wall, driving my eyes towards another frame, in which my inescapable destiny hung, forever fixed under glass: here was a jumbo-sized baby-snap with its prophetic captions, and here, beside it, a letter on high-quality

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\(^\text{29}\) Although dispersed throughout the city, enclaves of Kolis (known as Koliwadas) still exist especially along the western coast—namely in Worli, Cuffe Parade near the Sassoon docks, Madh Island, and Guru Tegh Bahadur Nagar (formerly Koliwada) in Sion, Mumbai.

\(^\text{30}\) Neil ten Kortenaar argues that this painting is very likely a copy of, or reference to, “The Boyhood of Raleigh” by Sir John Everett Millais from 1870 (171).
vellum, embossed with the seal of the state—the lions of Sarnath stood above the
dharma-chakra on the Prime Minister’s missive, which arrived, via Vishwanath
the post-boy, one week after my photograph appeared on the front page of the

Times of India.

Newspapers celebrated me; politicians ratified my position. Jawaharlal
Nehru wrote: ‘Dear Baby Saleem, My belated congratulations on the happy
accident of your moment of birth! You are the newest bearer of that ancient face
of India which is also eternally young. We shall be watching over your life with
the closest attention; it will be, in a sense, the mirror of our own.’ [...] 

Perhaps the fisherman’s finger was not pointing at the letter in the frame;
because if one followed it even further, it led out through the window, down the
two-storey hillock, across Warden Road, beyond Breach Candy Pools, and out to
another sea which was not the sea in the picture; a sea on which the sails of Koli
dhows glowed scarlet in the setting sun...an accusing finger, then, which obliged
us to look at the city’s dispossessed. (155-6)

The painting thus signifies the confluence of personal and public narratives imposing upon
Saleem. He must reconcile his view of India and England, but also of Bombay’s own
disenfranchised communities. He is inside looking out, but also an outsider surveying the
landscape, who thinks he can comprehend this complex of relationships. Neil ten Kortenaar
argues that “Saleem’s ekphrasis, while seemingly respectful of the painting, is an attempt to
appropriate it for himself” because it reveals his understanding of history-making (174).
Kortenaar explains,
The finger thus points, as cause to effect, both to the English-language text written by Nehru and to the imperialist-created topography of Bombay. Breach Candy Pool, the reader will remember is built in the shape of British India. The two framed images that accompany the print of Millais work against each other: Nehru’s letter celebrates Indian history-making, and the presence of the Koli fishermen serves to denounce all history-making. (175)

The bedroom in which Saleem grows up mimics British colonialism (especially when his mother dresses him in a replica of Raleigh’s attire [154]). It is also a space awaiting his production of Indian history post-independence—his “inescapable destiny” which has already been “embossed with the seal of state” (155). His room is also partially produced by the Koli community, whose initial settlement and subsequent disenfranchisement are the foundations of Bombay. The point being that for the postcolonial individual like Saleem, to whom identity is ambiguous and history must be written as historiography, there is no easy separation of the city’s histories—no clear frames that prevent British colonialism from bleeding into Koli settlements and Indian independence. Saleem’s repeated descriptions of looking westward over the sea are elucidated by Rai’s descriptions of the Arabian Sea in The Ground Beneath Her Feet.31

Rai describes the “come-hither murmur” of the sea at Juhu Beach that lures boys away from Bombay. However, it also connects them to a variety of places: “Touch the sea”, Rai explains, “and at once you’re joined to its farthest shore, to Araby (it was the Arabian Sea), Suez

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31 This later novel is less often considered a Bombay novel primarily because it ends in New York, the city Rushdie himself now calls home, but it reproduces the defining features of Bombay narratives, which Midnight's Children helps us identify.
(it was the year of the Crisis), and Europa beyond. Perhaps even [...] America” (Ground 59). This is the same sea decorated by Koli dhows, which Saleem will never physically cross, though he will reach across it with his “open grasping hand” and swallow the culture and individuals who come to him from across the sea. In other words, the sea and what it brings make Bombay and its residents, cosmopolitans. According to Rai’s story, this call away from the city of his birth is not necessarily an abandonment of the city or its influence on his identity. “A kind of India happens everywhere,” he informs the reader,

that’s the truth too; everywhere is terrible and wonder-filled and overwhelming if you open your senses to the actual’s pulsating beat. There are beggars now on London streets. If Bombay is full of amputees, then what, here in New York, of the many mutilations of the soul to be seen on every street corner, in the subway, in City Hall? (417)

He tries to cut ties from India and Bombay here to “deliver us from nostalgia” and replace Bollywood with Hollywood, but he cannot fully abandon the city’s influence. He continues, “if I’m honest I still smell, each night, the sweet jasmine-scented ozone of the Arabian Sea, I still recall my parents’ love of their art dekho city and of each other. They held hands when they thought I wasn’t looking. But of course I was always looking. I still am” (417). Living on the other side of the sea, Rai constantly looks back to the city but his nostalgia demands that it be “eternal, unchanging, immortal” (573). He achieves this immortality by translating Bombay into myth. He must leave his mythic Bombay because it is doomed by political history. He explains,

32 The call of the sea is repeated in Midnight’s Children, The Satanic Verses, and The Moor’s Last Sigh. In the final scene of TSV, Saladin turns away from the sea which once took him away from Bombay and his family and turns towards the city he had previously abandoned. In The Moor’s Last Sigh, individuals use the sea to escape the constrained lives, but theirs is no hopeful migration west, it is suicide.
When you grow up, as I did, in a great city, during what just happens to be its golden-age, you think of it as eternal. Always there, always will be. The grandeur of the metropolis creates the illusion of permanence. The peninsular Bombay into which I was born certainly seemed perennial to me. Colaba Causeway was my Via Appia, Malabar Hill and Cumballa hills were our Capitol and Palatine, the Brabourne Stadium was our Colosseum, and as for the glittering Art Deco sweep of Marine Drive, well, that was something not even Rome could boast. (78)

Rushdie’s pessimism about the city’s future has grown substantial since Saleem’s nostalgic utopia, and Rai describes Bombay as a place to leave (much like Saleem describes Indian and Kashmiri villages). This pessimism is fully realized in The Moor’s Last Sigh, but in The Ground Beneath Her Feet, Rushdie returns to the nostalgia for the city of his birth. So in his final setting—living in New York with Mira and her daughter—Rai has already taught his readers to make the comparison between New York and Bombay, because he has spent the entire novel comparing every place he visits to the city that he abandoned (or that he feels abandoned by because his agency over the city’s identity falters). Unlike Saleem, Rai is never able to reclaim the actual spaces in Bombay and so he recreates Bombay elsewhere and sees (or smells) it every place he goes.

Rai, like Saleem, presents himself as an oral storyteller who must make sense of the multitude of stories that intersect with his own memories by mythologizing them. Like Saleem’s positioning of himself as an oral storyteller, Rai frequently addresses his audience directly as he offers readers his story of growing up in Bombay with his friends Vina and Ormus. Rai’s descriptions of Bombay explicitly examine everyday experience and the importance of
controlling the narrative of that experience. And this experience is inextricable from Bombay’s crowds. Consider, for example, how he describes the experience of walking through the city in order to show how crafting stories in and about Bombay is synonymous with producing everyday events:

They lived in a great city, a metropolis of many narratives that converged briefly and then separated for ever, discovering their different dooms as that crowd of stories through which all of us, following our own destinies, had to push and shove to find our way through, or out. In Bombay the stories jostled you in the street, you stepped over their sleeping forms on the sidewalks or in the doorways of pharmacies, they hung off the local trains and fell to their deaths from the doors of B.E.S.T. buses or—once upon a time but no more—under an onrushing tram.

(52)

Similar to Saleem who has trouble navigating Bombay’s streets as a pedestrian, Rai moves through the streets by translating them into narrative form. For Rai, each person living in Bombay does not just have a story to tell, an individual is his or her story. Thus, encountering people in the streets, a pedestrian has to “push and shove” past the narratives of other people inhabiting and moving through those same spaces. Unlike Saleem who struggles to tell the stories of many “intertwined lives” or to ignore the people he walks by, Rai’s intention is to push past the stories of others and make the novel a place in which his particular story can be read and/or heard. Despite the fact that he privileges his story above all other Bombay stories, Rai does so from a position on the ground; he does not imagine himself above Bombay’s crowds. He acknowledges that he cannot be the voice of all the stories he encounters in the streets and preserves the possibility for each individual to wield power over his or her own stories by
referring to people’s bodies as a metonym for their narratives—articulating the existence of coexisting narratives which compose Bombay’s space. This realistic portrayal of narrative limitation and the difficulty of gathering an audience does not however lend Rai’s narrative any more literary realism than Saleem’s story displays; rather, it grounds Rai’s story in fiction and the genre of mythology.  

In The Ground Beneath Her Feet, Rushdie clearly identifies the Bombay migrant as not just a privileged point of view, but a potentially comprehensive one. Early in the novel as we are still being introduced to the Cama family (whose son Ormus is Rai’s rival for the position as the novel’s protagonist), William Methwold reappears in Bombay to argue philosophical paradigms with Sir Darius Cama, the father of Ormus. As Cama and Methwold try to establish connections between Eastern and Western religious beliefs, they seize upon a theory of threes, which Methwold claims “fill out the insides of the whole social picture” (42). But Cama isn’t satisfied: “‘Yes,’ said Sir Darius, ‘But what about outsideness? What about all that which is beyond the pale, above the fray, beneath notice? What about outcasts, lepers, pariahs, exiles, enemies, spooks, paradoxes? What about those who are remote?’” (42-43). He poses the question, but does not care for Methwold’s response (that these people simply do not count—that we should, in effect, always walk around with “city eyes”). Rai explains, “He was standing at the great

33 Rai describes his role as storyteller in explicitly mythological terms: “I stand at the gate of the inferno of language,” he says, “there’s a barking dog and a ferryman waiting and a coin under my tongue for the fare”. Rai presents himself as a modern Dante using language and narrative to travel across the River Styx into the underworld in order to tell stories of the dead, which make up his own life story. Aligning himself with a long tradition of mythology storytellers, Rai is able to tell a narrative that is at once fabulous and real. He explains, “Mine is the hellish gift of conjuring response, feeling, perhaps even comprehension, from uncaring eyes, by placing before them the silent faces of the real” (22). Rai’s dependence on mythology’s genre conventions converges with his limited assumption of narrative power over other people’s stories. In order to erase the divide between his story and the stories of his friends, Rai incorporates the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice into his narrative depiction of his everyday life. Thus, he must create a world with no clear divide between imagination and reality if he is to portray other people’s stories within his own.
window of the library, staring out at the Arabian Sea. ‘The only people who see the whole picture,’ he murmured, ‘are the ones who step out of the frame’” (43). This assertion of the potentially powerful and comprehensive perspective of outsiders as being able to “see the whole picture” on the one hand serves as a rather obvious justification for Rushdie’s own ability to tell the story of Bombay—it seems directly aimed at those who criticize the authenticity of his voice. But more than that, as this scene continues it helps problematize the narrative perspective and emphasize the importance of local space. Rai, as narrator, is the person who “steps outside the frame” to see the whole picture, but the picture he sees is also one he invents, not an objective reality (or even a painting on a wall) that he witnesses and reports. His own voice also intrudes upon the scene to verify the fictionality of the events he describes. He announces, “This is the picture I keep seeing, although it couldn’t be, could it, how it really happened” (43-44). As his description continues, the city invades Darius’ library sanctum: “the tumultuous sensation of the city” comes streaming through the open window, “the scents of channa and bhel, of tamarind and jasmine; the shouting voices, [...] and the quarrel of traffic, the hooves, the sputtering exhausts, the bicycle bells; the brilliant light of the sun on the harbour, the hooting of warships and the electricity of a society at a point of transformation” are all necessary elements to Rai’s perception of the scene (43). Thus the crowds that Saleem tries so hard to ignore and control cannot be kept out of Rai’s house.

Saleem exemplifies this through his telepathic connections to individuals across the city, and by the fact that he (and Rai for that matter) tell their stories in the form of memoirs—

34 Staring out of the window, gazing over the Arabian Sea and looking for answers alludes to Saladin Chamcha at the end of *The Satanic Verses*, where he stands in the same position. This scene also alludes to the painting that hangs over Saleem’s bed, in which a figure points his finger out over that same sea, this time, towards England, presumably.
emphasizing events and places as remembered. Caroline Herbert argues that the difference between Saleem’s and Rai’s narrations indexes a transformation [...from] a migrant narrative of the nation which enacts a process of reconnection and reclamation, [...to one of] disconnection and detachment [in the later novels]. In doing so, Rushdie revises his previous fictional representations of Bombay and India as experienced places, by depicting them as voyeured spaces; that is, as spaces which the narrator observes rather than participates in. (“No longer a memoirist” 142)

I disagree with this claim that “voyeured spaces” are not experienced simply because Rai adopts the role of observer and photographer, where Saleem presents himself as an actor; such a claim unnecessarily privileges active participation in events over observation and narration. What I want to emphasize is that Rai’s narration is participatory experience because he reveals his explicit shaping of events and places through reminders of the narrative form—he is telling the story he remembers, regardless of “what really happened.” The formal emphasis on narration in Rushdie’s novels foregrounds individual control over the manipulation of identity and establishes literature as a privileged space in which an individual has the power to write (or tell) his or her Bombay story and not just be heard, but to exercise agency over his lived space based on his or her particular perspective. This power to speak for themselves and for Bombay’s crowds, in other words, empowers them with postcolonial agency over identity. The identities that they craft are driven by their migrant nostalgia. Rushdie spends a lot of time emphasizing the importance of the narrative perspectives of his characters. In Midnight’s Children and The Ground Beneath Her Feet, he endows his characters with the power of narration and has them continually elaborate on their narrative techniques. In so doing, he forces us to consider how these individuals construct their own sense of identity, personal history and agency.
2.4 Bombay's Ground: finding stability

The narrative forms of *Midnight's Children* and *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* suggest the spatial multiplicity of Bombay, but the thematic fracturing of individuals and ground within the novels insists upon reading space and identity as fluid. Bombay’s spatial multiplicity is thematically depicted as physical fissures in the narratives of Rai and Saleem. Saleem walks on solid ground while his mental fragmentation manifests as actual cracks in his body. In *Midnight's Children*, bones often break, while the ground is the solid thing that will punch you in the nose and reveal god-shaped holes within you—such is the experience of Aadam Aziz (10-11). For Saleem, the drawing of an abstract border to partition the nation-states of India and Pakistan became the partition of his mind that forever links him to the other midnight’s children. Unlike his fractured country, Bombay remains stable because of Saleem’s willingness to imagine it as a place capable of containing multitudes. Saleem stabilizes Bombay’s identity when he creates Bombay in his own image (or perhaps, vice versa) by describing both himself and the city through images of swallowing. Describing the city during his infancy, he says, “Our Bombay: it looks like a hand but it’s really a mouth, always open, always hungry, swallowing food and talent from everywhere else in India” (159). He positions himself at the centre of his “teeming”, “manifold”, and “multitudinous” place in order to “give meaning to it all”—that is to give meaning to the histories and identities of both himself and the city (160). A few pages later, he uses the example of his own identity to make sense of this

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35 Even after they are castrated during Indira Gandhi’s declared State of Emergency in the 1970s and Saleem can no longer unite them telepathically, they remain linked as a community of victims. Their shared consciousness has been forced into Saleem's subconscious, perhaps, but it does not disappear.
multiplicity:

Even a baby is faced with the problem of defining itself; and I’m bound to say that my early popularity had its problematic aspects, because I was bombarded with a confusing multiplicity of views on the subject, being a Blessed One to a guru under a tap, a voyeur to Lila Sabarmati; in the eyes of Nussie-the-duck I was a rival, and a more successful rival, to her own Sonny [...] to my two-headed mother I was all kinds of babyish things—they called me jooonoo-moonoo, and putch-putch, and little-piece-of-the-moon. (165)

Saleem’s narrative goal is to make sense of the various identities imposed upon his person. He explains his method for understanding the multitude of identities he contains using the same terms he used to describe Bombay: “swallow all of it and hope to make sense of it later” (165). Just as the city swallows its migrants, ingesting them and making them part of itself, Saleem ingests all the various definitions of himself crafted by other people, and then orders them into a manageable identity when he finally wields the power of authorship and narrates his own story in the form of the novel. The secrets that Saleem gathers as a mute infant and later as an adolescent hiding in the bathroom washing chest are ones that he reveals through the narrative space he crafts. Saleem offers these secrets to his audience—readers and listeners (i.e., us and Padma)—like pickles in jars, ready to be ingested (or re-ingested, if his telling constitutes a regurgitation). The image of swallowing enables identity to remain fluid but stable. The pieces of identity are ordered by the author, rather than left in chaos—they are ingested and incorporated into personal
or spatial identity without threatening either. This is the defining image of Rushdie’s cosmopolitan Bombay as defined by childhood nostalgia—the open, out-stretched hands and mouths of Bombay’s crowds taking in history, culture, and everyday experience in order to create their own selves.

The “teeming and manifold” identity of the city extends to his descriptions of its streets. Instead of organizing the city’s chaos into orderly descriptions, a myriad of images run into one another. The road to Methwold Estate, his childhood home is found “between a bus-stop and a little row of shops”, but Saleem quickly appears to lose control over the images and he bombards his readers:

Chimalker’s Toyshop; Reader’s Paradise; the Chimanbhoy Fatbhoy jewellery store; and, above all, Bombelli’s the Confectioners, with their Marquis cake, their One Yard of Chocolates! Names to conjure with; but there’s no time now. Past the saluting cardboard bellboy of the Band Box Laundry, the road leads us home.

(117)

Saleem’s memories are overwhelming and the Bombay he constructs as a result is difficult to navigate. Bombay is a “teeming”, “manifold”, “shapeless” place according to Saleem; it is not the static, map-able space that Amitav Ghosh’s narrator of The Shadow Lines encounters in London, for example. In Ghosh’s novel, the protagonist is able to navigate London’s streets

36 The association of food with cultural identity is a theme throughout Midnight’s Children, exemplified by Saleem writing his tale from the pickle factory in which he lives. The importance of food re-emerges throughout Rushdie’s work, including an essay published in Imaginary Homelands on the role different types of bread play in his sense of self. These ideas about bread also find their way into The Ground Beneath Her Feet. For an in-depth discussion of food in Rushdie’s work see Stéphanie Ravillon’s “Espousing the Cause of Gastronomic Pluralism: Salman Rushdie and the Art of Cooking” in The Global and the Particular in the English Speaking World (2002).
based on the knowledge he gained reading maps of the city: “It was easy enough on the A to Z street atlas of London that my father had brought me. I knew page 43, square 2, by heart” (57). But Saleem’s nostalgia for the city interferes with the narrative representation of the space—the Bombay of memory is much harder to navigate than the London of maps. This also explains why Saleem is barely ever seen walking through the city streets.

For all his cosmopolitanism, for his comfort with an identity not based on blood-lines and cultural traditions, Saleem can only exercise agency over the construction of identity when he is confined to a closed-off space. He must, in other words, distance his body from the physical crowding of the city. I argue that his need for washing chests and clock towers from which to exercise agency is Rushdie’s ultimate comment on Bombay: the city’s crowds are ultimately too overwhelming and difficult to negotiate for Saleem as he expresses his “I, I, I” (238). His descriptions of Bombay may be of a place of cosmopolitan mixing, where all identities are ingested, but the product of this mixing lives within dark, interior spaces, isolated from the crowded city streets. In other words, the only way for Rushdie’s narrators to control and understand the city is to confine Bombay and its residents to pickle jars and photographs. Lost in Bombay’s language marches, Saleem wants and needs to be the bomb exploding in the streets, if his cosmopolitan utopian vision of the city is going to survive. Like the fragmented

37 Rushdie challenges this description of London as unmappable in The Satanic Verses: “the city in its corruption refused to submit to the dominion of the cartographers, changing its shape at will and without warning, making it impossible for Gibreel to approach his quest in the systematic manner he would have preferred” (The Satanic Verses 127).

38 This is how Saleem describes first hearing the Midnight’s Children whom he had previously failed to notice among the crowded voices in his head, “sending their here-I-am signals”, begging to be heard amongst the crowd.

39 The jump from pickle jars to bombs is explained by the fact that a bomb, before it explodes, is a confined space, in fact the confinement is necessary in order for the chemical reactions to occur which give a bomb its explosive power.
memories of migrant authors, Rushdie’s Bombay is a place that individuals must break into many pieces in order to know the chaotic multitude of narratives that coexist and comprise Bombay’s identities.

While Saleem spends much of his narrative “winging over the city”, presenting panoptical views of the city and its events, Rai engages more directly with the city’s ground. Saleem readily admits to his physical and mental fracturing, but Rai depicts himself as a whole, stable self while the ground around him shakes and splits. A series of earthquakes erases people and places—they swallow without ingesting to produce something new. The earthquakes serve as a metaphor for Rai’s psychic fracturing; they also make the ground in Rai’s world the most volatile of all of Rushdie’s novels. Rai explains, “It wasn’t just the great San Francisco earthquake of 1984: the 1980s had been a bad time for the whole faulty earth” and goes on to list a series of locations ravaged by earthquakes throughout the decade (450-51). In the opening pages, Vina is lost in an earthquake in South America—one in a series that threatens the very existence of Rai’s world. The instability of the ground in general appears to be a universal characteristic of space in Rai’s narrative, however, Bombay’s specific instability is a result of more than just earthquakes—natural geographical phenomena—it is one of the city’s physically constructed features. Rai explains this in a description of his father excavating at Juhu Beach. He refers to his father as the “Digger of Bombay” and explains that his father digs holes in order to discover the city’s past, but unlike Rai’s narrative, V.V.’s quest to find a definition of the city beneath its surface is not a narrative with an audience:

For twenty years, through one of the greatest upheavals in the history of nations, the end of the British Empire, my father, architect, excavator and local historian, burrowed away into the underground memory of the city the British built,
becoming the undisputed master of a subject in which nobody else had the slightest interest; for Bombay forgets its history with each sunset and rewrites itself anew with the coming of the dawn. (62)

Rai’s disdain for his father’s digging can be explained by the fact that Rai, as an author, knows that meaning is created, not found. Thus his father’s burrowing only contributes to the instability of the ground in Bombay, rather than stabilizing the city by producing a narrative which would contain his version of the city and of himself. He explains the instability of the ground as something with which his father should already be familiar:

The ground, the ground beneath our feet. My father the mole could have told Lady Spenta a thing or two about the unsolidity of solid ground. The tunnels of pipe and cable, the sunken graveyards, the layered uncertainty of the past. The gaps in the earth through which our history seeps and is at once lost, and retained in metamorphosed form. The underworld at which we dare not guess. (54)

The instability of Bombay’s ground is thus literal and figurative according to Rai. The urban infrastructure is proof of “the unsolidity of solid ground,” as is the ground on which the city stands has been taken away from the sea. This reclaimed land is a metaphor for Rai’s (and Saleem’s) construction of their own identities and Bombay as fluid and multiple, as “unsolidly solid”. Neil ten Kortenaar reminds us that in Rushdie’s writing “The self, the text, and the city are products of the same process. All involve erecting walls to hold back the sea. To avoid being swallowed by the tidal movements, the self must channel and contain the tides” (222).

Containing the sea, however, is not so easy considering its allure—a pull to cross the ocean that Rai says he feels from the tender age of nine. He has no interest in digging with his father and entrenching himself in Bombay because he hears a call from the sea: “Its come-hither murmur,
its seductive roar...The lure of a different element, its promises of elsewhere, gave me my first intimation of something hidden within me that would pull me across the water” (Ground 59). He continues, “That sandy shore, on which my barefoot father dug like an over-worked undertaker, that beloved homeland, came to seem like a prison to me. The sea—over the sea, under the sea, it scarcely seemed to matter—the sea and only the sea would take me where I could be free”—free from his parents’ definitions and constructions of Bombay, free to write his own Bombay narrative. Thus, the identity he constructs will always be anything but free from Bombay.

In *Midnight’s Children* and *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*, the difficulty of maintaining a fluid personal identity and acknowledging fluid spatial identity is depicted as literal cracking of bodies and ground. The repeated image of swallowing reinforces the fluidity of the personal and spatial identities and the idea that an individual’s power over identity resides in the position of swallowing, not being swallowed. In other words, power in Bombay is wielded by constructing narratives, rather than letting others create narratives for you. Thus, the stability that Bombay lends to Rai’s and Saleem’s identities does not require the city to be an unchanging geographical location—neither text depicts Bombay as a static, unchanging place. For Saleem, Bombay is a mouth swallowing individuals to produce its fluid identity, and for Rai, Bombay is an always-already, hybrid place which produces individuals with hybrid identities. The shaky ground of Rai’s Bombay functions as an origin point inclusive of all culture because it is fluid and multiple—it is a place that has swallowed the world and is composed of many coexisting and competing narratives. Rai and Saleem rewrite these narratives and make sense of them for readers. They manipulate time, space, and memory in order to exercise agency over the narrative construction of their own and Bombay’s identities. They gain stability and control by making Bombay the centre of their narrative identities and drawing explicit attention to the constructedness of their memories of the city.
2.5 Bombay Sighs: The Creation of Mumbai

In Rushdie’s 1995 novel, *The Moor’s Last Sigh*, Mumbai has replaced Bombay and his narrator, Moraes Zogoiby, is defined more by his relationship to his mother than to the city. Aurora, rather than the narrator, is the artist trying to construct the meaning of her life and of India based on the relationship between fantasy and reality. Her first painting reproduces Rushdie’s imagined India as a place where individuals struggle against crowds: “beyond and around and above and below and amongst the family was the crowd itself, the crowd without boundaries, Aurora had composed her giant work in such a way that the images of her own family had to fight their way through this hyper-abundance of imagery” (60). But it is not a hopeful image of plural India with a mongrel Bombay at its centre, the God-less India that she paints is a “protean Mother India who could turn monstrous [...] and at the heart of this [...] was the simple tragedy of loss” (61). Both Aurora’s and Moraes’ memories are essentially “act[s] of mourning” and lack the nostalgic hope that Saleem and Rai pin to Bombay. Thus, *The Moor’s Last Sigh* exemplifies a text in which a singular narrative of the city takes over. Rather than a postmodern multiplicity, the narrator in this novel does not have the power to control or engage with conflicting Bombay narratives and pessimism for the future of Bombay triumphs over individual imaginative agency.

Moraes’ memories and narrative agency cannot overpower the political machinations of Raman Fielding, who seeks to destroy the secular, cosmopolitan Bombay loved by Aurora. The violent politics of this new city force Moraes to shed his “city eyes” and see the invisible (rotten) parts of the city which Saleem and Rai are able to walk past. In the third section of the novel, Moraes is jailed for drug smuggling and forced to not only acknowledge the horrors at the heart of Mumbai, but to act as their agent. Locked in an imposing building he has never seen on a street he has never heard of, he cannot imagine his prison as part of Bombay. As a result, his
narrative agency slips away and he wonders, “had I slipped accidentally from one page, one book of life on to another—in my wretched, disorientated state, had my reading finger perhaps slipped from the sentence of my own story on to this other, outlandish, incomprehensible text that had been lying, by chance, just beneath?” (Moor 285). Fielding chastises him for his disorientation and his inability to identify this part of the city. According to Fielding, Moraes’ ignorance is proof that the city is actually Fielding’s:

‘You live in the city and know nothing of its secret, of its heart. To you it is invisible, but now you have been made to see. You are in Bombay Central lock-up. It is the stomach, the intestine of the city. So naturally there is much of shit.’

‘I know the Bombay Central area,’ I protested. ‘Railway stations, dhabas, bazaars. I found no place resembling this.’

‘A city does not show itself to every bastard, sister-fucker, mother-fucker,’ the elephant man shouted before slamming the window shut. ‘You were blind, but now wait and see.’ (287)

This city which Moraes could not see is the one defined by a narrative that has replaced the narratives of cosmopolitan Bombay constructed in Saleem’s and Rai’s nostalgic memories—that “bastard child of a Portuguese-English wedding, and yet the most Indian of Indian cities” has been replaced “as the old, founding myth of the nation faded, the new god-and-mammon India was being born” (350, 351). His explanation for the death of the cosmopolitan utopia and the birth of Fielding’s violent hell is that “[t]hose who hated India, those who sought to ruin it, would need to ruin Bombay” (351). Nostalgia for their childhood Bombay and their ability to exercise agency over the numerous narratives that manifest in the city-space, protects Saleem
and Rai from the changing city, but nothing protects Moraes from Raman Fielding’s narrative construction of Mumbai. Fielding not only forces Moraes to acknowledge the existence of this new version of the city, but he requires him to become one of his henchmen. His last days in Bombay are spent as an agent helping to destroy the plurality of his beloved city. This tragedy of Bombay’s transition into Mumbai is mediated by the one-dimensional caricature of Fielding.

Rushdie parodies the Shiv Sena in the novel through his depiction of “Mumbai’s Axis” as a group organized around the principles of cricket (231). Rachel Trousdale offers an insightful reading of Fielding and the Axis in her examination of the Shiv Sena in Midnight’s Children and The Moor’s Last Sigh. She argues that the “arbitrary nature of communal identity is parodied by the group’s name and its origins in cricket, which turns the Sena/Axis leader into an unwitting anglophile: by combining cricket with Nazism, this post-colonial rejection of the former colonizer turns out to be inextricably and ridiculously rooted in a hodge-podge of European cultures” (105). Trousdale argues that Fielding plays the buffoon to a more dangerous villain, the narrator’s father, Abraham Zogoiby and that Rushdie’s continued critique of the Shiv Sena is also a critique of “destructive, exploitative internationalism” (108). She sees Rushdie’s texts as a rather hopeless portrayal of Bombay’s, and thus the India’s, future—caught between communalism and this internationalism, there is only room for dystopia. Her argument for a reading of the novel’s internationalism reinforces my own argument that, ultimately, this is not a Bombay novel composed of numerous narratives, but a Mumbai novel, defined by a singular, hegemonic narrative of the city.

The Bombay Rushdie depicts is a crowded, cosmopolitan place created through memory, personal history, and agency and is characterized by disruption, fragmentation, and alienation. It is an imagined place created by migrant nostalgia and governed by politics that threaten the
individual agency of its inhabitants. I have argued that the city Rushdie depicts contains, creates, and is created by the personal memories and histories of those individuals whose agency is threatened. Narrative agency and power over identity are wielded from small, safe spaces which render the narrators invisible and enable them to stabilize the plural, constantly changing identities of themselves and of the city. In this chapter, I showed how the personal nostalgia of narrators in Rushdie’s imagined Bombay overpowers regional and national politics. This nostalgia is powerless over his imagined Mumbai, however.

The end of Bombay in *The Moor’s Last Sigh* is quite literal: explosions destroy all that remained of Saleem’s Bombay at Breach Candy (375). The bombs that detonate are not powerful metaphors about the numerous and fragmented narratives which comprise Bombay’s identity. When Moraes flees the city, he flies away, gaining a panoptical perspective of the city that he cannot recognize. From the airplane, he sees a place which will never call him back home: “There was nothing holding me to Bombay any more. It was no longer my Bombay, no longer special, no longer the city of mixed-up, mongrel joy. Something has ended (the world?) and what remained, I didn’t know” (376). The parody of the Shiv Sena and this distance between Moraes and Mumbai produces a portrayal of the contemporary city that lacks the nuance and complexity of the versions of Bombay contained within *Midnight’s Children* and *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*. The death of Bombay and the birth of Mumbai are certainly central to the novel’s pessimism and dystopia and construct a singular narrative for the city and its future. For a nuanced portrayal of everyday life during and after this transition, I turn now to Rohinton Mistry, whose realism and focus on the domestic spaces of one particular minority community in Bombay creates a nuanced pessimism for the city’s future. If Rushdie imagines a Bombay to love and leave, Mistry imagines one in which leaving is not an option and loving is a struggle.
Chapter 3
Rohinton Mistry’s Parsi Bombay

Rohinton Mistry depicts the power disparity between personal memories and public histories in order to reveal how one particular minority community rewrites Bombay. His portrayal of the Parsi community presents a perspective unique to Bombay and thus offers an alternative model to Salman Rushdie’s positioning upper-class Muslim migrant narrators as representative of all minority experience in Bombay. Mistry’s depiction of Parsi spaces and the community’s use of the city reveals the commingling of modern, traditional, and sacred narratives that are encountered within the everyday space of Bombay. At the same time, the power his characters have over the city’s identity is undercut by the growth of disenfranchising, communal politics. In his novels, Mistry questions how this isolated, alienated, and diminishing community continues to live and construct homes in a city where nostalgic narratives of memory are increasingly ineffectual against hegemonic constructions of identity.

Like Rushdie’s novels discussed in the previous chapter, Mistry’s *Such A Long Journey* and *Family Matters* confine characters mainly to Bombay’s downtown Fort District and thus invoke colonial narratives of the city-space alongside the postcolonial identity narratives being constructed. While Rushdie’s novels control the multiple narratives of Bombay through an emphasis on the agency of narrators and the artifice of magic realism, Mistry’s realism constructs a street-level view of the plural narratives which coexist in Bombay’s space. From this vantage point, Mistry’s characters are frustrated by their limited
narrative agency over space. In the previous chapter, I argue that Rushdie’s characters empower themselves against the hegemonic public narratives that fuel their growing pessimism for Bombay’s secular, cosmopolitan future by physically distancing themselves from the city. They geographically distance themselves from Bombay by locking themselves in closed, private spaces (clock towers or cameras) or by moving out of the city altogether. This geographical distance creates isolated panopticons from which Rushdie’s narrators are separated from the city’s anonymous crowds and can privilege their own narrative perspectives of the city over and above those of other residents and politicians. Rohinton Mistry’s characters are not afforded any such empowering distance. His Parsi characters have little or no access to private space: they live in crowded homes and walk through congested streets that are constantly invaded by public politics and external definitions of their categorical identities. Mistry’s Bombay novels reveal how political hegemonic narratives of communalism and modernity threaten the very existence of the Parsi community and alienate them from the city. But rather than succumb to the forces pushing the Parsis towards extinction—rather than give in to their pessimism about the city’s future and abandon it—Mistry’s characters are empowered to continue constructing their imagined Bombay through their everyday lives. Their love for the city is lived out in their everyday lives, rather than through constructing narratives for their nostalgia.

*Such a Long Journey* and *Family Matters* explore the home life of Parsi families living in Bombay in the 1970s and the 1990s, respectively. At the heart of each novel is a family struggling to define their domestic spaces as regional and national politics intrude
upon the individual identity of each member of a family. In *Such a Long Journey*, the Noble family lives their everyday lives against the backdrop of the national political turmoil surrounding Bangladesh’s struggle for independence and the Indo-Pakistan War of 1971, and Indira Gandhi’s declaration of a State of Emergency. At the behest of a family friend, Major Bilimoria, Gustad embroils his family in a dramatic plot laundering money embezzled from Indira Gandhi (who has herself stolen the money) for the purpose of helping aid the war effort in Bangladesh. This criminal drama often takes a backseat to Gustad’s daily activities—fighting against the Bombay Municipal Company’s (BMC) claims on his domestic space, fretting over his son’s refusal to attend the Indian Institute of Technology, and taking his daughter to the doctor. The Vakeels in *Family Matters* are also living in Bombay isolated from the political brutality which devastated the city in the 1990s. They are untouched by the wide-spread, communal riots and subsequent bombings that were instigated by the destruction of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya, the Hindu celebration rallies in support of its destruction which inflamed Muslim residents, and the insensitive mishandling of the tensions by the police. However, their distance from the communal violence that ravaged

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1 Mistry saves his depiction of the horrors that took place during Indira Gandhi’s declaration of a State of Emergency in 1975 for his novel *A Fine Balance*. Many critics read the city depicted in *A Fine Balance* as Bombay. This “city by the sea” may resemble Bombay, but Mistry refuses to actually name the city and thus I omit *A Fine Balance* from this initial exploration of Bombay novels in English. I discuss the difficulty of naming the city in my introduction and argue for the importance of naming the city specifically in the previous chapter where I examine the proclamations of Salman Rushdie’s characters who declare themselves to be “Bombayites”.

2 Between December 1992 and January 1993 a series of riots left approximately nine-hundred people dead in the city. The riots were followed by retaliatory bombings on 12 March 1993 which resulted in approximately three-hundred fatalities and twelve-hundred injuries as thirteen coordinated bombs exploded throughout the city. The Srikrishna Report, published in 1998 as the product of the government’s inquiry into the riots, explains, “For five days in December 1992 and fifteen days in January 1993, Bombay, *prima urbs* of this country, was rocked by riots and violence unprecedented in magnitude and ferocity, as though the forces of Satan were let loose, destroying all human values and civilized behavior […] From January 8, 1993, at least, there is no doubt that the Shiv Sena and Shiv Sainiks took the lead in organizing attacks on Muslims and their properties” (qtd in Kumar 43).
the city does not translate into their feeling safe or stable in their houses, which they are constantly struggling to protect from deterioration. Furthermore, the tenuous hold the Vakeel/Chenoy/Contractor family has over their homes exemplifies the housing crisis that plagues Mumbai’s residents. The characters in *Family Matters* also remain preoccupied by their domestic problems which overshadow national and local politics. Financial difficulties and health concerns dominate their everyday lives: the family’s patriarch, Nariman, suffers worsening dementia and a broken leg, while his son-in-law and grandson struggle to reconcile their traditional values with the family’s pressing financial concerns. Mistry’s narratives examine the experiences of family members both as distinct individuals and as members of various communities—beginning with the family unit and extending to the nation. The imposition of external categorical identities on individuals threatens their ability to construct private, stable homes in Bombay and reveals the strain of living in a city in which so many competing identity narratives coexist.

### 3.1 Categorical identities: Parsi perspectives

I argue that the uneven relationship between the public and the personal in Mistry’s novels creates a Bombay in which individuals feel powerless against the public hegemonic definitions of identity but are still able to engage with the multiplicity of narratives that coexist within city-space. The performance of categorical identities in Mistry’s Parsi Bombay reveals the narrative artifice that constructs multiple, coexisting Bombays which must be negotiated in everyday life. Perhaps the most important hegemonic force influencing the identity of his characters is their membership in the Parsi community—a distinct categorical identity which is primarily found in Bombay.
Patrick Colm Hogan’s explanations of categorical and practical identities shed light on, and can refine our discussion of, the competing narratives that define Parsi experiences in Bombay and how individuals negotiate the plurality of identity narratives against which they feel (but are not necessarily) powerless. In *Empire and Poetic Voice*, Hogan delineates a nuanced theory of hybridity and identity to be applied to the construction of identity in postcolonial literature. Hogan argues that Homi Bhabha’s work on hybridity and Judith Butler’s theory of performative gender identity, which oppose colonial hegemonic constructions of identity, do not necessarily break down the “regulatory regimes” that they criticize. Instead, he argues, they offer substitute alternative (i.e. non-normative) regimes which can be equally hegemonic. “The problem of identity categories” he writes, “merely repeats itself for each segment of a plural culture” (3). His aim is to read the complex relationship between postcolonial authors and their metropolitan and indigenous traditions without resorting to the critical tendency to focus only on hybridity or resistance. He achieves this through his explanation of categorical and practical identities, terms that apply to how individuals negotiate identity in everyday life.

Categorical or reflective identity is a person’s self-concept and is “defined by a set of categories, prominently including gender, race, ethnicity, religion, and so on” and it often “involves a hierarchy of categories in a person’s internal, mental lexicon” (8). There are two components of categorical identity: first, the presupposition of who else belongs to the group based on some identification criteria (which are not necessarily definitive) in order to produce in-group/out-group divisions. “The sole definitive property” of categorical identity “is group membership. The rest is propaganda”, Hogan explains (9). The second component of categorical identity is definition, which he articulates as “the complex characterization that
includes definitional elements, but also prototypical and even stereotypical properties, ideas, and so on.” Practical identity, meanwhile, “comprises a vast number of procedural schemas” or “cognitive structures that allow us to do certain things”, like drive a car in Hogan’s example, or perform morning prayers in my example below (Hogan 9-10). Individuals continually monitor their behaviour cognitively—practicing and evaluating their actions according to category ideals (i.e., what makes a good driver or what makes a good Parsi) in order to develop procedural schemas which will establish their membership in particular categorical identities. So how do these definitions help us understand Bombay from a Parsi perspective?

Hogan’s reading strategy enables us to produce a nuanced reading of the nexus of identities and regimes vying for narrative control of Bombay’s space without reproducing the exclusionary identity politics that divide the urban population into, essentially, groups of insiders and outsiders. The communal politics which began to dominate the social landscape of Bombay after the 1950s gains power from its division of the population into insiders and outsiders, where outsiders are enemies to the insider indigenous group. Mistry’s descriptions of everyday life in Bombay reveal the constant change required in a person’s practical identity in order to meet the ideals of their various categorical identities. In other words, his characters must adjust their behaviour depending on whether they are being

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3 Hogan provides an example based on gender to reveal the performativity of identity as an act of will (this second part is where he distinguishes his own theory from Butler’s): “Max comes to believe that men should be self-assertive. Though he tends to be shy, he monitors his behavior and begins to make small gestures of self-assertion. These develop into procedural schemas until he responds with self-assertion automatically. The same point holds for Krishna and properties of being Hindu” (10).

4 I elaborate on these social divisions by groups like the Shiv Sena in my introduction. See also Arjun Appadurai’s Fear of Small Numbers (2006).
perceived (or perceive themselves) first as Parsis, or as Bombayites, or as Indians, or by some other categorical identity such as gender. The Bombay that Rushdie composes based on utopian, nostalgic cosmopolitanism, Mistry portrays as a place defined by its schizophrenic pluralism, where individuals are both integrated within, and disconnected from, traditional and metropolitan narratives of culture in equal measures. That is to say, Mistry’s protagonists are sometimes devout, orthodox Parsis espousing the categorical ideals of purity and righteousness; sometimes they are assimilated cosmopolitans bringing together Parsi, Indian, British cultures and Parsi, Hindu, Muslim, Christian religions; and sometimes they are alienated individuals struggling to protect their families from the all-consuming rhetorical power of communal politics. In all three cases, his characters are isolated from belonging to majority communities. In the following section, I consider the ways which Mistry’s characters in Such a Long Journey and Family Matters offer perspectives which bring together the variety of narratives coexisting within Bombay’s city-space and competing for dominance as they negotiate their way through the city. Their practical identities, or how they act in everyday life in order to perform this negotiation rather than their narrative agency, define Mistry’s Parsi Bombay.

In Bombay, being able to identify as Parsi makes an individual eligible to live in the Parsi baug. These apartment complexes, Roshan Shahani explains are a “‘city’ within the city” which “becomes a communal refuge, a cultural bulwark against the fast-changing, ‘menacing’ city” (in Patel & Thorner 109). Mistry’s depiction of these spaces reveals how the tiny Parsi community is protected by the walls of their dwellings, while simultaneously stifled by the “stultifying effects of its culture” (Shahani 109). By definition, the residents of Khodadad Building in Such a Long Journey are a Parsi community; and by presupposition,
no other shared characteristics are necessary in order to create in-group/out-group division. Therefore, the tensions between neighbours in Khodadad Building—the disagreements that arise between them based on their practical identities—do not prevent them from uniting as a group in order to alienate other groups of city residents.

In the novel’s opening scene, Gustad performs his morning prayers, tying and untying his kusti (a sacred thread worn around the waist, symbolizing moderation and commitment that Parsis are given after being initiated into the faith as a child), while his neighbour, Miss Kuptitia, berates the bhaiya selling milk:

“Muá thief! In the hands of the police only we should put you!” [...] Miss Kuptitia’s threats lacked any real conviction. She never bought the bhaiya’s milk herself but firmly believed that periodic berating kept him in line, and was in the interest of the others. Somebody had to let these crooks know that there were no fools living here, in Khodadad Building. (2)

She yells at the milk seller to establish herself as part of the community of neighbours: she is an honourable and educated insider; the seller, an uneducated thieving outsider who must be guarded against. Kuptitia’s sense of communal belonging is limited to this imagined in-group/out-group “propaganda”, in Hogan’s terms, which enables Kuptitia to use her personal actions to publicly define the group identity. Since her practical identity is characterised by her chastisement of others—neighbours and milkmen alike—her neighbours avoid associating with her “because of the reputation she had acquired over the years, of being
mean and cranky and abusive”.

This separation between herself and the community of neighbours is superseded by her categorical identity, however, and she is not cast out of the fractured in-group. The fractures within this Parsi categorical identity are exacerbated by her juxtaposition with Gustad. Her rebukes of the bhaiya are measured against Gustad’s quiet, pious morning prayers. He appears to be the good, pure Parsi who adheres to the principles of Good Thought and Holy Devotion, while she is angry and cruel. The point is, that the fractured identity of this categorical identity group does not negate its hegemonic definition of the apartment space. This is one way that Bombay spaces are constructed and defined by individuals who lack narrative agency but are none-the-less actors in narratives. In other words, they are the unwitting agents of hegemony. The categorical and practical identities competing and coexisting within this confined city space are further complicated when we turn to Gustad. Mistry’s portrayal of categorical identities reveals that the individual’s lack of agency over the ability to control categorical identities does not disempower the hegemonic narratives defining space and individuals, even when it disempowers individuals.

Gustad’s own categorical and practical identities are also depicted in this morning encounter in the courtyard and reveal the complex relationship between narrative identities that comprise an individual’s experience of everyday life, and, in turn, impact identity in, and of, Bombay. His morning prayers provide quiet time for introspection and devotion, but rather than thoughts about God or words of prayer, we see his vanity. His thoughts are preoccupied by the “envy and admiration of friends and relatives” who continually comment on his strength and health, “whenever health or sickness was being discussed” (2). His mind

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5 Only Gustad’s wife befriends her, but that is purely out of her own her procedural schema: her “childhood training to show unconditional respect for elders” (4).
continues to wander amidst the “clatter and chatter” of the women and milkman in the courtyard. The several narrative digressions that take place during Gustad’s morning prayer draw attention to the cacophony of narratives which an individual must negotiate in Bombay’s city-spaces. As a good Parsi, his practiced procedural schema for prayer enables him to complete the ritual without physical interruption: the sounds “seemed remote to [him] while he softly murmured his prayers under the neem tree” (5) and his “prayers were not disturbed by the banter nor distracted by the radio” (6). The fullness of Bombay space is exemplified in the number of motifs that appear in the scene—the radio, the neem tree, the milk seller, etc.

The description of the neem tree alone reveals the multiple meanings imposed upon objects in Bombay’s public space:

The neem tree had not been kind to Tehmul, the way it had to others. For children in Khodadad Building, cuttings from its soothing branches had stroked the itchy rashes and papules of measles and chicken-pox. For Gustad, neem leaves (pulped into a dark green drink by Dilnavaz with her mortar and pestle) had kept his bowel from knotting up during his twelve helpless weeks. For servants, hawkers, beggars passing through, neem twigs served as toothbrush and toothpaste rolled into one. Year after year, the tree gave unstintingly of itself to whoever wanted.

But there had been no such benevolence for Tehmul. The fall from the neem had broken his hip. And although he had not landed on his head,
something went wrong inside due to the jolt of the accident [...and] Tehmul was never the same. (35)

The tree alone represents sacred prayer space, traditional medicines, and the Icarian danger of climbing too high. Additionally, while the tree belongs to the Parsi community and is protected within the confines of their compound, they share its benefits—like good Parsis practicing good deeds—with the rest of the city (in the form of strangers passing through). The number of meanings represented by the tree suggests that it is easy for plural narratives to coexist within space, however the harmony is a result of the fact that the tree is not a subject trying to simultaneously create his own narrative. And it is this desire for narrative agency which produces discord between Bombay’s residents.

Mistry presents this discord as Gustad’s frustrated attempts to control narrative in Such a Long Journey. The text continually emphasizes Gustad’s undisturbed focus on his prayers, but the representation of his thoughts is continually interrupted and it takes the length of the chapter for Gustad to finish his prayers. Moreover, while Mistry appears to present Gustad’s prayers in minute detail, the prayers are actually absent from the page: Gustad may perform the sacred ritual, but we do not hear him recite the sacred language. Thus Gustad performs the ritual prayer without having to stay focused on the words he recites. In effect, he reveals the ambiguity and performativity at the center of his integrated

6 The image of his silent prayers being interrupted is repeated again later: “He turns his face to the sky, eyes closed, and began reciting the Sarosh Baaj, silently, forming the words with his lips, when the domestic sounds of the building were drowned by the roar of a diesel engine. A lorry?”, he wonders, but “he resisted turning around to see. There was nothing he disliked more than to permit a break in his morning prayers. Bad manners, that’s what it was. He would not rudely interrupt when talking to another human being, so why do it with Dada Ormuzd?” (15). Thus, according to Gustad, turning one’s thoughts to the lorry is not a disrespectful disruption because he does not perform a physical turn with his body.
orthodox identity—his thought process need not lead to the questioning of his identity as an individual upholding the purity of Zoroastrianism because his physical performance of the rituals constitutes his orthodox identity.\textsuperscript{7} In other words, he is once again an unconscious agent. Instead of prayer, we see Gustad’s cosmopolitan education, which has enabled him to combine Parsi ritual with English myth. Mistry writes:

He recited the appropriate sections and unknotted the \textit{kusti} from around the waist. When he had unwound all nine feet of its slim, sacred, hand-woven length, he cracked it, whip-like: once, twice, thrice. And thus was Ahriman, the evil one, driven away—with that expert flip of the wrist, possessed only by those who performed their \textit{kusti} regularly.

This part of the prayers Gustad enjoyed the most, even as a child, when he used to imagine himself a mighty hunter plunging fearlessly into unexplored jungles, deep in uncharted lands, armed with nothing expect his powerfully holy \textit{kusti}. [...] One day, while exploring the shelves in his father’s bookstore, he found the story of England’s beloved dragon slayer. From then on, whenever he said his prayers, Gustad was a Parsi Saint George, cleaving dragons. (4-5)

\textsuperscript{7} Compare instead Yezad Chenoy’s experience in the Fire Temple in \textit{Family Matters}. Yezad enters the ablutions area and watches another man perform his kusti prayers. When the man unties his kusti and touches it to his forehead, the “slight gesture in the dim light brought back the words of the prayer Yezad hadn’t recited in years...Ahura mazda khodai, az hama gunah, patet pashemanum...he let it run through his mind, feel a sense of deep satisfaction that he could still remember it” (267). His memories continue but they are not of far away mythical places; Yezad remembers coming to the fire temple on Navroze and Khordad Sal as a boy with his family. The crowds he remembers are a familial group to which he belongs, not the anonymous chaos he encounters in the streets. Thus the temple offers a tranquil retreat, “a real oasis in the midst of this big, mad city” (268).
Not only is Gustad using his prayer time to touch upon the sights and sounds around him and his own physical presence in the world, he is also pretending to be somewhere else, fighting mythical battles. Without any external catalyst from the city, Gustad’s Parsi prayers lead him to mythical English landscapes. Some might argue that this is an hierarchical judgment of English stories over Parsi narrative, but I contend that it reveals the coexistence of narratives within Bombay space without prioritizing one or the other in this moment. The stories he knows are products of his Bombay education, which includes English literature. This opening scene sets the stage for the question of narrative agency that reappears throughout Mistry’s novel by emphasizing the performance of identity, but not the writing of identities (at least, not in the same way that Rushdie’s narrators actively construct their narratives). For Mistry’s Parsi characters, the struggle between public and personal narratives is governed by their categorical identities and the theological mandates of purity and good deeds.

3.2 What it means to be Parsi: categorical identities in Bombay

“In the stories that he’d read so far Father said that all the Parsi families were poor or middle-class, but that was okay; nor did he mind that the seeds for the stories were picked from the sufferings of their own lives; but there should also have been something positive about Parsis, there was so much to be proud of [...] what would people reading these stories think, those who did not know about Parsis [...]?” Rohinton Mistry, “Swimming Lessons” in Tales from Firozsha Baag
Since the publication of his first book of short stories, Rohinton Mistry has been teaching the world how to read stories about Parsi Bombay. In “Swimming Lessons”, the final story in his first short fiction collection, he fictionalizes his position as an author writing Indian literature in English while living abroad. The unnamed narrator in the story sends his manuscript—the selfsame Tales from Firozsha Baag—to his parents in India and then describes their reactions to his stories about his childhood in a Parsi apartment building in Bombay. His father’s disappointment pre-empts critics who will think that he should write about the place he lives now (Canada), rather than focusing on the city he left (Bombay) or that he should delineate the proud history of Parsi success in his fiction, rather than the community’s struggles (256). The narrator’s mother is pleased by his “remembering everything so well, how beautifully he wrote about it all, even the sad things, and though he changed some of it, and used his imagination, there was truth in it”. Mistry’s novels focus on how this tension between history and personal imagination is a defining feature of everyday life in Bombay for the Parsi community.

The individuals in Mistry’s novels are defined first and foremost by their membership in the Parsi community. This group of Zoroastrians is an ethno-religious minority set apart by their “generally lighter skin, [...] their lingering aura of foreignness, despite their having

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8 His work has received numerous awards. “One Sunday” and “Auspicious Occasion” won the Hart House Literary Contests in 1983 and 1984, respectively. These stories were later anthologized in Tales from Firozsha Baag (1987). In 1985 he was awarded a Canada Council Grant and won Canadian Fiction Magazine’s annual Contributors’ Prize. Such a Long Journey (1991) received the Governor General’s Award for Fiction, the Commonwealth Writers Prize, the W.H. Smith Prize, and was shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize. The book was made into a movie in 1999 and won three Genie Awards. A Fine Balance (1995) won the Governor General’s Award, the Giller Prize, the Royal Society for Literature’s Winifred Holtby Prize, the Los Angeles Times Award for Fiction, was also shortlisted for the Booker, and it was featured on Oprah Winfrey’s show as a selection for her Book Club in 2001. Family Matters (2002) was also shortlisted for the Booker Prize. He received the Neustadt International Prize for Literature in 2012.
being domiciled in India for well over a thousand years, and their customs, perceived as peculiar even in a country of eclectic religious, cultural and social practices,” writes Rashna B. Singh (30). They emigrated from Persia (now Iran) after the collapse of the Persian empire in the mid-seventh century to avoid persecution by Muslim invaders and settled primarily in modern-day Gujarat.  

Zoroastrianism is the oldest surviving, prophetically-revealed religion in the world and thus has influenced Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and Gnosticism. Although a demographically tiny community, the religion “has probably had more influence on mankind, directly and indirectly, than any other single faith” (Boyce 1). Part of the reason this community has had such a large impact is their belief in the importance of actively engaging with the world around them in their quest for purity.

The quest for purity is product of their theological doctrines. Named for the prophet and priest Zarathustra, Zoroastrianism worships the God Ahura Mazda (or Ohrmazd) who is the “Creator of all that is good, including all other beneficent divinities” and who stands in opposition to Angra Mainyu, the “Hostile Spirit” who lives in darkness and instigates deceit (Boyce 20; Clark 19-21). Ahura Mazda is the head of the Amesha Spentas, a pantheon of special entities—Immortals—who each personify a manifestation of Light fundamental to the spiritual and ethical principles of Zoroastrianism. “The Immortal who leads the way to all the rest is Vohu Manah, ‘Good Purpose’; and his closest confederate is Asha Vahishta, ‘Best Righteousness’”, explains Mary Boyce, author of Zoroastrians: Their Religious Beliefs and Practices. She continues,

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9 Some sources disagree on the exact dates and reasons for migration. See Nilufer Bharucha, “Imagining the Parsi Diaspora” (57); Peter Clark, Zoroastrianism (19-21); Eckehard Kulke, The Parsees in India (15); Peter Morey Rohinton Mistry (6-7).
there is Spenta Armaity, “Holy Devotion”, embodying the dedication to what is good and just; and Khshathra Vairya, “Desirable Dominion”, who represents both the power which each person should properly exert for righteousness in this life, and also the power and the kingdom of God. The final pair are Haurvatat and Ameretat, “Health” and “Long Life”, who not only enhance this mortal existence but confer that eternal well-being and life, which may be obtained by the righteous in the presence of Ahura Mazda. (22).

The basic tenet of Zoroastrianism is thus that each individual must constantly and consciously choose to follow the path of righteousness in the struggle between Good and Evil by following the ethical code, “good thoughts, good words, and good deeds”. Their perspective of Bombay is not only concerned with power over identity and space, it is also attentive to morality and ethics. “For the Zoroastrian,” Peter Morey explains in his volume on Rohinton Mistry, “faith is manifest in a morally informed interaction with the material world, rather than the retreat from it sanctioned by some other religions” (7). In practical terms, this means that the Parsi community cannot withdraw from everyday life in order to pursue their spiritual enlightenment. These principles are visible throughout Mistry’s fiction as his characters struggle to live ethically and maintain purity in both themselves and the world around them.

This emphasis on the purity of the physical world translates into strict community laws on intermarriage and an historical prohibition against conversions. These restrictions, combined with the diminution of birth rates in the community, means that the population of Zoroastrians steadily declines. Currently, there are approximately 150,000 Zoroastrians in the world, and the majority of them live in Bombay (Clark 137; Morey 8-9). To say that
Parsis are a minority community hardly seems to do justice to the Parsi experience, especially after my previous discussion of Rushdie’s Muslim narrators as minorities. The risk of extinction is a visceral reality for Parsis. The point being that their need for purity is a survival tactic reinforced by their demographics, their psychological and social marginalization, and their sacred spaces and rituals. The community is not less-threatened because the majority of them live in Bombay, a city on which they have had tremendous influence.

Despite their small size, the Parsis have made significant contributions to the development of Bombay and are central to its historical identities. As Bombay began to grow, the majority of them eventually relocated to the heart of the city, settling in the Fort District, where many can still be found. Their contributions during the colonial period are reflected in Bombay’s architecture and nomenclature. Gyan Prakash explains that the names of the most successful Parsi traders, “like Jeejeebhoy, still adorn public spaces and buildings in Bombay—the Wadias, the Cowasjis, the Motichund Aminchund, Khemchund Motichund and others. These men combined their interlocking interests in cotton, opium, banking, brokerage, and shipping to become great merchant princes of the city” (Mumbai Fables 38).

In The Parsis of India: preservation of identity in Bombay city, Jesse S. Palsetia points out that Parsis were also responsible for carrying out the land reclamation projects and construction of the Fort in downtown Bombay:

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10 According to the 2011 Census, Muslims composed 18.56% of Mumbai’s population, where Parsis and Jews combined made up approximately 0.06% of the nearly 12.5 million people. Hindus comprised 67.39%; Buddhists, 5.22%; Christians, 4.2%; Jains, 3.99%; and Sikhs 0.58%. (“Census GIS Household” n.pag).
In 1665, the Parsi Kharsheedji Pochaji Panday had provided the materials and men for the construction of the first fortifications of the town, while under Portuguese possession. Within the next hundred and fifty years, Parsis would shape the familiar physical outline of Bombay and would become some of its principal inhabitants. (35)

To this list of Parsis who helped shape the city, we could add the business tycoon J.N. Tata; the social activists Dadabhai Naoroji, K.R. Cama, D. F. Karaka, Behramji Malabari, Cornelia Sorabji; the philanthropists Sir Sinshaw Petit, Sir Cowasjee Readymoney, N.M. Wadia; and politicians Pherozesha Mehta, and D.E. Wacha. The successes of these individuals “helped to establish Bombay’s image as a place of untold wealth” (Kapadia 76). Kapadia explains that “Parsis have always allied themselves to progress and in many fields have given the lead to adopting new techniques and ideas to improve and embellish outmoded contentions and beliefs” (76). These are the successful Parsis that the unnamed narrator’s father in “Swimming Lessons” wishes were delineated in his son’s stories and the proud footsteps that Gustad hopes his eldest son, Sohrab, will follow if he attends ITT.

The economic and social success of the community was not without its repercussions, however. Parsis were able to accomplish so much because of their willingness to work with British colonials. As a consequence, they are often described as “westernized” or “Anglicized”. This description of Parsi acculturation strictly in relation to their adaptation of British cultural practices alienates the group and prevents them from claiming their place at the heart of Bombay as authentic Indians. Singh explains, “Historical circumstances compelled tiny marginalized communities such as the Parsis to adopt a contingent identity that served to ensure both physical survival and cultural integrity. The structuration of Parsis
as Anglicized or westernized is also a structuration of them as inauthentic Indians” (31).

Quoting the work of T.M. Luhrmann, Singh points out that the Parsis were not the only Indians influenced by western culture:

> Elite Indians, of whom Parsis are only one but a remarkable example, shaped their ideals and sensibilities and the ideals and sensibilities of their children upon the canons of English colonial culture: its literature, its sociability, its competitive athletics, its pianos, and lace and fitted suits, but also its dismissal of their countrymen as effeminate, traditional, and lowly. (qtd in Singh 31)

In other words, their relationship to the British should not preclude Parsis from claiming their place in the plural Indian national fabric, but it often does, especially when the label of “Anglicized” is combined with the conflation of Indian nationalism with Hinduism. Their history of assimilation and acculturation is not limited to British influences. Since their arrival in India, Parsis have tried to assimilate into the dominant culture to such a point that the desire to assimilate and accommodate is written into the mythology of their arrival in India. Singh summarizes the “apocryphal tale told to every Parsi child”:

> The story goes that when the newcomers first asked to live among the local ruler, Jadhav Rana’s people on landing in Sanjan in the present state of Gujarat, he sent a bowl of milk filled to the brim to signal that there was no space for any more people in the kingdom. The people from Pars added sugar to the milk and returned the bowl. The message was that they would dissolve like the sugar, without displacing the milk and, in fact, sweeten it and thus, symbolically, the land. (Singh 31; see also Kapadia 14)
This parable and the stereotypes of assimilation produce an identity crisis for Parsis trying to negotiate the struggle to preserve their Zoroastrian categorical ideals while trying to claim their place as Indians. This narrative of assimilation is made more complex by the overcrowding in Bombay; Novy Kapadia describes the above parable in terms of “inadequate space” and foreshadows the lack of adequate housing that will plague future generations of Parsis living in Bombay (14).

As a categorical identity, the Parsi weltanschauung is important because it provides the guiding principles for the everyday lives of Mistry’s characters. The everyday lives of Mistry’s characters are marked by their religious observances and their participation in Zoroastrian rituals. His focalization of Bombay life through Parsi perspectives emphasizes the impact that this small community has on the city’s identity. Equally significant are the ways that the demands of urban life affect the identities of these marginalized individuals. This recursive relationship between Bombay and Parsi residents requires these individuals to isolate themselves in order to maintain the existence of their exclusive community, even as they assimilate into the cosmopolitan crowd.

In her study of Parsi narratives, Rashna B. Singh in “Traversing Diacritical Space” argues that the conflicting desires for purity and assimilation exemplify Homi Bhabha’s theory of hybridity and narration. A Parsi himself, Bhabha contends that in order to understand the postcolonial hybridity of identities it is critical “to think beyond narratives of originary and initial subjectivities and to focus on those moments or processes that are produced in articulation of cultural differences. These ‘in-between’ spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood” (Location of Culture 1). According to Singh’s application of Bhabha’s theories of hybridity and Third Spaces, there is “a clear distinction
between the Parsis’ lived experience, which is one of cultural borrowings and hybridity, and their epistemological formations, which are premised on racial and religious purity” (33). From within Third Space, Parsis are able to “articulate their own ambivalences” (36). Literature provides this space for enunciation. Parsi writers can, Singh argues, “reconstitute Parsi identity as always provisional and recognize myriad selves within it” by relocating their characters at the centre of the nation instead of at the margins and thus present “a postcolonialist understanding of identity as performative, unstable and contingent” (Singh 37). Singh is not alone in her attempt to understand the struggles between narratives of purity, hybridity, and assimilation in Parsi fiction. For example, in a two volume collection of essays entitled *Parsi Fiction*, editor and scholar Kapadia identifies a general “identity crisis” evident throughout all Parsi literature. She argues that the “struggle to create their own space in the West as well as in India and the identity struggle of what it means to be a Parsi Zoroastrian are all the major problems, aspirations, hopes, ambitions and prejudices of the community” (16). These Parsi novelists include Bapsi Sidhwa, Boman Desai, Thrity Umrigar, Rohinton Mistry, and Cyrus Mistry. With the exception of Sidhwa writing about Pakistan and Partition, all of these novelists set their stories in Bombay Parsi homes which are often secluded from the violence of post-Independence Indian politics, but Kapadia does not investigate the reciprocal narrative relationship between Parsis and Bombay as it is mapped onto space and identity. The tension inherent within the Parsi community between purity and assimilation is a powerful revelatory tool for understanding how individuals’ everyday experiences of Mumbai’s plurality are affected by the increasingly politically-powerful communalism. For my own approach, I focus on Mistry’s depictions in particular because of the popularity of his novels which has produced critical comparisons between his
Bombay and that of Salman Rushdie. The pessimism in Mistry’s novels can partly be read as a product of the inability of his characters to understand categorical identities—regardless of their hegemony—as fluid and performative. I argue that Rohinton Mistry’s novels foreground the role of Bombay and the categorical identities manifest in its landscape which create a recursive relationship with the identities of Parsi individuals.

3.3 Narratives collide: Parsi Bombay

The people and sounds that intrude upon Gustad’s thoughts without disrupting the tranquility of his prayers also exemplify the chaos of everyday life in Bombay. Gustad transforms the Khodadad Building’s courtyard into sacred space with his prayers, while Kutpitia’s yelling and the bhaiya’s presence transform the private courtyard into a public marketplace. The introduction of Gustad’s categorical identities is thus not confined to his religion, it includes his economic class. We are told that the Nobles are forced to buy milk from the bhaiya because of government rationing and their declining finances. Dilnavaz, Gustad’s wife, “remembered the days when ration cards were only for the poor or the servants, the days when she and Gustad could afford to buy the fine creamy product of Parsi Dairy Farm (for Miss Kutpitia it was still affordable), before the prices started to go up, up, up, and never came down” (3). Despite the shared experience of not being able to afford milk, the Nobles do not align themselves with other economically-disadvantaged Indians. She does not

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recognize that both she and the *bhaiya* are equally powerless over the milk situation.\(^{12}\) Instead, Dilnavaz worries that Miss Kutpitia’s screaming will only heighten his resentment of the Parsis—the same resentment that she imagines the “house-poor” of Mumbai feel towards herself and her neighbours.\(^{13}\) Dilvanaz thinks, “as it was, these poor people in slum shacks and *jhopadpattis* in and around Bombay looked at you sometimes as if they wanted to throw you out of your home and move in with their own families” (4). The scene reinforces Sandeep Pendse’s argument that “the utilization of space [in Bombay] is far more intense than in non-urban areas. Even small areas of space are filled up” (“Toil, Sweat and the City” in Patel & Thorner 13). Dinvanaz’s concerns reveal the growing unrest between classes, unrest which certain political organizations capitalized on to gain power throughout the 1970s in Bombay.

The ability to segregate individuals from one another, even as they share living spaces and financial burdens, reflects the proliferation of categorical identities which empower communal Bombay politics in the twentieth century. Arjun Appadurai explains that as jobs became scarce, “rural arrivals in the city found themselves economic refugees. Slums and shacks began to proliferate. The wealthy began to get nervous. The middle classes had to wrestle with overcrowded streets and buses, skyrocketing prices, and maddening traffic” (“Spectral Housing” 629). Both Appadurai and Gyan Prakash examine in detail how Bal Thackeray took advantage of this economic hardship and division in his campaign to bring

\(^{12}\) Miss Kutpitia’s accusations that the milkman takes advantage of her neighbours by watering down the milk elicits his mumbled response: “As if I make the milk. Cow does that. The *malik* said go, sell milk, and that is all I do. What good comes from harassing a poor man like me?” (2).

\(^{13}\) “House poor” is the phrase Arjun Appadurai uses to delineate Bombay’s simultaneous but not synonymous housing and economic crises in “Spectral Housing and Urban Cleansing: Notes on Millennial Mumbai” (2000).
the Shiv Sena to power. Thackeray, founder and president of the Shiv Sena party, located their “enemies” in the non-Hindu, non-Maharastrians pouring into Mumbai’s slums. Suketu Mehta summarizes the sentiment in his exploration of the 1992-1993 Hindu-Muslim riots; interviewing one municipal employee in particular, Mehta writes: “In Bombay, numbers of people are important; the sense of being crowded by the Other in an already overcrowded city is very strong. ‘In a few years they will be more than us,’ the municipal employee predicted gloomily” (42-3). In this case, “they” refers to the Muslim slum dwellers and serves as a linguistic marker of the sentiment that has fuelled the horrific riots between Muslims and Hindus in the early 1990s. These are the politics that seep into Mistry’s *Family Matters* and *Such A Long Journey*. Mistry’s characters are affected by these politics, but as Parsis, they are not the objects of the violent communal politics which position Hindus and Muslims against one another. Mistry’s novels reveal how marginalized individuals reconcile the clash between categorical identities that dominates their everyday spaces whether or not they are targets of violent communalism.

Mistry’s 2002 novel, *Family Matters*, has been criticized for its lack of engagement with the violent communal politics of the 1990s, which some critics argue overshadows life in Bombay. Nilufer E. Bharucha chastises Mistry’s novel for glossing over the “troubled and shameful time that Bombay went through” between 12 December 1992 and 12 March 1993,

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14 See Appadurai’s “Spectral Housing” and Prakash’s sixth chapter in *Mumbai Fables*. Thomas Blöm Hansen’s *Wages of Violence* also focuses on the growth of the Shiv Sena.

15 The invasion of communal politics into domestic space is a primary concern of Manil Suri’s Bombay novel, *The Death of Vishnu*. Suri depicts Muslim, Hindu and Parsi families sharing one apartment building. His portrayal of Bombay communalism is interspersed with one character’s journey towards Hindu spiritual enlightenment.
following the destruction of the Babri Masjid (169). For Bharucha, Mistry’s text relies too heavily on hearsay and newspaper accounts. She argues that

Mistry’s political consciousness and acumen thus begs comparison with another diasporic book on that same troubled and shameful time that Bombay went through—Salman Rushdie’s *The Moor’s Last Sigh*. Rushdie’s in-the-face tackling of the complicity of the Shiv Sena in the Hindu-Muslim riots that rocked Bombay in the wake of the demolition of the Babri Masjid, in Ayodhya in Northern India, by militant Hindu mobs, while the state administration stood by as mute witnesses, is papered over in Mistry’s book. Also missing is any elaboration on the suspicion of the involvement of Islamic fundamentalists, in nexus with the Underworld, in the Bombay blasts” (169).

Bharuca seems unable to justify how these politics are able to seep into the novel without becoming its primary focus: “One could of course say that this is because the focus [is] on the personal rather than the political, but the political is allowed to intrude in a major way into the text” (169). I disagree with Bharuca’s concern about the isolated nature of Mistry’s novel. I think that Mistry’s subtle engagement with communalism and his primary focus on personal space emphasizes the pernicious impact that these alienating politics have on the entire city, not just the victims of violence. The intrusion of the public into private spaces is the basis for his characters’ feelings of powerlessness and hopelessness. Mistry’s Parsi characters are a meeting point for the post-colonial and the traditional, as well as the privileged and the minority identities of Bombay’s residents. They must negotiate the demands of the crowded metropolitan landscape and the orthodoxy of their religious
traditions simultaneously. And they perform this negotiation without access to the bombastic narrative agency that Salman Rushdie’s characters command over identity.

The imposition of categorical identities as communal politics in public spaces is exemplified in *Family Matters* when the Shiv Sena appears in the novel to impose their bureaucratic policy of renaming public spaces. Yezad Chenoy conceives of a scheme to use the Sena’s campaign to try to motivate his employer to run for political office and thus create an opportunity for a promotion for himself. Yezad wants to enlist the “help” of the Shiv Sena to convince his employer, Mr. Kapur, to change the name of his business from Bombay Sporting and take down his Christmas decorations, rather than hiring actors to impersonate Sena thugs as his friend suggests. Yezad is governed by categorical ideals that stress “family service before public service” (263) and so he cannot see beyond his own personal motivations to recognize the dangerousness of the Sena’s politics. His friends warn him “When Shiv Sena comes, it will bring more than one stone. It will spread such terror, we’ll all be trembling like your father-in-law” (280). And when the real Shiv Sena appear to force Kapur to change the name of his store to Mumbai Sporting Goods Emporium, he resists them and ends up stabbed to death. Yezad’s careful planning of the situation thus proves fruitless, because it does not actually provide him with agency over the communal politics which govern interactions between individuals living in Mumbai in the 1990s. Yezad’s father-in-law, Nariman displays this same powerlessness but without the arrogance, through his physical frailty and his non-violent struggle against categorical identities.

The lack of narrative agency Mistry’s characters possess over their categorical identities is best exemplified by Nariman. His transgressions of the Parsi categorical identity alienate him from his already-isolated community and translate into a desire for private
space, which he is unable to find. At seventy-nine, he is a generation older than Gustad Noble, but he does not represent the ideal Parsi elder helping to preserve the community. Rather than a model of physical or mental strength, he spends almost the entire novel bedridden, suffering from worsening dementia and reminiscing about his love-affair with a non-Parsi which scandalized the older generation of Parsis when he was young. Lucy Braganza is a Christian Goan and “the woman he should have married” (FM 11). His love for Lucy alienates him from his already-isolated Parsi community. When he finally agrees to marry a Parsi girl (the widowed mother-of-two, Yasmin Contractor), his parents and their friends rejoice while he sits alone on the balcony (12). He remembers being out in the city with Lucy, watching the tide at Breach Candy: “he thought about the eleven years he and Lucy had struggled to create a world for themselves. A cocoon, she used to call it. A cocoon was what they needed, she said, in to which they could retreat, and after their families had forgotten their existence, they would emerge” (13). Their inter-faith relationship may be tolerated on the public beaches of the city, spaces which often serve as rendezvous points for Bombay lovers, but it cannot protect them from the hostility of the Parsi elders. Nariman and Lucy believe that inside a private cocoon they would be able to exercise agency and construct their own narratives. His inability to change the category ideals of Parsi identity—his lack of power or agency—means that he is unable to establish himself as an insider in the group of “good Parsis” comprised of his parents, their friends, and his own step-children. The demands for Parsi purity mean that there is no room in this world for a cosmopolitan individual who wants to marry an outsider. This scene also reveals a defining characteristic of Bombay and its residents: the city’s crowdedness. For Mistry’s characters, Bombay’s
crowdedness is as much a concern over a lack of physical space as it is a distress over the inability for competing narratives to coexist harmoniously.

Nariman’s inability to rewrite his Parsi identity and the impossibility of finding an isolated cocoon for himself and Lucy in Bombay, is exemplified by the fact that after more than a decade of resisting, he renounces his love and marries the girl his parents arrange for him. He spends the rest of his life as an outsider in his own homes, as his children move him between Chateau Felicity and Pleasant Villa, arguing about where he belongs. Nariman’s feebleness can be read as Mistry’s ambivalence about resisting communalism in Bombay because Nariman’s physical powerlessness is echoed in the narrative structure of the novel. What Nariman’s example makes clear is that the divide between public and private is a false one. Mistry’s novel thus exemplifies Homi Bhabha’s point that “the personal-is-the political” (*Location* 11), and provides a space in which we can focus on examining how and where the political and personal conceptions of identity confront one another. Mistry’s Bombay adds to this a demand that we investigate not just what narratives exist within the city, but how they are told.

### 3.4 Narrating Parsi Identity

Mistry’s novels portray realistic, pessimistic versions of Bombay in which individuals are impotent against hegemonic definitions of the city and of themselves. His characters move through space loaded with competing narratives and are unable to reconcile their memories with the hegemonic narratives they encounter. While Rushdie’s characters embrace their alienating hybridity and exercise agency over the recursive creation of their identities and the
identities of the city, Mistry’s characters are powerless against the definitions of categorical
identities that alienate them from Bombay. In *Such a Long Journey* Gustad’s best friend,
Dinshawji, struggles to understand how the changing identity of the places he has lived—
represented by the renaming of public buildings and streets which preceded the city’s name
change—disrupts the continuity of his own personal
narrative. He complains to Gustad,

> Names are so important. I grew up on Lamington Road. But it has
disappeared, in its place is Dadasaheb Bhadkhamkar Marg. My school was on
Carnac Road. Now suddenly it’s on Lokmanya Tilak Marg. I live at Sleater
Road. Soon that will also disappear. My whole life I have come to work at
Flora Fountain. And one fine day the name changes. So what happens to the
life I have lived? Will I get a second chance to live it all again, with these
new names? Tell me what happens to my life. Rubbed out, just like that?
Tell me! (SLJ 74)

He fears that the renaming of space erases one place and creates a new place, one to which he
has no personal (and therefore no narrative) connection. The erasure of the places he has
lived in and identified with threatens the narrative of his life and he feels that he must be
afforded the opportunity to relive his life in order to rewrite his place-bound identity because
he cannot fathom how else to exercise narrative agency over his memories, nor can he
imagine how two places can co-exist within the same space.

Dinshawji’s dilemma is that while the identities of people and places in Bombay may
change continuously, the multiple identities of one person or place are often threatened by
the city’s politics rather than allowed to coexist harmoniously. The erasure of place—of the
colonial city Bombay, to be precise—is exactly what some proponents of the city’s name change intended through their insistence on rigid definitions of two versions of the city: Bombay and Mumbai. 16 Like Moraes Zogoiby whose nostalgia cannot protect him from Mumbai and so he must flee the ruins of Bombay, Dinshawji’s memories are destroyed by the political rewriting of the places he lived. In other words, he does not have the power to reconcile his postcolonial and his traditional categorical identities in the face of the communal politics that are taking control over his everyday spaces. It’s still the 1970s though in this novel, and the Shiv Sena has not gained enough power to officially create Mumbai in Mistry’s world. Thus the characters living in Mistry’s 1970s Bombay are in a contest for the control and definition of their identities and the identities of the city. Mired in realism, Mistry’s characters battle against unseen forces, rather than parodic villains and their lack of agency manifests as frustration and an inability to make meaning.

Furthermore, this discussion occurs while the men walk through Flora Fountain—a public space crowded with narratives that neither Gustad and his friend, nor the Shiv Sena can erase through the creation of additional narratives. The fountain is described not as just an artefact of British colonialism (which it certainly is), but as the

great traffic circle [from which] radiated five roads like giant pulsating tentacles. Cars were pulling out from inside the traffic island and recklessly leaping into the flow. The BEST buses, red and double-deckered, careened dangerously around the circle on their way to Colaba. Intrepid handcarts,

16 The proponents of this change are the Shiv Sena thugs who threaten Yezad’s boss in *Family Matters* (282-85).
fueled by muscle and bone, competed temerariously against the best that steel, petrol, and vulcanized rubber threw in their paths. With the dead fountain at its still centre, the traffic circle lay like a great motionless wheel, while around it whirled the business of the city on its buzzing, humming, honking, complaining, screeching, rattling, banging, screaming, throbbing, rumbling grumbling, sighing, never-ending journey through the metropolis. (86)

The description of the traffic circle invokes the trope of the crowded and chaotic anonymous city which individuals must try to negotiate in their everyday lives. Moreover, the “dead fountain” at the centre of the traffic circle also serves as a metaphor for both the ineffectual bureaucracy that fails to maintain the city’s infrastructure and the former glory of the Raj. In his essay “Heritage Streetscape” for India Seminar, Abha Narhain Lambah, explains that the street, Dadabhai Naoroji Road (formerly Hornby Road after the Governor from 1771-1784), which Gustad and Dinshawji traverse connects Chhatrapati Shivaji Station (formerly Victoria Terminus) with Crawford Market and the fountain. This street “forms the main commercial spine and image centre of the city. By its very existence as a dynamic commercial artery, as well as the fact that it is virtually the civic centre with the Municipal Corporation headquarters, the Times of India and various banks and public plazas located on and around it, the area plays a critical role in framing the public perception of Mumbai” (n. pag). The scene thus expands well beyond the intimacy of two friends conversing and reveals the fullness of Bombay’s public spaces. In this particular case, Gustad centres himself by focalizing his everyday experiences through the strict ideals and practices of his Parsi categorical identity.
Gustad frequently walks through Flora Fountain and visits Crawford Market or St. Thomas Church, some of the city’s most well-known locations. When in these spaces, he is confronted with the crowded city-space which refuses to welcome him. In fact, when he visits Crawford Market or the church, he relies on his childhood friend Malcolm to act as a tour guide who can safely conduct Gustad through the crowds of people and narratives. Here Gustad’s Bombay streets are as crowded as Saleem’s history, but are much more physically threatening. After all, this particular passage is bookended with descriptions of individuals being injured by traffic. Just a few pages prior, we are told that Gustad still walks with a limp after being forced off of a bus into the middle of traffic (70-71). And he is saved from having to respond to his friend, Dinshawj’s metaphysical exhortations on the renaming of city-spaces when a man on a Lambretta is hit by a car (87). This incident reveals the lack of anonymity in Gustad’s crowded, chaotic Bombay and the contrived coincidences which guide Mistry’s plot. The man on the scooter is the same taxi-driver who saved Gustad’s life—driving him home and then to the bone setter—after he broke his hip. This taxi-driver will reappear later in the novel as a member of Major Bilimoria’s embezzlement plot, in which Gustad is not yet involved at this moment in the text.

These contrivances reveal the artifice of Mistry’s narrative, but do not necessarily undermine the novel’s realism. In his review of *Family Matters* (which deploys similar narrative techniques), Kanaganayakam argues that Mistry’s novel relies too much on melodrama for its realism to be considered much more than a plot device: “Mistry’s novel is

17 For example, Malcolm acts as a practical, spiritual, and historical guide when he teaches Gustad how to buy beef from the market butchers, and when he explains both the theology and the history of the church. I discuss his relationship with Gustad in further detail below.
[...] as much a construct as anything done by Rushdie. But where Rushdie self-consciously proclaims his artifice, Mistry seeks the illusion of the real” (2012, 4). The realism of Mistry’s texts presents a mundane version of Bombay, devoid of the fabulous adventures found in Rushdie and Chandra and mired in the everyday spaces of home and work. Mistry’s illusion of the real emphasizes the frustrated lack of individual agency over identity experienced by Bombay residents.

The lives of his characters are defined by identity crises over which they appear to have no control because they lack narrative agency. The novel, however, insists that we investigate these feelings of powerlessness as a product of agency, not a reference to some objective lack of power. From his perspective, Dinshawji remains unable to continue the narrative himself or to find a way to rewrite his life story using the new places created by the name changes and he repeatedly calls out to his friend, the novel’s protagonist, to continue it: “Tell me…Tell me!” he pleads, but Gustad also lacks the power of narration in the novel. Unlike the Bombay novels by Salman Rushdie, Rohinton Mistry’s *Family Matters* and *Such a Long Journey* lack clearly-defined narrators engaged in the act of storytelling. However, the fact that they have this conversation while walking through the space of Flora Fountain and their participation with traffic accidents that also help define the space suggests that they do have the power to produce identities, even if they lack the power to craft stories.

Dinshawji’s power is also revealed in his relationship with Laurie Coutino, the bank’s typist. His sexist jokes and comments turn the protected space of the bank into an aggressive and uncomfortable place for her, though it transforms him into the “Casanova of Flora Fountain”

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18 Storytelling is, however, a dominant theme in Mistry’s short story collection, *Tales from Firoshza Baag*. For an in-depth discussion of Tales, see Davis 2000 and 2001.
according to his colleagues (85). The point is, that Dinshawji’s words and actions construct Bombay’s space just as powerfully as the Sena’s renaming, but he just cannot understand this because he lacks the ability to produce narratives for the space. Thus, I argue that while Mistry’s novels articulate a pessimistic view of Bombay’s future, they also use narrative to question the power of the political narratives which inspire this pessimism.

Mistry emphasizes the relationship between power, narrative agency, and identity in his Bombay narratives through his narrative mode. Instead of a clear authorial voice, Mistry’s novels continually slip between narrative styles and diegetic levels, in Gerard Genette’s terms, and thus frustrate readers’ attempts to identify whose voice controls the narrative. The slippage between external third-person narration (the extradiegetic level) and internal stream of consciousness (both free indirect discourse and first-person narration at the diegetic level) emphasizes the lack of a boundary between public and private space in the domestic lives of Mistry’s characters. When Saleem Sinai invades people’s private thoughts, he remains in control of the novel’s narrative. But Mistry’s free indirect discourse also enables readers to “overhear” a character’s thoughts without granting him or her any authorial power—characters do not become authors of identity simply because their thoughts are made public by the narrator, author, or implied author. The pessimism of Mistry’s novels is a product of his characters’ frustrated attempts to rewrite identity in the crowded city of

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19 The bank is described as protected space when the men discuss the Bombay riots: Dinshawji and other bank members are threatened by the Sena rioters who shout “Parsi crow-eaters, we’ll show you who is the boss”. In the end, the bank’s windows are broken, but Dinshawji and his colleagues are protected by “those two Pathans doing chowki at the entrance. I used to think they were nothing but decorations with their uniforms and turbans and shiny rifles” (45).
Bombay. His characters act in the story, practicing, and evaluating their categorical identities, but they lack agency over their categorical identities and the city’s identities.

In *Such a Long Journey*, for example, the slippage between narrative styles seems to occur almost unintentionally and blurs Mistry’s authorial voice with the omniscient narrator’s and with the characters’ voices. He thus forces readers to question whose narrative perspective of Bombay space we are reading. The first chapter introduces Gustad Noble and his family by describing the domestic rituals that comprise their practical identities—buying milk, praying, waiting for the newspaper—through their interior monologues. Consider the following passage which describes Gustad’s early morning wait for the newspaper by combining objective descriptions of the setting with his emotional state and his private thoughts:

> Long before the sun had risen that morning, before it was time to pray, Gustad had been waiting anxiously for *The Times of India*. It was pitch dark but he did not switch on the light, for the darkness made everything seem clear and well-ordered. He caressed the arms of the chair he sat in, thinking of the decades since his grandfather had lovingly crafted it in his furniture workshop. And this black desk. Gustad remembered the sign on the store, he could see it even now. Clearly, as though it is a photograph before my eyes: *Noble & Sons, Makers of Fine Furniture*, and I also remember the first time I saw the sign—too young to read the words, but not to recognize the pictures that danced around the words. (6)

Mistry here uses photography as a metaphor to describe the relationship between memory and space: the darkness in the room enables him to remember. Like a photographer in a
darkroom, Gustad develops the image of his grandfather’s store in darkness. However, Mistry does not give his character narrative control over this metaphor (unlike Rai, who is both photographer and myth-maker). Gustad’s memories may be a photograph—a visual marker of his past relationships—but it is a text that he initially cannot read or write. His first memory of the sign is also of a time that he is “too young to read the words”. Like the sign in his memory, he exists within the novel as an object to be viewed and read, not as a subject who can write identity. In the narrative construction of the scene, it remains ambiguous whether or not Gustad has any narrative agency: he can neither exclude readers from, nor invite readers into, his mental space, we just intrude. The abrupt switch mid-paragraph to the first-person present-tense occurs without any preparation: the previous six pages are all written in third-person narration and free indirect discourse. This jump to first-person stream of conscious calls into question the explanation of the setting provided in the second sentence in the paragraph: is it the narrator or Gustad who thinks that “the darkness made everything seem clear and well-ordered”? Unlike Dinshawji, who articulates his frustration about not being able to craft a powerful public narrative for Bombay’s space the way the Shiv Sena does, Gustad appears content to let other people tell the stories of his Bombay. The narrative continues to slip between styles and points of view and draws attention to the artifice of the narrative constructing the identities of Mistry’s Bombay and characters.

Mistry articulates the reciprocal relationship between individuals and Bombay through his depiction of Gustad’s relationship to books. The continual references to Gustad’s

20 Gustad’s fraught relationship to reading is exemplified in the everyday space of Crawford Market, where he buys books and laments the failure of his father’s business—a bookstore (21-22).
books—those he read as a child, those he salvaged from his grandfather’s store, those he buys at Chor Bazaar, and those which hide secret coded messages from Bilimoria—reveal the importance of critical engagement with narrative identities. Gustad hardly ever reads and when he does, he mainly reads newspapers and letters from Major Bilimoria. Similar to the absent language of his prayers, this lack, I argue, his inability to read (or disinterest in it) reveals his need for someone else to write the meaning of his Bombay. This need is translated onto space when his search for books sends him to Chor Bazaar, the most famous flea market in Bombay, also known as the “Thieves Market”. The market has a reputation for selling stolen goods, but it is not the kind of illegal market-place which Vikram Chandra or Gregory David Roberts write about. This is a place that Gustad can wander through and eventually find his way.

He needed to get his bearings in the maze of narrow lanes and byways that was Chor Bazaar. Where to begin? And so many people everywhere—locals, tourists, foreigners, treasure hunters, antique collectors, junk dealers, browsers. Away from the crowds’ swirls and eddies, he stopped by a little stall selling a variety of used sockets and rusty wrenches. (118)

Here he asks the vendor to explain the crowded space he cannot understand and the answer gives us insight into yet another narrative perspective—that of devout Muslims—defining Bombay’s space: “‘Bazaar is happening,’ said the tool-seller. ‘Friday is always the biggest bazaar day. After namaaz at the mosque’” (11). Even though he cannot write the meaning of the space, nor craft a narrative, Gustad is not prevented from negotiating Bombay’s congested spaces. The crowds and competing narratives within the space do not impede
Gustad and he negotiates the space of Chor Bazaar without a tour guide, just like he eventually negotiates Crawford Market on his own.

Gustad’s lack of narrative agency combined with the depiction of his perspective as he walks through Bombay’s streets draws explicit attention to the ability of other characters to craft narrative. Out in public spaces—in the streets and in the Towers of Silence—he encounters other people who can exercise narrative agency and create identities for themselves and Bombay. Peerbhoy Paanwalla is one such character who actively experiments with storytelling. Peerbhoy sells paan outside the House of Cages brothel and uses his storytelling to gather crowds of customers. His stories serve as digressions within the novel, but they do little to develop his characterization. The story he tells as Indian forces mobilize for war in Bangladesh is preceded by an explanation of his storytelling techniques, but it is ambiguous at best whether the description is Gustad’s free indirect discourse or the third-person omniscient narrator’s commentary. Mistry writes,

In deference to the mood of the country and the threat from without, Peerbhoy Paanwalla had mobilized his talents for the common good, using his skills to weave a tale that defied genre or description. It was not tragedy, comedy or history; not pastoral, tragical-comical, historical-pastoral or tragical-historical. Nor was it epic or mock-heroic. It was not a ballad or an ode, masque or anti-masque, fable or elegy, parody or threnody. Although a careful analysis may have revealed that it possessed a smattering of all these characteristics. But since things such as literary criticism mattered not one jot to the listeners, they were responding to Peerbhoy’s narrative in the only way that made sense: with every fibre of their beings. They could see and smell
The possibility that Gustad produces this critical analysis of Peerbhoys narrative is not supported by any other descriptions of Gustads analytic ability. Additionally, earlier in the novel he reminisces often about his childhood friend Malcolm, who acts as a tour-guide for Gustad, teaching him about non-Parsi cultural traditions such as buying beef and Catholicism while they shop at Crawford Market. The implication of their relationship is that Gustad cannot navigate culturally diverse public spaces like Crawford Market on his own. This explains why Gustad seeks Malcolm out later in the novel, when he feels lost in the world.

When Gustad and Malcolm reunite as adults they talk about their childhood memories, but the meaning attributed to these memories is authored by the omniscient narrator, not the men. Reminiscent of Dinshawjis lamentations concerning the lost past, the old friends are unable to reclaim the past for themselves. The narrator describes the scene:

They talked fondly of the old days, of college, and the crazy old professors and padres. [...] They tried to fill in for each other the lacunae in the scanty outlines exchanged earlier at Crawford Market. But to reclaim suddenly the gaping abyss which had swallowed up time was well-nigh impossible. They had to be content with wisps and strands that came to hand as they groped or stumbled their way through the vaults of memory. (229)

The rest of their conversation, which the narrator presents as transcribed dialogue, reveals Gustads inability to craft meaning or even identify his feelings in these memories: “I still

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21 The other stories he tells are about the powerful aphrodisiacs he sells which can empower men inside the House of Cages. The gender politics and implications of this story are worthy of longer examination.
cannot decide exactly whether it made me feel sad or happy. So difficult to describe”, he says about listening to Malcom’s father play the violin. The difficulty of crafting narrative, of finding words to describe experiences and create meaning from events and spaces, is made explicit as the paragraph continues in staccato fragments: “So difficult. Like Tehmul, all of us. Even with proper tongues, words are hard to find”. Gustad may have a hard time finding the words to describe the world he lives in, but Mistry does not. The reliance on free indirect discourse and third-person omniscient narration proves that while Mistry may be a masterful storyteller, he does not write characters who are also able to exercise agency over identity by crafting narratives, at least not in Such a Long Journey or Family Matters. Thus the private thoughts of individuals are public and the form and artifice of narration in Mistry’s novels reveal characters powerless to construct identity through storytelling. The implication is that Mistry’s Bombay, like Rushdie’s, is a city comprised of numerous competing narratives, but not every man is able to exercise the agency needed to craft his particular story. The evidence of narrative artifice without agency also reveals the constructedness of Mistry’s Bombay without his having to rely on magic.

The characters in Family Matters are also constantly frustrated in their attempts to exercise agency over the definitions of their identities. Nariman Vakeel, for example, may have once had the ability to read and write narrative through his professional critical interpretations as an English professor, but as a retiree he is both professionally silenced and domestically powerless. Throughout the novel, Nariman struggles with his stepchildren, Coomy and Jal, for power over their shared domestic space (space from which the children

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22 His narrator in “Swimming Lessons” may also be an author, but he has to move to Canada to become one; he cannot write these stories about Indian Parsi identity from within the walls of Firozsha Baug.
eventually banish Nariman). Similar to *Such a Long Journey*, the narrative slippage between third person omniscient narration and free indirect discourse reinforces the constantly shifting power over narrative and identity in *Family Matters*. The confusion of voices is as unclear to the reader as it is to the characters. For example, the novel opens with a description of Nariman’s preparations for his evening walk which include getting dressed and fighting with his stepchildren over the benefits and dangers of his constitutional. The narration continually moves between description, dialogue, and individual characters’ points of view. In one particular passage, the slippage between narrative styles intentionally confuses the readers and the characters:

Nariman thought he smelled the benign fragrance of earth after rain; he could almost taste it on his tongue. He looked outside. [...] He went to the window and pointed at the sky. “Look, the rain has stopped.”

“A stubborn child, that’s what you are,” she complained. “Should be punished like a child. No dinner for disobedience, hanh?”

With her cooking that would be a prize, not a punishment, he thought. “Did you hear him, Jal? The older he gets, the more insulting he is!”

Nariman realized he’d said it aloud. “I must confess, Jal, your sister frightens me. She can even hear my thoughts.”

Jal could hear only a garble of voices, confounded by the earpiece that augmented Coomy’s strong voice while neglecting his stepfather’s murmurings. (5-6)
The changing perspective is easy enough to follow until Nariman’s comment about Coomy’s cooking. The lack of quotation marks around Nariman’s statement about Coomy’s cooking places the reader in the same confounded position as Jal—unable to follow the conversation. The slippage also mimics Nariman’s dementia—a disease which precludes him from being a reliable narrator because it prevents him having complete control over his voice and thoughts. This passage exemplifies how Mistry teaches his readers about the unreliability of narrative agency: definitions of people and places must be read with caution because they are identities constructed by (potentially) unreliable authors. The conflation of Mistry’s authorial voice with fictional characters’ streams of conscious further emphasizes the fictionality of his realistic Bombay. They do try to overcome their alienation, though, through the physical control they exert over their domestic spaces—the changes to their apartments which I examine below. Their inability to exercise narrative agency means that Mistry’s characters have great difficulty overcoming their isolation and alienation in Bombay. This passage is directly followed by a description of Nariman walking through Bombay’s streets in an unspecified neighbourhood and exercising a different kind of narrative technique—flânerie.

The isolation of the Noble family from national politics is repeated at street-level, where the family and their neighbours are divided from the crowded city streets by a wall that surrounds their building. Nilufer Bharucha argues that the wall “both includes and excludes. It is protective as well as reductive. It protects the Parsi minority from the ingress of the engulfing Indian world. However, it also makes this world isolationist” (Bharucha 123). The wall is “the sole provider of privacy” between the Khodadad Building residents and the increasing traffic and population on the other side: “[o]ver six feet high, the wall ran
the length of the compound, sheltering them from non-Parsi eyes” (SLJ 82). But on the other side, Bombayites use the wall as a latrine, inviting stink and flies that mercilessly pester Gustad and his neighbours. But when the wall is threatened by the demands of the crowded city, Gustad protests vehemently and tries to protect it. The space of the apartment compound is threatened by a municipal project proposal to widen the road: “The compound would shrink to less than half its present width, and the black stone wall would loom like a mountain before the ground-floor tenants. More a prison camp than a building”, according to Gustad’s estimation (16). The dangerousness of the street traffic on the other side of the wall is particularly threatening to Gustad after the traffic accident which broke his leg and left him with a permanent limp. His instinct is to preserve the physical barrier between the apartment complex and the rest of the city.

His solution to save the wall is to make it a sacred space shared by many religious groups: he enlists an artist to paint a mural that depicts the pantheon of Indian gods. The wall is eventually covered with “[p]ictures of prophets, saints, swamis, babas, seers, holy men and sacred places” and becomes a sacred site of worship for people of all faiths (286). The transformation is a glimmer of hope for Gustad. It is “the kind of miracle [he] like[s] to see, useful and genuine” as the “stinking filthy disgrace has become a beautiful, fragrant place which makes everyone feel good” (289). The transformation of the wall reveals that it

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23 The timing and nature of this municipal project suggests that it is part of the Emergency Urban land ceiling regulations (enacted by the ULCR Act), imposed by the national government to (potentially) help India’s poor gain access to adequate housing, but which very rarely resulted in providing housing to those most in need. Amrita Abraham in “Bombay’s Promised Land” explains the goals of the land ceiling regulations and the disappointing realities of their implementation in Bombay. Most notable for our purposes, Abraham summarizes: “Out of the 41.5 hectares actually acquired by the government itself, nothing has been put to housing (in fact the government does not seem to have any plans as yet to use land acquired thus for its own housing programmes). Some of those 41.5 hectares may be in residential zones but the administration gives priority to infrastructure requirements. Thus land has been distributed so far to BEST for depots, [and] to BMC for road widening and parks” (392)
cannot isolate and protect Parsi communal identity without accessing the city’s religious multiculturalism. But it is also doomed to be destroyed by the municipality, and not by just any anonymous government official, but Gustad’s friend Malcolm. Malcolm’s destruction of the wall is interrupted by a protest march, led by Peerbhoy. The lack of anonymity in this urban crowd will not protect anyone, however and the scene devolves into a violent riot, which ends with sewage in the streets and Tehmul, one of Khodadad’s residents, dead. The final scene of the novel shows Gustad tearing down the blackout paper and letting the light and air into his flat, but the pessimism of the scene suggests that Gustad is not acting out of hope for the future, but inevitability of the clashes to come.

The characters in *Family Matters* are living in a more violent Bombay after the 1992-1993 riots, but Nariman attempts to take pleasure in walking through the streets instead of remaining within the stifling flat with his step-children. For Coomy and Jal, the streets of Bombay are terrifying and dangerous, and they try to prevent their step-father from taking his evening walk around the city. Jal warns his step-father, “Even with my healthy legs, Pappa, walking is a hazard….And lawlessness is the one certainty in the streets of Bombay” (5). Neither Jal nor Coomy understand how Nariman, in his old age and suffering from dementia, can take pleasure in walking these unsafe streets, but Nariman insists, “Ditches, potholes, traffic cannot extinguish all the joys of life” and “[w]ith his umbrella, which he used as walking stick” he exits the apartment building. In one of the novel’s few scenes set outside, Nariman describes the pleasure he finds in observing how the marketplace vendors affect the streets:

Their baskets and boxes, overflowing with greens and legumes and fruits and tubers transformed the corner into a garden…In the flower stall two men sat
like musicians, weaving strands of marigold, garlands of jasmine and lily and rose…The bhel-puri stall was a sculptured landscape…It was all magical as a circus, felt Nariman, and reassuring, like a magic show. (5)

Nariman’s role here is to observe and interpret the spaces he sees, modeling the behaviour identified with *flânerie*—the act of casually strolling, without purpose or direction, and seeing the city in poetic terms. The *flâneur* is a particular type of city-walker able to tell the story of the city—an urban wanderer whose passive participation in the city provides him a privileged position as observer, simultaneously part of and apart from the city. Charles Baudelaire goes so far as to define the *flâneur* as the male poet; Keith Tester explains: “The poet is the man for whom metropolitan spaces are the landscape of art and existence. […] Baudelaire’s poet is a man who is driven out of the private and into the public life by his own search for meaning. He is the man who is only at home existentially when he is not at home physically” (2). Thus, Nariman sees “sculptured landscapes” and “a magic show” in the market activity and is the most at home outside of his flat, where “The bustling life was like air for starving lungs, after the stale emptiness of the flat” (Mistry 5). While it is unclear how much of his joy derives from his urban experience and how much from his escaping his oppressive stepchildren, Nariman, in this particular scene, brings the *flâneur’s* “contemplative, aestheticising gaze” (Donald 127) to Bombay.

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24 Baudelaire and Benjamin both restrict the *flânerie* to males, a gender distinction I will maintain because the protagonists I examine are all men. For discussions of female *flâneurs* see Elizabeth Wilson’s “The Invisible Flâneur” in *New Left Review* (Jan-Feb 1992); Keith Tester on gender in *The Flâneur* (124-126), and Rachel Bowlby’s “Walking, Women and Writing: Virginia Woolf as Flâneuse” in *New Feminist Discourses: Critical Essays on Theories and Texts*. 
To explain the flâneur’s position, Walter Benjamin references Edgar Allan Poe’s “The Man of the Crowd” as an example of the “[d]ialectic of flânerie: on one side, the man who feels himself viewed by all and sundry as a true suspect and, on the other side, the man who is utterly undiscoverable, the hidden man” (Arcades 420). In Poe’s story, the narrator observing the city crowds is juxtaposed with an anonymous, silent old man who walks aimlessly and whose purpose and emotions are inscrutable; in the end, the unknowable old man is not aware of being observed, and all the narrator can do is observe. 25 Nariman’s role as flâneur is complicated by this interpretation of flânerie, which draws a clear line between the observer and the observed, because Nariman does not understand himself to be separate from the market crowd: he only visually consumes the produce and imagines that the vendors understand his role as browser—that they all possess a similar view of the market as an urban space with more than just an economic utility. 26 In other words, Nariman’s relationship to, and understanding of, the urban landscape never expands beyond his immediate circumstance—the gardens and magic that he perceives are not spectres of the past, they are “only” an aestheticized view of the present. Walter Benjamin argues that the flâneur takes both a physical and a psychic journey while walking through a city’s streets: “The street conducts the flâneur into a vanished time. For him, every street is precipitous. It leads downward—if not to the mythical Mothers, then into a past that can be all the more

25 In Poe’s story, the narrator functions as the flâneur because he spends his time watching the other pedestrians and eventually, following one particular old man for twenty-four hours. In the end, the two men stand face to face, but, the narrator explains, “He noticed me not, but resumed his solemn walk, while I, ceasing to follow, remained absorbed in contemplation. ‘This old man,’ I said at length, ‘is the type and the genius of deep crime. He refuses to be alone. He is the man of the crowd’ (1567).

26 The fact that his poetic vision of the city manifests in the market suggests another part of the problem impeding his flânerie: according to Benjamin, flânerie is not possible outside of nineteenth-century Paris because “the rationality of capitalism and, especially, commodification and the circulation of commodities…defined the meaning of existence in the city so that there remained no spaces of mystery for the flâneur to observe” (Tester 13).
spellbinding because it is not his own, not private” and, moreover that “[a]n intoxication comes over the man who walks long and aimlessly through the streets. With each step, the walk takes on greater momentum; ever weaker grow the temptations of shops, of bistros, of smiling women, ever more irresistible the magnetism of the next streetcorner [sic], of a distant mass of foliage, of a street name” (*Arcades* 416; 417). But Nariman is not drawn to discover ever more mysterious corners of the city; he appears content to explore the “magic show” with which he is familiar, a place where the street vendors recognize him and his purpose there. Defining Nariman’s walks as *flânerie* is further complicated by the fact that he suffers from dementia, and, as a result, the distinction between places that continue to hold mystery for Nariman because they are unknown and places that are familiar to him is unclear. In other words, what he sees every day may hold the same mysterious meanings as the yet unvisited parts of the city.

### 3.5 Making a Bombay house a home

The houses in Mistry’s novels are nexuses for the fraught meeting of categorical and practical identities which define the Parsi experience in Bombay. Characters must learn to reconcile their individual practical identities with the different, often competing categorical identities they encounter in their everyday lives as they practice their identities as Parsis, as Bombayites, as Indians, and as family men. Their identity crises are not always purely abstract: Mistry’s characters must also fight against the housing crisis in Mumbai which leaves them living in dilapidated and deteriorating structures. Through the relationships of Mistry’s characters to their living spaces, we see how Parsis in Mumbai negotiate their community belonging which produces their alienation and their isolation. His characters are
powerless against the intrusion of the public into personal space and thus struggle to create homes for themselves in Bombay.

In literature, the representation of home-life and the way individuals are incessantly partitioned based on the categorical identities reveals the difficulties of reconciling individual identity with communal identity. In *The Politics of Home*, Rosemary Marongoly George argues that “‘homes are not neutral places’ but are ideological imaginings with closed borders maintained through power and fear” (qted in Herbert p. 82). George is particularly concerned with the representation of feminine narration of domestic space as a form of anticolonial protest. She elaborates on the home as an imagined construct and examines the relationship between “home” and “home-country”. In her dissertation *Representations of Migrant and Nation in Selected Works of Rohinton Mistry and Salman Rushdie*, Caroline Herbert also examines the contest between nations and homes without confining her analysis to female domestic perspectives. She argues that Mistry’s depictions of Parsi homes challenge the conventional understanding of home as a “a space of stability, security and protection, a welcoming place of belonging” (83). For Herbert, Mistry’s depiction of Bombay in *A Fine Balance* and *Family Matters* confronts secular socialist constructions of Indian identity and reveals the limitations of exclusionary and essentialising constructions of identity. In her dissertation “*Home*” In Postcolonial Literature, Esra Mirze argues that “[h]ome, according to Rushdie, is a messy site which inevitably complicates our perception of reality by blurring the lines of separation between inside and outside” (54). Mirze argues

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27 This conception of home can be found in Avtar Brah’s *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities* (180); Rosemary Marongoly George’s *The Politics of Home* (1); Susheila Nasta’s *Home Truths: Fictions of the South Asia Diaspora in Britain* (2); and Edward Said’s *The World, the Text, and the Critic* (8).
that postcolonial homes articulate the complex relationship between private and public, between subject and spaces and demand a reworking of the significations of home based on postcolonial, migrant identity politics. I agree with Mirze’s reading and would extend her argument to show how Bombay’s Parsi community specifically lacks privacy or private space within their homes. While Rushdie achieves this, at least in part, through his magical realism, Mistry’s realism confines his characters to specific locations in a way that Rushdie does not. This difference in the obviousness of the imaginativeness of spaces also speaks to the difference between the magic realism of Rushdie and the realism of Mistry. These critical approaches illustrate the idea of homes as imagined, private spaces in which individuals try to retreat from the world, but are ultimately unsuccessful at their attempt to escape public intrusions.

Through a reading of Mistry’s Parsi houses and the challenges his characters have constructing homes, I want to expand these arguments beyond the migrant status of Mistry’s characters and their relationship to the nation by focusing on the more local, intimate implications of his domestic spaces. I argue that in order to negotiate the conflict between categorical and practical identities, characters must have a safe space from which to reflect upon their personal identity and values, where they can work to reconcile them with their communal identities. For Mistry’s characters this entails not just imagining a home, but also finding physical space for their domestic activities. Similar to Rushdie’s Bombayites, Mistry’s characters struggle to make room for themselves in the crowded city. However, unlike Rushdie’s characters whose economic privilege gives them access to private domestic space, Mistry’s characters are unable to prevent public political definitions of identity from intruding upon their homes. There is no truly “private” space for Mistry’s Parsis.
The realism of *Family Matters* and *Such a Long Journey* creates homes that are less obviously imagined spaces than they are in the work of Rushdie. In Mistry’s Bombay, home is synonymous with characters’ houses. As physical structures, the spaces which constitute home are architecturally fixed—they are apartment buildings and flats that cannot be transported to different locations like Saleem’s baskets or Rai’s camera. But the conflation of home with an architectural structure like an apartment building, does not lend his characters anymore stability in their homes than Rushdie’s narrators can access. The constant flux and plurality of Bombay’s identities and the identities of its residents and the intrusion of the public into their private space renders characters unable to create stable homes and identities for themselves.

While these buildings can function as metonyms for modern urban life and identity—depicting the crowdedness and multiculturalism of the city (and also the nation)—they also simultaneously fail to translate directly into maps of individual identity. The portrayal of homes in Bombay literature therefore reveals the inadequacy of Gaston Bachelard’s theories of homes, which map identity onto the levels of a house. For Bachelard, each room in a house serves a particular function, which is mapped back onto the self/identity. He argues that the “chief benefit of the house” is that it “shelters day-dreaming, the house protects the dreamer, the house allows one to dream in peace” (6). And, for example, he argues that the verticality of a house is “ensured by the polarity of cellar and attic”, which provide “two very different perspectives for a phenomenology of the imagination”: while the roof provides space for rational dreaming, the cellar is a place of dark, subterranean forces in which individuals “are in harmony with the irrationality of the depths” (17-18). But what happens when individuals are crammed into shared spaces and have no rooms or corners in which to
be alone with their thoughts because of Bombay’s housing crisis? For this is the defining characteristic of Mistry’s Bombay homes. There are no attics or cellars in Parsi baugs (or any other Bombay apartment buildings for that matter), there are only neighbours all around. In *Family Matters* and *Such a Long Journey*, Mistry’s characters struggle with the unhomely breakdown of borders between public and private. The intrusion of the public into private, domestic space comes in the forms of national and political definitions of identity and space. This breakdown of the imagined border between public and private impinges upon the characters’ sense of self and threatens the stability of their homes.

In *Such a Long Journey* and *Family Matters*, domestic space is contested, but also taken for granted. The need for residents to “make room” for themselves—a defining characteristic of Parsi Bombay narratives since the community’s arrival in the city—continues to dominate the space that they find to live in. In the novels, the struggle to imagine a home for both the Noble family and the Chenoy-Vakeel family is challenged by the limited amount of dwelling space afforded to them. The plot of *Family Matters* revolves around the family’s struggle to make room for their incapacitated patriarch. After he is injured in a fall and must remain in bed, Nariman Vakeel’s step-children cast him out of the seven-room flat in which the children grew up and foist him upon their married half-sister, Roxanna Chenoy, who lives in a two-room flat with her husband and two children. When Coomy and Jal arrive at Roxanna’s to insist upon her taking care of their father, she declares it an untenable situation by mapping out the size and function of the space in their flat:

> She began pointing out the few items that filled up the small room, explaining their function as though they were arcane museum pieces: “The daytime
settee, on which you two are sitting, is Jehangir’s bed at night. Under it, Murad’s cot. There.’ She lifted a corner of the counterpane.

‘Nice and low, comes out at night, slides back in the morning. Next to it, one armchair, and a Formica teapoy, which Murad moves aside when he pulls out his bed. And our huge dining table for two, with four chairs. Shall we go to the back room now, where Yezad and I sleep?’

[…]Besides the small double bed, there were two cupboards and two clothes horses. A little desk and chair were squeezed into the corner by the bed, where the boys did their homework.

[…] ‘Wait, there’s still the kitchen, the bathroom, the toilet to inspect. And don’t forget the passage by the WC—could be a place there, near the rice and wheat and sugar and kerosene.’ (89)

Her crowded house is another version of Bombay’s crowded public spaces that have multiple uses—like Gustad’s courtyard. Gustad is undisturbed by the multiple uses of the courtyard because it is shared outdoor space. Within the walls of her home, however, Roxana cannot fathom how to re-imagine her family’s dwelling space to add any more additional uses. Peter Morey reads her struggle as the divide between filiations and affiliations. Regardless of how the line between Roxanna and her family is drawn, her lack of control of domestic space reveals her powerlessness and her lack of personal space. Her unwillingness to take in her invalid father does not arise out of a lack of compassion, but is a result of her inability to exercise narrative agency to rewrite how her domestic space is used in order to crowd her family further. Instead, her step-sister insists the flat needs only to be considered properly:
“Small? […] By Bombay standards it’s huge! You know very well that in chawls and colonies, families of eight, nine, ten live in one room” (75). Despite her selfish, almost-villainous motives, Coomy is right and the Chenoys are able to make room for Nariman, just as the house-poor throughout the city make room for themselves.

One way the Chenoy family makes room is by transforming the balcony into a bedroom for Murad—an act which blurs the line between finding room and making room—the latter requires agency and power, the former requires luck. The open-air of the balcony offers limitless possibilities for their imaginations and presents a stark contrast to the stifling Chateau Felicity flat he lived in with Coomy and Jal. In fact, the boys fight over who will get to sleep in this tent under the stars because of the imaginative possibilities the space holds. The boys immediately celebrate and argue about the space’s possibilities: “‘Yipee!’ said Jehangir. ‘Simply smashing! I’ll make a tent and have a midnight feast in it.’” But his brother interjects, “‘Sorry,’ said Murad, ‘Squadron Leader Bigglesworth needs it for a base to conduct secret operations’” (Mistry 105). Roxana may be powerless to change the definitions of the space, but her father and children are able to exercise agency over the definitions of her domestic space, albeit limited agency.

Nariman reinforces that the difference between the sizes of Chateau Felicity and Pleasant Villa are all in perspective, not measurable space: “‘That huge flat is empty as Himalayan cave for me, this feels like a palace’” (104). Nariman suffers from the stagnant environment of Chateau Felicity, suffering which he tries to alleviate through his evening walks through the city where “The bustling life was like air for starving lungs, after the stale emptiness of the flat” (7). The flat, now run by his step-daughter Coomy, holds the same museum-like quality that Dilnavaz warns Gustad about in Such a Long Journey. The space
of the flat is most obviously bounded by the bars on the windows—bars which feature heavily in Nariman’s imaginative escapes from the stifling stagnation. For Nariman, the production of home in this domestic space is built through nostalgia and imagination. The bars on his window serve as a catalyst for Nariman’s memories of his love affair with Lucy Braganza and the boundaries which prohibited them from living happily ever after; after he has been moved to Pleasant Villa, Nariman is still troubled by insomnia: “Turning his head, he looked for the familiar bars on his window, and saw his grandson’s cot instead. He was not in Chateau Felicity. He must stay quiet tonight, muzzle his memories, must not disturb Roxana and Yezad, and the children sleeping close by” (112).

In *Such a Long Journey* Gustad laments his inability to fit proper beds for all three of his children in their small flat (8), but overall the crowded space is not a major preoccupation for him, the way it is for the Chenoys and Vakeels. Gustad’s primary preoccupation is cordon off space for his family—keeping them safe and protected within the walls of their domestic space. The novel opens with Gustad praying (safely) within the confines of his apartment building’s walled compound. He is described as a man who finds peace and safety by keeping his things (his personal possessions, his family members, even his memories) in a restricted and ordered space. His peace is quickly disrupted by screaming neighbours and the realities of financial and emotional insecurities during this time of rationing and anxiety about his son’s future and his daughter’s health. Inside his personal apartment, he tries to control space by isolating the family from external influences, like national politics. The blackout curtains in his house exemplify his attempts and failures to prevent national politics from impacting his private domestic space. Gustad originally puts paper over the apartment windows in 1962 at the beginning of the Indo-China war in order to keep the family safe
from the threat of Chinese invaders. His subsequent refusal to take them down is justified in 1965 when Pakistan attacked India, and then again when violence erupts in East Pakistan in the 1971 war for Bangladesh’s independence. According to Nilufer Bharucha, the curtains are “symbolic of the many hardships that families like Gustad’s have to learn to live with” (123). They also represent the family’s attempt to prevent politics (and public warfare) from encroaching into their home.

The curtains are a literal barrier between the family and the public: protecting the family from the foreign invaders, who never actually materialize. By literally blocking light from entering the apartment, the curtains metaphorically close off Gustad’s family from the hope and newness that also comes from the public sphere. We are told, “Weeks went by, then months, with paper restricting the ingress of all forms of light, earthly and celestial” and that the Nobles “grew accustomed to living in less light” (11). Thus, Gustad’s protective measures do not translate into the fostering of a safe and secure home; instead, they create a suffocating, confined space within which the family is trapped like bugs. In fact, Gustad’s wife, Dilnavaz, complains about the bugs that nest in the blackout paper: “[s]oon Khodad Building will become one big insect museum” (12). At this point, Dilnavaz has already clarified for the reader the danger of insect museums in her musings on Sohrab’s childhood fascinations—a fishtank, bird cage, and butterfly display case—which foreshadow the danger of the museum: these cases all lay empty and “covered in dust and cobwebs on the dark shelf” and within the butterfly case, “[t]he rusted mounting pins still held a few thoraxes in place, but little else. An assortment of wings, like fallen petals of exotic flowers, littered the bottom of the case, mingled with broken antennae and tiny heads which did not resemble heads after they separated from the thoraxes” (7). Sohrab’s museum-like archives only
display death and decay, and provide no hope for the future—not even Sohrab’s at this point, whom Gustad encouraged in the hopes that “if he persevered and took it up in college, doing research and all that, he could make a world-famous name for himself” (7). Instead, Gustad’s plans for his son’s future are the cause of the rift in their relationship (Sohrab wants to enrol in the arts programme, rather than in the Indian Institute of Technology), and Gustad will have to learn that his family is made up of individuals whom he cannot control and that their home cannot possibly be a static museum. Gustad’s insistence on archiving his family within the walls of his house adds to the perception of homes as fixed and stable, but such static spaces are, in actuality, spaces of stagnation and decay.

As such, Gustad’s house (and the walled-in apartment complex more generally) serve as a metaphor for the Parsi community’s dwindling size as a result of the isolation they impose on their categorical identity group in order to preserve its purity. His flat is not the only museum-like space of decay. Gustad recognizes the absurdity of locking oneself in a museum of a house when he enters Miss Kutpitia’s flat to use the telephone. The neighbours all perceive her to be their wealthiest neighbour, since she continues to buy milk from the Parsi Dairy Farm, has custom-catered meals from the Ratan Tata Institute, and has the luxury of a telephone. However, she “lived like a miser, a typical loose-screw eccentric, with dust and cobwebs everywhere, stacks of old newspapers piled to the ceiling, empty milk bottles in corners, curtains tattered, sofa cushions spilling their insides, and cracked light shades hanging from the ceiling like broken birds and bats” (85). Gustad cannot see the similarity between her flat and his own cobwebbed, lightless rooms, filled with books that he does not
read, but surrounds himself with nostalgia. These crowded, dusty homes present a stark contrast to the stereotyped images of large Parsi homes with pianos in their drawing rooms. The exclusivity of Mistry’s Parsi communities does not translate into elite, urban privilege, instead it frustrates their desires to make homes within the city. Their isolation does not protect them from external forces, it merely suffocates them in confined spaces.

Images of a cordoned-off community are repeated throughout Such a Long Journey, as Gustad frequents a doctor’s office next to a brothel called the “House of Cages” and tries to save the wall around his apartment complex from being demolished. Gustad’s attempts at order and preservation alienate him from his son and wife, but also from the city. He continually references the most notable sites in Bombay—Crawford Market, the Chor Bazaar, the Red Light district, Flora Fountain, etc.—but he lacks any real connection to these places. For example, his experiences at Crawford Market are marked by the people who accompany him to the market (his father’s servants and his Christian friend Malcolm who act as tour guides for him). For Gustad, Crawford Market is “a dirty, smelly, overcrowded place where the floors were slippery with animal ooze and vegetable waste, where the cavernous hall of meat was dark and forbidding, with huge, wicked-looking meat hooks hanging from the ceiling” (21). His perception of the market ignores the architectural splendor of the building. The authors of Stones of Empire, describe it as one of the best examples of covered markets built by the British in India:

28 Gustad rescued his books, like his furniture, from his father’s bankrupt bookstore. Reminiscing about the lost past, he opens up E. Cobham Brewer’s Dictionary of Phrase and Fable, “opened it at random […] and held it up to his nose and closed his eyes. The rich timeless fragrance rose from the precious pages, soothing his uneasy spirit” (53). The books are collected together with papers (an entire shelf of “files, folders and old magazines”) and assorted odds and ends.

29 Gyan Prakash describes the westernization of Parsis by pointing “to the presence of a piano in many Parsi households he has visited” (Singh 30).
completed in 1869 [...] Fruits, fish, meats, poultry and various craftwork are sold in it, and it looks today, in its functions as in its substance, almost exactly as it did when it was built. Inside is unexpectedly fine. A central hall with two wings, Moorishly arched, it is lined with wooden stalls, often set on several tiers, so that market-people are to be seen high above their produce, bawling offers or reaching down for cash. The floor is clad in flagstones from Caithness, there are ecclesiastical windows at each end, and the whole structure is fitted out, wherever you look, with whimsical iron lamp-brackets in the shape of winged dragons—perched upon by pigeons, and fouled by their immemorial droppings, but still graceful and surprising. […] The exterior is] finished in modes variously Swiss, Flemish, and Moorish, with half-timbering, eaves, and a clock tower. It occupies a commanding position at a junction of streets, conveniently opposite the police station. (142)

Gustad tried so desperately to keep his domestic life private and behind walls, that he can only be intimidated by the crowded marketplace. His desire to separate himself and his family transforms Mistry’s Bombay in this novel from a cosmopolitan utopia defined by cultural tolerance, into a segregated city whose dangerous plural crowd requires careful management and negotiation.

### 3.6 Conclusion

The unnamed protagonist and narrator in Anosh Irani’s *The Cripple and His Talismans* is a man without a home and so represents an alternative to Mistry’s characters trying to prevent the destruction and decay of their homes. Despite the fact that he has a place to live (a
ground floor apartment in a very old building [36]), the unnamed narrator remains lost and afraid in his house and in the city.\(^{30}\) The cause of his disorientation is the loss of his arm, which has altered his self-identity: his identity crisis is a result of the fact that he now sees himself as a “cripple”, but is not a “beggar”—two categorical identities which he had previously thought of as synonymous. In order to reorient himself in the city, he must reconcile how he (or his individual identity) can fit into one but not both of these categorical identities. He journeys—physically and psychically—throughout the city in search of reconciliation, in search of home. Along the way, he asks for help and direction, only to be met with cryptic answers from some of the often invisible denizens of the city—beggars.

“‘I’m lost,’” he tells Gura, the beggar who lives outside his building,\(^{31}\)

‘Then use your lost arm.’

‘But it does not exist.’

‘Nothing really does.’ (17)

The narrator’s disorientation results from the fact that he does not understand that home is an imagined place of belonging and so he cannot restore his sense of belonging in this city and he cannot resolve the conflict between his practical and his categorical identities. The protagonists in *Family Matters* and *Such a Long Journey* are on similar quests to find (or to maintain) their sense of home, but do so by (re)defining the spaces in which they live, rather

\(^{30}\) His crisis epitomizes the difference between “homeless” and “houseless” (or “house-poor”): throughout the novel he encounters people who are at home in the city—safe and secure—even though they do not have houses to live in, while he wanders homeless but housed.

\(^{31}\) The narrator refers to Gura as “the floating beggar” whom he had never noticed before, despite Gura’s presence at the entrance of the narrator’s apartment building (14).
than wandering the city streets looking for answers.\textsuperscript{32} The agency that Mistry’s characters attempt to exercise over the spaces in which they live foregrounds the imaginative use of dwelling space in Mumbai that enables individuals to claim Bombay as a home. 

Mistry’s depictions of the city are focused on the clashes between different types of categorical identity—the violent, fear-based Hindu fundamentalism which has encroached upon Bombay politics and the benign, isolationist community-building traditions that define the Parsi experience of Bombay’s conflicted narratives. In \textit{Family Matters} and \textit{Such a Long Journey}, the protagonists are isolated but not protected within their apartment complexes as national, regional, and local politics continually intrude upon their private spaces and threaten their place in the city. Since categorical identities depend upon in-group/out-group distinctions, conflict between communal identities is unavoidable, regardless of theoretical and political ideals. The particular divisions depicted in Mistry’s novels—the Parsi-Hindu-Muslim relationships, the economic divides between neighbours—can be read as representative of communal conflict more generally, but are also unique to Bombay, as residents are united by their shared history of immigration to the city.\textsuperscript{33} Both \textit{Family Matters} and \textit{Such a Long Journey} are set in Parsi apartment complexes and highlight the interiority of homes and the effects of identity communities on individual identity.

\textsuperscript{32} In addition to his wandering, we are told by the Irani’s narrator that he relocates his house after the loss of his arm, trying to find a place that he belongs: “The moment I lost my arm, two months ago, I felt like a pariah in the company of normal people. After I got out of the hospital, I sold my white-marbled apartment by the sea and moved to one with stone flooring, where flying cockroaches and mosquitoes sang at midnight” (14).

\textsuperscript{33} The Parsis may be a diasporic community, but, as detailed in my introduction, only the Kôlis are actually indigenous to Bombay.
Mistry depicts Bombay’s Parsi community confined within exclusive apartment complexes. The walls around these complexes separate residents from the rest of the city both literally/physically and metaphorically/psychically. His characters share in a collective group identity, but it is a group whose insularity dooms it to obsolescence. This self-exiled community is further alienated from the city by the rising tide of religious communalism that has continued to gain political power in Mumbai since the 1950s. Furthermore, I have shown how the relationship between Mistry’s characters and their houses reveals how individuals in Bombay gain a sense of self from their homes. Their residences challenge the very existence of such borders in Bombay dwellings and challenge the definition of home as a stable and fixed place. As individual residents struggle to reconcile their categorical and practical identities within their residential structures, they create homes—safe spaces in which this negotiation of identity can take place. The focalizers in these novels are alienated by the fact that their personal values often conflict with those values imposed upon them by their community identities as the political turmoil of the 1970s and the 1990s becomes an active force on the characters’ lives. This intrusion of the public into the private breaks down the borders between the national and the domestic, as well as the secular and the sacred clash within their domestic spaces. This breakdown of imagined borders is shown to impinge upon characters’ sense of self and threatens the stability of the spatial identity of their homes and of their personal identities. Thus, I argue that Mistry’s novels offer characters (and readers) the freedom to explore the manipulation of identity within Bombay houses and help call into question the type of space that can constitute a “home” in a city that is also plagued by a housing crisis.
In Bombay literature, concerns over housing and space are governed by the economic privilege or destitution of narrators: Rushdie’s characters often enjoy the luxury of economic ease in their Malabar Hill estates, while Rohinton Mistry’s characters struggle to maintain possession of their flats in middle-class, Parsi apartment buildings, which also appear to be located in downtown Bombay. Alternatively, *The Death of Vishnu* by Manil Suri and *The Cripple and his Talismans* and *The Song of Kahunsha*, both by Anosh Irani, present the struggles of “house-less” Bombayites juxtaposed with the struggles of the lower middle-class housed, while Gregory David Roberts’ *Shantaram* imagines the lives of slum dwellers.34

*The Death of Vishnu* quite specifically reproduces Appadurai’s description of housing demands as the apartment building houses individuals in its rooms, on its landings, and outside its doors. All together, these texts provide insight into the everyday experience of the living conditions found in Mumbai, but Mistry’s novels in particular reveal the nuanced and complex relationships between political, religious, and personal definitions of identity which are practiced in everyday life. In the next chapter, I examine how Vikram Chandra’s depictions of Bombay’s housing crisis combine with the distinction between legal and illegal classifications of individuals in order to reveal the power struggles between visible and invisible residents in Bombay.

34 To the best of my knowledge, *The Song of Kahunsha* is the only novel in English whose main focus is the lived reality of house-less beggars on the streets of Bombay.
Vikram Chandra’s *Sacred Games* details the gritty criminal side of Bombay life. Chandra’s 2006 novel uses the threat of nuclear holocaust and the relationships between mob bosses and the police in order to explore the ways hegemonic narratives of postcolonial nationalism, religious communalism, and individuality manifest within the city spaces of Bombay. Through these character-types and his exploitation of the detective novel genre, Chandra presents a Bombay narrative in which the struggle for narrative agency and control of Bombay’s many competing narratives is manifested as a divide between (il)legal and (in)visible urban residents. Each of his characters’ love for the city, despite his alienation from it, becomes a defining motivation for his life.

Notably extraordinary, the plot devices and the main characters comprise our evidence of everyday life within the text, creating a map of the gangsters’ and policemen’s city for readers. Similar to Mistry’s characters, Chandra depicts characters whose individual agency is exercised over identity through their ability to negotiate Bombay’s crowded streets and public spaces. However, Chandra’s characters have more freedom to move into and out of locations not visible in the Bombay novels of Mistry or Rushdie—most notably, slums and prisons. Their power over space is juxtaposed with their limited ability to create narrative meaning or identity.

Chandra’s portrayal of Mumbai depends upon the depiction of the city’s inherent contradictions. While Mistry and Rushdie focalize their stories through conventionally...
privileged members of society (upper and middle class, educated families), Chandra depends upon the perspectives of individuals traditionally marginalized by their criminal associations. Through Chandra’s depiction of the extraordinary elements of everyday life in Mumbai, he presents the gangland city so often seen in Bollywood movies. His manipulation of the crime/detective genre suggests that his extraordinary narrative of the city intersects with Bombay’s objective realities just as much as Rushdie’s or Mistry’s novels. Furthermore, Chandra’s researched approach to his crime drama lends a level of realism and authenticity to his novel, which suggests that this extraordinary version of the city is the real Bombay. Similar to Suketu Mehta’s non-fiction work, Maximum City (2004), Chandra’s novel presents a non-traditional range of characters who make significant contributions to Bombay culture—gangsters, bar girls, film personalities, and rioters. These members of Bombay society are often rendered invisible by politicians and the power they have access to from these marginalized positions. However, the narrative form of Sacred Games reveals the constructedness of these identities and subverts attempts to read the novel as an exposé of criminal Mumbai. Chandra’s exposure of Mumbai’s underbelly as a detective novel gives his novel an unrealistic quality, similar to the effects of Mistry’s melodrama and Rushdie’s magic realism. However, the real-life parallels blur the boundary between fact and fiction in the novel. Thus, Chandra’s novel reveals the unbelievability of the inherent contradictions that

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1 See Mazumdar’s “Gangland Bombay” in Bombay Cinema (149-196).

2 This is not surprising considering that Mehta and Chandra conducted some of their research and interviews together. In fact, Chandra, his sister Tanuja, and brother-in-law Vidhu Vinod Chopra dominate Mehta’s discussion of Bombay’s film industry in chapter eight of Maximum City, “Distilleries of Pleasure” (373-464).
constitute everyday life in Mumbai as individuals negotiate the myriad of narratives competing for dominance over city-space.

4.1 Authentic Bombay Fiction: Chandra’s chronicle of the imagined and the lived city

Many reviews of Bombay literature read the novels of Salman Rushdie, Rohinton Mistry, and Vikram Chandra as novels searching for “authentic” narratives of the “true” Bombay. Chandra’s novel, in particular, has been criticized as little more than a highly commercialized crime novel, but also has been commended for the extensive research into the city’s criminal underbelly which preceded the publication and informed the writing of Sacred Games. His construction of a haunted, criminal Mumbai of epic proportions has opened him up to criticisms of inauthenticity at the same time that his novel is commended for its well-researched depiction of Bombay.

Chandra’s work in the short story collection Love and Longing in Bombay, initially embroiled him in public debates with critic and literary historian Meenakshi Mukherjee over the authenticity of his work, which he describes in “The Cult of Authenticity”. Mukherjee argues that the titles of Chandra’s stories (i.e. “Dharma”, “Artha”, and “Kama”) “are necessary to signal Indianness in the West” and therefore exoticize Bombay for Western markets by capitalizing on the popularity of eastern philosophies (qtd in Chandra 1). Chandra argues that this emphasis on authenticity denies the cosmopolitanism of India and “worships Indianness over art”. He writes, “[t]o be self-consciously anti-exotic is also to be trapped, to be censored” and commands his
audience to “[b]e free. […] India is full of elephants and snakes and mysticism, and also cell phones and nuclear weapons and satellites. Give up nothing, and swallow everything.” (17). In other words, categorizing a work based on its perceived authenticity privileges one particular narrative version of the city and excludes all other versions.

Mukherjee may be focused on the exoticization of India in generally, but she is not the only critic concerned with the authenticity of the representations of Bombay in fiction. Amitava Kumar’s survey of Bombay literature in an article for *TimeOut*: *Mumbai* exemplifies this often-encountered problem with assumptions about postcolonial literature as he attempts to distinguish between realist and magic realist texts about Bombay. He writes,

Naipaul, Mehta, and even Chandra—unlike Rushdie, their writing about Bombay has been based on a diligent search for material. These are works of reportage. It is crucial to grasp this break from Rushdie’s magical realism. The map that these writers unfold for us is not so much of a remembered place as of real people in real places” (“Map of the World” par 12).

Based on his privileging (or deprivileging?) of realism as less fictional than magic realism, Kumar dangerously suggests that Mehta, Chandra, and Naipaul provide true and real maps of the city as it is, not as they remember or imagine it to be. This privileging begins the slippery slope that translates these fictional texts into static, confining, singular narratives about the “real” Bombay—that it is a city made up solely of the character types and spaces that appear in some books. Kumar’s conflation of the research techniques of
Naipaul, Mehta, and Chandra fails to acknowledge the different levels of narrative artifice in their finished products—Naipaul and Mehta write non-fictional memoirs, while Chandra produces a fictional novel.

When read as a nonfictional work, the events and places presented in novels must be read as a mimetic representation of facts, and, as such, can never be authentic or accurate enough to do justice to the world they present. Robert Alter describes the tradition of critical discussions that focus on how the novel “represents” or “reflects” the reality of the city in *Imagined Cities: Urban Experience and the Language of the Novel*. Focusing primarily on the western cities depicted in the novels of Gustav Flaubert, Charles Dickens, and Franz Kafka, among others, he counters this tradition by asserting that “there is a qualitative difference between journalism and fiction writing that the focus on the representation of material reality and social institutions tends to blur,” because novels and fiction-writing depend upon the “strong mediation of an individual imagination” (x). In other words, no matter how successful the realism, novelistic portrayals of life should be read as crafted fictions. The question I pose is, if we accept the imagined constructions of other cities as part of their inherent truths, why would we not afford this same access to truthful imagined constructions to Bombay? Chandra’s research and reproduction of actual events and people does not preclude his depiction of the city from creating an imagined Bombay, it merely exacerbates the connections between the hard and soft cities and the numerous narratives which coexist to create Bombay’s identities.

Although some of the urban themes in Chandra’s novel—the overcrowding, the riots, life in slums, Bollywood and its ties to gangsters, and mobsters relocating to foreign
soil—are based on historical facts, I argue that his text is not an attempt to mimetically reproduce Bombay, but rather, exemplifies the role literature plays constructing narrative truths about the city which are often obscured by the classification of texts as “works of reportage.” I will return to the importance and danger of mis-reading non-fiction memoirs and journalistic exposés in the final section, for now, I want to stay focused on the fictionality of Chandra’s novel, which emphasizes the constructedness of Bombay identities, regardless of how well-researched it is. For now, let me say that the conflation of the real with the fictional leads to things like slum tourism—a practice performed by people who believe they can visit the slums of Shantaram or Slumdog Millionaire and do not recognize these narrative spaces as imaginary places that are as inaccessible as the slums of Dickens.3

Chandra’s depiction of researched city space teases readers into conflating the realism of Sacred Games with “the real”, but his simultaneous manipulation of the detective fiction genre helps reinforce the artifice of his identity-defining narratives.4 His narrative manipulation of realistic space challenges the confines of detective fiction genre conventions which might otherwise limit the novel to a logic-driven, crime-solving mystery. Police and gangsters in Sacred Games operate in a space that looks and acts like the real world of Bombay, but, by and large, Chandra’s realism remains a device for

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3 For more on slum tourism in Bombay and the transnational currents of reading see my chapter “Slumbai Mumbai” in Transnationalism, Activism, Art edited by Kit Dobson and Aine McGlynn (2013).

4 This conflation of the real with the fictional is the same slippage critiqued in postcolonial attacks on cartography, which argue that postcolonial maps (and narrative mappings) aim to destabilize erroneous and incomplete colonial cartographic depictions of colonized cultures and places. See, for example, Graham Huggan’s “Decolonising the Map: Post-Colonialism, Post-Structuralism and the Cartographic Connection” in Past the Last Post: Theorizing Post-Colonialism and Post-Modernism, edited by Ian Adam and Helen Tiffin (1990).
limiting characters’ narrative agency over their everyday lives and their categorical identities. In other words, Chandra’s emphasis on narrative identity in his characterizations of a mafia don, modeled on the real Bombay gangsters Arun Gawli, and a detective, based on police officer Rakesh Maria (Ganapathy-Doré 117, 118) humanizes these individuals beyond the one-dimensional character-types dominated by the tropes and themes of corruption, criminality, secrecy, logic and rationality which define the genre of detective fiction. The debates concerning reality and fiction in Chandra’s work exemplify my argument that Bombay novels depict the complex and nuanced relationships between individual agency, personal memories, and everyday experiences of the city and public histories. His manipulation of time, space, and memories constructs characters who can transgress national borders and boundaries between public and private spaces in the ways that Rushdie’s and Mistry’s upper-class and middle-class elite characters cannot.

4.2 Dead Criminal: a haunted perspective of Bombay

The emphasis on detection and storytelling in Chandra’s novel makes explicit this mediation of everyday life through an individual perspective that defined Bombay narratives. By foregrounding the artifice of oral story-telling, the ideological complexities of Bombay’s space manifest and reveal the simultaneous struggles against (in)visibility and for power and agency over identity that define Bombay and its residents. *Sacred Games* follows the detective Sartaj Singh as he investigates crimes and
struggles to carve out a personal life for himself after the collapse of a love affair. Sartaj’s story is entwined with the autobiographical reminiscences of Ganesh Gaitonde, an infamous gangster don. The stories of these two men are further fragmented by a number of seemingly disconnected insets that depict episodes from the lives of various minor characters; all of the stories are at least partially set in Bombay. The plot centres on Sartaj’s city-wide police investigation into the mysterious suicide of Ganesh, and Ganesh’s retelling of his rise to power and subsequent quest to prevent his mentor, Swami Shridhar Shukla (an internationally renowned Hindu spiritual leader and nationalist), from detonating a nuclear bomb in Mumbai. In the end, Sartaj and Ganesh unite their searches as they fight to save Mumbai from nuclear holocaust. Within this crime and detective story, is the story of the two men’s searches for belonging: Ganesh struggles to make a home for himself, while Sartaj searches for love and community.

The reader alone can perceive the way the narratives of these individuals overlap in space and time; in the case of Sartaj and Ganesh these overlaps are only perceptible to the stories’ inhabitants momentarily in the form of Sartaj uncovering clues. The reader, then, is not simply a voyeur or tourist in Chandra’s world, but an active agent—a detective—reading the landscape and piecing together the puzzle, but ultimately powerless to write identity. Sartaj’s ‘whodunit’ case transforms readers into detectives, but also into flâneurs, slipping through the streets and falling through the precipices of history, watching multiple Bombays collide.

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5 Singh first appears in the short story “Kama” included in Chandra’s short story collection, Love and Longing in Bombay.
Pankaj Mishra’s review, “Bombay Noir”, featured in *The New Yorker* presents the most disparaging reading of Chandra’s book, but he along with Claire Chambers and Kumar commend Chandra’s research into and “chronicling” of the city. In his review, Mishra opposes classifying Chandra’s novel as realism because of this adventure. He dismisses “the elaborately contrived plot” because it “seems finally to offer a vision no more compelling than the romantic brutality and cynicism of hardboiled crime fiction” and relies on a “moral imagination [which] seems too much in thrall to the kind of sensationalist fantasy underpinning disaster movies that manipulate terror in an age obsessed with terror” (“Bombay Noir”). However, its emphasis on narrative techniques, and its literary depth save *Sacred Games* from being dismissed as boiler-plate crime fiction sensationalizing Bombay. Chandra himself calls the novel an “anti-thriller” in the realist tradition that draws on the film noir genre (Chambers 46). He aims to depict everyday life in a particular place and period. As realists, authors like Mulk Raj Anand, George Eliot, Gustav Flaubert, Raja Rao, and Edith Wharton, highlight characterization over and above implausible, supernatural, or heroic events that define romance and Romanticism. Reading Chandra’s novel in this tradition means that we resist categorizing his depictions of crime, corruption, and terrorism in Bombay as sensational or exotic and accept them as part of everyday life in the city. As characters in a realist novel, Ganesh and Sartaj expose the incredible elements of Bombay life as invisible rather than fabulous and exemplify the difference between readers and writers of city space. Despite the fact that they lead adventurous lives, Chandra does not allow his characters to escape the confines of literary realism in order to create identities anchored
by a fluid Bombay or to be privileged, elevated above all other narratives of the city’s space.

In fact the objective realities which Chandra references in his novel are reinforced by Thomas Blöm Hansen’s and Suketu Mehta’s non-fiction studies of Bombay’s history of violence, police corruption, and gangsterism. Hansen and Mehta verify the ordinariness of Chandra’s themes and the bombings and attacks on Bombay in March 1993, December 2002, January 2003, March 2003, July 2003, August 2003, July 2006, and December 2008 exemplify that terrorism is an aspect of everyday life in the city and not necessarily the “sensationalist fantasy” that Mishra dismisses. While Hansen’s book specifically examines the social implications of Hindu fundamentalism and Shiv Sena politics as giving birth to the endemic violence in Bombay, Mehta’s Maximum City: Bombay Lost and Found focuses on exposing the local, ordinary lives affected by this criminal and violent side of Mumbai life. The veracity of his details aside, to read Sacred Games without examining Chandra’s particular narrativity reduces the novel’s commentary on the reciprocal relationship between the identities of Bombay and its residents to a mimetic portrayal of gangsters and detectives in Mumbai. However, his novel, like Rushdie’s and Mistry’s Bombay novels, reveals the individual struggle to exercise agency over identity in Mumbai. Unlike the more conventional stories of Rushdie and Mistry, Chandra critiques the hegemonic segregation of the population

6 See Thomas Blöm Hansen’s Wages of Violence for an elaboration on the movement and financial investments of gangsters and the work of Sujata Patel, Jim Masselos and Alice Thorner for a more in-depth sociological and historical explorations of the overcrowding and slums, the rioting and violence, and bureaucratic structures in Bombay.
based not so much on religious or class differences, but on characters’ (il)legal activities and associations.

As Chandra maps Bombay through Ganesh and Sartaj, he crafts a piece of literature that is the epitome of detective fiction:

the detective story is the very paradigm of the ‘rattling good story’; the reader cannot put the book down (as the saying goes) because of the sheer compulsion to find the explanation of ‘whodunit’. At quite another level, the detective story enshrines that perennial hermeneutic of the narrative mode which works with deep structures of change and stasis, of onward-moving events and retrospective reflection, of mystery and its resolution.

(Swales xii)\(^7\)

Arguably, Chandra’s story fails at the level of creating a complex, exciting “whodunit” mystery, making the plot of the story often seem less than artful because Ganesh reveals clues to the reader before they are known to, or understood by, Sartaj. Thus, the answer to the mystery is revealed long before the book ends. However, this contrivance allows the plot to retreat to the background and the narrative artifice to emerge as a primary concern for the novel. The detective mystery is merely a device used to show off Chandra’s reading of the city and how the city manifests differently based on various

\(^7\) Pankaj Mishra also chastises Chandra’s novel for not living up to the standard of literature the author proved himself to be capable of in *Love and Longing in Bombay* and *Red Earth, Pouring Rain* (80). But this criticism merely repeats the traditional objection to detective fiction: it’s lack of art or literariness.
narrative perspectives. The narrative perspectives he depicts depend upon distinguishing between detectives and criminals based on insider/outside or visible/invisible binaries.

Ganesh may be a first-person narrator, but his narrative style belies his attempt to write himself as a confident, powerful author of narrative and draws attention to the narrative artifice that constructs Chandra’s Bombay novel. The first two chapters are focalized by Sartaj and narrated by a third-person omniscient narrator. In these chapters, Ganesh attempts to establish his role as an audible but invisible storyteller by trying to gather himself an audience. At the end of the first chapter, Sartaj receives an anonymous phone call alerting him to Ganesh’s whereabouts; later, Ganesh reveals that he made this phone call himself (Chandra 27, 816). This invitation is repeated at the beginning of the third chapter and establishes Ganesh as a storyteller and Sartaj as an audience member. The fact that Ganesh’s storytelling does not begin until the second chapter and occurs through a security voice box enables his story to be audible while he remains invisible—buried beneath the city in a nuclear bomb shelter. The third chapter seems to increase Ganesh’s control of narrative because it is composed by Ganesh’s first-person narration and it is focalized by the criminal’s point of view not the police officer’s. The opening lines of the third chapter announce Ganesh’s narrative control but also undercut his authorial power because they reproduce his disembodied call for an audience: “So Sardar-ji, are you listening still? Are you somewhere in this world with me?” (Chandra 49). His dependence on inquisitive rather than declarative sentences to initiate storytelling reveals his uncertainty regarding his audience and presents a stark contrast to the confidence displayed by Saleem and Rai, who never question the presence of their audiences. Saleem, for example, perfects his storytelling by reading his chapters aloud to
Padma, whether or not she likes his story or the way he tells it. Additionally, the beginning phrase of *Midnight’s Children*, “once upon a time”, signals that the act of storytelling has already commenced—the audience has been invited and collected before the book ever opens. Thus, Saleem’s narrative is coterminous with the novel’s narrative. Ganesh’s narrative, however, is fragmented by the narratives of other individuals; his chapters are continually interrupted by insets describing the lives of secondary characters and chapters depicting Sartaj’s everyday life. Thus, Chandra’s novel portrays many more of the myriad Bombay stories which Rushdie’s characters brush past and which crowd in on the private spaces of Mistry’s characters. The form and length of Chandra’s novel reveal that in his attempt to expose Mumbai’s underbelly, he must recreate the chaotic clash of narratives which individuals encounter in Bombay.

Bombay novels continually reference the desire to exercise narrative agency and have your story be heard. When Saleem and Rai address their reading audiences, it is to ensure understanding, not to confirm attention; Ganesh, however, can never be certain of an audience whom he must repeatedly petition for attention. Ganesh understands the need to exercise narrative agency over his story and thus control the definitions of his identity, but his ability to maintain his audience (i.e., his authorial power) is threatened by his criminal need to remain invisible to police. Ganesh’s attempt to aurally captivate Sartaj as an audience member does not overpower Sartaj’s desire as a police officer to take Ganesh physically captive. Despite his interest and Ganesh’s pleas, Sartaj continues

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8 Padma’s impatience with Saleem’s narrative style leaves him wishing “for a more discerning audience, someone who would understand the need for rhythm, pacing, the subtle introduction of minor chords” (Rushdie 127).
his pursuit of Ganesh’s arrest, after all his profession requires him not merely to observe the city and its inhabitants, but to take action when his observations reveal a crime. Instead of patiently listening to Ganesh’s life story, Sartaj orders a bulldozer to knock down the door of the bunker and leads a team of officers inside. When Ganesh’s bunker is invaded by the police force, his narrative devolves into repetitive lamentations with little narrative value:

But you haven’t listened to all of it, Sartaj. [...] You sat in front of the steel door to the bunker, and you listened, but you called in a bulldozer. [...] You are coming in. I’m still talking, but you aren’t listening to me any more. Your eyes are afire. You want me, you and your riflemen. But listen to me. [...] Listen to me. If you want Ganesh Gaitonde, then you have to let me talk. Otherwise Ganesh Gaitonde will escape you, as he escaped every time, as he escaped every last assassin. Ganesh Gaitonde escaped even me, almost. Now, at this last hour, I have Ganesh Gaitonde, I know what he was, what he became. Listen to me, you must listen to me. (817)

In this, the final passage narrated by Ganesh, the word “escape” is repeated four times before he admits that he—not his audience—has been captured: “at this last hour, I have Ganesh Gaitonde”. The statement implies that Ganesh realizes that only through his death will he be able to wield the power necessary to craft his narrative and redefine his identity. Unlike Saleem Sinai, Ganesh can only exercise this agency over identity after he has run out of time.

The disconnection between his voice and his body represents the limited power of
his narrative. Although he redefines his identity and humanizes himself, these achievements are confined to his posthumously-created narrative and remain a secret between Ganesh and Chandra’s readers, invisible to Sartaj who must uncover Ganesh’s narrative himself by collecting clues. The stories of Saleem and Rai gain power through the dissemination of their meaning (i.e. through their visibility to audiences), but Ganesh’s power as a narrator is limited by his need to remain undetected and invisible to the police. Ganesh’s criminal need for invisibility limits his ability to share his narrative definitions of himself with others occupying the same temporal (i.e., everyday) spaces in Mumbai.

Ganesh’s limited ability to save the meaning of his life by narrating the identities of himself, his city, and his country before he splinters into nothing like Saleem, is exacerbated by the fact that not just any audience will suffice. Where Saleem pokes fun at Padma’s inability to understand particular narrative affects and meanings in his story, Ganesh understands that audiences also have the ability to rewrite narratives. He very clearly articulates the tenuous nature of the relationship between storyteller and listener: “If I didn’t tell them, they wouldn’t understand. They would spread rumours, and lies, and invent reasons, and speculate about causes” (816). Ganesh understands that he must write his own story in order to prevent his story from being relegated to Mumbai’s hidden criminal world (the so-called “underbelly” or “underworld”), but that every audience is not equal. He explains his careful attempt to select his audience:

But who would listen to me? Jojo [his best friend whom he has just murdered] was gone, and Guru-ji [his spiritual mentor] was absent. I could call any reporter, and he would come running. But reporters were
devious bastards, they wanted headlines and action, scandals and tales.

There was that fellow at *Mumbai Mirror*, who was very good, but even he would think of me as Ganesh Gaitonde, crime lord and international crook. No, it had to be somebody good, somebody simple. Somebody who would listen to me as a man might listen to another man on a railway platform, with sympathy and kindness, just for an hour or two until the train came. Somebody who had seen me not merely as Ganesh Gaitonde, but [as] a human being.⁹

Somebody, in other words, who would not try to impose his or her own narrative onto Ganesh’s by rewriting the story when he or she hears it (like the legions of racists transforming immigrants in *The Satanic Verses*). And so Ganesh calls Sartaj—an urban observer whose job it is to collect information and not to invent stories with these clues. This is why their stories complement each other without competing for space within the novel. Ganesh may be a first-person narrator, but his narrative style belies his attempt to write himself as a confident, powerful author of narrative and actor in everyday life. Despite his careful audience selection, Ganesh cannot maintain his position as storyteller because Sartaj’s role as police detective supersedes his role as audience member.

In Ganesh’s final moments of narration (and life), he oscillates between objective descriptions of Sartaj’s movements and plaintive entreaties to his lost audience members—proving his inability to capture his audience in the silent, still pose indicative of listening and reflection. For his part, Sartaj understands that his professional

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⁹ The irony that Chandra’s 900-page tome takes exponentially longer to read than “an hour or two” is not lost.
obligation severed the connection between Ganesh the storyteller and Ganesh the criminal, a connection Sartaj will not be able to reconstruct because he is not an author. Chandra describes Sartaj at the end of his day:

he remembered Gaitonde’s grandiloquent voice, his rapid speech, his sadness. He had never met Ganesh Gaitonde, and now their lives had crossed and the man was dead. On the edge of sleep, Sartaj remembered all that he had heard and read about Gaitonde, the rumours and legends, the intelligence reports and the news-magazine interviews. He tried to connect the public image to the voice he had heard, and couldn’t. There had been the famous gangster, and there was the man this afternoon. (47-48)

As an incorporeal voice, Ganesh exemplifies narrative power disassociated from physical action: his voice, rather than his physical actions, define his personal identity and he loses power over space when he must silence his own voice. Furthermore, Sartaj as detective, is a man gathering information about his adversary, but he is unable to rewrite Ganesh’s identity based on these facts. Thus, both Ganesh and Sartaj recognize their limited narrative agency over the construction of identity.

Ganesh exemplifies the criminal need for invisibility—physical and narrative—which is particular to Bombay gangsters, under the threat of being “encountered.” In Bombay criminal culture, “encounter” refers specifically to instances in which police kill a gangster in a public place. Suketu Mehta explains:

It is an innocuous word, ‘encounter’, suggesting a chance meeting while strolling in the park. But in Bombay it has come to mean murder by the
state without benefit of trial, an extrajudicial killing. It occurs when the police arrest and interrogate a suspect and then take him to a public place and shoot him dead. The explanation they give out to the press is that they ‘encountered’ a dreaded gangster, asked him to surrender, found themselves fired upon, and fired back in retaliation, killing him. (183)

The term emphasizes the police need to make criminals visible in order to erase them from Bombay’s landscape. The action reveals how individuals can exercise a kind of hegemonic power over Bombay’s space without having to control narrative space. When Ganesh phones Sartaj, he makes himself—a known criminal—visible to the police and he can only escape arrest by committing suicide. He may have the capacity to tell his story posthumously, but he loses all power over the city and his crime family. Death may be his last chance to escape confinement in Sartaj’s prison, but it confines his body to the grave and his narrative to the space of someone else’s novel. Ganesh’s posthumous narration rescues his role in Bombay society from the margins of society, where his criminality would otherwise relegate him. It is only when Ganesh no longer shares space temporally with Sartaj, when he is dead and can no longer participate in everyday life, that he succeeds in writing and exercising narrative agency over identity. Thus, through his posthumous narrative, Ganesh is able to define his identity and his connection to Mumbai as more than the abstract definition of criminality that marginalizes him as an invisible member of society.

\[10\text{ Thomas Blom Hansen contextualises encounter killings in terms of police corruption, supari (contract) killings, and media complicity in Wages of Violence (185-193).}\]
The narrative artifice of Ganesh’s criminal story thus empowers him to develop his character beyond a one-dimensional character-type. In one of the few published, scholarly articles on *Sacred Games*, Dora Sales Salvador argues that Ganesh’s posthumous narration humanizes the gangster and challenges the genre conventions of noir and detective fiction. Salvador explains Ganesh’s posthumous, realist narration creates “a fictional pact” between the narrator and the reader: “It is, in a sense, the voice of his conscience, explaining himself to himself in a sort of catharsis” (136). *Sacred Games* is successful, Salvador argues, because Ganesh’s first-person narration reveals him as an unconventional villain: “narrating himself, he leaves the reader with a humanised image of himself, not pardoning his crimes, but understanding the human being in the context of an unmitigated struggle for existence” (136). Similarly, in “The Long Wait: Time Secret of the Contemporary Detective Novel”, Theodore Martin argues that Ganesh’s posthumous narration helps emphasize the importance of temporality in Chandra’s novel and demands an expanded definition of the genre beyond “whodunit” mysteries driven by logic and expectation. “The temporality of detection,” he writes, complicates the familiar hermeneutic dichotomies of surface/depth, beneath/beside, buried/open, absent/present, reminding us that a reader’s negotiation of interpretive space always takes place over time. It is thus time to rethink the long-taken-for-granted relation between readers and detectives. (165-166)

Martin argues that Ganesh’s posthumous narration, and not a crime, is actually the central mystery in Chandra’s detective novel “[b]ecause none of the other characters is able to register the problem, *Sacred Games* leaves the reader alone to deal with the impossibility
of believing the matter plainly before his or her eyes: the intrusion, into the logical world
of detection, of a confessing corpse” (175). “The mystery of Ganesh’s suicide” he
continues, “is thus displaced onto a more fundamental and resolutely formal problem,
which the novel neither answers nor even treats as a question: how in the world is Ganesh
able to narrate in the first place?” (178). Since the events described by Ganesh’s
narration continue to adhere to the objective, mimetic conventions of realist fiction, the
fact that his narration occurs posthumously does not defy the novel’s classification as
realism any more than the access to interiority in Flaubert’s Madame Bovary subverts
realist genre conventions. Thus, like other Bombay novels, Sacred Games demands
readers question the narrative agency of the focalizing characters. Ganesh’s narrative
explains his criminal behavior as a by-product of his community-building in Bombay.

The liminality of Ganesh’s story—his need for invisibility, his marginalization
from society as a criminal—are reinforced by the physical location of his storytelling.
His posthumous narration occurs from within an underground bunker on the geographical
margins of Bombay. He has literally buried himself into the city’s landscape, but it is
also located in the northern-end of the city far away from the Forst District and
neighbourhoods more typically found in Bombay novels. Chandra writes, “The building
was a precise cube, white with green windows, on a large plot of land in Kailashpada,
which was on the still-developing northern edge of Zone 13. Here, among the heavy
machinery groping at swamp, edging Bombay out farther and wider” (28). The police
detectives, responsible for close surveillance of the city, are shocked by the cube’s
appearance: “It was somehow deeply satisfying [to Sartaj] that even Katekar, Mumbai
native and practitioner of a very superior Bhuleshwar-bred cynicism, was startled by an
impregnable white cube suddenly grown in Kailashpada, with a black, swivel-mounted Sony video camera above the door” (29). This is not the first time that Ganesh will physically alter Bombay’s landscape and take (non-narrative) control of the city’s identity.

He is the father of a crime family, as well as the creator of a crowded basti. His construction of the neighbourhood is a necessary part of his gaining criminal power in Bombay. Ganesh tells Sartaj:

“I took the land between N.C. Road and the hill which overlooks it. You know Gopalmath basti, from N.C. Road all the way up the hill and four miles wide, from Sindh Chowk to G.T. Junction? All that was empty land then, nothing but a wasteland of weeds and bushes—it was municipal land. The government owned it, and so nobody owned it. I took it. […]”

(102)

This fictional location (probably in the north of Mumbai where much of his story is set) enables Ganesh to reproduce the British colonial narrative of blank space—brazenly taking for himself what the government will not defend. And he will continue to write the narrative meaning of his neighbourhood. Looking out over Gopalmath, Ganesh sees more than just the physical structures before him; he is able to draw conclusions about human behavior within the city based on what he observes. In other words, he constructs their narratives:

Gopalmath filled up fast, there were citizens queuing up for the kholis even before we finished them, before we had the land cleared, before we even imagined the rows of houses. Up and down the road the basti spread,
and it went climbing up the hill, it seemed to grow every day. Right from the beginning, we had Dalits and OBCs, Marathas and Tamils, Brahmins and Muslims. The communities tended to cluster together, lane by lane. People like to stay with those they know, like seeks like, and even in the thick crores of the city, in this jungle where a man can lose his name and become something else, the lowest of the low will seek his own kind, and live with them in proud public squalor. *I saw this, and thought it strange, that not one man in thousands has the courage to be alone.* (emphasis added 106)\(^\text{11}\)

Ganesh’s description begins with objective observations similar to Sartaj’s procedural investigation of space, but it quickly moves beyond the surface to acknowledge the fear associated with separating oneself from the swarming mass. This also serves as further evidence that Ganesh establishes himself as an outsider to the city’s population because these communal associations are odd to him. For Ganesh, staying within the confines of a religious (or any identity) community is a sign of weakness—he attributes this to why he can so easily establish himself as a leader here. Arguably, then, it is Ganesh’s connection to the land and streets of the city that enables him to function as a secular, modern Bombayite. Perhaps even more than Saleem Sinai, Ganesh is a cosmopolitan character who can continually reinvent himself into various fixed identities and grows more powerful with each one. However, these attributes do not help him during the communal riots that erupt in December 1992 and ravage the city. The depiction of the

\(^{11}\) The passage continues explaining that he gathered together “the boys” for G-Company from Gopalmath, “Not yet in the papers, but in the north and east of Mumbai the basti-dwellers knew us, and the police, and the other companies” (106).
communal riots reveals the strength of these communal relationships—the power of the mob—which Ganesh scorns. Ganesh’s power to manipulate public/outsider and private/insider positions enables him to metaphorically construct communities by physically building a neighbourhood.

4.3 Detecting perspective, discovering Bombay
Ganesh may have limited power as a storyteller, but when he does narrate his memories, he crafts a Bombay narrative replete with the chaotic competition between the many narratives that exist within Bombay space. Perhaps the most important narrative perspective of Bombay also presented within the novel is that of Ganesh’s foil, Sartaj, as a traditional detective, who cannot write narrative to create meaning. In his analysis of Chandra’s manipulation of the detective fiction genre in Sacred Games, Theodore Martin explains that Sartaj fulfills the role of detective as it is defined by Shoshana Felman, who argues that “the detective is only a detective in his (her) function as a reader” and that, through reading, the detective works “to extort the secret of the text, to compel the language of the text…to confess “ (qtd. in Theodore 176, 165). As a reader and hence, voyeur, Sartaj must remain an outside observer (as opposed to a writer who can write himself into events and spaces).

Sartaj’s inability to create narrative is exemplified in the first chapter. The novel opens with a chapter titled “Policeman’s Day” which details Sartaj’s thoughts and actions.

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12 Unlike the “swarming mass” that defines the typical urban crowd for de Certeau and is comprised of individuals acting and thinking separately from one another, a “mob” is an unthinking collection of people acting as one, ruled by one narrative or goal.
as he conducts police business around the city. His day ends with him drinking whisky at home, unable to sleep, looking out his window. His admiration of the view reveals his inability to delve beneath the surface of objects and construct a narrative for the vista.

Chandra writes:

He lay with his head away from the window, so he could watch the sky, lit still by the city. To the left was a long grey sliver, the building next door, turned by the window frame into a crenellated abstraction, and to the right what was called darkness, what disintegrated softly under the eye into an amorphous and relentless yellow illumination. Sartaj knew where it came from, what made it, but as always he was awed by it. (22)

These objective aesthetic details reveal Sartaj’s observational skills, but tell us very little about the identity of Mumbai—this could be the light pollution of any city. Sartaj may know the explanation for the light, but his superficial understanding of external phenomena leaves him feeling reverent and fearful, indicating that there is much to the scene that he is overwhelmed by, perhaps because he cannot control it. He does not write the definitions that comprise his knowledge of the city and the people around him, he merely memorizes them. If he had the ability to write narrative and create meaning in order to explain his everyday experiences, he would feel powerful in the scene because, like Saleem and the language riots, he could write a story that gives him control over events and spaces.

His lack of narrative agency contributes to his disconnection from the city, which is different from the critical distance manipulated by Rushdie’s characters. When the
passage continues focus shifts abruptly to Sartaj’s memories of other places in the city:

He remembered playing cricket on a Dadar street, the fast pok of the tennis ball and the faces of friends, and the feeling that he could hold the whole city in his heart, from Colaba to Bandra. Now it was too vast, escaped from him, each family adding to the next and the next until there was that cool and endless glow, impossible to know, or escape. Had it really existed, that small empty street, clean for the children’s cricket games and dabba-ispies and tikkar-billa, or had he stolen it from some grainy black-and-white footage? Given it to himself in gift, the memory of a happier place? (22)

The “amorphous and relentless yellow illumination” that he previously understood is now a “cool and endless glow” that is “impossible to escape”. Geetha Ganapathy-Doré highlights this passage as a moment in the novel when Bombay becomes a non-place, in the vocabulary of French anthropologist Marc Augé. She argues, “The rhythm of mutual transformation of the city and its inhabitants is so fast that the city ceases to be a place” (120), which is one way of understanding the multitude of narratives manifest in Bombay’s spaces. Bombay in this passage manifests as a barrage of memories: it is a moment when time collapses into space and Sartaj appears to be able to see it all at once.

Since his memories do not map easily onto the landscape, Sartaj doubts whether or not they are true. Like Dinshawji who, in Mistry’s Such a Long Journey, thinks that his ties to Bombay’s places are severed when the places are renamed, Sartaj has no way to write his memories onto the city’s constantly changing landscape. He is unable to
distinguish between the memories he wrote for himself and the memories created by photographs, and unlike Rai, he is not the narrating photographer capturing these images in language for his audience. In such a passive position, the city is an overwhelming place for the detective who needs to label and categorize, but cannot control what he sees through narration or force. The alienating crowds of Bombay manifest here as a crowd of memories. Unlike other fictional Bombayites, Sartaj’s alienation is not a result of the number of people in Bombay’s streets or a lack of privacy because he is isolated high above the city in a private room. His home is a privileged retreat far above the noise and crowds, which provides him space to distance himself from the definitions of himself and the city created by other individuals and public politics. His privileged view of the city is thus one that protects him from the intrusion of the public into private space that plagues Rohinton Mistry’s characters, but this also means that he remains disconnected from Bombay.

Sartaj’s elevated perspective does not translate into a position of power, as it does in Rushdie’s Bombay narratives. His discomfort in the role of storyteller keeps him confined to the role of voyeur, rather than author of identity narratives. This is made explicit in his reaction to the killing of his police partner Katekar during a stakeout. At the funeral, Sartaj reflects on the series of events that led to the death, but struggles to create a narrative—the explanation of how and why these events occurred in the order they did and what it all means. Chandra writes:

It was a simple story, the way Kamble and others would tell it: three apradhis cornered, we should’ve fired first, encountered the bastards, but it was Singh’s operation, Katekar got too close and didn’t shoot, so he died.
Case closed. These things happen. It’s the job. But after everything, after all, Sartaj was unable to rest with this story, to be comforted by the neatness of it, by its clean forward velocity and its final rest. He was beset by questions: where was Bangladesh, what was it? Where was Bihar? How do three men travel thousands of miles, to one city, to a particular stretch of road, to a constable waiting under a thela? We are debris, Sartaj thought, randomly tossed about and nudging into each other, splitting each other’s lives apart. Sartaj opened his eyes, and the room was still the old one, the shadows outside completely known to him, known a thousand nights over. This was his corner of the world, safe and familiar. And yet here was this question, sitting on his chest: why did Katekar die? How did this happen? (290)

The existential nihilism in this passage emphasizes Sartaj’s role as police officer who *finds* answers by reading the world around him, instead of as an author who *creates* answers by writing the world around him. He knows what questions to ask in order to create narrative (“where was Bangladesh?...How do three men travel thousands of miles, to one city, to a particular stretch of road, to a constable waiting under a thela?”), but he cannot answer them himself.Thematically, this is also what sets him apart from the representation of “typical” Bombay police in the novel. The Bombay police force is notoriously corrupt, and, in the novel, Sartaj stands out as much for his refusal to take a bribe, as for his being the only Sikh detective in the city. Thus, he is only comfortable in his “safe and familiar” room in the “corner of the world” which he claims as his own because he has objective knowledge of it. The fear and paralysis that Sartaj feels because
he does not wield power over the narrative of the events in his life translates into a
difficulty connecting to other people. Chandra’s novel thus reveals the crushing
anonymity of Bombay’s urban crowds in a way that Rushdie and Mistry do not.

Sartaj spends much of the novel feeling alienated and isolated because he avoids emotional bonds with other people. Instead of writing his own interpretations onto people (and places) in order to establish emotional relationships or in-groups based on categorical identities, he remains emotionally detached and people remain strangers to him. The story told about Sartaj focuses on his ostensible quest to solve the mystery of the woman found dead beside Ganesh. However, his investigation into Jojo Mascarenas introduces him to her sister, and thus his search for clues becomes an emotional journey towards love for the divorced detective. By the end of the novel, he has stopped avoiding emotional connections, though he is still learning to exercise agency over the definitions of other people. Thus, the people around him remain strangers. In the novel’s final chapter, Sartaj, his mother, and his girlfriend are all identified as strangers; however, he is no longer alienated by this strangeness because he has a new understanding of the acts of reading and writing identity. Sitting next to his mother on a train he recognizes, “Whoever she was, this woman, Sartaj did not feel alone sitting at her feet, or lonely” (897). He is able to feel connected to his mother because he is no longer an alienated outsider merely collecting data. He also now feels safe and comfortable committing to a woman who is not his ex-wife: “He was here with Mary, and he was not afraid of either the happiness or the heartbreak that lay ahead” (899). In the next section, I argue that Sartaj’s movement through Mumbai’s spaces over the course of the novel reveals his emotional education: Sartaj learns to move forward with his life, secure in the knowledge
that he will continue to learn and change with each story he hears, rather than be debilitated by the unknowability of a person or place. Sartaj’s sections in the novel are dominated by his procedural police thinking: what matters to him is connecting the dots as evidence, not constructing a narrative that would unite the Ganesh he knows from public media with the Ganesh who tried to tell him the story of how he came to Bombay, for example. Sartaj may not be able to explain why Ganesh’s personal narrative is important to the facts of his case, or be able to produce narratives for the women in his life, but Chandra provides the narrative space in which the stories of these characters are depicted and reveals why the details of their lives are significant not just to Sartaj’s case, but to an understanding of life in Bombay.

Chandra emphasizes the multiplicity of Bombay’s narratives through the juxtaposition of numerous stories within the same story. In addition to the complementary stories of Ganesh and Sartaj, there are various insets interspersed throughout the novel which function, on one level, as a simple plot device that reveals connections between seemingly unrelated characters. For example, one family’s uncommunicative grandmother turns out to be another’s missing sister as the story of Daddi, née Navneet, is told in the insets “A House in a Distant City” and “Two Deaths, in Cities Far From Home”. These numerous insets emphasize the coexistence of the multiple Bombays created through individual perspectives by providing glimpses into the life stories of other peripheral characters in the novel. These glimpses reinforce the way urban lives continually collide and intersect as individuals navigate through cities. These are the stories that Rai and Saleem “push and shove past” to make room for their own narratives within the city. Daddi’s story reveals that she is also the sister of Sartaj’s
mother who was kidnapped during Partition. Her story shows how the historical event of Partition shattered families, while it created new ones out of the pieces. Thus, the happiness of her new family depends on her ability to keep her non-Muslim identity a secret. By convincing them that she is a Muslim, she effectively becomes the enemy who tore her away from her original family and identity. However, only the reader has enough information to put together all of these details, and the secret nature of Datti’s past protects her anonymity. The intertwined narratives in Sacred Games showcase individuals moving through and connecting with the cityscape in ways that exemplify the way “[n]arratives can revitalize the language of comprehensive space, and they can designate the sites of, accesses to, and relations with it” (Kort 157). They reinforce the way urban lives continually collide and intersect with one another as individuals navigate through cities.

Ganesh and Sartaj may have limited power over narrative in the novel, but Bombay still plays a significant role in their senses of self. Chandra’s detective story is not a spatial mystery, in fact the space in the story—the city—provides the basis for the relationship between his main characters: Ganesh and Sartaj are on opposite sides of the law and are united by their common ground in Mumbai. While Theodore Martin may be correct that the temporality of the novel helps expand the genre definitions of detective fiction, the space within the novel advances Chandra’s characterizations. In the section below, I examine how Chandra’s characters move through Bombay. Since Sartaj’s path through the city is dictated by the clues Ganesh leaves—Sartaj is retracing the gangster’s footsteps months after he has walked them—it is evident that space, rather than time, unites these men. Moreover, the motivations behind their movements in their everyday
lives are based on their love for the city. Ganesh’s love for the city and his desire to protect it from the Swami’s nuclear bomb leads him to call Sartaj in the first place, even though this encounter (like most encounters between police and gangsters in Mumbai) will end his life. Meanwhile, Sartaj’s love for the city motivates his work to save Bombay from crime and corruption. The city that connects them is as filled with multiple narratives as the city found in Rushdie’s and Mistry’s fictions, but unlike Rushdie, Chandra creates a multiple and fluid urban environment without relying on magical realism. And unlike Mistry, he constructs the frustration of his characters trying to negotiate the city’s myriad narratives without their being strictly confined by religious communal identities.

4.4 Walking the beat

The power to tell stories in Sacred Games reveals the limited power individuals have over the narrative construction of identity in Mumbai. However, the characters are empowered by their everyday lives. They are active participants in the city who help to define and create Bombay’s stories through their actions. Chandra’s depiction of his characters’ street-level perspectives invites comparison to Walter Benjamin’s flâneurs and Michel de Certeau’s Wandersmänner in order to understand how their movement through the streets establishes a recursive relationship between individuals and the city.

13 Unlike Saleem who wants to be “the bomb in Bombay”, the bomb in Chandra’s novel is literal and threatens the very existence of the city, not just the focalizers.
How a character moves through space—negotiating crowds and public perceptions—is a gauge for determining how much power characters can exercise over Bombay’s spaces. Often the relationships of characters to the city are explained from street-level views of everyday life. Since these views are inseparable from narrative agency, the perspectives of these pedestrians should be considered through the narrative spatial theories of Walter Benjamin (flânerie) and Michele de Certeau (Wandersmänner).

For de Certeau, and Benjamin, the individual walking through the city creates the city’s identity. Benjamin defines the figure of the city-walker able to tell the story of the city as the flâneur—an urban wanderer whose passive participation in the city provides him a privileged position as observer, simultaneously part of, and apart from, the city. That is to say, he is both insider and outsider, visible and invisible. Exemplified for Benjamin in the work of Charles Baudelaire, the flâneur is a poet who can both read and write the space he helps create. The role of the flâneur depends on his ability to move through the city while maintaining a distanced perspective from it. Baudelaire conceives of the flâneur as “the man of the crowd as opposed to the man in the crowd. The poet is the centre of an order of things of his own making even though, to others, he appears to be just one constituent part of the metropolitan flux. It is this sense of being of rather than being in which makes the poet different from all the others in the crowd” (Tester 3). In

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14 Henri Lefebvre also specifically theorizes the movement of individuals through the city streets in Rhythmanalysis, a collection of essays published posthumously in 2004 and considered to be the fourth volume in his series, Critique of Everyday Life. Unlike de Certeau’s and Benjamin’s theories which theorize the power individuals have to affect city space through walking, Lefebvre sees movement through space as one of the many rhythms of the city to be analysed, along with the setting and rising of the sun, changing of traffic lights, etc. However useful, Lefebvre’s conception of the rhythms of city-space implies a certain amount of order or predictability that does not enhance a discussion of Bombay’s spaces, unless perhaps, one is well-versed in the syncopation of Indian music.
Other words, the flâneur is apart from the crowd by virtue of the fact that he knows he is a member of the crowd—suggesting that the flâneur possesses a certain amount of introspective awareness, which influences his view and experience of the urban landscape. As flâneurs and Wandersmänner, Chandra’s protagonists present themselves as passive voyeurs reading the urban text (i.e., Bombay’s identities), but also as active participants helping to create those identities. In their novels, the role of the individual in the city is made explicit through narrative perspectives which engage with the movement of characters through urban space because this movement comprises the chaotic urban crowds that are the defining image of Bombay in literature.

Michel de Certeau uses the distinction between observer and observed to distinguish between the voyeur and the Wandersmänner. As de Certeau sees it, an observer must view the city from an elevated position in order to understand it (as a kind of voyeur-god), whereas walkers’ “bodies follow the thicks and thins of an urban ‘text’ they write without being able to read” (93). In other words, the observer reads from above the text that the Wandersmänner compose (i.e., they are the observed), unlike the flâneur, who reads the city as he walks through it. The difference between the flâneur and the Wandersmänner depends on the level of awareness a person can have walking through the city streets. De Certeau suggests that the active negotiation required to navigate the streets (deciding when to cross a street, how to weave through sidewalk traffic, etc.) monopolizes a person’s attention and prevents him from reading the city—prevents the casual strolling necessary for him to focus, as the flâneur does, on his aestheticizing gaze of the urban text. This is the distinction between Poe’s observing narrator and the observed pedestrian. However, such a separation between observer and
observed removes the narrating agency from walkers. In other words, Wandersmänner, conducting business in the city, cannot tell the story of the city because they are the story of the city. Alternatively, the figure of the first-person narrator and/or focalizer is able to occupy both subject positions—reading details of scenes while creating them to be read—because the relationship between storytelling and memory does not require these acts to happen concurrently.

Walking through the crowded streets of Bombay, Ganesh exemplifies the way de Certeau claims urban pedestrians “give shape to spaces […and] weave places together” (97). Chandra exposes this phenomenon early in his text as Ganesh recalls making his way to the police station in Goregoan in order to find an informant who can tell him where to find a money launderer. Ganesh explains:

I walked to the station, though narrow roads lined with shops and thelas on either side. I slipped through fast, bending and sliding shoulder-first through the crowds, revived by the tea and eager for the next turn. I found the station, and leaned against the bonnet of a car, facing the long, low, brown façade. (52)

This passage draws the reader’s attention to the constant movement of the city and Ganesh’s own trajectory through the crowd—“shoulder-first,” slipping eagerly past people (in much the same way that Rai imagines pushing past other people’s stories in Bombay’s streets). In this way, Ganesh becomes integral to, but separate from, the moving crowd. In tracking his non-linear path through the streets, we can understand Ganesh’s place in “the small crowd” that, as he explains, “shifted and wandered and re-
formed” (52)—which is the chaotic and unorganized Bombay rhythm of deCerteau’s “swarming mass.” As a Bombay pedestrian, Ganesh must navigate streets packed with handcarts, vendors, and hawkers, in addition to the beggars, automotive and pedestrian traffic that might be found in any other city. He weaves his way through streets that are crowded with different types of vendors, with “shops and thelas,” in order to conduct his business (which, in this case, is sitting and observing the crowd until he sees someone who can help him). Ganesh inhabits a powerful liminal position as both individual and crowd, voyeur and pedestrian, and thus can be both reader and storyteller as he simultaneously observes and narrates the story, even as he acts it out.

Ganesh’s ability to map his story and the city depends upon his ability to move through it, even when he arrests his physical movement. We follow the trajectory of his gaze inside the police station; the above quotation continues: “I could actually see, even from this distance, through the front door into the receiving room with its long desks, and I knew what lay beyond” (52). His privileged narrative perspective here reveals how the visible and invisible become complicit in the narrative construction of Bombay’s public spaces. Ganesh’s perspective thus reproduces the invasion of private space experienced by Mistry’s Bombay residents. Ganesh’s power derives from his ability to use his private perspective to invade public spaces. In this case, the police station appears private, closed off to most of the individuals in the crowd and accessible only through insider knowledge (which Ganesh possesses); it is a state facility operated for the public good, but can only achieve good by restricting the public’s access to its interior. The reader follows Ganesh’s gaze as it travels through the crowd and into the police station while he stays perched, like a voyeur-god, reading the text of the city from street-level and
revealing the invisible interiority of the station. His observations also make the police (who would otherwise be considered insiders with regards to the police station) members of the crowd—public and visible to Ganesh, who possesses criminal “insider” knowledge:

I could actually see […] through the front door […] and I knew what lay beyond, the crowded offices, the prisoners squatting in rows, the bare cells at the very back. The small crowd in front shifted and wandered and re-formed but was always there, and I flipped through the newspaper and watched. I could pick out the cops, even the plain-clothes ones, from the coil of their necks and a backward leaning, something like a cobra sprung straight in the middle of fresh furrows, hood fanned, quivering with power and arrogance. They had a glittering belligerence in their eyes. I was looking for something else. (52-3)

Ganesh’s description of the police officers as snake-like parallels his own previous slithering through the crowded streets and metaphorically unites officers and criminals as part of the same reptilian species. Chandra’s depiction of Bombay’s street rhythms and crowds as snake-like also calls attention to the city’s narratives of Hinduism. Snake worship for the Hindu religion is second only to the sacredness of the cow. Ironically, actual snakes and snake charmers are not allowed within the city limits of Bombay, except for on certain religious holidays. Thus, like the gangsters, snakes are also integral parts of Bombay’s identity which are simultaneously forbidden from its

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15 There is also something to be said here about how snakes are brought in to the city by charmers: they are kept in baskets from which they emerge in a dance. The snakes, like police and detectives thus manipulate (in)visibility, through their ability to hide in plain sight.
landscape by bureaucratic narratives. The above quotation also foreshadows the fact that
the criminal path that he embarks on at this point in his life will eventually take him
inside the police station as prisoner. The foreshadowing is complicated by the fact that
Ganesh already appears to possess knowledge that he will gain from future experience,
meaning either that he has already been imprisoned, or that time again noticeably
collapses to provide him knowledge and insight before the actual experience. In either
case, this detail marks his powerful perspective through his ability to know (without
seeing) “what lay beyond.”

Mapping the freedom of movement of criminals and of police officers reveals the
intricate play between insider and outsider, and visible and invisible member of society,
that each individual must negotiate as a Bombay resident. In order to establish himself as
a powerful gangster, Ganesh shows how he must constantly negotiate between insider
and outsider. As criminal, Ganesh struggles to make himself invisible to police officers
who will bring him inside the station if they arrest him. But in order to achieve this status
of invisible insider, the police must remain visible to him. Meanwhile, Sartaj’s work is
based within the building, inside of which he is free to move about and bring others into;
however, the officer is always visible/identifiable on the streets—reinforcing his outsider
position against Ganesh’s status as insider and thus, invisible member of the crowd. 16

Alternatively, the criminal, once captured, will be brought and kept prisoner inside the
station, but has the power of invisibility on the streets. The divide between insider and
outsider is not the same as between good and bad—both police and criminals are corrupt
in this world, but it is the corruption that allows positive events to happen (i.e., the

16 The invisible outsider here is notably not the silenced, powerless subaltern.
nuclear bomb plot is thwarted because Sartaj uses corrupt methods to gain intelligence). The police corruption combined with the lack of visible politicians in the novel suggests that the problem is not that everyone is corrupt in Bombay, but that the system itself generates corruption.\textsuperscript{17} Thus Chandra’s depiction of the Bombay jail presents a complicated, nuanced contrast to the one-dimensional jail Rushdie depicts in \textit{The Moor’s Last Sigh}. Unlike the imprisoned Moraes Zogoiby, invisible and powerless inside Bombay Central prison, Ganesh manipulates his (in)visibility in order to gain more power in Bombay. In fact, it is while he is in prison and participating in the yoga program that he meets the Swami who plots to destroy Bombay.

A neighbourhood creator and gangster don, Ganesh appears to conflate the urban narrator with the type of voyeur-god conceived by de Certeau. The urban theorist endows the voyeur with false, totalising power when his perspective is gained from a tower above the city and problematically calls forth a Foucauldian panoptical view of

\textsuperscript{17} In his non-fiction account of Bombay, \textit{Maximum City}, Mehta discusses the corruption in terms of influence and connections—for him, everything in Bombay can only be accessed through personal relationships. He explains:

There’s very little you can do anonymously, as a member of the vast masses. You have to go through someone. The reservations clerk needs that personal touch of a human being he recognizes. It is the same with railway reservations, theater tickets, apartments, and marriages. It has to be one person linking with another who knows another and so on till you reach your destination; the path your request takes has to go through this network. You cannot jump the chain by phone line. Then it becomes just a buyer and a seller, a transaction rather than a favor. A friend went from Bombay to London and told me she was horrified that she could spend an entire day—buy tickets on the Tube, go to a play, eat—without ever needing to make a personal connection. When you want to book a hotel in Matheran or a movie ticket at Metro, you ask around: ‘Who has influence?’ This is why people stay on in Bombay, in spite of everything. They have built a network here; they have influence. (256)

This refusal to adhere strictly to a bureaucratic system encourages corruption and alienation of outsiders. Amin and Thrift also argue against the understanding of propinquity understood only in local terms.
authority (which de Certeau identifies as a fictional, panoramic concept of the city) (45-60). However, the panoramic views of Bombay narrated in many texts, like Sacred Games, defy Foucauldian authority: there is a summarizing mapping that occurs but not authoritative repression or monitoring as a result. For Chandra, this mapping is always intimately connected to locomotion, primarily through the streets. Bombay thus appears to adhere to deCerteau’s definition of the fact of the city: “The city that people inhabit is a labyrinth reality, which produces ‘an anthropological,’ poetic and mythic experience of space” (qtd in Donald 14). The street-level and elevated views described in Sacred Games resist ascribing any type of stationary authority to the viewers—no matter their vantage point. One such example of Sartaj’s lack of panoptic authority is described as he leaves his informant in Navnagar:

Sartaj looked over his shoulder as they came up the slope, and the endless mud-brown and white roofs of Navnagar made a vast serried crescent, horizon to horizon, under the falling sun. The tableau impressed Sartaj as always with its gory reddish gigantism and melodrama, with the pressing energy of its very being, it was incomprehensible that such a thing should exist, this Navnagar. And yet here it was, astride Sartaj and towering, crimson-mouthed and real. He turned away. (210)

Again, Sartaj is seen turning and walking away from his role as observer, taking this final look over his shoulder before he turns around. Here, his power as observer, as policeman and enforcer of panoptical power, fails and the panoramic vision of the basti overwhelms Sartaj with its dramatic incomprehensibility. Moreover, the description of Navnagar’s
“crescent” shape of “gigantism” and “melodrama” filled with “pressing energy” suggests that Navnagar serves a synecdoche for the city as a whole.

In his fictional text, Chandra acknowledges the widespread reach of slum labour and products, with Sartaj referring to Navnagar and places like it as ‘the engine that pumped the city into life” (210). Chandra describes Sartaj and Kamble picking their way through the muddy roads of Satguru Nagar:

Five hundred cramped little homes, brick and wood and plastic and tin making small spaces for many bodies […] Sartaj was trying to be careful of his own Italian masterpieces, but if your shoes got dirtied, you had to accept the smear and deal with it. People lived here, and this was their life […] But they didn’t like policemen, these inhabitants of Satguru Nagar. Two teenage boys sat on a ledge between two kholis, their arms intertwined, and they glared at Kazimi [their local police guide], and Sartaj caught the rest of their hostility as we walked past them. A balding grandmother sitting in a doorway, a thali laden with rice grains between her knees, called out to them, ‘What sin are you going to commit today, inspect-tor?’ There was enough stinging contempt just in her ‘tor’ to curdle the milk that she had boiling on the stove side. (613)

The police inspectors here, on their way to arrest a blackmailer, are the objects of scornful stares and must slowly pick their way through the lives of others to accomplish their task—very unlike the quick, agile movements of Ganesh. The glares, undeserved
by Sartaj, but deserved by many of his colleagues, reinforce the blurred lines between criminals and detectives in Bombay.

Themes of corruption, visibility and movement are paralleled in Sartaj’s story. As a police inspector, Sartaj is constantly moving about the city conducting surveillance. In this way, he becomes a commentator on the city, whereas Ganesh is a manipulator; this difference between the men can be understood as the difference between reader and author. Following a section in which Ganesh tells of his creation of his own basti, Gopalmath, Sartaj moves throughout Navnagar, another basti in Bombay. Walking through the streets, Sartaj’s perception of the place lacks judgment, he appears to be a mere gatherer of information, cataloging what he sees:

The road had been recently tarred and maintained, and there was a constant traffic of cycles and scooters. The houses in this part of Navnagar were old and well-established, all of them had good water connections and electricity. Many of them were two and three stories tall, with shops and workshops on the ground floor fronting the street. (208)

Sartaj’s observations remain focused on the exterior, unlike Ganesh’s earlier examination of the police station. Although Sartaj’s police authority provides him access to the insides of these homes, he is most often relegated to the duty of external patrolman—only able to gain access to the inside when he is called in by duty. Thus, his movement through the streets and crowds is necessarily stilted—reinforcing the image of police as coiled and still snakes, rather than freely mobile, slithering through the streets and crowds.
Sartaj as a walker is necessarily a part of the urban rhythm of Bombay, but Chandra acknowledges in this differentiation of movement the variety of rhythms present and observable on the streets, reinforcing the “singularities” that comprise the “swarming mass” (de Certeau 93). Additionally, Sartaj’s description of Navnagar broadens to include a billboard bolstering the idea of Sartaj as the visible and watchable entity:

A face floated above the staggered roofs, huge, luminous brown eyes that went and came from behind the parapets, larger than any of the windows, and there was a gleaming brow touched by blue light, half-open lips and swirling hair, all of it somehow completely weightless and paradisiacal. Sartaj knew that she was only a cunningly lit model on a vast billboard across the main road, but it was distracting to be watched so intently by her. He turned his eyes down and went on. (208)\(^{18}\)

Sartaj’s turning away from his observer marks his discomfort with his own visibility, but his downcast eyes also suggests the inappropriateness of watching a police officer’s surveillance (unlike Saleem, who becomes the Kolynos Kid). The “weightless and paradisiacal” face on the billboard reinforces the unreality and incomprehension that Sartaj experiences observing the overwhelming humanity as it exists in slums such as Navnagar throughout Bombay. Thus, Sartaj feels discomfort as he attempts to see “the

\(^{18}\) The existence of life writ-large on billboards continually reappears in Sartaj’s observations of the city. Life as depicted on billboards is flashier and glossier than ever, and an imposing presence as Sartaj moves about the city. Life depicted on billboards is also static and stationary—mirroring or mocking the stilted trajectory of the police detective through the city.
big picture.’ In other words, he attempts to adopt a summarizing gaze that can help us
distinguish between a panoramic and panoptical gaze.

Sartaj’s inability to comprehend his setting exacerbates his inefficiency as a
storyteller and explains why he does not get to narrate his own story. Instead of panoptic
meaning, Sartaj’s story must remain focused on minute, individual details in order to
make sense of what he sees:

He noticed now that Katekar was carrying a large paper bag full of fresh
pavs, to eat with his family over the next few days. Much of what Katekar
and everyone else ate came from or through Navnagar, and other nagars
like it, Navnagar made clothes and plastic and paper and shoes, it was the
engine that pumped the city into life. (210)

Thus the omniscient narrator can see Navnagar as an engine (a heart) of the city, not
merely a collection of brown and white roofs. Despite the fact that Sartaj is now elevated
and can look down to survey the city, he is not able to access the texturology of the city
that deCerteau describes when he says that an individual must be lifted out of the city and
given a view from above in order to (properly) read a city:

When one goes up there [to the top of the World Trade Center in
Manhattan], he leaves behind the mass that carries off and mixes up in
itself any identity of authors and spectators. […] His elevation transforms
him into voyeur. It puts him at a distance. It transforms the bewitching
world by which one was ‘possessed’ into a text that lies before one’s eyes.
(92).
The roles of walker and voyeur are unified in Chandra’s novel and reveal the limited narrative agency characters have over identity.

4.5 Transnational Bombay

In this final section of my dissertation, I map Ganesh’s transnational border crossings because they reveal an alternative way for characters to exercise agency over their identities other than narrative agency. Chandra’s character, so entrenched in invisible aspects of Bombay life—building networks and neighbourhoods not typically visible to readers of Indian literature in English—is able to expose the intangible networks which connect Bombay to the rest of the world. Ganesh’s criminal activities and his manipulation of his invisibility to authorities enable him to cross national borders and participate in the global economy, from which the hegemonic State would exclude him.

Although his criminal activities force him to leave Bombay and operate his gang from aboard a yacht docked in Thai waters (not unlike the real-life Bombay mobsters who move their bases of operations to Dubai20), he is never far from the dream of the city. Here in international waters, Ganesh recognizes the forces of economic globalization acting upon his crew—forces that simultaneously bolster the appeal of Bombay and thus emphasize the equality of local-to-global and global-to-local

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19 An earlier version of the ideas and portions of this section can be found in my chapter “Mumbai, Slumbai: Transnationalism and Postcolonialism in Urban Slums” in Transnationalism, Activism, Art (Kit Dobson and Aine McGlynn, eds. 2013).

movements of ideas, goods, and people that contribute to the definitions of Bombay’s cultural identity:

When they were back home, in Bombay, all the boys begged for foreign service. They wanted the foreign jeans, and the foreign girls, and the salaries in foreign currency. They had competed with each other to come to Thailand, to my yacht and my overseas operations, and demonstrated their eagerness and hard work and commitment every hour. But after a month or two or five in these alien waters, they always grew sour. They became sullen. Their bodies missed Bombay. I know, because after a year away from Mumbai I still got attacks of yearning, I craved the spittle-strewn streets of that great whore of a city. (537)

The lure of generic ‘foreign’ commodities displaces America or any particular nation as the centre of power behind globalization, and allows every local home to become a centre in search of exotic peripheries. For Ganesh and his boys, the unspecified foreign reinforces the equality of movement identifiable through transnationalism, allowing Chandra to upset the Western-oriented view of globalization and keep his novel focused on Bombay.21 The idea that an original source of culture does not exist or can never be located is exemplified by Chandra’s gangsters, who continually watch gangster movies to

21 This polyvocality is reinforced by the novel’s alternating first-person narration by Sartaj and Ganesh and by the absence of an omniscient authorial narrative voice.
inform their own gangsterism even as they are involved in making Bollywood films, which will, in turn continue to craft the mythology of their own beloved city.\footnote{In an interview, Chandra acknowledges that this element of the text is also based on the real-life connection between gangsters and film: “I’m generally interested in this kind of active self-fashioning,” he says in an interview, “but in reference to policing and the underworld, it became something I felt I couldn’t ignore....My portrayal has a basis in fact, too: the image that I give of the underworld don Suleiman Isa watching the Godfather trilogy repeatedly, that is true of a real gangster and was told to me by one of his associates. I think that the connection between them [gangsters and film] goes beyond the merely financial to something mythological, again producing meaning” (Chambers 47).}

Also implicit in this passage is a critique of postcoloniality as a desire for exoticized goods which inspires Ganesh to reveal his vexed feelings about the city of Bombay that he calls home. The gangsters’ desire for foreign goods is incapable of replacing a desire for a local home that is “spittle-strewn” and a “whore”—a stark contrast to Rushdie’s utopian nostalgia for the city. Chandra’s portrayal of transnational market currents reveals non-hierarchical exchanges of legal and illegal goods, services, people, and ideas based on demand, not hegemonic power. Through criminal heroes like Ganesh, the exchanges that take place as part of legal globalization are seen to be codependent with the illegal black market that enables currency and individuals to move across national borders more freely than the laws of nation-states allow, while still retaining their identities as Bombayites. This codependence is further problematized by the challenges that slum dwellers make (both inside and outside of texts) to the categorization of people as ‘illegal’ by various political agencies.

\textit{Sacred Games} juxtaposes this transnational economy of desire and crime alongside the rise of the Shiv Sena into Bombay’s political landscape. As discussed at various points throughout my project, the Sena began accumulating power in the 1960s...
following the division of India into states based on linguistic borders as part of the nation’s decolonization. Bombay was initially divided between two states—Gujarat and Maharashtra. As the city grew into an economic capital of India, the Sena emerged, under the leadership of Bal Thackeray, claiming that Bombay rightfully belonged to Maharashtrians. By the 1980s, the Shiv Sena had organized itself as a political party based on a platform of ethnocentrism and religious intolerance, which can be seen as a reaction against globalization and the ideals of multiculturalism that the Sena believes have taken power away from the Hindu Maharashtrians. Thus, the Sena crafts a hegemonic narrative defining Bombay. It also simultaneously exemplifies the fact that transnationalism is not limited to a local-to-global trajectory and that global-to-local currents are equally important to Bombay’s social landscape, in that the Sena is a seemingly isolated local group that depends on global migration to produce its political platform. This is where the novel demands, and transnationalism enables, a postcolonial reading that considers the politics presented or alluded to in the novel without privileging one particular political critique or hegemonic narrative over another. The result is a version of Bombay that Chandra’s characters accept with resignation, as opposed to Rushdie’s characters’ nostalgia and need to escape the city, or the pessimism of Mistry’s characters.

The Shiv Sena imagines economic disparity as a crime against local Marathi victims; it often seeks retribution from individual culprits (i.e., local Muslim shopowners and residents) and gains most of its support from slum communities. Outside of novels, journalist Kalpana Sharma encounters evidence of this perception of victimization and ethnocentric reaction in the growing generational gap among residents of Dharavi (one of
the largest slums in all of Asia). Sharma explains that “in a sense, what is happening in Dharavi is not very different from the changes taking place in many small towns in India. The big city is forcing a breakdown of social and caste barriers yet politics is forcing communities into becoming more insular and conservative” (72). The slums, then, serve as a nexus for the local and global forces that interact through transnational currents; they also reveal the falsity of perceiving these forces as isolated from or subordinate to one another. The dire consequences of this local backlash, which has its origins in the idealization of an isolated indigenous community, can be seen in the 1992–3 riots, which were sparked by the destruction of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya.

These riots plagued Bombay but were not confined to the city. Chandra shows the destruction of one particular slum during the riots as a metaphor for the lines that have been drawn between communities. The riots are depicted from Ganesh’s point of view as he returns to the city to protect his gang’s territory. Ganesh explains: “During a lull in my own war I had left my home, and came back to find my home the battleground for a larger conflict. They, somebody, had drawn borders through my vatan. My neighbours were now refugees” (366). Ganesh recognizes that although he had been fighting a gang war in the streets of the city, it had not disrupted the neighbourhood community. However, the communal riots alienated residents by allowing non-local anger to manifest itself locally: neighbours had drawn lines based on religion and had driven out certain members of their once-united community and Gopalmath is no longer the close-knit quilt he had described earlier (109).

Chandra stresses the invisibility and fictionality of these communal lines by depicting Ganesh as viewing the riot-torn streets from above. Despite his elevated
position, Ganesh gains neither insight into nor control over the situation. Flying into Bombay after the riots have begun, Ganesh feels that he is no longer a “king but an impotent clown,” unable to protect the slum neighbourhood that he helped create. He and his entourage look helplessly out the window as their plane descends:

From the muddy coast-line emerged a scattering of islands, and then I could see clearly roads, buildings, the shape of colonies and the spreading brown patches of bastis. From behind [me and my wife] I could hear the boys arguing, ‘That’s Andheri there.’ ‘Maderpat, where Andheri? That’s Madh island, can’t you see?’ Then they were all quiet. A thick black snake of smoke grew from a coastline settlement and twisted in towards the centre, towards another dark, curving fume—the city was burning.

From the airplane, Ganesh and his gang are powerless and ignorant—they can no more protect their neighbours from the flames than they can properly identify the city’s districts without artificial map lines. Theirs is not the privileged, imagined view of Saleem winging across the city and able to name all the sites he passes. Instead of creating a Foucauldian panopticon or tower-perch from which to view the circumstances, Ganesh’s elevated views reinforce the blindness that accompanies this height, thereby eliminating any suggestion that there is a power hierarchy to be ascended. Their impotence and the city’s anonymity in this situation together reinforce the fiction of a power hierarchy drawn between local and global people or places. Instead, this scene reinforces the importance of visibility in transnational currents and acknowledging the existence of multiple Bombay narratives: from high above, all sections of the city are
equally invisible to the viewer. From this perspective, slums are not uniquely singled out as they are in government housing policy, which often focuses on demolishing them.

The city government’s hegemonic narrative of Bombay’s slum spaces began seeking alternative methods for improving living conditions in the 1970s, beginning with the Maharashtra Slum Areas Improvement, Clearance, and Redevelopment Act in 1971, which allowed the government to improve slums instead of simply demolishing them. But it was not until the decision in a 1985 Supreme Court case that slum residents began to be protected from eviction. Following the injustices of the Emergency, which ended in 1977, a petition to the Supreme Court argued that slum dwellers “were citizens of the country with the same rights as everyone else and […] by not providing them alternative accommodation [after demolishing slums], the State was denying them the right to life because they could not work if they had nowhere to live” (Sharma Rediscovering Dharavi16). Thus, the housing crisis in Bombay centres on the struggle to recreate the right to housing already guaranteed in the UN Declaration of Universal Human Rights. According to Gita Dewan Verma, these rights have been manipulated and reinterpreted away from an understanding of the right to an adequate standard of living and have been limited to the ‘right to stay’ by the Bombay city government (Slumming India: a Chronicle of an Indian Slum 66-80). Under what Verma identifies as the ‘shadow charter of rights,’ the conversation over housing rights has been taken out of the UN’s global

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23 Article 25, Section 1, states: ‘Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control.’ Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, ‘The Universal Declaration of Human Rights,’ Official UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 10 December 1948, [http://www.unhchr.ch/udhr/lang/eng.htm](http://www.unhchr.ch/udhr/lang/eng.htm), accessed 6 September 2008.
context, restricted to the city’s own housing crisis, and limited to the physical conditions of dwellings and land rights.

So, while there has been an evolution in the language used in the Bombay plans for its slums (from ‘demolition’ to ‘rehabilitation’ and ‘redevelopment’), the pernicious notion of ‘relocation’ often remains part of the solution, because the government perceives slum dwellers as non-residents who do not have valid claims over the city land on which they live. Thus, they can easily be removed from those lands. Notably, this attitude defies the international operational definition of slums as outlined by the UN; while that definition focuses primarily on the physical conditions of dwellings, it also includes ‘insecure residential status’ as an essential characteristic of slums. Consequently, the Brinhanmumbai (née Bombay) Municipal Corporation (BMC) need only try to provide specific amenities to improve the quality of life instead of trying to solve the root causes of the problem. Vandana Desai summarizes the government disconnect from slums:

The BMC is considered to be the most affluent and one of the most efficient local bodies in India. Its scale of investment is both the highest in the region and the highest in the country for a municipal body. Its range of services is wider than that of any other city corporation [...] The BMC has, however, not been involved directly in public housing or slum

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24 The UN Human Settlements Programme, UN-HABITAT, defines a slum as ‘an area that combines, to various extents, the following characteristics: inadequate access to safe water; inadequate access to sanitation and other infrastructure; poor structural quality of housing; overcrowding; insecure residential status.’ In The Challenge of Slums: Global Report on Human Settlements (London and Sterling, VA: Earthscan, 2003), 12.
upgrading on a major scale except for staff housing or the provision of
facilities to slums on its own lands [...] The maintenance of improved
slums was seen as a problem of inadequate subventions from the
government rather than of civic obligation to slum-dwellers. (115-16)

In other words, city residents may be exiled from the city based solely on the physical
state of their dwellings. This has allowed the BMC to separate itself from the more
difficult-to-define social characteristics that define and create slums. In other words, the
BMC justifies the lack of assistance it provides slum dwellers by laying blame for the
housing crisis on the Indian government’s lack of financial support to the lower classes.

When the scope of the debate is limited to local circumstances and the (il)legality
of slum residents, the struggle for housing rights in Bombay is limited thereby to a
fundamentally flawed debate (a flaw that groups such as ‘No One Is Illegal’ are
attempting to rectify). To gain the status of ‘legal resident,’ and thereby legitimize their
claims to the local government for housing rights, slum dwellers must produce paper
records, such as identity cards or utility bills. For example, in 1976, while attempting to
gather census data from all of the slums, the city gave out photo passes to participants,
which thus provided secure tenancy to some residents while many were left out. The
BMC has been struggling since the 1970s to distinguish between “authorized” and
“unauthorized” slums and residents. Another struggle: identity cards are gained by
participating in infrequent and often incomplete censuses (though now these cards are
also bought and sold on the black market), and slum residents often rely on illegal means
to gain utilities such as electricity, paying the local slumlord to provide them with illegal
services. Additionally, inhabitants must establish that their residency began before a
particular date; as it stands now, inhabitants only qualify as residents eligible for relocation and rehabilitation programs if they can prove that they have lived in a slum since 1995. Appadurai warns that

their inability to document their claims to housing may snowball into a general invisibility in urban life, making it impossible for them to claim any rights to such things as rationed foods, municipal health and education facilities, police protection, and voting rights. In a city where ration cards, electricity bills, and rent receipts guarantee other rights to the benefits of citizenship, the inability to secure claims to proper housing and other political handicaps reinforce each other. (“Deep Democracy” 27)

This double-bind not only renders new slum residents invisible to the government but also handicaps the government’s attempts at solving the city’s housing crisis. Harini Narayanan summarizes the government’s failure to meet residents’ housing needs as a bureaucratic problem:

though India has a multitude of land use laws and policies that purport to ensure a base level shelter for all its citizens, the two (i.e. the legislative framework and complementary policy instruments) have very rarely been blended effectively to produce a far-sighted and implementable set of tools that can actually result in concrete and dramatic changes on the ground. (184).

He goes on to conclude that “until fundamental problems relating to the implementation of existing housing policies are addressed and corrected, the existence or otherwise of
legislation like the [Urban Land Ceiling and Regulation Act] on the law books will make no difference to the lives of Bombay’s poor and homeless” (205).

The constantly shifting line between the visible and the invisible—the legal and the illegal—unites Bombay slum residents in an internationally recognized struggle for universal housing rights. The questions raised by activists and by Chandra remain: When do urban poverty and impoverished living conditions become urban blight targeted for demolition by government agencies? And how do slum communities become no more than faceless statistics representing crime and poverty? The history of the housing rights struggle within slums provides part of the answer. The fight for slum dwellers’ rights has been marked by contestations over citizenship claims—that is, by struggles to separate out the legal dwellers from the illegal. Historically, unauthorized (i.e., illegal) residents have been forcibly erased from cities by demolition crews. Gregory David Roberts depicts slum demolitions in Shantaram, but he does not elaborate on the casualties caused by the BMC’s attempts to demolish the illegal slum; however, images of the tragedies caused by the demolition of Bombay’s slums can be found in works as diverse as Salman Rushdie’s Midnight’s Children, Rohinton Mistry’s A Fine Balance, and documentaries like Anand Patwardhan’s Bombay, our City. In these texts, emphasis is placed on the irreversible displacement of families and on the destruction of all their worldly possessions. Slum demolition destroys lives, not just houses. The consequences of demolition are not adequately represented by Roberts’s brief assertion that “the people had just enough time to gather the bare essentials—babies, money, papers.” (Shantaram 261). Although this statement reinforces the futility of demolition, it does so by
suggesting that victims are left with their essentials and, after this inconvenience, can rebuild their dwellings.

This divide between legal and illegal residents manifests as Ganesh’s difficulty protecting his neighbourhood from the riots. Chandra depicts an harmonious idealized village untroubled by its connection to illegal activity, but it is a doomed space. Anosh Irani, alternatively, presents a much more heartbreaking image of life in the crowded, illegal residences of Bombay. His child protagonist in Song of Kahunsha is a brutalized child who is forced to participate in the riots by helping to lock families in their homes.

The exclusion of certain city residents from city planning and bureaucracy is compounded by a more comprehensive erasure of slums from the city through the identification of slums as urban villages. This categorization reinforces slums as isolated local spaces and implies a reversal of the BMC’s assertion that slums are a national problem rather than a municipal one. The conception of slums as urban villages continually emerges in texts, from Rajesh Gill’s sociological study Slums as Urban Villages (1994) to Suketu Mehta’s description of community bonds, wherein ‘we forget that out of inhospitable surroundings, [slum dwellers] form a community, and they are attached to its spatial geography, the social networks they have built for themselves, the village they have created in the midst of’ Jogeshwari (59). This perception of slums as reconstructed villages abounds, but isolating the slums as villages within the city constitutes a refusal to acknowledge the larger forces at work—forces that contribute to the growth and persistence of slums. This perception ignores the current plight faced in Indian villages at the national level: the majority of slum residents migrate to cities from villages, where the living conditions not only may be worse but also are often utterly without hope. Immigrants flock to Mumbai in droves, looking for economic opportunity, and often find it: sociologists A.R Desai and S.D. Pillai have found that while slums “are among the most overcrowded localities in Bombay,” they “are also among the oldest business localities” (41). Thus, the city has come to depend on the labour provided by slum residents. Kalpana Sharma explains:

In previous decades, the ‘pull’ factor of cities was seen as a problem which had to be deflected by developing the countryside and thereby negating the lure of cities. By the 1980s it was clear that the poor who came into cities were not just gainfully employed but provided essential services which cities needed. An informal census of Dharavi, for instance, revealed that only 10 per cent of the people were unemployed. In the absence of a welfare system, none of them were living off the State. Thus, they provided for themselves and for the city through their labour. (18-19)

Sharma’s assertion is particularly insightful because it acknowledges that slum residents are a self-sufficient and industrious group—countering all stereotypes of the urban poor, and making them, whether illegal or legal, a visible, active, and indispensable part of the urban fabric. Sacred Games works to recuperate the image of slum residents. In his fictional text, Chandra acknowledges the widespread reach of slum labour and products, with Sartaj referring to Navnagar and places like it as “the engine that pumped the city into life” (210).
and burning them to the ground. Irani’s narrative bears little resemblance to the aestheticized violence of *The Moor’s Last Sigh* or *Sacred Games*. It also exacerbates the fact that Chandra distances his characters from the horrors of the violence of 1992-1993. Ganesh is away when these burnings occur, and his experiences of violence are largely limited to romanticized gangsterism.

Chandra’s *Sacred Games* draws our attention to numerous politicized issues and creates a space for readers to examine and question the power relationships that make up the struggles over citizenship and housing rights in Bombay, and to challenge our understandings of cultural commodities, globalization, and postcolonialism. Just as postcolonialism sheds light on particular identity struggles that arise out of colonization, transnationalism enables us to read these texts and consider the various power relationships within them without becoming complicit in a transfer of power by allowing texts to be dominated by their (artificial) market value. Transnationalism deprioritizes the power struggles that define the local–global relationships in both globalization and postcolonialism. Reading global–local relationships transnationally implies that while it is significant that we are aware of subjects (in this case, slum residents) being commodified and fighting against commodification, it is also vital that we, as readers, recognize and analyse that situation without participating in or reinforcing the hierarchy. This process liberates the subjects from a postcolonial writing back, as well as from centre/periphery, victimized/victimizing, oppressor/oppressed binaries, because we can map all of these relationships in order to see that the binaries are not mutually exclusive but rather are codependent. This is not to say that the oppressed slum residents are complicit in allowing the relationship—that they give power to their oppressors—but
rather that it is not a question of gaining power at all. If postcolonial readings of anti-colonial struggles have taught us anything, it is the need to explore without restricting either group to a categorical identity. Chandra presents rich and complex images of India and Bombay that continue to challenge identity categories. Thus, he only exoticizes the slums insofar as we as readers allow him to; he only idealizes them as much as we let him. The slum residents do not actively participate in these representations, they are merely depicted in them, and so are neither fighting against nor lobbying for the textual portrayals. When the power struggle is eliminated from the debate, the call to adequate housing as a universal human right gains strength and visibility in these works of art.

4.6 Conclusions

Chandra refuses to idealize the ‘whore of a city’ for which Ganesh and his men long; indeed, the very word ‘whore’ emphasizes Bombay as a place of illegal and indecent transactions, as something at once selling itself and being exploited by the sale. By mapping this city through the movements of sympathetic albeit criminal protagonists, and by locating part of the narratives within a slum, Chandra sheds new light on the unstable, illegal status and invisibility of individuals constructed by Bombay narratives. Much like the criminals who operate on both local and global levels, the individuals engaged in the struggles for housing rights in Bombay are participating in a global fight for human rights; this is their attempt to gain visibility as citizens (not illegal inhabitants) of the city, the nation-state, and the world—even when their ambitions and concerns do not appear to extend beyond the condition of local dwellings.
The movement through city streets and spaces depicted in *Sacred Games* provides the reader with an intimately-detailed panoramic view of Bombay that forces the conclusion that even from above/outside, perspectives of the city—the maps and the narratives—are always only partial. The importance of investigating such incomplete constructions of a city can be understood in terms of the need to “come to terms with how ordinary social life is configured in urban India, how localities and identities are produced there” as Thomas Blöm Hansen calls for in his introduction to *Wages of Violence* (6). For Chandra’s characters, the in comprehensibility of Bombay helps them to understand the urban alienation they experience. Consequently, the artifice of crafting an identity-defining narrative—such as the fictional autobiography of Ganesh Gaitonde and the biographical narrative of Sartaj Singh—reveals the recursive relationship between individuals and the city, even if the individuals are not actively authoring meaning through their narrative agency, like Rushdie’s first-person narrators. In other words, the identities of Bombay are written through the movement of individuals just as they are written through the memories of these characters, and the nostalgic retelling of those memories. Ganesh and Sartaj reveal narratives about themselves that simultaneously define the city and narratives about the city that define themselves.

*Sacred Games* publicizes the transnational networks that emerge as gangsters are shown living in city slums and working both within the city and across national borders. It depicts how slum dwellers and gangsters struggle equally against national and metropolitan citizenship regulations that segregate illegal from legal activities. While representations of the local activities of Bombay’s slum dwellers often suggest that this is a local community isolated from global networks, the representations of the
international criminal activities of gangsters demonstrate how transnationalism re-
empowers invisible urban residents. Chandra’s characters, however, remain part of the
economically and socially privileged members of society. As such, they are powerful
members of Bombay, even if they are sometimes invisible to global audiences. Thus, he
portrays extraordinary elements and characters as something other than peripheral to
Bombay. Through his presentation of the extraordinary as a normative part of everyday
life, Chandra erases the distinctions between the visible and the invisible aspects of
Bombay society and forces us to reconsider where the margins are and who inhabits
them.
5
Conclusion

“Shakespeare is like Bombay. In them both, you can find whatever you need—they contain the universe.” Rohinton Mistry, *Family Matters*

“Bombay is the future of urban civilization on the planet. God help us.” Suketu Mehta, *Maximum City: Bombay Lost and Found*

“Everyone has a Bombay story, a Bombay they want represented. And everyone’s Bombay is not the Bombay we thought we knew.” Jerry Pinto and Naresh Gernandes, “Introduction: The Lived City” in *Bombay Meri Jaan*

Bombay novels are concerned with how postcolonial individuals imagine the city and their place in it, as well as how these imagined identities are themselves constructed in narratives. The imaginative (re)constructions of the city emphasize the limitations of narrative agency as well as the multiplicity and competition between the narratives that create Bombay’s identities. These novels present Bombay as an imagined city comprised of coexisting, contradictory narratives. The novels of Rushdie, Mistry, and Chandra reveal, as I have shown, the different ways that the conflicts between the city’s identities impinge on the private spaces and personal narratives of the characters. Characters, in turn, define themselves based upon their identification with Bombay as they struggle to make their voices heard amidst both the city’s dense population and its crowd of stories. Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* and *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* reveal how individual narratives are made to dominate definitions of space as his first-person narrators are seen manipulating time, space, and memories from protected,
private spaces in which they are distanced from the city that is central to their individual identities and to their narratives. Mistry’s Parsi characters in *Such a Long Journey* and *Family Matters* present individuals with almost no power to exercise narrative agency and, consequently, they must learn other means for negotiating the overwhelming crush of identity narratives that exist in Bombay and impinge upon their private spaces. They often attempt to do this through their everyday actions. Chandra’s *Sacred Games* expands the range of characters visible in Bombay novels by using the threat of nuclear holocaust and the relationships between mob bosses and police in order to sensationalise characters’ engagements with hegemonic narratives. Chandra’s novel reveals how typically elided characters reinscribe themselves into Bombay’s spaces. The versions of Bombay these novelists produce are at once nostalgic, utopian, and pessimistic, at a time when contemporary non-fiction narratives about the city are primarily just pessimistic.

The investigation of Bombay that I undertake reveals that the narrative perspective in novels causes the continued erasure of communities and individuals from Bombay’s landscape, even as it reveals the city’s plurality. To the extent that they are given voice in narrative, the perspectives presented in the texts of Chandra, Mistry, and Rushdie are always privileged, regardless of whether they are from the point of view of criminals, police detectives, fathers, children, upper-class businessmen, or homeless beggars. Whether or not it is possible for a character to exercise narrative agency within a novel set in Bombay and not be relegated to the literary realm of magical realism (where magical events occur and the dead can speak for themselves) is a question left unanswered by Rushdie and Chandra and is the source of Mistry’s pessimism regarding Bombay. Nevertheless, the various degrees of literary realism found in the novels of Rushdie, Chandra, and Mistry reinforce the importance of an individual’s ability to rewrite their own sense of identity, personal history, and agency. Thus, I have argued, the
narrative artifice and literariness of their novels offer a helpful starting point for developing a strategy for reading Bombay narratives that does not reproduce the exclusionary, singular, and hegemonic identity narratives that are often constructed to both obscure and control the objective reality of Bombay. With this framework in place, the next step is an examination of the way similar narrative modes and techniques for constructing the city and depicting individual negotiation of its spaces and identities are evident throughout the wide range of Bombay novels. For example, the work representing more traditionally socially-marginalized individuals (i.e., beggars, gangsters, prostitutes, homosexuals, etc) in Anosh Irani, Anita Desai, R. Raj Rao, and Ardashir Vakil demand consideration, as does the work of Thrity Umrigar, Manil Suri, and Kiran Nagarkar, to name just a few of the Bombay novelists writing in English who are under-represented in the archive of literary criticism. The spectrum of protagonists who appear in Bombay literature and the alienation they experience force us to reconsider where the margin is, who inhabits it, and how they narrate it.

When I began this project, the studies of Bombay novels as a distinct category of literature were an unpublished dissertation and a handful of essays on the topic by Roshan Shahani (1995), Nulifer Bharucha (1993), Vidyut Bhagvat (1995), and Shirin Kudchedkar (1995), and Claudia Anderson (2001, though unavailable). Since then, Priyamvada Gopal’s book chapter in *The Indian English Novel: Nation, History, and Narration* (2009) and the dissertations of Caroline Herbert (2006) and Esra Mirze (2010) have made the biggest contributions to the field of Bombay novels. Like many of the other approaches to Bombay in novels which do not read them as a genre, these readings focus specifically on the migrancy of characters—prefacing the experiences of Bombay with the characters’ postcolonial conceptions of Empire and, often, their relationships to London. As for nonfiction sociological and historical accounts of the city, Gyan Prakash’s *Mumbai Fables* (2010), Suketu Mehta’s *Maximum City*
(2005) and Govind Narayan’s *Mumbai* (2009) were all published after my project commenced. They have made significant contributions to the historical readings of the city, in particular Prakash’s contemporary historical overview which supplants the out-dated and limited histories that tended to read Bombay history as a singular linear trajectory. In the social sciences in recent decades, significant advancements for understanding Bombay’s postcolonial architecture and politics have been made by Jane Jacob’s *Edge of Empire* (1996), Thomas Blöm Hansen’s *Wages of Violence* (2005), Arjun Appadurai’s series of articles (2000, 2002, 2004, 2006), and the essay collections edited by Sujata Patel, Alice Thorner, and Jim Masselos. *Bombay: Metaphor for Modern India* (1996), *Bombay: Mosaic of Modern Culture* (1995), and *Bombay and Mumbai: The City in Transition* (2003) have helped to redefine the way we understand the numerous, competing, postcolonial narrative constructions of pre-1995 Bombays and the post-1995 Mumbais. Not until Ranjani Mazumdar’s *Bombay Cinema* (2007) has the discussion turned specifically towards how audiences are reading texts set in Bombay. Mazumdar’s work uses Bombay cinema to understand how the imagining of the Indian urban has changed through the twentieth century based on texts specifically filmed and set in Bombay, and then her argument extrapolates out to more generalized notions of the Indian urban. The need for criticism that emphasizes how to read Bombay, specifically, as something other than a static, mimetic representation of objective reality or as a national allegory seems long overdue (especially if we consider how many critical works are dedicated to the exposition of literary representations of London). At this point in time, my project has been necessarily limited to a consideration of the narrative artifice and individual interiority which govern access to constructions of Bombay in literature, but my projects in the future will continue to elaborate on the literary representations of Bombay’s postcolonial spaces and identities.
The danger of not having a reading strategy for Bombay narratives is revealed in the reception of recent non-fiction depictions of the city. The current trend in publishing has promoted non-fiction works written like novels and set in Bombay. Suketu Mehta’s *Maximum City*, Katherine Boo’s *Behind the Beautiful Forevers*, Sonia Faleiro’s *Beautiful Thing* are perhaps the most notable because of the large number of reviews that make them visible to the reading public. Boo’s and Faleiro’s books in particular reveal an important shift in the reading practices of the audiences consuming narratives about Bombay in English because they are continually compared to novels.¹ In *The Virginia Quartley Review*, Jeff Sharlet argues that non-fiction works are increasingly being read as, or at least, lauded for their proximity to, novels. His review of Boo’s *Behind the Beautiful Forevers* approaches the work based on his experiences teaching it to undergraduates and questions what it means that the book is being marketed with blurbs by David Sedaris lauding the text for reading “like a novel”. He argues that for a work to be “like a novel” is a reassurance to “the reader that the suffering documented on every page isn’t what matters. It’s the experience. The reader’s, that is. This book will make you feel close to that suffering, but not too close” (n.p.).² The point is, the formal construction of novels—their narrativity and fictionality—impose a critical distance on their subjects. The goal of my dissertation is to offer an approach to literary depictions of Bombay that focuses on this formal narrative construction of imagined Bombays and its inhabitants by examining the depictions of

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¹ This trend is not limited to Bombay literature: Aman Sethi’s *A Free Man* (which examines the lives of houseless, contract labourers in Delhi) and Siddharta Deb’s *The Beautiful and the Damned: Life in New India* encounter similar critiques.

² Martha Nussbaum criticizes Boo’s work for this lack of a call to activism in her own review in *The Times Literary Supplement* (10 October 2012).
everyday spaces, narrative perspectives, and agency, and, in so doing, discourages reading any of these texts in search of authentic, mimetic, and/or static representations of Bombay, Mumbai, or its residents.
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Appendix A: Bombay Novels in English (including Juvenile, Memoirs, Pulp and Travel Narratives)*

*I include these other forms of literature under the category of “Bombay Novels” to make this list inclusive, rather than an exclusive list which discriminates against texts based on literary aesthetics.


---.  *St. Cyril Road and Other Poems*.


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