Reconstructing, re-imagining: South Asia through alternative gazes

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আমায় ডুবাইলিরে আমায় ভাসাইলিরে
অকুল দরীয়ায় বুঝি কুল নাইরে...

amay bhasaili re, amay dubaili re.
okul doriar bujhi kul nai re

At times you've drowned me
At times you've drifted me afloat.
O unbound river, your encounters seem to be forever limitless[i]

Jasimuddin (Bengali folklore poet), n.d.

While concluding the editorial of the volume, 'Picturing south Asian culture in English: Textual and visual representations' (Shakur, T and D'Souza K: 2003), the editors strongly felt that a homogenised representation of South Asia continued to persist in the West, despite the phenomenal growth of regional culture in post-colonial South Asian nation states. Turning the gaze to the lesser-researched cultural and literary development of diasporic South Asian communities of Britain, America and the African continent also indicated the emergence of more diverse identities. As an off-shoot of this volume (ibid) and these findings, an on-line journal, 'South Asian Cultural Studies' (SACS), was launched in 2006, involving a number of South Asian academics from all over the world, with one of the main objectives being to interrogate the impact of traditional cultural practices on the evolution of diasporic communities, including trans-national cultures and their changing relationships within specific and distinct host communities.

Some eight years on, as more insightful articles and commentaries started pouring into the journal from South Asia, Africa and non-English speaking regions of Europe, an international 'South Asian Cultural Studies' (SACS) workshop was jointly organised in January 2014 with Professor Nuzhat Kazmi of Jamia Millia University, entitled '*Imaging south Asian culture in non-English: Re-constructing popular textual and visual representations*'. This two-day workshop intended to revisit South Asian popular cultural themes by removing the 'Englishness'. Encompassing a wide range of cultural elements – from history, through archaeology, to cinema and language – the overriding objective of the conference was to explore the representations, and *re-representations* of South Asia through languages other than English, or indeed, as Pennycook refers to them, languages *othered* by English (2001: 145). It is worth unpacking precisely what the authors understand by 'removing' the Englishness. Here, English is not simply the language in which certain elements of popular culture have been written, but in a larger, metaphorical sense, representative of the colonial gaze that has dominated the ways in which South Asian culture has been framed,

analysed and interpreted. Exploring *non*-English representations is thus an opportunity to provide alternative understandings of an area of the world all too frequently subjected to a homogenizing narrative. In other words, the conference sought to explore how the construction and representation of South Asian culture could be *imaged* differently, when viewed from angles that attempted to reject the colonial gaze.

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'*History is riddled with Eurocentric racialist assumptions' (Rasheed Araeen, 2002: 334)*

South Asian English texts may have currency with a section of the South-Asian middle class population, but still have not reached the overwhelming majority living in rural areas, where Vedic, Mughal and other indigenous cultures are still in practice. There, Balmiki, Mahabharata or Akbarnama are still more popular than Rudyard Kipling's 'Jungle Book' or E.M. Forster's 'Passage to India'. Certainly, the representations, identity and portrayal of south Asian cultures (through the British Raj and during the post-colonial period) have often been constructed and exoticised through romantic colonial narratives such as those mentioned above, and such literature suffers from a condescending portrayal of South Asian characters both in the colonial and post-colonial periods. Yet, the literature in popular circulation in large parts of South Asia hails from very different roots.

Such Non-English texts are often disregarded or unaddressed in Western academia. Tagore and Satyajit Ray may be more popular in the West and urban South Asia, but philosophical/romantic/rebel poets and novelists like Iqbal, Kazi Nazrul Islam, Faiz Ahmed Faiz or Prem Chand may provide more authentic depictions of South Asian people's popular cultures in Bengali, Urdu and Hindi, for example. Revisiting early 20th century south Asian regional poems, songs, novels and fictions, one can argue that the work of rebel/romantic poet Kazi Nazrul Islam constitutes the notions of 'hybridity' and 'postmodernity': one is reminded, for example, of his 1920s poem *Chakrobak* (The Swan: see Kamal, 2013 for a translation). He lived in Calcutta and travelled the mighty rivers of East Bengal but wrote songs in a very different 'Ghazal' style. Unfortunately, because markers of 'hybridity' or 'postmodernity' are often only attributed to situations in which the hybrid itself involves in someway English or European languages, his work goes often unnoticed.

Building on this idea, in her abstract for the 'Imaging south Asian culture in non-English' Sophie Kelly warns of potential issues that arise when attempting read the chosen poetry through the esoteric and inherently Western lenses of postcolonial theory (Kelly, S: 20: 2014).

> *'Postcolonialism as a theoretic [sic.] framework, for its inherently automatic assumptions that to lack an English voice is to lack any sort of autonomy on the global literary stage, is thus made redundant when the success of the south Asian writer need no longer be decided within the spheres of the white, English language in order to attain literary success. And further, how do we define these works which refuse to be reduced to [...] theories of Orientalism, Othering, Hybridity or Subaltern studies?*

Such a stance certainly raises questions about the Westernised underpinnings of postcolonial critique itself.

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This special issue is, in many ways, the natural cumulating point of the discussions first sparked in the 2014 conference. It is, furthermore, particularly timely: in August of last year, India and Pakistan celebrated their 70th year of Independence, which prompted a proliferation of output in the UK media, particularly through documentaries and films. The popular British representation of the events of 1947 persistently underemphasises the country's role in the tragic outcome of partition, and films such as *Viceroy's House* (2017)*, Victoria and Abdul* (2017) and *Darkest Hour* (2018) have been rightly criticised for romanticising and whitewashing British colonialism. Indeed, as Shashi Tharoor writes in his insightful *Inglorious Empire: What the British did to India,* "[t]hese days there appears to be a return in England to yearning for the Raj…" (2017: 20). He goes on to support Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn's calls to "start teaching unromanticised colonial history in British schools" (ibid), lamenting that "the British public is woefully ignorant of the realities of the British empire, and what it meant to its subject peoples". Of course, the Brexit/Leave rhetoric that surrounded EU referendum was largely shaped by such a lingering imperial nostalgia, one which remembers the British Empire as a benevolent force for good, and something which 59% of respondents to a 2014 YouGov poll cited as "something to be proud of" (Dahlgreen: 2014). One is also reminded of the Telegraph's 2005 vocal appeal to raise money for Civitas' republishing of H.E. Marshall's *Our Island Story*, and drive to re-launch *Our Empire Story* two years later – books which present undeniably whitewashed re-tellings of the Battle of Plassey, among many other colonial atrocities. Yet, in the wake of Brexit, such misinformed claims are being more frequently, and more emphatically, challenged. Certainly, there is a dangerously strong right-wing presence that continues to both sway and shape public opinion, but there is also the distinct rumble of dissent on the wind.

This was particularly noticeable in the debate surrounding the call to decolonise the English curriculum at Cambridge University, one that the editors of this special issue followed with great interest. It began with an open letter, written by the Cambridge Student Union Women's Officer, Lola Olufemi, and signed by hundreds of students and academics. In the letter, Olufemi calls on the University's English department to take an active role in the dismantling of institutional racism by including not only more diversity in terms of authors, but also by incorporating more postcolonial thought. The latter is a crucial part of the drive to decolonise. It is not enough to simply add Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) voices to the debate; the ways in which we read, interpret and interact with texts also needs to be interrogated if we are to truly attempt to decolonise our teaching and readdress power dynamics that linger within, and indeed shape, our institutions. As Priyamvada Gopal writes in her Guardian article on the subject, "decolonisation is not just about bringing in minority texts but also how we read "traditional" texts" (Gopal, 2017: para 11). That is, one must also question the frames and epistemological groundings that impact our reading.

Such an endeavour did not, however, escape the inevitable backlash from the right-wing media. Following the publication, Olufemi became the victim of vicious

online harassment, with many media outlets distorting the objectives of the open letter. The Telegraph ran the headline, "Student forces Cambridge to drop white authors" on its front page, accompanied by a picture of Olufemi. Yet, the letter itself reiterated that there was no desire to *remove* any of the authors currently studied on the programme:

> This is not a call for the exclusion of white men from reading lists, needless to say: it is a call to re-centre the lives of other marginalized writers who have been silenced by the canon. It is a call to not be so arrogant so as to assume civilization began with the writing of white men and so this should be the basis of our learning. (Olufemi, 2017)

While the Telegraph admittedly published a short correction at a later date, they were not alone in their misinterpretation of the letter's requests. Such a skewed misunderstanding raises many pertinent questions on how deeply embedded the normalisation of Whiteness is within our institutions. The continued dominance of white men on reading lists has gone largely unchallenged thus far – an implicit acceptance of white (predominantly male) literature as 'legitimate'. To construe a request to *add* voices of colour to the syllabus as an attack on the canon, or as an overtly political gesture, is to imply that creating a syllabus based almost only on white (male) literature is somehow a-political, 'normal', 'natural'. Such syllabi are always, already political, but in ways that uphold the status quo and therefore shield themselves precisely by becoming so normalised. It is for this exact reason that a deep introspection of the power dynamics of academia is so overdue yet, simultaneously, so difficult to achieve.

This special issue, then, is a humble attempt to offer a contribution to the conversation. It is an attempt to shine light on possible, alternative ways of *seeing* and *representing* when we remove English from the picture. It is an attempt to give space to counter-narratives, counter-discourses, and to offer re-framings of existing understandings. The importance of interrogating such frames of interpretation, as Judith Butler (2009) urges, is not to be overlooked, as this influences whose lives we recognise as being grievable. Situating her argument with reference to the wars waged in the Middle East post-9/11, she writes:

> The frames though which we apprehend or, indeed, fail to apprehend the lives of others as lost or injured (lose-able or injurable) are politically saturated. They are themselves operations of power (2010: 1)

The context in which Butler writes is one of life and death; her argument could easily be applied to the relative lack of global outcry or action with regard to the Rohingya genocide. While such examples are certainly extreme, they are the inevitable result of political and social constructs that deem certain lives and voices as being more or less legitimate, more or less worthy of a liveable life. In order to push toward more democratic framings, the frames themselves need to be named, and called into question. As a modest nod of the head to Butler's call to interrogate our frames of understanding, for this issue we have opted for a slight change in the title, replacing "*Picturing* South Asia in English" with "*Imaging* South Asia in Non-English". The editors are of the opinion that, while 'picturing' implies a static, finished state, 'imaging' allows for more fluidity, and, potentially, encourages a whole new re-*imagining,* or perpetual re-framing, of what has thus far been concretised into homogenous, static representations.

And yet, such an attempt is not without its own shortcomings. We are painfully aware of the irony – even hypocrisy – of publishing this volume in English. Yet, it would be naïve to believe that one can eschew the English language in Academia (and, indeed, various other fields) and still hope to gain even a modest readership. The reality is such that publishing this article in Bengali, Hindi, Urdu, would have meant sacrificing the potential for wider dissemination, a difficult choice considering the growing pressure within academe to publish high-impact research, or what Strauss and many others refer to as the "publish or perish mentality" (Strauss, 2017: 27). Consequently, questioning academic practice becomes "very much a side issue", with the focus remaining on "practical solutions to getting published" (ibid: 27), and, importantly, getting published in high-impact journals – most of which are in English. Publishing this volume in English certainly increases the chances of reaching a wider audience, but this does not make writing in English a 'neutral' act. It actively privileges certain academics, disadvantages and burdens others, and perpetuates the unquestioned global dominance of English by misrepresenting it as simple pragmatics. Logistics and workload notwithstanding, publishing this volume in the authors' respective "other(*ed*)" (Pennycook: 2001: 145) languages could have been feasible. Be that as it may, such an act would have, in all likelihood, proven to be a mere gesture; we would have been pressed to provide an accompanying English translation. We find ourselves thus in somewhat of a double bind: it is imperative to find strategies to challenge English imperialism in Academia, but in doing so, scholars run the risk of penalising both themselves and their research. These are not simply linguistic questions; there are political implications at stake, ones which raise the question of the possibility of dismantling the master's house with the master's own tools.

In line with this discussion, the editors faced long discussions over the use of certain *varieties* of English in the issue – discussions that, for the most part, remain open for debate. The vast majority of submissions came from South Asian academics, many of whom use English in ways that diverge from our own uses. As a Bangladeshi living in the UK for over three decades, and an English woman (who lived four and half years in India), it is unsurprising that there were instances where we disagreed over the use of a preposition, or the structure of a particular sentence[ii]. Yet, for us to impose our preferences on a writer is to re-enact the linguistic hegemony of British English. Thus, we preferred for the editing process to allow for a greater deal of linguistic and stylistic autonomy, but were equally cognisant of the simultaneous pressure to adhere to traditional academic expectations (which are themselves dictated by Western institutions). At each turn of the editing process, we were faced with difficult decisions. As a result, the issue finds itself in somewhat of a state of tension, between conservative institutional expectations, and the progressive drive to undo the power relations from within. As the open letter from Cambridge implored, one cannot attempt to address unequal balance of power without turning a constant, critical eye to *who* is speaking, *how* they are speaking, and the epistemological vantage point from which they speak. We make no bold claims about the impact of our volume; we certainly do not claim to have found solutions to unravelling deeply embedded colonial structures. We hope, simply, to contribute to the discussion of how we can seek to create space for alternative representations.

Re-capturing history: Whose voices are we hearing anyway?

The first part of this volume raises several questions regarding *interpretation*, and interrogates the gazes that have been enacted upon South Asian cultures. Encompassing a diverse range of subjects, from Rock Art to the Islamic History of West Bengal, India, these articles each draw attention to the ways in which interpretations are shaped and formed by subjectivities and dominant narratives, and therefore call for spaces that allow for alternative understandings.

In the first chapter, Bhattacherjee explores the role of archaeology as a tool in the construction of nationhood, with specific reference to what she terms the exploitation of archaeological artefacts to meet "the aspirations of religious nationalism in India" (p.22). The manipulation of such cultural artefacts, she argues, leads to the crystallisation of representations of certain communities – particularly what we understand as "Hindu" and "Muslim" – much of which was influenced by the archaeological legacy of British colonists. Through a brief study of the archaeology of Hinduism, Bhattacherjee calls for a "much needed flexibility" within the field (p.24), reflection on archaeological praxis itself, and a greater understanding of the role of the archaeologist's subjectivity in the interpretation of findings and the re-constructions of the past.

Abdul Matin's investigation of 'Socio-religious reform and Sufism in 20th century Bengal' provides a fresh insight into the Sufi sub-culture in rural undivided Bengal during the consolidation period of the British Raj in South Asia. Matin's article, punctuated with Persian words and various cultural/religious expressions (which went hand in hand with the prevailing Sufi tradition) illuminates a wonderful Sufi scenario, which attracted both Hindus and Muslims through a new hybridised Bengali Sufi culture. In charting the lifetime achievement of this incredible Pir (spiritual guide), Abu Bakr, during the 19th century Bengal under strong British rule, Matin skilfully explores the Pir's non-traditional and somewhat radical/reformist Sufi spiritual leadership, as he exerted his influence on education (through madrassas) and, most relevant to this volume, on the vernacularization of Bangla language as the vehicle of expression. This is perhaps because most of his supporters were from rural Bengal, where the dialects were quite different from 'pure', urbanised Bangla. What is also noteworthy is the Pir's denouncement of some prevailing Sufi practices, such as Pir worshipping, Shrine pilgrimages and singing and dancing. To some extent, this may be taken as a reversion to somewhat puritan Islam. Yet, in his exploration of the life and impact of this Pir, Matin offers an alternative narrative to the commonly homogenised understanding of Islam and Muslims.

Returning to a similar field as in Chapter 1, Srimaal and Lamminthang Simte call attention to the problematic claims of 'scientific' or 'objective' constructions of the past in the domain of Rock Art. The authors question the possibility of 'text-free' interpretations of such rock art, drawing on examples from the Southern Vindhayan landscapes. Through their exploration of these sites, they highlight the persistent euro-centrism within the field, arguing that "the theoretical framework that has dictated the field of rock art studies in the country stand in need of a serious reappraisal" (p.42). If not, in seeking parallels between contemporary ethnic rituals and ancient art, there is a great risk that certain communities will continue to be perceived as "un-changing and passive" (p. 37). As in the previous two chapters, we see here an emphatic cry for alternative interpretations, ones that seek to diverge from the euro-centric, colonial gaze.

Bioscope: Seeing through the lenses of south Asia

The history of South Asian cinema can be traced as far back as the silent film era of the early 20th century, with Dadasaheb Phalke's (who studied in the University of Bombay's Art school in the late nineteenth century) classic film *Raja Harischandra* (1913). Both the pre-colonial Mughal (Persian) and the later English colonial influences continued to persist well into the postcolonial period. Common themes included magical dreams and experience, Hollywood spectacle, Soviet montage, Hindu-Muslim unity and, later, anti-hero, despair, conflict between tradition and modernity and so on.

However, since the late 1950s, South Asian cinema (mainly Indian cinema) has presented a somewhat complex cultural space, raising questions about nation and temporal positioning (Molloy and Shakur, 2013:246). Unsurprisingly, Indian film has had an uneasy relationship with state ideologies, with on-going tension between popular culture and nationalism (Rajadhyaksha, 1996: 698). These are reflected in the western-influenced films such as *Devdas* (1955) or those that appear somewhat hybrid (e.g. the mixing of western tradition and Urdu literary culture in *Pyasaa* (1959) (Molloy and Shakur, 2012: 246)). Indeed, certain new wave directors such as Satyajit Ray experimented with Bengali/Urdu colonial/rebel writers like Bibhutibhuson Bandyopadhyay (Pather Panchali/Songs of the road: 1929 novel/1955 film) and Premchand (Satranj ki Khilari/The Chess Players 1973).

In Satranj ki Khilari/The Chess Players (written in Hindi by Premchand in 1924) and Sadgati/Deliverance (1981 written by Premchand in 1931), Ray discovered two very nationalistic and combative short stories of the eminent Hindi/Urdu writer Munshi Premchand (Cooper, 1994: 174). Premchand was involved during the 1930s with the Progressive Writers Association (PWA), which reflected the Eastern traditions, scholarship, culture and humanism through mainly pre-colonial Parsi/Urdu/Hindi literature (see Part III for further exploration of Persian, Hindi and Urdu), while also taking inspiration from international socialism in order to fight against caste exploitation, sexism, imperialism and racial and religious antagonism. Indeed, until the late 1950s, there were not many films that propagated anti-class or anti-caste ideas.

South Indian socialist director, and member of the conscientious 1970s 'New Cinema' movement, Shyam Benegal, had similar themes that went against the capitalist themes of Bollywood. Having watched various films (Ankur 1974, Nishant 1975, Manthan 1976) directed by Benegal, Guardian critic, Derek Malcolm, commented, 'Benegal's films on Indian history, whether cultural or political, are models of their kind, showing that this commitment is not confined to fiction but securely based on fact as well as imagination' (Malcolm, 2002). Furthemore, these directors of what is labelled as 'parallel cinema' were so focused on local issues that it has been argued that if it were not "for Ritwick Ghattak (one of the celebrated left wing film directors from Bengal) Hollywood might not have existed" (Shakur, T: 5:2014). As such, South Asian cinema across its history has always had an investment in the social and the political, and has taken on various forms that go much further than the typical Bollywood genre most associated with the area. In the second part of this issue, we are presented with the varied filmic representations that, to an extent,

demonstrate both an aligning with and a breaking away from colonial frames of thought.

Since the trauma of partition of the British Raj in 1947, where millions of people were forced to flee their native lands because of their religion, 'border' issues have provided a sense of horror, pain, sadness, or even nostalgia in the South Asian psyche. While many South Asian stories, novels and poems contain such painful or nostalgic memories of 'border crossing', explorations of the representations in cinema seem limited. Anakshi Pal and Dev Nath Pathak's scholarly article provides an insightful understanding of the 'imagined spaces of the borders'. Covering an impressive range of South Asian films, from Ritwick Ghatok's partition of Bengal based political film, 'Komol Gandhaar' (1961), to Nittin Kakar's fantasy comedy based on the India-Pakistan border, 'Filmistaan' (2012), the authors address the diverse ways in which borders are used metaphorically in film, thus demonstrating how borders can be re-imagined as subversive sites, that are not only symbolic of the process of 'othering', but can also be re-defined and re-imagined as negotiable, flexible spaces. In doing so, they show how certain South Asian films problematize "the grand hegemonic narrative of nation-states and throw light on 'micro-narratives' of the everyday that imagine the border differently". This is particularly interesting given the main focus on the India-Pakistan and India-Bangladesh borders, and their hegemonic relationship to each other within wider global geopolitical settings.

The persistence of the Raj was omnipresent in chapter 2 of 'Picturing south Asian culture in English' (Shakur and D'Souza, 2003:77-98); ironically, the second article of this chapter seems to reverberate a similar spirit. Salman Al-Azami and Tasleem Shakur's comparison between the original Bengali text and two Hindi film productions of *Devdas* during the postcolonial period from 1955 to 2002 demonstrates the impact of the Victorian period well into the 21st century Indian film-making, and its currency with the film-goers. This article, which falls under both 'cultural theory' and 'linguistics', deals with the analysis of the original Bengali novel '*Devdas*' (Chottopadhoy, 1917[iii]) and its film adaptation in both Bengali and Hindi. It explores how the original Bengali novel, written by an accomplished popular novelist Saratchandra Chottopadhoy in between the Edwardian period and WW1, shows all the hallmarks of Victorian literature. Indeed, the authors argue that *Devdas* exhibits all the characteristics of a Victorian novel's sentimental love story, pointing out the resemblance of Thomas Hardy's escapism or the narrative description of Dickens's 'Great Expectations'. The second part of the article deals with the novel's more faithful adaptation in the Bengali film of 1955, contrasting this with the Hindi version of 2002, where the plot is glamourized very much in line with the expectation of Bollywood films, which, along with the comparative differences between Bengali and Hindi language, arguably affects the sensitivity of the characters, and the spirit of the plot.

Arpana Awwal's article 'Heroes and villains: Masculinities of romance, dominance and violence in Bangladeshi films of 1970s cleverly questions the emerging representations of a set of cultural/sociological variables through two formulaic but popular Dhaka-based cinemas. Through this exploratory essay, Awwal convincingly exposes the filmic victimisation of women through a series of 'shot by shot' analyses, under the backdrop of the slow transformation of a traditional patriarchal Muslim society to the modern nation state of Bangladesh. What is

intriguing is the clear feminist stance adopted in the article, but the seeming decision to not use such a label to advocate her case. In the first part, Awwal refers to the rise of the model of the 'Hero' in the hearts and minds of converted Muslims of Bengal and the related socio-cultural and religious transformations, including the so called 'masculinity nuances' that were attributed to Muslim Pirs (leader) or martyrs. This certainly makes for an interesting comparative study alongside Abdul Matin's article on the role of a Pir in the 20th century Bengal (see Part 1). Within such an intricate transformation of Bengal sub-culture, Awwal's case studies of two 1970s pulp fiction type popular films are carefully discussed through the framework of the 'masculine narrative'. Ultimately, Awwal sheds light on the portrayal through such media of men's 'active masculinity', while women continue to be portrayed as 'passive prey'; we are reminded, of course, that such a representation is not unique to South Asian cinema, and is equally common in Western films.

Linguistic traces: South Asian culture in and through language(s)

The third section of this issue comprises commentary pieces encompassing various linguistic aspects of South Asia, from 16th century to the present day. As such, in exploring the development of several languages across the subcontinent, these articles bring to the forefront the traces of South Asian history that can be identified in the languages used today. From the Moghul rulers, through British colonisation, the use of language across South Asia has reflected, in many ways, the shifting power dynamics as different rulers came and went, thereby influencing the discourses that dictate the prestige (or lack thereof) of certain languages. In this brief introduction to the linguistic history of South Asia, the authors demonstrate the extent to which, contrary to Western perceptions of monolingualism as the norm, language contact, diversity and mixing has always been, and continues to be, the 'natural' state of language in South Asia.

Highet's chapter, inspired by observations made during her time spent teaching English and French in India, raises questions on the ability of delineating English and Non-English in such a multilingual setting. Drawing upon anecdotal evidence as well as theories in Applied Linguistics to demonstrate the commonality of translanguaging in India, she problematizes the conceptualization of languages as discrete entities, while also drawing attention to the power dynamics of certain languages, particularly English. Citing data from her research carried out in India, she demonstrates the hybridization of languages – notably of Hindi and English – in informal but equally in more formal, or 'scripted' instances, such as television advertisements, and emphasizes the inability to fully comprehend or appreciate Indian culture if viewed only through English.

Analysing the works of August Seidel during the colonial period, Grant's article shines light on the orientalist, colonial documentation of languages so common during this time: a prelude, of sorts, to the current day situation as described in the previous chapter. He provides, among others, an interesting observation on the mistranslation of the Hindustani word 'goraa' (fair) as 'pretty', itself highly revealing of the colonial influence on the construction of beauty standards. With its focus on a German scholar, who was writing at a similar time to Premchand (see Part II), this article indeed deals with a 'Non-English' perception of South Asia culture, yet, as a Western European perspective, it a particularly clear example of the colonial gaze as

Seidel comments upon *"ethnic groups about whose languages he had written but whom he may never have met in the flesh"* (this issue, p. 103, our emphasis).

The final section is an exploration of the influence of Persian on South Asian languages, literature and culture. Covering phonology, morphology and lexis, Billah poignantly demonstrates how the history of South Asia continues to be reflected in the use of its languages today. Billah provides a vast range of examples, both in terms of vocabulary and structure, of the ways in which Persian roots can be found across various languages of India and Pakistan which, as he argues, is unsurprising given the long history of the economic and political relationships that flourished between Persia and South Asia. As such, these traces are testament to the shifting elite languages over time, from Persian under the Moghul rulers to English during colonization and beyond; one cannot help but remark the continued influence of Persian today on Urdu literature and *ghazals*.

Emerging voices: Creating textual and visual representations

The final part of this volume delves into contemporary visual and textual representations of South Asian Popular Culture, beginning with an analysis of the role of popular culture media, such as literature and film, in the creation of the *Razakar* discourse in Bangladesh. Laden with visual and textual examples, Nusrat's paper highlights how these have been used to re-frame the popular Bangladeshi notion of *Razakar,* from the beginning of their separation from West Pakistan, through independence, up to the present day.

The second and third sections of this part are comprised of what one could consider to be less traditional contributions to an academic journal issue, in that we have chosen to showcase textual and visual art emerging from the South Asian diaspora. As we hope to have clearly demonstrated in this editorial, one of our main objectives is to push at the boundaries of both what *is* and *is not* included in dominant academic discourses. Sabheena 'Sabz' Khan is a British-born Pakistani poet. Her poetry, written in two languages and two scripts, is born of a desire to help second-generation Urdu speakers connect to their heritage language by making her work accessible to those with varying levels of familiarity and ease with the language and the script. In many ways, her multilingual poetry is a reflection of the hybridity of those living in and across multiple cultures.

Shahabuddin, a Bengali artist, has lived in France for almost 40 years, and received, in 2014, the 'Ordre de Chavalerie' (Order of chivalry) for Art and Literature. His art is inspired by his own personal trajectory, including his contribution to the liberation of Bangladesh and, since, his dual-cultural experience living across Europe and South Asia. In the words of his daughter, Charza Shahabuddin, who provides in this volume a detailed account of her father's work, Shahabuddin is "an ambassador for building a bridge between the West and the East, mixing both cultures, seeking harmony and universality in his work" (p.138). Such hybridity is indeed mirrored in his artwork, as he threads together the influences of traditional Bengali artist Zainul Abedin, and Irish-born post-modernist Francis Bacon. We are delighted to have these additions to our special issue.

Concluding thoughts

As a final note, while the collation of this volume has been an enjoyable, if demanding, process, we find ourselves nevertheless lamenting things that we have not been able to include. One will remark the dominance of Western theoretical frameworks and Western (predominantly male) scholars cited throughout the papers – something that the editors themselves are certainly not exempt from. There are references to non-Western scholars and scholars of colour, but they are noticeably on the sidelines. Importantly, where scholars of colour are present, there is often a noticeable lack of voices from those further marginalised by intersecting factors such as gender, class, caste, and so forth. This in itself is entirely unsurprising when we consider the theoretical canons of academia, not only in the West but elsewhere, too. For the sake of avoiding misinterpretation, this is emphatically *not a call to reject any theory created by White Men*. It is, however, a reminder that decolonising academia, like the Open Letter from Cambridge stated, requires much more than simply diversifying; it is a case of questioning the epistemological groundings that we have so long taken for granted. It is integral to ask which voices are remaining unheard; to ask not only what is being said but also what is left *unsaid*. On reading the articles that follow – and this is not a problem unique to this journal – one may notice that certain parts of South Asia tend to be overrepresented, while others remain overlooked. Furthermore, there are several important and highly relevant issues that are not part of this volume, not through a conscious decision on the behalf of the editors, but through a lack of submissions. We received many articles regarding the rise of radical Islamic fundamentalism, but relatively few addressing Islamaphobia. Similarly, we received very little on the rise of radical Hindutva, or on the continued social stratification of the caste system and the oppression of Dalit communities. The focus on radical Islam and the relative lack thereof on Hindutva and Islamaphobia is, in itself, highly revealing of dominant global narratives. It is only by questioning what *is not* being spoken about, that we can attempt to interrogate our ideological framings. Thus, we implore our readers to engage with the volume in this way; we invite you to interact not only with what we have produced, but also, what we *could have done*.

As ever, this volume would not have been possible without the great help of various people. We would like to thank the presenters and attendees of the original conference, many of whom supplied articles for this issue. We express our sincere gratitude to the students of the third-year module "Popular Culture of South Asia" at Edge Hill University, whose discussions have helped shape this issue, and who were responsible for the choice of cover photo. As suggested during a seminar[iv], the cover image of the Tiger (*le Tigre du Bengal)*, painted by Shahabuddin, is an interesting parallel to Rudyard Kipling's *The Jungle Book*. For an issue exploring Non-English re-imaginings of South Asian culture, we could not have found a more appropriate picture; our sincere thanks are owed to Shahabuddin for permitting us to use his paintings, both for the cover and in the final article.

We would like to dedicate this special volume to two extraordinary women from South Asia, both related to one of the editors. Firstly, Taz Shakur's late mother Sayma Khatun (daughter of late Khan Shahib Dr Kabir Hossian, eminent Professor of Medicine in Calcutta Medical College during the colonial period of the 1940s), who, during the partition of British India in 1947, migrated at the tender age of 16 to East Pakistan with her East Bengal-born, Calcutta Police Officer husband, the late Abdush Shakur, and her newly-born infant daughter, Ruby. Later leaving all her family

members in West Bengal, India, she raised six children (who are all now established academics and professionals living in different parts of the world) with her husband in East Pakistan, which later became Bangladesh (1971).

Secondly, this volume is dedicated to Taz's late wife, Yasmin Shakur MBE, a onetime architect, who, like her mother-in-law, migrated with her baby son, Rameen, from Bangladesh to England during the early 1980s to join her husband during his Commonwealth PhD studies in Liverpool. In order to raise her children, she gave up her profession and subsequently joined social services in the North West. Later, she received her MBE from the Queen for her community services in Preston, while both their sons became successful doctors. Yasmin sadly passed away in 2016. This project started with the death of Sayma Khatun in 2014 and halted in 2015 when Yasmin's health deteriorated; three years later, it has finally been brought to fruition.

Finally, Taz Shakur would like to provide his sincere thanks to Katy Highet, doctoral candidate at University College London IOE, who has enthusiastically and voluntarily helped in teaching the South Asian Popular Cultural Studies module on Edge Hill third year Geography programme, while simultaneously taking on the painful (but rewarding!) job of co-editing this special issue.

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Viceroy's House (2017) Director: Gurinder Chadha
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[i] Thanks to Masrufa Nusrat for the translation.
[ii] One may also find interesting to note that on several occasions the editors also had to learn to navigate their contrasting cultural work preferences, with Tasleem preferring to discuss the project orally, and Katy preferring the written word!
[iii] We have opted here for his Bengali name, Chattopadhyay, rather than his anglicised "Chaterjee"; however elsewhere in the volume he is referred to as Chaterjee.
[iv] Thanks to IIIrd year Edge Hill Geography student, Jessie Brooks, for this suggestion