Queerspace: Sexualized spaces revisited

Diepiriye Sungumote Kuku-Siemons

SUMMARY: Reflecting on lessons learned from the endemic and tacit homophobia throughout his childhood in the American south, Diepiriye's personal narrative begins with realizing his first ally in a most unlikely corner. His best friend became the first in their class to grow breasts and the world seemed to collapse in on her much the same way the world abandoned him because of his effeminacy. Told in first person, this is the first chapter in a book that regards gender, race and class in the American south with critical the hindsight of a native who has now traversed the world, and currently resides on the other side.

Queer a formerly pejorative term reclaimed by nonheterosexual and/or antihomophobic subjects, signifies an open, multiperspectival, and fluid--if slippery--conceptual space from which to contest more effectively a heteronormative and heterosexist social order. (Martin and Piggford 1997)

Space *freedom*

Greenspace

Parmindar and I first met one Sunday evening at Nehru Park. It is an expansive park, complete with a kidney bean shaped lake, large, smooth boulders, lightly forested acreages, rolling hills of trimmed green grass, healthy green foliage, whirling cement and well-treaded paths throughout. The roads on all sides are wide in both directions, reducing the standard honking and buzz of auto rickshaws of Delhi traffic. Anyway, the park sits on the edge of the sparsely populated diplomatic area; the park is unusually tranquil and manicured for its size in this city. It was pitch dark, indicating that the police would soon abruptly arrive to close the area. The park is open until 8PM in the cooler months and till 9PM during the six months of summer. The New Delhi Municipal Council posts opening hours at each entrance alongside a lengthy list of prohibitions restricting: Plucking of flowers, cooking, gambling, shooting, washing, swimming, bathing, posting bills, cycling and smoking. Shortly after the closing hours, policemen regularly show up to clear the park. It is a highly trafficked cruising area, largely due to the specificities of its accessibility and therefore anonymity. The cops know what goes on in the park and notoriously do not miss any opportunity to exploit its participants.

Parmindar and I first crossed paths on a typical early Sunday evening. Clusters of young women and young children, or elderly

men out for a stroll filled the space during the day. Elderly women in pairs or small groups were also in abundance in the park throughout the day until sunset. Joggers, presumably from the nearby embassy enclave whizzed by on the trails that pass around the perimeter of the park and through its bowels.

Towards sunset, more and more cross-sex couples populate the park as families and other larger flocks of folk exit like the seasonally migrating ducks that hover in the soot ridden pool in the heart of the park. Men and women in pairs are notably thinly spread all around the park, reclining under a tree, one partner lazily lying against the other's thigh, or more rarely caught in a tight embrace. Though couples of all ages seem to enjoy the solace of the sunset of the park the youth are bold; generally, those couples openly expressing greater physical affection are young people. By the time the sun starts to set, the couples march out, as if in a procession, holding hands, deeply entrenched in their discussions, dragging their heels on one final tour around the premises, before going home to face reality, I presume.

Single Men largely start to arrive just as the couples and straggling families evacuate the park en masse. As the night progresses, men come in pairs or even small groups, but most arrive solo. Nervously fidgeting with mobile phones or sucking on cigarettes, the men

patiently loiter, trying to appear distracted, avoiding eye contact cautious not to appear to have an agenda, provoke interaction with anyone until all the straight people are gone! They wait nonchalantly, biding their time, as if to disarming any who would demand an explanation for their presence and apparent loitering.

I met a young American undergraduate student in the lobby of my research department at Delhi University. Having heard my accent ring through the hallways, he introduced himself to me at the entrance to the school: "I thought I heard another American 'round here," he exclaimed. Over coffee we talked about dope people of color politics- Gen X activist lingo for the contemporary youth accelerated identity politics raging over progressive university. As Generation X (born 1964-74) and XYers (born 1974-85; aka *The MTV Generation)* [1], our primary education was steeped with messages to actively posit 'diversity' as a positive modern value. Access to MTV skyrocketed the commoditization of (youth oriented) popular culture through its introduction and dominance of the music industry's visual imagery. This marked an even greater distinction between the youth culture of the XY generation and our parents as compared to previous generations that saw similar inter-generational paradigmatic shifts at the onset of each new genre of popularized American music, i.e. from its roots in Spirituals, to Blues ('the devil's music'), to Jazz, to Rock-n-Roll, to Rhythm and

Blues (R&B), to Pop, to Rock, to Funk, and especially upon the debut of Rap/Hip-Hop which virtually coincided with MTV.

Moreover, the onset of HIV/AIDS and consequent governmental responses marks these age cohorts in several important ways (Levine 68-86). The advent of *safer sex* saw "radical changes in sexual values and lifestyles among gay men ... [and] ushered in a new epoch of coming out for teenagers and young adults." (Herdt "Rite of Passage" 34). According to Levine, HIV/AIDS "sharply curtailed the self-fulfillment ethic" (71), the sexual revolution that characterizes the late 1960s until about 1982 (Herdt, "Rite of Passage" 34). Indeed, Levine asserts that the coming of age of the XY generation was such that "unchecked consumerism and erotic hedonism became impractical in an era] of economic deterioration, genital herpes, hepatitis B and AIDS" (71).

Contemporary, urban India is undergoing a similar revolution as this aspect of generation XY, albeit 20 years later. In stark contrast to India, Jeremy Seabrook demarcates this generation as having "evolved as the consumer society has become more sharply segmented" (Seabrook 9). This accounts for the particular "connectedness" (Levine 83) to one another, having grown up with computers and having Internet access first as young adults, along with the health concerns that "fostered community service and

relational sex" (Levine 83), we were ripe to exploit the Internet revolution slicing through communication barriers that created isolation of gays in generations before. Universities that absorbed these generations once again became hotbeds for a different kind of peace and love. Yet my ethnography indicates that despite a myriad of examples of indigenous incidental as well as ritualized same-sex sexual activity, homosexuality in India is still criminalized, pathologized and ostracized- all of which I discuss below.

The spread of religious conservatism that dominated the United States administration throughout generation XY's adolescence culminated in 1994 when the Christian fundamentalist Republican Congressmen and women, led by Newt Gingrich, signed the 'Contract on (with) America'. This contract was a list of legislative actions that Republicans promised to take should they regain control of the House for the first time in 40 years. Among other social setbacks, it reduced welfare benefits and subsidized government loans for university students; for the MTV generation, this was a clear attack on America's working poor. Affirmative Action was also under attack during that era, making the society ripe for a social backlash, which came as more and more young people of color recognized that racism, sexism and class elitism were still a force mediating our lives- hence identity politics. The lingo of identity politics identified a sub-culture of young, educated people of color in

America. That we were both gay made meeting one another in India-on the other side of the planet- even more serendipitous.

The young American invited me to a small fundraiser organized by a new queer activist group. The 'party' took place in a south Delhi apartment- an obvious student-type housing with little or no coordinated furniture, window dressings or flatware. At that party, I met a European NGO worker whom I arranged to meet later. The following week we arranged to meet at a festival that took place at an embassy sponsored cultural center. After the beer, sausages and pleasantries, he escorted me on my first trip to Nehru Park.

The following week I had a second introduction to Nehru Park. I had met a Mumbai-based fellow scientist-cum-cultural anthropologist/writer/griot over the Internet before I arrived in India. I had initiated contact with him over the Internet after a web search revealed his numerous published texts about Indian mythology and the fluidity of gender in ancient India. He was responsive to my E-mails and encouraged me to pursue my life and research in this region; I could see that there would be peers with whom I could click.

Queering public space

Public green areas in New Delhi unattached to residential neighborhoods are typically well kept, innocuous, plausible cross-points for practically all of Delhi's citizenry; this provides an innate alibi to justify one's presence at such venues should the need arise. They provide both wide open, as well as secluded and intimate private spaces. The topography and traffic pattern of Nehru Park does not facilitate sufficient privacy for sex-on-premises, hence Nehru Park is most useful for its contacts. Men meet and exchange details to either leave together or arrange to meet later. It is just one of many such parks throughout the city.

In Love in a Different Climate , Jeremy Seabrook (1999) writes about afternoons spent in Dhaula Kuan, a large, well trafficked daytime cruising park in the western part of the city, that attracts poorer, Hindi speaking men seeking men generally for sex-on-premises.

Seabrook's experiences in the park elicit a wealth of information about the activities of a diverse array of lives whose paths cross in search of gratification on afternoons far away from the lives and families of some, adjacent to those of others, surreptitious for all. Reddy (2004), paints similar pictures with words about Hyderabad. Cruising and casual sex-on-premises are a staple area of study and intervention in public health and demographics- to which I shall explore further later.

Down the road in one direction from my residence in Delhi exists

another active cruising park. The green space sits at a major intersection, behind a congested bus stand, adjacent to a busy fly-over (over-pass). The intervention of the officers directing rush-hour traffic seemingly creates just as many problems as solutions, further choking-up the lame intersection. Characteristically consistent with Nehru Park, Dhuala Kuan, and Connaught Place as cruising spaces, this park is at a busy, broad intersection (urban India is quite densely populated, hence most intersections would be, by definition, busy), independent of any residential area, and the two major bus stops at its gates permit and contribute to its sense of transience; one is always on the move. This is not to suggest that neighborhood parks are free of cruising. My experience is such that in any sizable city park in Delhi I can generally expect being cruised, i.e. to at least receive non-verbal solicitation.

Like Dhuala Kuan, the park near my home attracts poorer, Hindi speakers. Both parks boast major municipal bus stands, bursting with commuters, particularly during evening rush hours. According to several English speaking habitues of Nehru Park and Connaught Place, Dhuala Kuan and the park down the street from my home are for "trashy figures." No one at the other cruising spots mentioned this park down the street, nor do they readily acknowledge the Interstate Bus Terminal or endless nooks or crannies around town where men cruise. I learned of this place from an Indian university professor in America. He spends each summer with his parents who live within walking distance of the park. His sister made a short film about his coming out. Interviews for the film, "Only for Straights," included several other gay and lesbian people of South-Asian decent in North America, and addressed their families' disappointment at what was seen as their rejection of their Indians traditions to adopt a "western cultural vice" (Chhibber Narula 2002). The film also showed the healing that had occurred in many, but not all, such families who learned to divest their ethnic identity from heteronormative epistemologies, epitomized by marriage.

Spaces are segregated by language, reflecting the class lines of the wider environment. Despite the differing socioeconomic status of the habitues of each area, the parks themselves- functions of the municipal park system- are similarly arranged, attended to, and policed. Typically, cruisers pass along the paths in just the specific quarter of the enormous park most distant from the entrances, which face the oncoming traffic and hordes of commuters.

Parmindar and I crossed paths on one such path, as I sat on the rocks observing and enjoying the scene. At our first encounter in Nehru Park, Parmindar spotted me as he walked along the path; we exchanged smiles. He stopped and approached me, and we briefly spoke. We exchanged pleasantries. I explained the reasons for my

overall presence in India, including the nature of my research. Over the next 18 months, we would consistently encounter each other at Nehru Park or Connaught Place and from time to time at other non-politicized, impermanent spaces delineated as gay (e.g. parties specifically for gays). I invited him to my home on several occasions for the conversations that are reflected here.

Migration, urbanization and modernity converge in the contemporary cityscape in a unique and particular fashion- particular to a time and particular to a space, though remnants can be found elsewhere or in times past. Here I explore these convergences and the ensuing creative and transgressive use of public space to carve out a space of freedom. Whatsoever that expression of freedom may be.

Setting the social stage

Once I was with my family and that other guy, he was also with his family. So, we saw each other and we could understand that, ok, we are like 'of the same stuff'. And, I just told my sister "I need to take a pee. I have to go to the loo." So, I went there and in the meantime, he came behind me. And we talked; we exchanged our numbers like that. These things happens [sic] and we can't do these things very openly but straight[s], they can do. Straights can do, not for sex, but if they like each other...you know, further go into a relationship.

(Parmindar interview)

Kamal, an informant from Seabrook's work had this to say about cruising:

From my early experiences in college, I learned of the secret circles of men looking for sex with men. Once you learn that this exists, you can see it everywhere. You learn to make contact by the exchange of a split-second glance, the raising of an eyebrow, the lingering of a footstep, the searching look at a face, a way of walking. Signals that no one else would ever pick-up, but which are unmistakable once you are initiated. It is at the same time unseen but highly visible (Seabrook 148).

Cruising in popular discourse implies men who have sex with men (MSM) seeking one another (Levine 86), for expedient mutual, casual sexual gratification for reasons that this work explores. Cruising takes place in a range of sites, from parks (the most common) to cyberspace. According to Seabrook, "the whole reason for coming to the Park [Dhuala Kuan] is to find men- for sex, friendship, affection, love; for release, comfort, reassurance; moments of tenderness as well as of quite brutal and functional discharge" (Seabrook 6). This suits these circumstances according to my own research and experiences.

Here, 'cruising' is used in much the same way, yet is not exclusive to sexual gratification. Cruising also describes the gratification from the exchange. Due to the social and public spaces that MSM as a target group (in epidemiological terms) inhabit, there is an assumed premise of sex. Seabrook animatedly advocates the usage of MSM over terms like *gay, lesbians, bisexual, transgender or queer,* all of which circulate widely throughout the west. Later, Seabrook asserts: "To impose such categories- except upon a small minority who have been much influenced by Western gay experience- is to bring alien concepts to the people involved; it is arrogant and disregarding of other cultures; and far from the respect for pluralism and diversity which the West now claims as one of its most characteristic attributes" (Seabrook v).

Seabrook goes on to exclaim that, "even the ideas of 'gay liberation' serve not as emancipatory slogans, but as new forms of colonialism and vehicles of control" (Seabrook 2). Seabrook later undermines this assertion, reflecting a claim that is consonant with my own ethnography, that "[b]y definition, those who frequent it [the cruising park] are self-selecting: by doing so, they become known to others and are compelled into some form of self-recognition, even though many still feel shame and anxiety about their sexual needs" (Seabrook 3).

As described earlier, identity clearly emerges from a set of behaviors, since confronting others with similar behavioral patterns mirrors and therefore forces us to re/consider ourselves. This is in great opposition to bigots and bigotry, where the self becomes defensive or evasive. In this sense, homophobia (as proxy for discrimination) stunts growth and self-development. Yet, even such bigotry can neither hinder activity nor, therefore, the emergence of identities. The task is to reduce one's own ego, to refuse to view difference as *other,* as an alternative to that which is central- the self, the ego, hence egocentrism, ethnocentrism, etc.

Seabrook is careful to avoid re-envisioning the world, via this work, based on his desires as an individual westerner in Asia, against the backdrop of a history of colonial exploration of the exotic other. Perhaps the imperial history between Seabrook's native United Kingdom and India renders him acutely sensitive to cultural imperialism. Moreover, heteronormativity is a form of cultural imperialism; as a western gay researcher, I am acutely sensitive to resist this hegemony established by the epistemological predecessors of this sort of work.

It is also in resistance to the work and repute of *our* predecessors in the field, E. Evans Pritchard, Ackerly or even Goethe -our legacy of imperialism. As Zahid Chaudhary (2004) discusses, this legacy

typically manifests as usurpation of a localized 'assertion of power and class relations' into the 'colonial machinery' (97) to exploit the indigenous, patriarchal 'fluidity between male homosocial and homoerotic bonds' in a way that ultimately reinforces "colonial binaries (powerful/powerless, ruler/ruled)" (97).

My *"positional* superiority" (89) in my own society, i.e. a non-immigrant ethnic minority in what hook's calls a 'white supremacist, capitalist patriarchal' society, leads me to choose a more active reasoning regarding the usage of *queer* and other western terminologies. Seabrook neutralizes identity to speak solely of MSM to classify "a behavioral practice that is little acknowledged or described" (qtd. in Seabrook v). According to Anjali Gopalan, Executive Director of the Naz foundation (India) Trust. This is an *epidemiological* definition. It is based on western logic. I use each term with intention- the terms are not interchangeable.

Completing what Parmindar suggests above, I present here several arguments why cruising is more about sexuality and less about sex. I explore here the nature of these things and the ramifications of lacking space to do them openly. This evidence rationally challenges caste supremacist patriarchal masculinity from the perspective of the particular intersection of gender, race

and class at which MSM sit.

Cruising consistently surfaces in regarding the behavior of men who have sex with men irrespective of sexual identity or conjugal status. Identities emerge as societies attempt to understand a distinct set of behaviors or traits, hence labels. Kamal, a protagonist in Seabrook's narrative mentioned earlier, clarifies the positioning of cruising vis-a-vis identity:

[Cruising] doesn't get you [romantic] relationships, friendship, love respect or comfort. It gets you sex. It is only by discovering the existence of yet another world- the openly gay world where you are not bound by pretence or false machismo or the demands of family- that you come out into the free air of making real choices, deeper relationships, more satisfactory friendships with other men (Seabrook 148).

My assertion is that the clandestine nature of cruising born out of a hegemony of patriarchy, hence sexism and therefore homophobia, leaves little room for the type of development mentioned by Kamal- that which gets more than just sex. In his treatise on the *clone* cohort, the generation immediately preceding the onset of HIV/AIDS, Levine asserts:

...the roughness, objectification, anonymity, and phallocentrism associated with cruising and tricking expressed such macho dictates as toughness and recreational sex. Finally, the endurance, impersonality, and risk taking connected with partying conveyed macho ruggedness and activity-centered forms of social interaction (Levine 83).

This exposes the readiness with which queer-identified men, on the margins, reinforced normative articulations hegemonically assigned to their gender. The connectedness characteristic of the XY generational cohort in the United States is indicative of resistance rather than adherence to the hegemonic dictates of masculinity. Previous cohorts emerged against a backdrop of homosexuality as the pathological "disease of effeminacy" (Herdt "Gay Culture" 4). These cohorts remained invisible, "without typically ever having to come out"; closeted, "recognizing or fulfilling same-sex desires for the first time while serving in the [World War II]; or, as discussed earlier, in the wake of the sexual revolution, and therefore "coming out in great numbers" (Herdt "Rite of Passage" 33). Despite these evolutions, *sex* usurped the centrality vis-a-vis gender role conformity. Homosexuality was hidden and deviant whereas gay is an identity to be forged. Previous cohorts in the United States responded to these gender disconformities, ultimately culminating in an environment where "butch attire,

muscles and masculine environments vividly articulated the sense that clones were *men* " (Levine 83). Within those patriarchal norms, then, homosexuals were castrated, "failed men" (Dollimore 266; Forth 199; Levine 72).

Black men in America face a similar struggle within the "fantasies of domination and submission" that characterize the contemporary "hedonistic" consumer culture that replaced the historical context for racial terrorism in America with the "symbolic slaughter and consumption" of Black bodies that "created a equal opportunity for all on the sexual terrain" (hooks "Real Cool" 78-79). Discussing the same historical era as that of the clone, hooks asserts that Black men embraced "the victimology script ... deployed to deflect attention and criticism [from feminist attacks on patriarchy and racists attack on minorities] away from the compulsive-obsessive nature of their sexuality" (hooks "Real Cool" 78). HIV/AIDS forced openly gay communities to reposition cruising and tricking as hedonistic, pathological, unhealthy, and "compulsive-obsessive" (hooks "Real Cool" 78). This shift gave way to "values sanctioning commitment, monogamy, coupling, and celibacy" (Levine 75).

Both MSM in India and Black men in America (post Civil Rights), then, have yet to face such an apparent and fatal pandemic. Regardless, racism and homophobia continue to pervade both social contexts,

disenfranchising both groups in their respective societies via structural violence and discrimination, and sanctioned by a contemporary pseudo-model of pluralism that, based on consumerism as an ideology, disembodies and co-opts these sub-cultures into their commercially viable pieces, i.e. the black male body as "the site for the personification of everyone's desire" (hooks "Real Cool" 78), and the commercially profitable image of the Metrosexual in urban India vis-a-vis queer-identified men. The cultural appropriation permits the majority a perusal of the transgressive. In both contexts the *transgressiveness is* simply a commodity of modern consumption- and the majority remain unchanged. Metrosexuals in India are invariably portrayed as: "Straight men who knew and cared about fashion, food and good grooming-and didn't care that people knew they did" (Chandran 2003). Yet, MSM in India are "highly stigmatized leading to a range of violence and abuses" (Khan 3).

Appropriation is highly problematic for Black and gay men are rendered invisible in America and India, respectively. Their "reality is dehumanized via a process of commoditization wherein no correlation is made between mainstream hedonistic consumerism and the reproduction of a social system that perpetuates and maintains an underclass" (hooks "Real Cool"182). Consumerism commoditizes the other, in this case Black and queer men, as the

embodiment of transgression. Hooks clarifies that, "When blackness is the sign of transgression that is most desired it allows whiteness to remain static, to remain conservative, and it's conservative thrust to go unnoticed" (hooks "Real Cool" 22). She later states "people are seduced by transgression in and of itself, as though transgression makes you radical and not what you are transgressing in the service of" (hooks "Transformation" 18).

Gay "increasingly marks a full spectrum of social life" (Herdt "Gay Culture" 4). Gay permitted the emergence of *"Gesellschaft,* a more inclusive gay culture vis-a-vis other pluralistic cultural systems" (Herdt "Gay Culture" 12). In India, MSM predominates discourse around same-sex attraction between men, largely due to the strength of early activists in response to the HIV/AIDS pandemic. There has been no gay revolution in India; change has progressed through the timid functionalities of non-governmental organizations that address prevention, care and support in response to HIV/AIDS and MSM as an epidemiologically defined high-risk group.

Even in his adult life, Parmindar has known of few gay male relationships that have *persevered.* Sex, as elicited from his story, was from a very early age connected to deviance and ostracization, and must therefore remain hidden, which is demoralizing. Void of

such exposure and affirmation leaves queer people struggling to create intimacy through a hurried, at times "brutal" albeit "functional" exchange. Gay sexuality is not by virtue consumed by sex.

Reflecting on this patriarchal socialization and the apprehension with which queer men approach one another, given that we are all socialized in patriarchal heteronormative hegemonies, in 1982 as anthem to the growing Gay Liberation, transvestite popular disco entertainer Sylvester sang:

There is something I want to ask you. There is something that I want to know.

And, to these questions you have the answer, so tell me what I want to know: Do ya wanna funk ...

So if I tell you that you're really something, baby, will you stay or will you go away. Don't go away. And if I lay my good loving on you, what will it cost me, baby, what will you make me pay?

His words served a litany to queers to question patriarchal socialization as it yet defined our (subaltern) interactions.

According to Kamal, patriarchal thinking is still a definitive masculine characteristic, against which a subaltern identity, in his case *Gay,* stands.

A heteronormative paradigm limits opportunities, and retards exposure to other queer people leaving few occasions to explore and forge a new socialization and set(s) of normative behaviors. In such isolation, one is constantly set in opposition to, versus enticed to align with, a set of norms. It is therefore imperative to neutralize one's assumptions and explore identity, to position oneself in opposition to demands that one conform to preconceived biases. It is a well-founded and pragmatic approach of public health, but even that requires advocacy to end homophobia in order to go about the business of promoting health-seeking behavior. Yet, to simply end an investigation at the point where a *behavioral practice* is the most common denominator is to ignore the hues of emergent identities.

While Parmindar does not imply that he is otherwise dishonest with his sister, as indicated above, he meticulously conceals any facts of his life as a gay man. He leads two lives: One with family, heterosexual friends and relatives, in addition to the one he is able to explore in parks, via the Internet, and in the anonymity of the urban center. To protect himself from possible extortion, those he meets on the Internet, or other cruising spaces may never know the details of

his 'other' identity, e.g. real name, occupation, place of residence, etc. Exposure of these facts leaves one vulnerable to possible extortion- and extortion amongst MSM is more than an urban legend. Lies and imprecise information, as described above, ensures that those in his homophobic environment may never come to know of his gayness. The simple lie told to his sister is part of a labyrinth of stories that effectively concocts a virtual reality that distracts those who allegedly disapprove of homosexuality and could hurt him should they come to know. Researchers are only now beginning to document the effects of the concocted virtual reality upon the self.

The lies and ensuing double lives permeate most spaces. Where can one be gay? Gays have loos, parks, private parties, and other discrete venues whereas straights have a dominance of space and time, permissive use of arenas beyond sex. Homophobia renders both identities vulnerable to exploitation due to the very existence of the other!

Ultimately, the spaces are masculinized by patriarchal masculinity, and then exploited by its dissidents in a manner nearly prescribed by the circumstances. Social control of female mobility, combined with (male) aggressiveness, such as eve-teasing, directed towards women when they are present means that women are less likely to be present (if not accompanied). This is particularly so in the types of public spaces where MSM cruise, which are specifically chosen because they are relatively obscured from the public gaze- which by definition renders them less safe for women.

"You're giving me everything I miss at home." (Cherrelle)

Neighbors and relatives with whom Parmindar's family has poor relations have said to Parmindar's mother: *My son is a man. Your son is a J'nana.* This was of course greatly insulting to Parmindar and his family. He further states:

Sometimes some people are [were] teasing me, "Oh you're a girl!" They're insulting me...I was called by my parents even, that I am J'nana...means who behaves like a woman. They always call me: J'nana. Most of the people in the society [in his home village] call me J'nana...It's a great insult...that you are not a man...something inferior to man. That's really sad. It's a shame. It's a insult [sic] to me. Nobody wants to be insulted. Sarcastically, they are saying. My parents, when they are sometimes angry to me, [sic] they call me J'nana.

Parmindar comes from a small village in the Gurdaspur district of Punjab, roughly ten miles from the border between India and

Pakistan. In Parmindar's view, 'this is a really backwards village', reflecting the enforcement of rigid, heteronormative gender roles and sexualities, which in his case are abusive and oppressive. Sadness and anger at feelings of insecurity and helplessness ensue. It is particularly harmful when familiar people act in uncaring ways. Many of Seabrook's informants from rural areas romanticized their hometowns. Many of those reflecting upon a "wider experience of men who have sex with men in India...want to preserve an image of a wholesome and sweet home, where wives, families, and children remain, which is not contaminated by association with activities that still inspire shame and revulsion in many Indians" (Seabrook 4). For Parmindar, this image of India had long since been shattered, as *shame* and *revulsion* became chillingly apparent:

[In] the village I belong to in Punjab, there was one guy...he was caught re-handed by his elder brother. He was doing sex with a 18-year-old guy. And, his age at that time was around 50...the result was that he had to commit suicide. There was so [much] pressure from the society...In a village community you have to live by meeting lots of people...there's a community living...you can't live alone, and the community was boycotting him and there was a stigma...they will not talk to you. They will not allow you to enter in their homes. They will not even come to your home. You will feel

totally withered and dejected by that society...[His family] was so arrogant with him that 'why he was like this'? [E]ven they were not accepting him. So, there was no option left with him; he just committed suicide...[T]here are so many cases, I will tell you there are another few cases [sic] where the people, they have committed suicide due to this only that they were found that they were a gay especially in the villages. In the cities, people, they don't bother [about] what people are doing.

Misogyny and homophobia provoke urban migrants to distance themselves from kin, when and where empowered to do so. Speaking of the many rural stories conveyed by habitues of Dhuala Kuan, Seabrook clarifies that the migration of MSM stands in a long history of this city as a place of asylum for many based on a range of identities: 'Delhi has served as a place of hope and refuge for hundreds of thousands of people; just as its promises have failed as many others who, disappointed and rejected, have had to make some kind of accommodation with an unchosen- and often irreversible- migration to the city " (Seabrook 4). Parmindar reaffirms that many choose to battle the urban jungle, alongside explicit police brutality despite, and in spite of, the adverse social conditions of their home.

Suicide as a result of rampant homophobia is not new to this scene

(Carrier 220-222; Herdt and Boxer "Horizons" 120-121, 200; 29-67; Herdt "Rite of Passage" 43; Khan 5; Levine 73). In the west, elevated suicide rates amongst queer youth is a call to action, exposing homophobia as a deadly societal ill. According to Gulshan, a twenty-four year old informant in Seabrook's research who became aware of his same-sex attraction by age "ten or eleven": "There was one boy in college who tried to kill himself because he was made to suffer. He was very weak and girlish, and he couldn't stand being laughed at. After he had tried to kill himself, they mocked him because he couldn't even do that successfully" (Seabrook 51). The topic of which Gulshan speaks is really no laughing matter. Gulshan had one "very effeminate" (Seabrook 51) friend with whom he was ashamed to be seen in public, fearing unbearable public ostracization. Gulshan very clearly exposes the sexist socialization that equates things feminine with "weak," despite his own alterity and opposition to the status quo.

In Parmindar's case, kin and other familial persons brutally attempted to enforce a normative, heterosexist pattern of sexual development. He describes numerous instances of what amounted to his kin's betrayal of his trust and confidence demonstrated by such brutal, socially violent and emotionally sexually abusive behavior. Young people and adults alike referred to him with epithets- derogatory terms aimed at reforming by denigrating his effeminacy, yet ultimately serving to alienate him from his environment.

Parmindar felt that his feelings were wrong until around the age of sixteen when he was exposed to news, journals and other sources of information that variously dealt with homosexuality, and thereby acknowledged its existence for him. Troiden and Plummer describe this second stage of the coming out process as "signification" (qtd. in Lynch 172), where this media prompted and assisted him in coalescing his feelings around a sub-altern sexual identity- a process of explaining himself to himself. He essentially describes a quest common to queer people, beginning with the time he was able to label his homosexuality to the present, where he incessantly sought first to understand, and then to establish pride in his alterity thereby firmly placing himself on the road to healing the wounds of heteronormatively sanctioned abuse (Khan 7; Carrier 207, 211-212). Cruising affords Parmindar access to a wider range of the socioeconomic gambits in Delhi. He has made many friends, claiming to know seventy to eighty percent of "the gays" in Delhi. The network he established through Farm House parties, public cruising areas, private parties and online cruising is extensive and overlapping. Parmindar explained:

There are so many areas in Delhi known as the cruising points, where normally these gay people, they meet, they go there to search [for]

someone for sex satisfaction. These are only metro-cities where you can find...in India in small cities, you can find cruising places which is normally like the public loo...sometimes on bus stops there are public loos...I think it's good for a city to have cruising areas. This is a big convenience for the gays. People, they have easy access to these areas.

The convenience for many of the gays is to have found a space free of the rejection felt in these otherwise, familial spaces.

At sixteen, Parmindar traveled one hundred fifty miles, to spend one half hour having sex with someone he had yet to meet. "You can see how desperate people are in Punjab for sex," he says. The anonymous sex partner was known throughout the region as a TV news presenter and small business owner. It was merely rumored that the he was gay until a university mate in Armritsar confirmed this for Parmindar; he provided him with the explicit location of the man's place of business. Parmindar promptly took a train to the man's town and was quite punctual for his appointment. Sure enough, Parmindar made a pass at the man, who accepted. "And we enjoyed," says Parmindar as he smiles, briskly waddling his head back and forth underscoring his recounting of the early incident. The TV personality only asked to know who had referred Parmindar to him.

By contrast, Delhi and the Internet each independently provide Parmindar access to worlds formerly, categorically unreachable. Denied by tradition, and restricted by resources- two hurdles easily overcome by urbanization and urban migration. Moreover, such early experiences of freedom in sexuality are essential steps towards countering the negative portrayals of sexual minorities that pervaded Parmindar's upbringing.

Cruising carries many compounding risks. Introductions are by nature hurried, and often void of prospects for building long(er), sustainable, romantic rapport. As a result of the clandestine nature of the logistics of cruising online and in public spaces, there is an underlying restriction on opportunity for sexual negotiation. In a hurried exchange, sexual roles and specific tastes precede and perhaps preclude any exchange of information regarding sexual health; it precludes the opportunity, for example, to disclose one's sero-status. The spread of disease, particularly HIV/AIDS, has hastened the need for attentive interventions, which address human sexuality. Nonetheless, the risk of HIV infection remains significant for Delhi's population of men who have sex with men.

Many argue that both local and national bodies addressing HIV/AIDS do not address sub-altern sexual practices of anyone. Few organizations exist that specifically target and reach queer

people, thereby bringing some relief and attention to the subject. In practice, many non-governmental organizations (NGOs) refuse to acknowledge the risk established between effeminized male identity, i.e. "Zenana/Kothi/Metis", and HIV/AIDS, let alone other factors such as sexual agency, poverty, and violence (Khan 3). The paradox is that by the early 1980s, the then unnamed "HIV" spread most rampantly among urban MSM so much so that it was widely perceived as a gay disease, and referred to as "Gay Cancer" (Chibbaro 1982), in the United States Senate at the onset of the HIV/AIDS pandemic in the West.

Efforts spearheaded in the West geared to halt the spread of the disease in the developing world initially assumed that MSM were globally at greatest risk. In India, this set the stage for very early HIV/AIDS prevention and care NGOs to galvanize local activist oriented MSM- the local counterparts to Queer activists in the West. HIV/AIDS prevention quickly assimilated queer psychosocial support networks as a primary, if unpublicized task. Parmindar speaks fondly of his experiences in association with such groups. He attributes his queer socio-political consciousness to one particular group (his queer socio-consciousness is also grounded in homegrown-values of respect towards others). Associating with such a group in formal activities, i.e. support group meetings, organized discussions, STI awareness building sessions, as well as socializing informally with group members facilitates community for it fosters a sense of commonality, self-agency, and normalcy (Herdt "Rite of Passage" 29-67; Magar 512).

Even a perusal of the multitude of socio-anthropological as well as public health and particularly epidemiological texts dealing with sexuality in India would elucidate the great deal of socially sanctioned, state reinforced/enforced restrictions on behavior and actions for heterosexuals. This includes a reticence towards explicit discourse around non-heteronormative domestic sex and sexuality outside of texts that specifically explore this topic. This thread of discourse largely articulates to the plight of females, who undoubtedly host fewer controls over their own lives in the patriarchal context, such as that in northern India.

Feminist work and research has made great strides in exploring patriarchy in terms of misogyny, rape, sexual exploitation and abuse, and even emotional sexual abuse. Frankly, feminist research is largely responsible for the academic and social exploration of this nexus. The lack of exploration of these topics from a masculine perspective both relieves men of any culpability to challenge oppressive extant gender normativity and firmly fixes them in the domain of the feminine. The following example shows just one of the mechanisms by which patriarchy fixes female

sexuality as threatening and therefore places the responsibility for adult sexuality firmly within the feminine domain:

Several attempts are made by the parents to curtail the opportunities for premarital sex. This control is often expressed by the removal of the girl from formal education. Various restrictions on mobility/peer interaction and an increase in domestic responsibilities all serve to limit her opportunities of interacting with young men (Mehta et al. 101 *).*

Mehta et al.'s work on sexual risks within the context of heterosexual marriage, the treatise goes on to explain that youth in these prohibitive circumstances develop a social network that permits sexual contact at a young age. These networks and ensuing emotional and physical sexual explorations are clandestine. Ruth Vanita emphasizes that "insistence on procreation works as the best way to constrain sexual activity" (34). Such insistence may increasingly prove ineffective. The girl-child is rendered particularly ignorant of sexuality and discouraged of desire by the bounds of her space. Essentially, her emotional and sexual well-being is compromised for the sake of controlling her (heterosexual) sexual initiation by restricting her mobility. Since these restrictions extend to her formal education, the overall effect of control over sexuality is far-reaching.

While the pre and extra martial sexual relationships of men may be tolerated, women's sexuality is controlled in many ways to prevent them from engaging in socially undesirable sexual relationships outside marriage. Such a control is manifested in terms of dress code, behaviour, mobility; restricted social contacts with the opposite sex, keeping them ignorant about sexual matters; and inculcating a feeling of shame regarding their bodies and sex. (Khan et al. 13-14).

Due to the relatively greater space masculinity occupies, men received little critical attention juxtaposing contemporary, cosmopolitan values of males versus their more traditional roles and traits of masculinity. This also breeds a silence around male liberation from the very same restrictive roles that, just as feminist research has established for women, can erode self-determination. Girls are raised to be adequate marriage partners, relieving their families of the burden of dowry. Young and adolescent males are raised to strive towards a success that would attract a suitable bride, ideally one whose family can offer a great dowry. Tension between traditional female gender roles around marriage can preoccupy women throughout life. Consider the space for self-efficacy- the ability, resources and perception that one can influence one's own life (Magar 511-513, 521) in the following predicaments: A girl whose parental influence orients her towards

inevitable wifehood; a girl who is chaperoned at all times in order to control her contact with non-kin males; potential brides who have little say in their marriage partner ('*in the village no one asks the girl'*) ; a wife who withholds and receives little overt gratification from her husband so as not to offend his mother; a mother receiving accolade only upon birthing a son. If widowed, "norms of widowhood are essentially norms of asceticism" (Kakar 98). Further, levirate marriages, still practiced in very rural areas in northern India, as yet another mean by which to ensure that men continue to control assets, further evincing lifelong controls on the lives and actions of women.

In terms of space accorded males and females in this patriarchal hegemony, Ruth Vanita neatly sums up the issues in the following example:

Entering a cross-sex marriage while having same-sex encounters or liaisons on the side is a relatively easier option for a man than for a woman. Most married men have greater mobility, leisure, freedom of social interaction, access to public spaces, and control over money, and less accountability to their spouses than women...Women lose more freedom when they marry than men (Vanita 53).

Such 'freedom' of determination provides ample space for men to seek and engage in clandestine casual sex relationships. Access to the anonymity of public space enables male-to-male encounters, but it is exactly that space which restricts women-to-women encounters. Clearly, cruising is a behavior pattern, an unequally available for both gender and identity. In a vacuum of queer identity and absence of language that affirms alternate, i.e. non-heteronormative, identity and behavior, cruising takes a center stage, much akin to adolescent sexual behavior in adult regulated space. These limits and their enforcement shall be discussed later and exhibited in the narratives that follow.

The contacts men gain through cruising populate the base from which emerges a critical mass to establish and perpetuate familiar bonds and patterns- norms. This informal network perpetuates itself and therefore elicits discernable and distinctive traits associated with the 'emerging' identity group.

Marriage does not preclude men from neither cruising nor discursive 'sexual' identity for men. In fact, men have the space to do both due to the restriction placed on female sexuality, which is likely under greater surveillance in this cultural context. When Seabrook confronted married men in Dhuala Kuan to discuss if their wives may not be patiently waiting at home, and instead they may have their own

clandestine relationships, many asserted: "Where would she go? How would she meet another man?" This reinforces the endemic nature of patriarchal norms to which we are all socialized. Patriarchal masculinity provides males greater space for sexual exploration and therefore mental space for development from childhood through adulthood. Feminist research in particular has well documented heterosexual sexual development and space for sexuality. Nonetheless, many others concur that MSM are subject to the same patriarchal socialization, (Khan 1; Levine 69; Lynch 190), hence the context for, and of, resistance- the carving out of transgressive space despite and in spite of patriarchy.

Cruising-space

Cruising 'spaces' locate physical- or cyber- space, exploited by MSM to seek contact with other MSM in spaces *they* specifically delineate for this purpose. Such spaces are readily identifiable to those concerned and are likely outside of wider public perception. Cruising spaces often span in function as social spaces, spaces for sex-on-premises, and the opportunity to arrange future appointments for a variety of forms of gratification. Given the density of population and widespread usage of public spaces, Delhiites are subject to the ubiquitous public gaze, or are under explicit public or private surveillance (e.g. security guards or law enforcement officers); legislation and law enforcement are but two factors easily demarcating the parameters of behavior and space. For MSM opportunities for sex in public are heavily dependent on avoiding detection, which could lead to adverse social and legal consequences. Extortion and others forms of exploitation by law enforcement officers are common complaints from MSM. The officers simply approach these men while they loiter in public spaces and accuse them of soliciting sex. Extortion payment is often money or oral or anal sex. Such exploitation hinders the work of health outreach workers whom epidemiology suggests are the highest risk group ad in most need of intervention. Consequently, a great deal of activism attacks this very issue from the socio-epidemiological perspective.

Stealth and Public Space

On many given early evenings, The Volga Restaurant is a smoothly lit, large room apparently reminiscent of the styles of similar venues found in the valleys near the river in Russia, presumably the namesake of this Delhi venue. The dim lighting help project an old world charm likening itself to romanticized images of the east European region, people, places and lives surrounding the all important trade route of the Volga. The Volga Restaurant formerly faced a park with significant shrubbery, which famously shrouded the park's habitues from public gaze. Subway construction (completed in this area in early summer 2005) altered this

landscape, depleting MSM of an otherwise extremely active cruising space. The shrubbery in Central Park is said to have been so dense as to facilitate public sex directly on the premises of the park. Wonders of nature, the shroud of darkness, flora and fauna so well maintained in *Green Delhi,* can provide for transgressive social activity. Certainly it was the people, their needs and resources that coupled with the need to survive drives us to adapt- and adopt new and evolving patterns of behavior in response to our ecological/metropolitan jungle.

The metro planning components of the local government and those contracted for the actual construction likely ignored the social ramifications of their actions. Theirs was a way forward for Delhi. People adapt. Daily, beginning at sunset, and especially on weekends, less than two-hundred meters away from the former Volga rests the small green space above Palika Bazaar and likens itself to a mela. Originally, 'mela' refers to a social, commercial, religious or athletic gathering, but more generally indicates a fair in rural areas. Yet, there are no festivities, at least not officially registered by authorities or in the public mind. The cruising continues in full swing. The shrubbery is at present non-existent, and the only space obscured from the public gaze is the area between the ventilation shafts above the bazaar, hence there is little sex-on-premises. The area is raised from the surrounding whirling

traffic and flush with sunlight. Adult masseurs sporting dusty red, rimless caps meander through the space offering to shoulders and arms, or even a full body massage under the sun, upon the green grass. Ear cleaners and young shoe-shiners are equally present, offering similar distraction to the park's habitues. Cruising, which famously evades public gaze, fixes itself in space and time above the shopping bazaar- one where consumers can find *anything!*

The excitement of the completion of subway construction around Connaught Place excites gay men waiting to cruise, according to Parmindar. In a previous interview, Parmindar exclaimed, "they're not making the place for the gays, but the gays are making the place for themselves."

A dear queer elder here in India once told me that when he first came to Delhi more than 30 years ago from Uttar Pradesh he found the Volga Restaurant. He also says that the decor has not changed much, if at all, since then and his recent visits. Apparently neither has its reputation and function. Recent visits to Connaught Place confirm that The Volga and the surrounding area are still extremely active venues for men to meet men. The construction of the Delhi subway has destroyed the park area in front of the Volga as a meeting place- formerly viewed as one of the most central meeting, cruising and sex-on-premises areas of the city. Hustlers, those trading sex for

money or favors, traverse the area above Palika, whereas the cruising near and around The Volga is believed exclusively 'non-commercial' cruising. Sitting under a tree facing the Volga, one informant suggested that the commercial demarcation was due to the nature of the Connaught Place versus that of the neighboring park. 'Loitering' in commercial spaces is more easily explained to police than waiting around in the park. The demarcated spaces filter those seeking hustlers from those exclusively cruising one another. On several visits to the park young, assertive, fashionably trendy (earrings, heavily gelled-hair, boot-cut denim pants, 'affected'/relaxed nonchalant stride) approached me unsolicited with great flattery before suggesting that I pay them for sexual favor. On each occasion, each pleaded for my phone number, insisting that I write it on scrap paper. Notably, none could produce two key tale-tale signs of modernity and wealth in (urban) India: A mobile phone and an E-mail address.

The area around the Volga restaurant is wholly commercial, and the newly constructed metro system disgorges passengers directly in front of the Volga, and onto its surrounding permanent shopping and food mela. Connaught Place is geographically more or less located in the center of the city, making it equally *inconvenient* distance-wise for both north and south Delhiites to reach. Interestingly, the expansion of the Metro system aims to decongest the more densely populated northern part of the city. As is stands, then, it would seem logistically advantageous for those in the northern part of the city to occupy the cruising spaces around Connaught Place.

The area is largely commercial, filled with towering office spaces encircling the shopping-in-the-round. Business signs and advertisements are loud and dust from the interminable subway construction in the center of the shopping areas weighs heavily. One might project that the distance of the locale from more predominantly residential areas contributes to its popularity, for in this case distance equates to anonymity. Connaught Place is unlike the posh market places and nearby parks of south Delhi, or the neighborhood parks or expansive green ways of the more densely populated northern part of the city. The area is therefore a cross roads for the entire city. It is not surprising that crossroads that are more formal tend to offer the same sense of anonymity and serve the same purposes as far as attracting men who seek other men for sexual gratification. The toilet stalls in the Interstate Bus Terminal (ISBT), one of the largest hubs for inter and inner-state bus transportation, are an additional well-known cruising site especially for a quickie. It is a locale for sex-on-premises. The distance, implying isolation from residential spaces, is one boundary that consistently demarcates the cruising spaces frequented by MSM. This diverges from Melas, which either are organized by or cater to residential

colonies, and therefore positioned nearby and even within residential enclaves. Nonetheless, these are all public spaces simultaneously owned by everyone and no one in particular. All are transients to these areas and may lay no claims.

Usurping Patriarchy: Cruising in heteronormative space
Cruising spaces emerge and thrive easily in urban settings where anonymity ensues with urbanization, and participants and communities can thrive virtually undetected. Delhi provides ample spaces for cruising for a variety sexual pursuit. Cruising patterns of men seeking men is aggressively covert yet apparently tolerated; its clandestine nature helps to maintain the facade of hegemonic sexual practices. By contrast, hegemonic heterosexual cruising spaces are ostentatiously ubiquitous and thereby evade the public gaze as *cruising spaces.* This likely explains the apparent absence of heterosexual cruising spaces from public discourse save for the occasional challenge around public space, eve-teasing and "misogyny" (Rajan 333).

Eve-teasing is an endemic and wide-spread public display of male sexual aggression. Author Jyoti Puri describes as "being slapped on the bottoms, being touched on the breasts, being whistled at, being deliberately brushed against, receiving cat-calls or sexually suggestive comment" (Puri 97). In his treatise on the intricacies that enforce/reinforce male dominance in India, Steve Derne suggests that extensive newspaper coverage of eve-teasing "helps constitute both the idea that women are never safe outside the home, and the idea that women who roam about shamelessly without a guardian deserve to be ill-treated" (Derne 34). Gendered differences and distances in power mar eve-teasing. In Signposts: Gender Issues in Post-Independent India , Rajan, describes eve-teasing as "harassment" (Rajan 341), distinct from sexual harassment in the west due to its localized implications. Self-righteous men may feel empowered to sanction females who are alleged to have somehow publicly indicated immodesty- the indecent dress that attracts male attention (Rajan 341).

Cultural festivals or fairs locally known as *Melas,* are notorious public heterosexual cruising and eve-teasing (Derne) and are often offensive or even threatening to those females on the receiving end of the aggressive taunts, fondling or gropes (Newman 429) of males of varying ages (Poudel et al. 901). In their investigation into the sexual patterns of Nepalese migrants to India, Poudel et al. found that for the participants, melas function as cruising spaces in both urban and particularly rural spaces, where few other spaces provide ample cover for 'clandestine' sexual behavior- evading public gaze or creating sufficient excuses to relatives and friends for unexplained absences. One Focus Group Discussion (FGD)

participant claimed that "[t]he main aim of *lahures* [returned migrants] attending the local mela and *deuda* [local cultural event] is to have sex (big laugh)" (Poudel et al. 901). Lahures come to cruise. Another participant contributed, "When we have *jatra* [local festival] for overnight, *lahures* would have fun (sex) with more that one woman... " (Poudel et al. 901). Deuda and jatra are hegemonically sanctioned (heterosexual) cruising spaces. Here, multiple and serial casual-sex-partnership does not imply deviance or (sexual) pathology.

The researchers concluded, "Local festivals ... provided good opportunities to have extramarital sex" (Poudel et al. 901). Such a venue serves as an open stage for a widespread aspect of heterosexual adolescent experiences with sexuality, and a forum for engaging genders in groups divided on normative gender lines. There are a plethora of spaces that operate under the guise of normative sexual practices, which function as a stage for heterosexual cruising for sex; venues whose 'effect' and pragmatism is to provide the space for men and women to engage over varying lengths of time and a range of processes, which inevitably results in sex. These spaces are also covert, for there is little direct acknowledgment of their functionality as cruising spaces; they are generally seen as meeting spaces and not overtly acknowledged as be sexually charged. Here, the sexual charge is concealed beneath its integration into hegemonic, heterosexualist norms.

An analogy is found in the popular view that Hip-Hop music and culture is violent, for which many of the most proliferated lyrics and imagery surrounding the genre easily attest. Yet, hooks clarifies the way in which patriarchy has appropriated the genre to perpetuate a dominate/subordinate power structure:

Misogynist rap music and the white male dominated patriarchal infrastructure that produces it encourages male contempt and disregard for females. It is the plantation economy, where black males labor in the filed of gender and come out ready to defend their patriarchal manhood by all manner of violence against women and men who they perceive to be weak and like women. Although it intensifies the problem of black male violence against women and children, misogynist rap did not create the problem. Patriarchy put in place the logic and patriarchal socialization that lets men take it to the level of practice (hooks "Real Cool" 62).

Hip-Hop culture spans the globe. Advertisement and product promotion dominate popular representation of Hip-Hop culture in India particularly to exploit Hip-Hop's appeal to the youth consumer segment. These youth are not readily exposed to the roots of

Hip-Hop as resistance music, which I explore later. Exposing the true nature of the success and proliferation of commercial Hip-Hop, despite its alleged underground/subaltern appeal, hooks affirms: "Much hip-hop culture is mainstream because it is just a black minstrel show- an imitation of dominator desire, not a rearticulation, not a radical alternative" (hooks "Real Cool" 152).

It is like claiming that Hip-Hop is violent and misogynistic- inherently pathological. Meanwhile, the Hollywood film industry hardly releases a fill void of sex, drugs, gratuitous violence and rock-n-roll. Critics who re/view these films ignore the violence as the basic 'relief' to a plot. The violence is a normal backdrop to which industry ratings are applied. The Motion Picture Association of America rates films on the following scale: G, PG, PG-13, R, NC-17 and X. See Index 1 for greater details. Violence fits neatly into a widely socially accepted and available understanding of popular imagery. Filmgoers are encouraged to ignore the violence and misogyny as inherent in the uncritical portrayal of life in Hollywood films, most of which reflect the lives of the elite. Few of those images from Hollywood or Bollywood reflect the lives of the poor from the perspective of the poor.

Concealing the sexual charge of sexually charged heterosexual spaces emphasizes, the sexual charge of discursive sexuality- it is this that renders 'the other' other. It provides a relief upon the other thereby constituting its alterity to that which is concealed; alterity exposes, and is therefore an act of resistance. Essentialist heteronormative views of non-normative sexualities synonymizes identity with behavior, behavior with sex, and sex with cruising. Undoubtedly, cruising for sex subjectifies same-gender loving men to essentialist discourse that circulates in the wider public. Public discourse lacks discursive exposure to same-gender loving people and is generally informed by limited sources such as radio, TV, print and (increasingly) Internet media, that 'fixes' same -gender loving men and even cruising within pathologized frames of transgression, hyper-sexuality and diseases, particularly HIV/AIDS.

One major consequence of this pattern of attitudes and behaviors vis-a-vis alterity is the spread of disease. In fact, following the path of disease, its epidemiology, exposes its highest risks groups. Defining that group often elucidates several intersections of marginalization- those outside of what the public deems as its purview. Were heterosexual space as scrutinized as MSM space, such studies would have long since elicited the tragedy that follows these migrants back to their rural home communities- ill-equipped and unprepared for high-risk sexual behavior, the apparent norms of the city-scape, transcending space and time via *mobility.* Migration often betrays spaces by linking them. The interface, however, can have dangerous ramifications if not adequately

mediated. Mobility (the impermanency of space) and consequent destabilization poses a confrontation of values between the varying spaces inhabited- be they modern/traditional, urban/rural, wealthy/impoverished, etc. Destabilization by mobility creates much insecurity and is therefore a risk. Seeking security may at time surpass the drive for dignity, which the anonymity of the cityscape only facilitates. The new and changing norms are informed by the rapid expansion of an urban population increasingly informed by their negotiation of security.

Queerspace: Social response to oppression

In the ethnographic/historical treatise, Stonewall, tracing the origins of the modern day Gay Right's movement, author/researcher Martin Duberman describes the climate and early signs of queer resistance to invisibility and oppression. The story chronicles the lives of the six protagonists whose lives converge in the Stonewall Inn, a bar in the embryonic queer enclave in New York's East Village, where police raids, exploitation, harassment, entrapment and extortion were common (Public Domain "Stonewall"). One fateful night in 1969 the bar owners had not been alerted to the regular police-raid as was normally the case. As the raid began, habitues assumed that the police would only arrest those "without IDs, those dressed in the clothes of the opposite gender, and some or all of the employees. Everyone else would be let go with a few shoves and a few contemptuous words." On this night, however, the officers yielded to their hatred of sexual alterity and divergent gender roles, physically harassing and bruising the already fatigued crowd of partygoers. After years of surviving within the purview of endemic racism, homophobia and humiliation in the form of social oppression and consistent brutality at the hands of law-enforcement, these poor and working class, African-American and Latin-American gays and transsexuals met violence with violence, force with force. Moreover, the detailed life histories constructed by Duberman's narratives suggest that some culpability rests with venting repressed frustration at a society that preached *freedom* while honing the praxis of *oppression.* Historian Howard Zinn attributes the riots to increasing popular sentiments and actions by the military citizenry to protest the American invasion of South-East Asia as well as a rise of African-American militancy, juxtaposed against the non-violent focus of the Civil Rights era (Zinn "People's History"). The ensuing riots and protests mark the start of gay liberation in America (Duberman "Stonewall").

Pre-Stonewall western society shares several important similarities with contemporary, urban India such as a similar climate of social invisibility and hostility as well as the discursive and unclear homophobic and heteronormative environment. Pre-Stonewall urban America parallels contemporary urban Indian space insofar

as public discourse domesticating sex and sexuality. Public space for queers is primarily sexualized, and seeds of resistance and change are avid only in pockets of urban middle-class activists highlighting the urban/rural discordances in sexual mores. In 1950's Chicago, there was a 10PM curfew for minors. One late night while Stonewall protagonist Craig Rodwell headed home after a night of cruising on the streets, "three or four police cars roared up from different directions" (Duberman 47), and arrested fifteen year old Craig along with another man for alleged "crime against nature" (Duberman 47). The sentences for Craig and the man were two years probation and five years imprisonment, respectively. Despite legitimized reproach, Craig continued to cruise the streets. A casual-sex partner introduced him to the only queer advocacy group listed in all of Chicago. Craig promptly visited the organization only to find that the contact he had been given was merely a post office box. Craig decided right then to head to New York, much the same way Parmindar and countless others head towards urban centers.

Resist

Once I was caught red-handed...I was doing sex with someone in the bushes in Nehru Park...by the time the cops came, we were not stripped at that time. I zipped up my pant, and everything was ok. And they [the cops] started to tell, "Oh, what you are doing here! This is a crime." And they started harassing me. Then they said, "The first we'll do, we'll call your family. We'll take you to the police station!" I said, "OK, take me to the police station. I want to talk to your SHO." He said [in a hushed and serious voice], "Why are you taking so rudely! You are a criminal. Once you have committed crime, now you are warning us." I said, "I was doing nothing wrong. What were we doing? We're just standing here. We're smooching here. That's it! So, we can do this [in a defiant voice]. Under what section you are booking us?" He said, "No, no. Give us money otherwise I'm going to tell your family." I said, No! Take me to the police station, I want to talk to your Station House Officer (SHO)." So, he said, "What do you do?" I said, "I'm an advocate." They said, "OK, you may go, please." And they went away...By the time they came to know I'm advocate, they were not in a position to argue with me because they know that I know the law better than them. They're such a stupid- eighth standard or ninth standard in class and they have been recruited in the police. They know nothing about the laws. (Parmindar)

As Parmindar relayed this story, I felt it an interesting distinctive confluence of lives and times: One on side, law enforcement approaches MSM cruising in Delhi in much the same way as the mollies of seventeenth century London. Then police routinely harassed MSM, and society seemingly had little concept of the identity beyond alleged behavior, and lacked a term by which to

refer to emergent identities (Wikholm "Gay History"). At the other extreme, the type of activism that surrounded Stonewall only happened centuries later.

Essential space

Queerspaces are for men seeking sexual encounters with other men, centralizes sex and power hence people where "feel manipulated or used." Homophobia dehumanizes homosexuality by equating alternate sexualities with sex, which it then labels immoral. In pre-Stonewall western society sex between two men was almost exclusively clandestine and hidden, often in anonymous public spaces. Queer pornography existed in a virtual vacuum of other aspects of queer images, voices and lives. The void of queer expression outside of *sex* implied an acceptance the hegemonic, homophobic essentialization of homosexuality to just sex, thereby an apparent mutual focus of homosexuals and their socio-political antagonists. Commenting on Kimmel's conjecture about this archetypical habitue he calls *cruising clone,* T. Edwards (1994) concludes: *Consequently, the cruising clone is seen as a conformist as opposed to an opponent, to 'masculine sexual scripts: "They [gay men] are not "perverts" or "deviants" who have strayed from the norms of masculinity and therefore brought this terrible retribution [AIDS] upon themselves. They are, if anything, over-conformists to destructive norms of male behavior* (Kimmel 109 qtd. in T. Edwards 48). Edwards, continues, and I concur, that this approach essentially pathologizes gay men, despite the useful linkage that ultimately challenges male scripts overall as most destructively evinced by ultra-masculinity in MSM. Clandestine sexual activity is the *only* point of reference for homosexuality, and the site of abuse. Parmindar had several personal stories, such as this one, of run-ins with the police while cruising:

I'm telling you the story of my boyfriend, that once he was caught red-handed with a Negro guy. He was having sex with a Negro guy in India Gate somewhere. At that time, he was carrying 500 bucks only, so he had to give 500 bucks to the police. And the next time he was caught somewhere else by the police. He was not carrying money and that's why the cops, they took him to the police station and they informed his parents. They [his parents] came and they [the cops] gave them the warning that "Your son...is up to all these things... " At that time, he was around 28 [years old].

Parmindar demonstrates that he is willing to resist this type of oppression. He refuses to be fixed as a victim- the role prescribed to him by society, and certainly, where it is succinctly enforced. Similarly, Black men in America are fixed within a hegemony that delineates specific, antiquated and dysfunctional (i.e. oppressive) roles for them as a gender, race and even attaches class, leading

bell hooks to iterate:

Black males who refuse categorization are rare, for the price of visibility in the contemporary world of white supremacy is that black male identity be defined in relation to the stereotype whether embodying it or seeking to be other than it (hooks "Real Cool" Xii).

Parmindar moves through the city creating and producing a distinct sort of 'urbanism' inflected with sexuality but also a sense of a society. From isolation (in Punjab), Parmindar moves towards a network within and through which to locate his personhood. Cruising through the city takes on an amplified meaning of generating social personhood, despite sustained invisibility. Parmindar is not a 'ghost' unto himself, nor a ghost within his created and creative urban network. In the queerspace that is generated, he experiences freedom through resistance.

Works cited:

- Baker, Paul. Polari: The Lost Language of Gay Men . London: Routledge, 2002.
- bell hooks: Cultural Criticism and Transformation . dir. Sut Jhally. perf. bell hooks. Media Education Foundation: Challenging Media, 1997.
- (Originally viewed on Youtube: downloaded from: http://www.mediaed.org/handouts.)
- Berlant, Lauren and Elizabeth Freeman. "Queer Nationality." Fear of a Queer Planet: Queer Politics and Social Theory . Ed. Michael Warner. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993, pp. 193-229.
- Berling, Tim. Sissyphobia: Gay Men and Effeminate Behavior . Binghamton, NY: Southern Tier Editions, Harrington Park Press, 2001.
- Bordo, Susan. "Never Just Pictures." The Feminism and Visual Culture Reader . Ed. Amelia Jones. London: Routledge, 2003, pp. 454-465.
- Bordo, Susan. Twilight Zones: The Hidden Life of Cultural Images from Plato to O.J. . Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997.
- Butler, Judith. Bodies That Matter: On The Discursive Limits of "Sex." . New York: Routledge, 1993.
- Butler, Judith. Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity . New York: Routledge, n.d.
- Campbell, John Edward. Getting it on online: Cyberspace, gay male sexuality and embodied identity . Binghamton, NY: n.p., 2004.
- Carrier, Joseph. "Miguel: Sexual Life History of a Gay Mexican American." Gay Culture in America: Essays from the Field . Ed. Gilbert Herdt. Boston: Beacon Press, 1992, pp. 202-224.
- Carrillo, Hector. "Sexual Migration, Cross-Cultural Sexual Encounters, and Sexual Health." Sexuality Research & Social

Policy. Journal of National Sexuality Resource Center 1.3 Sept. 2004, pp. 58-70.

- Chandran, Rina. "What's on the consumer's mind?." The Hindu: Business Line Internet Edition 6 Nov. 2003: N. pag. THE HINDU group of publications. 15 Oct. 2005 .

- Chaudhary, Zahid. "Controlling the Ganymedes: The Colonial Gaze in J.R. Ackerley's Hindoo Holiday." Sexual Sites, Seminal Attitudes: Sexualities, Masculinities and Culture in South Asia. . Ed. Sanjay Srivastava. New Delhi: Sage Publications, Inc., 2004, pp. 83-98.

- Cherrelle, released November 1988 on her album "Affair."

- Chhibber Narula, Kavita. Indian Gays Step Out: South Asian gays emerge to challenge the staid conventions of the community. . June 2002. Little India. 28 Apr. 2007 .

- Chibbaro, Jr., Lou. . Press Accounts. 'Gay CancerÂ´ Focus of Hearing in 'The Washington Blade.' . 16 Apr. 1982. Representative Henry Waxman- 30th District of California. 22 Oct. 2005 .

- Chomsky, Noam. Radical Priorities . Oakland, CA: AK Press, 1981.

- Coleman, Julie. Love, Sex and Marriage: A Historical Thesaurus . Amsterdam/Atlanta, GA: Rodopi B.V., n.d.

- Comas-Diaz, Lillian and Beverly Greene. Women of Color: Integrating Ethnic and Gender Identities in Psychotherapy . New York: The Guilford Press- Guilford Publications, Inc., 1994.

- Derne, Steve. Culture in Action: Family Life, Emotion, and Male Dominance in Banaras, India . Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995.

- Dollimore, Jonathan. Sexual Dissidence: sexual Dissidence Augustine to Wilde, Freud to Foucault . N.p.: Oxford University Press, 1991.

- Dube, Leela. "Seed and Earth: The Symbolism of Biological Reproduction and Sexual Relations of Production." Visibility and Power: Essays on Women in Society and Development . Ed. Shirley Ardener, Eleanor Leacock, and Leela Dube. N.p.: Oxford University Press, 1986.

- Dube, Leela. "Seed and Earth: The Symbolism of Biological Reproduction and Sexual Relations of Production." Visibility and Power: Essays on Women in Society and Development . Ed. Shirley Ardener, Eleanor Leacock, and Leela Dube. N.p.: Oxford University Press, 1986.

- Dube, Leela. Women and Kinship: Comparative Perspectives on Gender in South and South-East Asia . Tokyo: United Nations University Press, 1997.

- Duberman, Martin. Stonewall . New York: Penguin Group, 1994.

- Eble, Connie. Slang and Sociability: In-group Language Among College Students . Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996.

- Edwards, Lillian and Gerant Howells. "Anonymity, Consumers and the Internet: Where Everyone Knows You're A Dog." Digital

Anonymity and the Law: Tension and Dimensions . Ed. C. Nicoll, M.J.M. van Dellen, and J.E.J. Prins. The Hague: T.M.C. Asser Press, 2003, pp. 207-233.

- Edwards, Tim. _Erotics and Politics: Gay Male Sexuality, Masculinity and Feminism_ . New York: Routledge, 1994.

- Faiman-Silva, Sandra L. _The Courage to Connect: Sexuality, Citizenship, and Community in Provincetown_ . Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004.

- Forth, Christopher. "Guts and Manhood: The Culture of the Abdomen in Modern France." _Body Parts: Critical Explorations in Corporeality_ . Ed. Christopher E. Forth and Ivan Crozier. Oxford: Lexington Books, 2005, pp. 191-206.

- Gordon, Richard A. _Eating Disorders: Anatomy of a Social Epidemic_ . Malden, Mass: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, n.d.

- Gupta, Charu. _Sexuality, obscenity, community: women, muslims, and the Hindu public in colonial India_ . Delhi: Permanent Black Monographs, 2002.

- Hall, Joan Wylie. _Conversations with Audre Lorde_ . Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2004.

- Hartley, John and Catherine Lumby. ""Workherdting Girls or Drop-Dead Gorgeous? Young Girls in Fashion and News." _Youth Cultures: Texts, images and identities_ . Ed. Sharyn Pearce and Kerry Mallan. Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2003, pp. 47-68.

- Herbst, Philip H. _Wimmin, Wimps & Wallflowers: An Encyclopedic Dictionary of Gender and Sexual Orientation bias in the United States_ . Yarmouth, MA: Intercultural Press, Inc., 2001.

- Herdt, Gilbert and Andrew Boxer. _Children of Horizons: How gay and lesbian teens are leading a new way out of the closet_ . Boston: Beacon Press, 1996.

- Herdt, Gilbert. Introduction. _Gay Culture in America: Essays from the Field_ . by Gilbert Herdt. Boston: Beacon Press, 1992, pp. 4, 12.

- Herdt, Gilbert. "Coming Out" as a Rite of Passage." _Gay Culture in America: Essays from the Field_ . Ed. Gilbert Herdt. Boston: Beacon Press, 1992, pp. 29-67.

- Holmes, Ronald M and Stephen T. Holmes. _Sex Crimes: Patterns and behavior_ . Seattle: Bay Press, 2002.

- Herrel, Richard K. "The Symbolic Strategies of Chicago's Gay and Lesbian Pride Day Parade." _Gay Culture in America: Essays from the Field_ . Ed. Gilbert Herdt. Boston: Beacon Press, 1992, pp. 225-252.

- hooks, bell. _Feminism is for Everyone. Passionate Politics._ . Cambridge: South End Press, 2002.

- hooks, bell. _Talking Back: Thinking feminist, thinking black_ . Toronto: Between the Lines, 1989.

- hooks, bell. _We Real Cool: Black Men and Masculinity_ . New York: Routledge, 2004.

- Ingram, Gordon Brent. "Marginality and the Landscapes of Erotic Alien(n)ations." _Queers in Space: Communities, Public Spaces,_

Sites of Resistance . Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc., 1997.

- Jam, Jimmy and Terry Lewis. Everything I Miss at Home .

- Johnson, E. Patrick. "Mother Knows Best: Black Gay Vernacular and Transgressive Domestic Space." Speaking in Queer Tongues . Ed. Tom Boellstorff and William Leap. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004.

- Johnson, E. Patrick. "Mother Knows Best: Black Gay Vernacular and Transgressive Domestic Space." Speaking in Queer Tongues . Ed. Tom Boellstorff and William Leap. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004.

- Kakar, Sudhir. Identity and Adulthood . Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1979.

- Khan, Shivananda. "MSM, HIV/AIDS and Human Rights in South Asia." Expert group meeting on HIV/AIDS and Human Rights in Asia-Pacific, Bangkok, Thailand. Mar. 2004.

- Kimmel, Michael S. "After Fifteen Years: The Impact of the Sociology of Masculinity on the Masculinity of Sociology." Men, Masculinities and Social Theory . Ed. Jeff Hearn and David Morgan. London: Unwin Hyman, 1990, pp. 93-109.

- Kirsch, Max H. Queer Theory and Social Change . London: Routledge, n.d.

- Levine, Martin. "The Life and Death of Gay Clones." Gay Culture in America: Essays from the Field . Ed. Gilbert Herdt. Boston: Beacon Press, 1992, pp. 68-86.

- Lorde, Audrey. Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches . Freedom, CA: The Crossing Press, 1984.

- Lynch, Frederick R. "Nonghetto Gays: An Ethnography of Suburban Homosexuals." Gay Culture in America: Essays from the Field . Ed. Gilbert Herdt. Boston: Beacon Press, 1992, pp. 165-201.

- Magar, Veronica. "Empowerment Approaches to Gender-Based Violence: Women's Courts in Delhi Slums." Women's Studies International Forum 26.6, 2003, pp. 509-523.

- Maitra, Shubha and Stephen L. Schensul. "Public Social Reputation vs. Private Sexual Risk for Young Women in a Rural Area in Gujarat." Sexuality in the Time of AIDS: Contemporary Perspectives from Communities in India . Ed. Ravi K. Verma, Pertti J. Pelto, Archana Joshi, et al. New Delhi: Sage Publications India Pvt. Ltd, 2004.

- Martin, Robert K and George Piggford, eds., Queer Forster. Worlds of Desire: The Chicago Series on Sexuality, Gender, and Culture. Vol.10 . Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997.

- Mehta, Anupa, Stephen L. Schensul, and Suzane Fall. "The Evolution of Marital relationships and Sexual Risk in an Urban Slum Community in Mumbai." Sexuality in the Time of AIDS: Contemporary Perspectives from Communities in India . Ed. Ravi K. Verma, Pertti J. Pelto, Archana Joshi, et al. New Delhi: Sage Publications India Pvt. Ltd, 2004.

- Munt, Sally R. "Sister in Exile." New Frontiers in Space, Bodies and Gender . Ed. Rosa Ailnley. London: Routledge, 2004, pp. 3-19.
- Murphy, Dean, Martin Holt, Dermot Ryan, et al. Cruising and connecting online: The use of Internet Chat Sites by Gay Men in Sydney and Melbourne . Sydney: National Centre in HIV Social Research, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, The University of New South Wales, 2004.
- Newman, David. Sociology: Exploring the Architecture of Everyday Life . Oaks, CA: Pine Forge Press, 2004.
- Parmindar (pseudonym). Personal interview. 08 June 2005.
- (Interview for PhD Thesis on gender, race/caste and class in contemporary urban India through the experience of self-identified gay men. Parts of this interview were published for Aakar's "Exploring Masculinities: A Traveling Seminar".)
- Patel, Vibhuti Dr.. A Cultural Deficit . Aug. 2003. Indiatogether.org. Apr. 2007 .
- Poudel, Krishna C, Masamine Jimba, Junko Okumura, et al. "Migrants' risky sexual behaviours in India and at home in far western Nepal." Tropical Medicine and International Health 9.8 Aug. 2004: 897-903.
- Public domain,. Stonewall Riots . n.d. Wikipedia. 3 May 2006 .
- Puri, Jyoti. Woman, Body, Desire in Post-Colonial India: Narratives of Gender and Sexuality . New York: Routledge, 1999.
- Rajan, Rajeswari Sunder. Signposts: Gender Issues in Post-Independent India . New Delhi: Kali for Women, 2001.
- Reddy, Gayatri. "Modern Subjectivities: The 'Gay' Sexual Archetype." Sexual Sites, Seminal Attitudes: Sexualities, Masculinities and Culture in South Asia. . Ed. Sanjay Srivastava. New Delhi: Sage, 2004, pp. 147-164.
- Roy, Sandip. "From Khush List to gay Bombay: Virtual Webs of Real People." Mobile Cultures: New Media in Queer Asia . Ed. Chris Berry, Audrey Yue, and Fran Martin. Durham: Duke University Press, 2003.
- Russell, PhD, Glenda M. "Surviving and Thriving in the Midst of Anti-Gay Politics." Angles 7.2 2 Nov. 2004. Journal of the Institute of gay and Lesbian Strategic Studies.
- Seabrook, Jeremy and Anjali Gopalan. Love in a Different Climate: Men Who Have Sex with Men in India . London: New Left Books & Verso Books, 1999.
- Shah, A M. The Family in India: Critical Essays . Delhi: Orient Longman, 1996.
- Sibalis, Michael D. "Paris." Queer Sites: Gay Urban Histories Since 1600 . Ed. Higgs David. London: Routledge, 1999.
- Suresha, Ron Jackson. Bear on Bear: Interviews and Discussions . N.p.: Alyson Publications, 2002.
- Sycamore, Matt Bernstein. That's Revolting! Queer Strategies for Resisting Assimilation . Brooklyn, NY: Soft Skull Press, 2004.
- Sylvester. Do Ya Wanna Funk . (Performed by Patrick Cowley

featuring Sylvester; Megatone Records,

- Vanita, Ruth. Queering India: Same-Sex Love and Eroticism in Indian Culture and Society . London: Routledge, 2002.
- Verma, Ravi K and Hemkhothang Lhungdim. "Sexuality and Sexual Behaviours in Rural India: Evidence from a Five State Study." Sexuality in the Time of AIDS: Contemporary Perspectives from Communities in India . Ed. Stephen L. Schensul, Pertti J. Pelto, Archana Joshi, et al. New Delhi: Sage Publications India Pvt. Ltd, 2004, pp. 154.
- Weston, Kath. Families We Choose . New York: Columbia University Press, 1991.
- Whittaker, Jason. The Internet: The Basics . London: Routledge, 2002.
- Wikholm, Andrew. Mollies Arrested in London . Ed. Andrew Wikholm. 1998. Gay History.com. 08 Mar. 2005 .
- Williams, Stephen. Outdoor Recreation and the Urban Environment . London: Routledge, 1995.
- Zinn, Howard. A People's History of the United States: 1492-present . New York: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 1995.

_____

[1] For further discussion on Generation X and XY, see the Wikipedia entry: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/MTV_Generation

Diepiriye Sungumote Kuku-Siemons