

Performing the Third World in Montreal: Teesri Duniya Theatre, South Asia and the Transnational Circuits of Migration, Intersectionality, and Visual Culture.

Dr. Biju C. S.¹

¹ D.Lit. Fellow, University of Madras, Tamil Nadu, India

Corresponding Author:

Dr. Biju C. S.

Email: csbijustc@gmail.com

Abstract

This article reconceptualizes Teesri Duniya Theatre—a South Asian diasporic theater company founded in Montreal in 1981 by the playwright Rahul Varma—as a densely overdetermined site at which the historiography of Canadian theatre, the political economy of South Asian migration to Canada, the epistemologies of diaspora and transnationalism, the analytics of intersectionality, and the mediascapes of South Asian visual culture converge. Situating the company across postcolonial theory, diaspora studies, critical migration scholarship, feminist intersectional theory, and film and media studies, the article advances the claim that Teesri Duniya operates as a diasporic performance institution whose repertoire, publishing arm (alt.theatre), and community pedagogy together constitute both a counter-archive and a subaltern counterpublic. The company negotiates the double bind of racialized cultural production—rendered hypervisible as state-sanctioned "diversity" yet structurally peripheralized within hegemonic theatrical economies. Its self-designation as "Third World" is theorized as a disidentificatory political aesthetic that reactivates the anticolonial genealogy of Tricontinental solidarity while refusing assimilation into Canadian multiculturalism and Quebec interculturalism. Extending the original analysis, this article reads Teesri Duniya's dramaturgy against, and alongside, the transnational visual regime of Bollywood cinema, arguing that live diasporic theatre supplies an intersectional counter-image to the commodified, often nationalist and heteronormative imaginary circulated by popular Hindi film. Through sustained engagement with Counter Offence, Bhopal, Land Where the Trees Talk, and State of Denial, and through the historicization of South Asian settlement in Canada from the Komagata Maru to the contemporary conjuncture, the article theorizes diasporic performance as an ethical, spatial, and mediating practice that re-maps belonging beyond the territorial and symbolic frontiers of the nation-state.

Keywords: : diaspora theatre; interculturalism; transnationalism; South Asian Canadian theatre; South Asian migration; intersectionality; Bollywood; visual culture; Teesri Duniya; Rahul Varma; counterpublics

INTRODUCTION

Teesri Duniya Theatre occupies a constitutively paradoxical position within the cartography of Canadian and Québécois performance. Founded in Montreal in 1981 by the Indo-Canadian playwright Rahul Varma together with a collective of politically engaged artists, the company has, across more than four decades, sustained itself as an English-language, South Asian-identified, avowedly "Third World" theatre operating within a predominantly francophone province. Its Hindi-Urdu name—*teesri duniya*, "the third world"—announces a genealogical affiliation that exceeds the ethnic and identitarian frames through which racialized minority theatre is habitually apprehended. The company does not merely represent a South Asian community to a Canadian mainstream; it stages a sustained interrogation of the material and symbolic conditions under which diasporic subjects are produced, disciplined, and rendered legible within settler-colonial, multicultural, and intercultural state formations. This article contends that Teesri Duniya constitutes a *diasporic performance institution*: an organizational form through which the repertoire of embodied practice, the archive of critical discourse, and the counterpublic of minoritarian spectatorship are brought into productive—and frequently agonistic—articulation. The present study reworks and substantially amplifies an earlier analysis by embedding the company within five interlocking problematics that the original treatment either underdeveloped or left implicit: the longue durée of South Asian migration to Canada; the disciplinary formation and exclusionary genealogy of Canadian theatre; the analytics of intersectionality as they bear on gendered, classed, and racialized diasporic subjectivity; the theory of transnationalism as a mode of consciousness and political practice; and, most consequentially, the visual-cultural field of Bollywood cinema as the dominant transnational image-repertoire against which South Asian diasporic theatre defines its counter-aesthetic. The wager of this expanded account is that Teesri Duniya cannot be adequately theorized within theatre studies alone; it must be read at the interface of performance, migration, and

the visual, where the live and the mediated, the local and the planetary, the intimate and the geopolitical are continuously renegotiated.

Within Canadian theatre historiography, Teesri Duniya has too often been recruited as a token of "cultural diversity"—a signifier of institutional progress rather than an object of sustained theoretical elaboration. Yet the company's longevity, its multilingual and transnational repertoire, and its founding role in the periodical *alt.theatre* render it an exemplary case for rethinking the relation between theatre, migration, and the political. Drawing on the diaspora theories of Brah (1996), Hall (1990), and Clifford (1997); the transnationalist frameworks of Basch, Glick Schiller, and Szanton Blanc (1994) and Vertovec (2009); the postcolonial performance criticism of Bharucha (1993, 2000), Gilbert and Tompkins (1996), and Knowles (2010); the performance-studies interventions of Taylor (2003), Muñoz (1999), and Conquergood (2002); the intersectional feminism of Crenshaw (1991) and Bannerji (2000); and the film and media theory of Gopinath (2005), Desai (2004), and Rajadhyaksha (2003), the article develops a four-part argument. First, Teesri Duniya's self-designation as "Third World" is a strategic, disidentificatory gesture that reactivates the anticolonial genealogy of Tricontinental solidarity against the depoliticizing logics of Canadian multiculturalism and Quebec interculturalism. Second, the company's repertoire functions as a counter-archive that stages diasporic subjectivity as constitutively transnational, intersectional, and allied with Indigenous and other racialized struggles. Third, through *alt.theatre* and its community-embedded pedagogy, Teesri Duniya constructs a minoritarian counterpublic that renegotiates the terms of civic belonging and theatrical legitimacy. Fourth—and this is the argument's principal extension—Teesri Duniya's live dramaturgy operates dialectically against the transnational visual economy of Bollywood, furnishing an intersectional, materialist counter-image to the commodified diasporic imaginary that popular Hindi cinema circulates across the global South Asian ecumene.

Histories of Arrival: South Asian Migration to Canada as the Ground of Diasporic Performance

Any theorization of South Asian diasporic performance in Canada must be anchored in the material history of South Asian migration, for the conditions of arrival, exclusion, and settlement furnish the sedimented ground upon which diasporic dramaturgy is built. The South Asian presence in Canada is neither recent nor uncontested; it is inaugurated in a scene of racialized exclusion that continues to structure the affective and political horizon of the community. The earliest sustained migration—predominantly Punjabi Sikh men arriving on the Pacific coast in the first decade of the twentieth century—precipitated a nativist backlash that crystallized in the notorious *Komagata Maru* episode of 1914, when a chartered vessel carrying 376 passengers of Indian origin, most of them Sikhs, was denied disembarkation at Vancouver under the discriminatory "continuous journey" regulation and forced, after a two-month standoff, to return to India, where several passengers were killed in a colonial reprisal at Budge Budge (Johnston, 2014). This foundational trauma of refusal—of bodies deemed juridically ineligible for the settler nation—operates as what might be called the primal scene of South Asian Canadian belonging, an event whose memory is periodically restaged in diasporic cultural production as an indictment of the racial contract underwriting Canadian citizenship.

The subsequent trajectory of South Asian migration is legible only through the periodizations of Canadian immigration policy. The exclusionary regime of the early twentieth century, which effectively barred South Asian entry and denied the franchise to those already resident, gave way, after the dismantling of overtly racial criteria and the introduction of the points system in 1967, to a new demographic conjuncture in which professional and skilled migrants from India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh, followed by family-class and refugee arrivals, transformed the scale and composition of the community (Buchignani, Indra, & Srivastava, 1985). It is precisely within this post-1967 conjuncture that Teesri Duniya was founded in 1981, at a moment when the "visible minority" was being consolidated as a bureaucratic and demographic category and when the promissory rhetoric of official multiculturalism (adopted as policy in 1971) collided with the persistence of everyday racism, labor-market segmentation, and the securitization of racialized bodies. The company's dramaturgy must therefore be understood as a response to a specific migratory formation: a diaspora internally stratified by class, religion, region, caste, gender, and legal status, and confronting a state that simultaneously celebrated its "diversity" and disciplined its difference.

This historical grounding matters because it disrupts the homogenizing fiction of "the South Asian community." As critical migration scholarship insists, migration is not a singular event but a differentiated and ongoing process traversed by intersecting axes of stratification (Vertovec, 2009). The Ismaili refugees expelled from Uganda in 1972, the Tamil asylum-seekers fleeing the Sri Lankan civil war, the Punjabi agricultural laborers, the metropolitan professional-class engineers, and the undocumented care workers who together constitute "South Asian Canada" occupy radically incommensurate positions within the racialized political economy of the settler state. Teesri Duniya's repertoire, as the analysis below will demonstrate, refuses to flatten this heterogeneity into a marketable ethnic essence; instead, it dramatizes the fault lines—of gender, class, sect, and status—that fracture the diaspora from within, thereby enacting an intersectional rather than a communitarian politics of representation.

Theoretical Coordinates: Diaspora, Transnationalism, and the Third Space

To apprehend Teesri Duniya's intervention, it is necessary to disarticulate "diaspora" from the nostalgic and teleological formulations that long governed migration scholarship. Safran's (1991) influential model defined diaspora through the retention of a collective memory of homeland, the idealization of return, and the maintenance of group boundaries against the host society. Subsequent scholarship decisively critiqued this schema for its latent essentialism and its inability to register the generative, hybrid, and politically ambivalent character of diasporic formations. Clifford (1997) reconceived diaspora as a matter of "routes" rather than "roots," accentuating lateral connections, partial attachments, and the refusal of singular belonging. Hall (1990) characterized cultural identity as "not an essence but a positioning," constituted through difference, rupture, and the perpetual re-narration of the self. Brah (1996) extended this critique through her concept of "diaspora space," which designates the intersection of genealogies of dispersion with the genealogies of those constructed as "indigenous" to a given territory. Brah's formulation is indispensable for the analysis of diasporic cultural production in settler-colonial states, for it refuses the analytic quarantine of migration from colonization and compels attention to the ways in which diasporic subjects are entangled with—and at times complicit in—the ongoing dispossession of Indigenous peoples.

The transnational turn displaced the methodological nationalism that presumed a unilinear movement from origin to settlement. Basch, Glick Schiller, and Szanton Blanc (1994) demonstrated that migrants increasingly inhabit "transnational social fields," sustaining multi-stranded relations that bind societies of origin and settlement within a single, though profoundly uneven, field of practice. Vertovec (2009) systematized this insight by distinguishing transnationalism as a social morphology, a mode of consciousness, a channel of cultural reproduction, a form of capital, and a site of political engagement. For the analysis of theatre, the transnational optic foregrounds how performance functions as a technology for producing translocal solidarities and for contesting the territorial assumptions of national culture. Appadurai's (1996) account of the "scapes"—ethnoscapes, mediascapes, technoscapes, financescapes, and ideoscapes—that constitute the disjunctive flows of global modernity supplies a further vocabulary for understanding how Teesri Duniya's dramaturgy assembles images of Bhopal, Armenia, and the Oka crisis within a single Montreal stage-space, thereby constituting a counter-geography of affiliation. Crucially, Appadurai's category of the mediascape links diasporic theatre to the transnational circulation of the moving image, a linkage this article develops at length in relation to Bollywood: the diasporic subject's imagination is furnished not only by the live repertoire of the theatre but by the deterritorialized flow of cinematic images that constitute what Appadurai calls the "work of the imagination" as a social practice.

The concept of the "third space" associated with Bhabha (1994) has been so thoroughly naturalized that its political specificity is frequently evacuated. Bhabha's third space is a site of enunciation in which the meanings and symbols of culture are appropriated, translated, and rehistoricized, undermining any culture's claim to originary purity. Yet Bhabha's emphasis on the ambivalence of the colonial encounter must be distinguished from the political genealogy of the "Third World" invoked by Teesri Duniya's name. The term *tiers monde* was coined by the demographer Alfred Sauvy in 1952 to designate the non-aligned nations that refused the Cold War's bipolar division, and it was subsequently consolidated through the 1955 Bandung Conference and the Tricontinental movements of the 1960s (Prashad, 2007). For Fanon (1963), the Third World named not a geographical region or a developmental stage but a political project: the collective self-emancipation of the colonized. Prashad (2007) reconstructs this project as "the darker nations"—a transnational assemblage of anti-imperialist solidarities subsequently dismantled by neoliberal globalization and the debt regime. Teesri Duniya's invocation of the Third World thus activates a genealogy irreducible to Bhabhaian hybridity, even as its practice necessarily inhabits hybrid enunciative positions. The name conjoins the postcolonial critique of cultural authority with a Tricontinental ethics of solidarity, and it is this conjunction that distinguishes Teesri Duniya from liberal multicultural theatres that celebrate difference without interrogating the global structures of inequality that produce it.

Performance theory supplies the final conceptual axis. Taylor (2003) distinguished the *archive*—the ostensibly stable body of documents and records—from the *repertoire*—the embodied, ephemeral transmission of knowledge through performance. For Taylor, the repertoire is a distinct epistemological system that transmits memory and constitutes community in ways textual archives cannot capture. Schechner's (1985) notion of "restored behavior" illuminates how performance reiterates and transforms prior actions, while Conquergood (2002) insists on performance as "a way of knowing" that privileges embodied, situated, and subjugated knowledges against the abstraction of textuality. Muñoz's (1999) theory of "disidentification" is especially salient: disidentification names the survival strategy by which minoritarian subjects neither wholly assimilate into dominant ideology nor purely oppose it, but instead work "on and against" dominant cultural forms, recycling and re-signifying them for counter-hegemonic ends. Read through these frameworks, Teesri Duniya emerges as a repertoire-based institution whose productions, publications, and pedagogies transmit a minoritarian counter-memory constitutively resistant to archival capture.

Montreal's Cartography: Language, Interculturalism, and the Production of the Stranger

The specificity of Teesri Duniya's location cannot be overstated. Montreal is constitutively marked by linguistic division, by the fraught history of Quebec nationalism, and by a distinctive apparatus of cultural management that has come to be called interculturalism. The company's position as an English-language, South Asian theatre in a francophone province places it in a condition of *double minoritization*: peripheralized within the Canadian anglophone theatrical mainstream by virtue of its racialized "ethnic" designation, and marginal to the francophone Québécois theatrical field by virtue of its linguistic and cultural difference. This double marginality is not merely a condition of exclusion; it is also a vantage from which the company stages a critical perspective on both Canadian multiculturalism and Quebec interculturalism. As Simon (2006) has shown, Montreal is a "translating city" in which linguistic and cultural differences are continually negotiated through acts of translation, and Teesri Duniya's practice—producing in English, mounting French translations, and engaging Québécois as well as diasporic constituencies—exemplifies the translational labor through which minoritarian theatre inhabits a divided metropolis.

The ideological field within which this labor unfolds is structured by two competing state philosophies. Canadian multiculturalism, inaugurated under Pierre Trudeau in 1971 and codified in the 1988 Multiculturalism Act, promised the recognition and preservation of cultural diversity within a bilingual framework. Yet critics from the left and the racialized margins have long argued that state multiculturalism functions as a technology of depoliticization, converting structural inequality into folkloric difference. Bissoondath (1994) attacked the "cult of multiculturalism" for Balkanizing Canadian society, while Bannerji (2000) advanced a more radical critique, contending that multiculturalism obscures the racialized and gendered architecture of the Canadian nation-state by aestheticizing culture and severing it from political economy. Within this critical consensus, multiculturalism emerges as a mode of governance that manages difference by celebrating it, thereby foreclosing the more threatening claims of racialized subjects to structural transformation.

Quebec's response has been the elaboration of interculturalism, articulated most systematically by Bouchard (2012) and institutionalized in the 2008 Bouchard-Taylor Commission report on "reasonable accommodation" (Bouchard & Taylor, 2008). Interculturalism distinguishes itself from multiculturalism by prioritizing French as the common public language, by foregrounding the relationship between a "founding" francophone majority and cultural minorities, and by emphasizing integration through interaction rather than the coexistence of parallel communities. Yet critics observe that interculturalism, no less than multiculturalism, presumes a stable "host" society into which minorities are to be integrated, and that its emphasis on French and on secularism (*laïcité*) has repeatedly racialized religious and cultural minorities—particularly Muslims and Sikhs—as threats to Québécois identity. The trajectory from the reasonable-accommodation debates through the successive charters of values to Bill 21 (2019), which prohibited the wearing of religious symbols by certain public employees, discloses the disciplinary underside of a philosophy that presents itself as pluralist.

Ahmed's (2000) phenomenology of the "stranger" is illuminating here. Ahmed argues that the stranger is not an ontological category but a discursive and affective production: certain bodies are made strange through the repeated articulation of difference as danger, and the nation is consolidated through the expulsion or assimilation of these figures. The reasonable-accommodation debates of 2007–2008, which fixated on the alleged incompatibility of Muslim and Sikh religious practices with Quebec secularism, operated precisely as a machinery of strangeness-production, rendering racialized minorities legible only as problems to be managed. Teesri Duniya intervenes in this affective economy by refusing the position of the stranger who must be accommodated. Its productions stage racialized subjects as agents of critique, as bearers of histories—Bhopal, Armenia, Indigenous dispossession, the *Komagata Maru*—that implicate the very liberal state purporting to welcome them. In so doing, the company performs what Balibar (1991) would call a "civic" rather than "ethnic" universalism, one that universalizes the particular struggles of the racialized and the colonized rather than subsumes them into an abstract equality.

The Formation of Canadian Theatre and Its Racialized Exclusions

To situate Teesri Duniya within Canadian theatre requires a reckoning with the disciplinary formation of that theatre itself. The institutional consolidation of an English-Canadian theatre in the mid-twentieth century—galvanized by the 1951 Massey Commission, the founding of the Stratford Festival in 1953, and the regional-theatre movement of the 1960s and 1970s—proceeded through a cultural-nationalist logic that equated the "Canadian" with a white, Anglo-European settler subject (Filewod, 2002). The alternative-theatre movement of the 1970s, for all its formal radicalism, largely reproduced this racial imaginary, staging a nation whose diversity was linguistic (English–French) and regional rather than racial. Racialized and Indigenous artists were, in consequence, structurally excluded from the emergent national repertoire, admitted only belatedly and on terms dictated by the logic of representational tokenism.

Aquino and Knowles (2011), in their landmark anthology on Asian Canadian theatre, document the historical exclusion and tokenization of Asian Canadian artists within the mainstream, and argue for a critical practice that moves beyond mere inclusion to interrogate the structures that produce exclusion. The formation of companies

such as Cahoots Theatre, fu-GEN, Rasik Arts, and Teesri Duniya itself must be read as a collective institutional response to this exclusion—a building of parallel infrastructures capable of sustaining minoritarian production against the grain of a national theatre that could imagine racialized bodies only as ethnographic supplements. Teesri Duniya's founding in 1981, and its subsequent development of a dedicated critical periodical, thus participate in a broader movement of what might be termed *infrastructural self-determination*: the creation, by racialized artists, of the very conditions of intelligibility that the dominant institutions withheld. Canadian theatre historiography, in turn, has had to be rewritten to accommodate these formations, displacing the settler-nationalist teleology with a more capacious account attentive to the constitutive presence—and constitutive exclusion—of racialized and Indigenous performance.

The Name and the Project: "Third World" as Political Aesthetic

The decision to name the company *Teesri Duniya*—"Third World" in Hindi and Urdu—is a theoretical act in its own right. In the developmentalist discourse that dominated the late twentieth century, "Third World" functioned as a stigma: a designation of poverty, backwardness, and lack, hierarchically subordinate to the "First World" of liberal capitalism and the "Second World" of state socialism. To adopt this name in Montreal in 1981 was to refuse that stigma and to reclaim the term as a political affiliation. The gesture resonates with the history of the Tricontinental movement, which transformed "Third World" from a demographic descriptor into a rallying cry of anti-imperialist solidarity (Prashad, 2007), and with the radical resignifications characteristic of minoritarian cultural politics, in which pejorative terms are appropriated and revalued—a practice Butler (1990) theorized as performative resignification and Muñoz (1999) elaborated as disidentification.

Teesri Duniya's "Third World" identification performs a double refusal. On the one hand, it refuses the assimilationist logic of Canadian multiculturalism, which would grant legitimacy only to an "ethnic" theatre representing a bounded community within the national mosaic. On the other, it refuses the stigmatizing logic of developmentalism, which would reduce "Third World" to a condition of lack awaiting remediation by the global North. By claiming the term affirmatively, the company asserts that the Third World is not elsewhere—not confined to South Asia, Africa, or Latin America—but is present within the metropolis itself, in the racialized neighborhoods, precarious labor markets, and carceral institutions of Montreal. This assertion constitutes what Williams (1977) called a "formation": an emergent collective practice that contests the hegemonic distribution of cultural authority. Teesri Duniya's mission—to produce socially relevant theatre giving voice to marginalized communities and addressing social justice—is not a merely representational project but a cartographic one, remapping the city as a space traversed by transnational histories of colonialism, migration, and resistance. The company's persistent attention to what Nixon (2011) calls "slow violence"—the attritional, dispersed, often invisible harm inflicted by corporate and state power upon the global poor—binds its aesthetic to a Tricontinental political economy that liberal diversity discourse cannot accommodate.

Repertoire as Counter-Archive: Intersectionality and Transnationalism in the Plays of Rahul Varma

Taylor's (2003) distinction between archive and repertoire frames the analysis of Teesri Duniya's dramatic canon. The company's productions do not merely transmit a fixed textual tradition; they constitute a repertoire of embodied practice through which counter-memory is performed and transformed. Varma's plays, produced and revised over decades, function as what Schneider (2011) calls "performative remains"—reiterations that keep alive histories official archives would consign to oblivion. The plays stage *scenes of encounter*: confrontations between racialized subjects and the state, between diasporic memory and settler-colonial amnesia, between the local and the transnational. In each, the dramaturgy refuses the conventions of liberal tragedy, in which the racialized subject is offered as a pitiable victim, constructing instead a critical spectatorship in which the audience is implicated in the structures of violence on display.

Counter Offence (1996), among Varma's most widely produced works, exemplifies this strategy and furnishes the article's central instance of intersectional dramaturgy. The play centers on Shazia, a South Asian woman, and Shapoor, her Iranian refugee husband, whose domestic conflict becomes entangled with a police officer's racialized surveillance. Rather than presenting domestic violence and racial profiling as competing claims upon the spectator's sympathy, the play insists upon their structural imbrication: it demonstrates how the state's racialized policing of immigrant men operates through, and is compounded by, the patriarchal structures that constrain immigrant women. Here the play stages precisely what Crenshaw (1991) theorized as intersectionality—the analytic recognition that race, gender, class, and immigration status are not additive but co-constitutive vectors that converge to produce a distinctive vulnerability irreducible to any single axis. Crenshaw's insistence that anti-racist and feminist frameworks each, in isolation, fail the racialized woman finds a dramaturgical correlate in *Counter Offence*'s refusal to subordinate the critique of patriarchy to the critique of racism, or the reverse. Bannerji's (2000) intersectional critique of Canadian multiculturalism sharpens this reading: the racialized immigrant woman is doubly interpellated—by a state that instrumentalizes her victimhood to pathologize immigrant masculinity, and by a community that may demand her silence in the name of ethnic solidarity. The

play's title signals its refusal of the accusatory position into which the racialized subject is interpellated; to "counter" the "offence" is to reverse the direction of the charge, to indict the justice system itself. Ahmed's (2004) analysis of the cultural politics of emotion is apt: *Counter Offence* performs an affective pedagogy, teaching its audience to feel state injustice as a condition of civic life rather than an aberration.

Bhopal (2001) extends this dramaturgy of structural violence to the transnational scale. The play confronts the 1984 Union Carbide disaster, in which a gas leak from a pesticide plant killed thousands and injured hundreds of thousands in Bhopal, India—an event Nixon (2011) canonizes as the paradigmatic instance of slow violence. Varma refuses the temporal enclosure of the disaster as a singular past event, insisting instead on the ongoingness of the catastrophe: the continued corporate impunity, the medical and environmental aftermath, and the diasporic activism that sustains the memory of Bhopal. In this respect, *Bhopal* enacts what Felman and Laub (1992) called the "crisis of witnessing," staging testimony as at once ethically imperative and constitutively difficult, since the disaster's scale exceeds any single narrative's capacity to contain it. The theatre becomes a site for the transmission of traumatic memory across the transnational social field (Basch et al., 1994; Vertovec, 2009), positioning diasporic spectators not as distant observers of a foreign tragedy but as subjects whose own histories are entangled with the global circuits of capital and toxicity that produced the disaster. The play thereby dramatizes the transnational not as celebratory cosmopolitan mobility but as the differential distribution of death—what might be termed the necropolitical underside of globalization, in which the bodies of the global South absorb the externalized costs of Northern accumulation.

No Man's Land (1990), later reworked as *Land Where the Trees Talk*, constitutes the company's most theoretically consequential intervention in the politics of diaspora and settlement. Written against the horizon of the 1990 Oka crisis, the play interweaves the story of a South Asian immigrant woman with the struggle of Indigenous peoples to defend their lands against dispossession, drawing explicit parallels between deforestation in India and the destruction of Indigenous territories in Canada. This parallel is not merely analogical; it enacts Brah's (1996) "diaspora space" by staging the co-presence of migrant and Indigenous genealogies within a single contested territory. The play refuses the settler-colonial logic that would position the South Asian immigrant as an unmarked settler, assimilable to the nation through the erasure of Indigenous claims. Instead, it demands that diasporic subjects reckon with their own structural position within a settler-colonial state and forge solidarities with Indigenous struggles. Byrd's (2011) critique is instructive: settler states are constituted through the "transit of empire," in which Indigenous peoples are rendered "arrivants" in their own lands while settlers claim indigeneity. Teesri Duniya's staging of diaspora–Indigenous solidarity disrupts this transit, refusing the migrant's assimilation into the settler position and insisting on a decolonial mode of belonging. This is perhaps the most vital contribution of the company to a critical migration studies attentive to the settler-colonial ground: it refuses the innocence of the immigrant and confronts the vexed complicity of the racialized migrant within the ongoing dispossession of Indigenous nations.

State of Denial (2012) extends the company's transnational solidarity to the Armenian genocide, staging the encounter between a documentary filmmaker and an aging survivor whose testimony confronts the Turkish state's persistent denial. The play's engagement with the Armenian rather than a South Asian constituency is itself a significant theoretical gesture, demonstrating that Teesri Duniya's "Third World" identification is political rather than ethnic, encompassing the multiple diasporas produced by genocide, colonialism, and forced migration. Hirsch's (2012) concept of "postmemory" illuminates the play's temporal structure, in which the genocide is transmitted across generations not through direct experience but through the mediated, affective labor of recollection—a labor in which the visual document (the filmmaker's footage) becomes both instrument of witness and object of contestation. Two further plays, *Trading Injuries* (2003) and *Truth and Treason* (2009), round out the canon: the former interrogates the human costs of neoliberal trade regimes and the injuries inflicted upon workers in the global garment industry, legible through Appadurai's (1996) account of grassroots globalization; the latter examines the politics of truth commissions and the perils of speaking truth to power in the aftermath of state violence. Together, these plays constitute a repertoire in which the local stage is continually traversed by transnational histories, and in which the spectator is positioned not as a consumer of exotic difference but as a witness and potential ally.

The Cinematic Counterpoint: Bollywood, South Asian Visual Culture, and the Diasporic Image

If the preceding analysis situates Teesri Duniya within the fields of migration, diaspora, and intersectionality, a fuller account must reckon with the visual-cultural environment within which South Asian diasporic subjectivity is constituted—an environment dominated, more than by any other single cultural form, by the transnational image-economy of Bollywood. Popular Hindi cinema is not merely entertainment for the South Asian diaspora; it is, as Rajadhyaksha (2003) argues, a "cultural conglomeration" whose reach and ideological density exceed the boundaries of the film text, saturating music, fashion, ritual, and the very grammar of diasporic self-representation. To theorize South Asian diasporic theatre without attending to Bollywood is to ignore the dominant screen against which live performance must define itself.

Bollywood's relation to the diaspora underwent a decisive transformation in the 1990s, when the liberalization of the Indian economy and the courting of the non-resident Indian (NRI) as both market and moral emblem reoriented the industry's address. Films of this period increasingly staged the diaspora as a repository of cultural authenticity, dramatizing the NRI's negotiation of tradition and modernity, belonging and departure, in narratives that resolved diasporic ambivalence through the reaffirmation of the heteronormative, upper-caste, Hindu family (Desai, 2004). This cinematic imaginary performs precise ideological work: it interpellates the diaspora into a long-distance nationalism (Vertovec, 2009), suturing the dispersed subject to an idealized homeland whose cultural essence the diasporic family is charged with preserving. The transnational reach of these images—their circulation through satellite television, video, and, latterly, streaming platforms across the "brown Atlantic" and beyond—renders Bollywood a paradigmatic instance of Appadurai's (1996) mediascape, a deterritorialized flow of images that furnishes the raw material of diasporic imagination.

Yet this dominant imaginary is precisely what critical scholars of South Asian visual culture have subjected to intersectional interrogation. Gopinath (2005), in her foundational study of queer diasporic reading practices, demonstrates how Bollywood's insistent heteronormativity and its enshrinement of the patriarchal family render invisible—and impossible—the queer female diasporic subject, who can be recovered only through an oppositional, "against the grain" mode of spectatorship that reads for the illegible and the disavowed. Gopinath's intervention exposes the exclusions upon which the commodified diasporic image is built: the erasure of queerness, the subordination of women to the reproductive labor of cultural preservation, the effacement of caste and class antagonism, and the marginalization of religious minorities within a majoritarian Hindu frame. The transnational Bollywood image, in other words, offers the diaspora a seductive but profoundly conservative self-representation—one that converts the violence of migration into the sentimentality of homecoming and displaces structural critique with familial melodrama.

It is against this visual regime that Teesri Duniya's dramaturgy acquires its full significance as a *counter-image*. Where Bollywood offers the diaspora a mirror of nostalgic self-recognition, Teesri Duniya stages the fractures—of gender, class, caste, sect, and legal status—that the cinematic mirror occludes. Where the NRI melodrama resolves diasporic ambivalence through the reconstitution of the patriarchal family, *Counter Offence* discloses that family as itself a site of gendered violence entangled with the racialized state. Where Bollywood's transnationalism is a long-distance nationalism binding the diaspora to an idealized homeland, Teesri Duniya's transnationalism is a Tricontinental solidarity binding the diaspora to Bhopal's victims, to Indigenous land defenders, and to Armenian survivors. The contrast is not merely thematic but ontological and medial: the live, ephemeral, co-present repertoire of the theatre (Taylor, 2003) constitutes a mode of embodied witnessing that the mediated, commodified, infinitely reproducible image of cinema cannot replicate. The theatre's co-presence—its insistence that spectator and performer share a single, unrepeatable time and space—enacts an ethics of encounter that resists the consumerist distance of screen spectatorship.

This is not to install a facile hierarchy in which live theatre is authentic and cinema is degraded; such a binary would reproduce the very anti-mediation nostalgia that critical performance studies has rightly dismantled. Bollywood is itself a contested field, and diasporic audiences engage it through complex, often subversive, practices of appropriation and resignification—precisely the disidentificatory reading Muñoz (1999) and Gopinath (2005) theorize. Moreover, Teesri Duniya's own dramaturgy is not innocent of the cinematic; its address to a diaspora saturated in Bollywood necessarily cites, contests, and reworks the visual grammar of popular film. The relation is dialectical rather than oppositional: diasporic theatre defines itself in and through its differential relation to the dominant screen, mobilizing the audience's cinematic literacy even as it refuses the ideological closure the screen typically effects. In staging the intersectional, transnational, and materialist realities that Bollywood's melodrama sublimates, Teesri Duniya supplies what might be called a *counter-mediascape*: a live image-repertoire that reintroduces the political economy, the gendered violence, and the settler-colonial complicity that the commodified diasporic image is designed to forget.

Intercultural Performance and the Critique of Multiculturalism

Teesri Duniya's practice must further be situated within the debates over intercultural performance that have shaped postcolonial theatre studies. Bharucha (1993) launched the most influential critique of interculturalism in his polemic against Peter Brook's *Mahabharata*, arguing that intercultural theatre as practiced by metropolitan directors often reproduces colonial relations of appropriation, treating non-Western performance traditions as raw material for the universalizing projects of the West. Bharucha's later work (2000) extended this critique to cultural exchange under globalization, insisting on the asymmetry of power structuring even the most well-intentioned encounters. Knowles (2010) synthesized these debates, distinguishing a market-driven, appropriative "interculturalism" from a critical practice attentive to the material conditions of production and the unequal distribution of cultural authority.

Teesri Duniya's practice can be characterized as a *diasporic interculturalism from below*—an intercultural performance proceeding not from metropolitan appropriation but from the lived experience of migration,

displacement, and minority cultural production. Unlike Brook's universalist aspiration, which effaced the specific histories of the *Mahabharata* in the name of a transcendent humanity, Teesri Duniya stages intercultural encounter as politically situated and historically specific, refusing to assimilate difference into a universal humanism and insisting instead on the irreducibility of particular struggles. This materialist orientation informs the company's implicit critique of Canadian multicultural theatre policy, which has tended to operate through a logic of representational adequacy—treating the presence of racialized bodies on stage as evidence of inclusion, regardless of the structural inequalities persisting in the distribution of resources, the composition of artistic leadership, and the terms of critical reception (Aquino & Knowles, 2011; Knowles, 2004). Teesri Duniya's longevity—its refusal to disappear after the multicultural funding cycles of the 1980s and 1990s—is itself a form of institutional critique, demonstrating the possibility of sustained, self-organized minoritarian production against a funding regime that rewards novelty and tokenism. The Quebec context compounds this complexity: as an English-language company within an interculturalist framework that privileges French, Teesri Duniya is neither part of the francophone majority nor comfortably assimilable to the historically dominant anglophone minority. This double marginality denaturalizes the binary of "majority" and "minority" that structures both multiculturalism and interculturalism, revealing the "majority" as a hegemonic construction rather than a demographic fact.

***alt.theatre* and the Construction of a Subaltern Counterpublic**

The publication of *alt.theatre*, a periodical dedicated to "cultural diversity and the stage," extends Teesri Duniya's intervention from the repertoire of performance to the archive of critical discourse. Founded under the company's aegis, the magazine has functioned as a discursive infrastructure for the critique of exclusionary practices in Canadian theatre, providing a platform for artists, scholars, and activists to theorize the conditions of minoritarian production. Fraser's (1990) concept of the "subaltern counterpublic" is indispensable here: marginalized groups have historically constituted parallel discursive arenas in which they "invent and circulate counterdiscourses" challenging the exclusionary norms of the dominant public sphere. Warner (2002) similarly theorizes "counterpublics" as publics constituted through their oppositional relation to a dominant public, sites where the very norms of address and intelligibility become objects of contestation. *alt.theatre* operates as precisely such a counterpublic, subjecting the norms of Canadian theatrical criticism—historically oriented toward a white, anglophone, canonical repertoire—to sustained critique.

The magazine's significance lies as much in its form as its content. As a publication produced by a minoritarian company, *alt.theatre* refuses the separation of artistic production from critical reflection that characterizes the mainstream theatrical economy. It embodies what Conquergood (2002) called "co-performative witnessing," an engaged criticism accountable to the communities it addresses. By documenting productions, debates, and manifestos that would otherwise leave no archival trace, it also functions as a counter-archive in Taylor's (2003) sense, supplementing the ephemeral repertoire with a textual record that ensures the intergenerational transmission of minoritarian theatrical knowledge. This archival function is politically consequential, for the erasure of minoritarian theatre from official histories is a primary mechanism of its marginalization. Yet the counterpublic remains an ambivalent formation: Fraser (1990) herself concedes that subaltern counterpublics are "not always necessarily virtuous," since the separation enabling counterdiscourse can also reproduce the segregation it contests. There is a persistent risk that *alt.theatre* and Teesri Duniya's broader project will be read—and funded—as a specialized "diversity" niche rather than as a challenge to the hegemonic theatrical public. Muñoz's (1999) disidentification names the strategic navigation of this ambivalence: neither full assimilation nor permanent segregation, but a continual renegotiation of the boundary between margin and center.

Institutions, Funding, and the Material Conditions of "Diverse" Theatre

A fully materialist account must attend to the institutional and economic conditions under which the company has sustained its four-decade practice. Knowles (2004) argues that theatre is always "read" through its material conditions—the architecture of the venue, the labor relations of production, the funding structures, the demographics of the audience—which are constitutive of meaning rather than merely contextual. Teesri Duniya's precarity is itself meaningful: like most racialized and community-based companies in Canada, it has operated primarily through project-based arts-council grants, supplemented by box-office revenue and philanthropy. Harvie (2013) analyzes how the neoliberal restructuring of arts funding compels artists to become entrepreneurial subjects, perpetually demonstrating "innovation" and "relevance." For minoritarian theatre, this imperative is compounded by what Mercer (1990) called the "burden of representation": the expectation that a single company will speak for an entire, internally differentiated community. Teesri Duniya's multiple roles—producer, publisher, advocate, educator—are less a sign of ambition than a structural response to the absence of a robust infrastructure for minoritarian production; the company has had to build the very conditions of its own intelligibility.

This infrastructural labor has a distinctive linguistic dimension in Montreal. As an English-language company in a francophone province, Teesri Duniya navigates Quebec's linguistic politics through a practice of translation at

once pragmatic and theoretical. Apter (2006) argues that translation is a site of geopolitical contestation, a "translation zone" in which power relations are negotiated and sometimes transformed. The company's production of French translations and its engagement with francophone audiences constitute a translational politics that refuses the enclosure of minority theatre within a single linguistic community, complicating the monolingual assumptions of Quebec interculturalism and performing a multilingual urbanism truer to the lived reality of Montreal than the official monolingualism of the state (Simon, 2006). The perpetual scramble for funding, the pressure to demonstrate "relevance," and the expectation that the company represent a heterogeneous diaspora all threaten to instrumentalize its practice and foreclose the more radical possibilities of its Tricontinental politics—an insistent reminder against any idealization of minoritarian theatre as a site of pure resistance.

Toward a Diasporic Performance Ethic at the Interface of Stage and Screen

Teesri Duniya Theatre constitutes a singular and theoretically generative object for the study of performance, migration, and the politics of belonging. Its name, repertoire, and critical publishing practice together enact a *diasporic performance ethic*: an orientation that refuses the assimilationist and depoliticizing logics of state multiculturalism and interculturalism, that insists on the transnational and intersectional character of minoritarian experience, and that stages solidarity across the multiple diasporas and Indigenous nations produced by colonialism and global capital. The company's "Third World" identification reactivates the anticolonial genealogy of Tricontinental solidarity, re-signifying a stigmatized term as a political aesthetic; its repertoire functions as a counter-archive transmitting counter-memory across generations and geographies; and *alt.theatre* constructs a counterpublic in which the norms of Canadian theatrical criticism are continually contested.

The principal extension of this reworked analysis lies in situating the company at the interface of stage and screen. By reading Teesri Duniya's live dramaturgy against the transnational visual economy of Bollywood, the article has argued that diasporic theatre furnishes an intersectional, materialist counter-image to the commodified, heteronormative, and long-distance-nationalist imaginary that popular Hindi cinema circulates across the global South Asian ecumene. The theatre's co-present, embodied, and ephemeral mode of witnessing reintroduces precisely the political economy, gendered violence, and settler-colonial complicity that the cinematic mirror is engineered to sublimate. This dialectical relation between live performance and mediated image constitutes a crucial and understudied dimension of diasporic cultural production—one that a discipline-bound theatre studies, sealed off from film and visual-culture analysis, cannot apprehend.

The theoretical significance of Teesri Duniya extends well beyond Canadian theatre historiography. For migration studies, the company demonstrates that the history of arrival—from the *Komagata Maru* to the post-1967 conjuncture—furnishes the sedimented ground of diasporic aesthetics, and that migration must be theorized as a differentiated, intersectional, and ongoing process rather than a singular event. For diaspora studies, it demonstrates that diasporic subjectivity is not merely a demographic condition but a performative achievement, constituted through the repeated enactment of transnational affiliations. For intersectional feminism, its dramaturgy renders visible the co-constitution of race, gender, class, and legal status that both the multicultural state and the Bollywood melodrama occlude. For the study of visual culture, it discloses the live stage as a counter-mediastage capable of contesting the dominant screen. And for the critique of multiculturalism and interculturalism, it reveals the insufficiency of liberal recognition that celebrates difference without transforming the structures producing inequality.

Future research should attend to the generational transition of diasporic performance institutions, the digital remediation of counter-archives, the comparative study of diaspora theatres across settler-colonial contexts, and the increasingly convergent relation between live diasporic performance and the transnational streaming platforms now reorganizing South Asian visual culture. The precarious sustainability of companies like Teesri Duniya is itself a pressing object of inquiry, for the neoliberal restructuring of arts funding threatens to extinguish precisely those institutions that have built the counterpublic infrastructures of minoritarian critique. To study Teesri Duniya is thus not merely to document a company but to theorize the conditions of possibility—and precarity—of diasporic cultural production in the twenty-first century. In staging the Third World within Montreal, Teesri Duniya insists that the Third World is not elsewhere; it is here, in the contested spaces of the metropolis, demanding to be witnessed, remembered, and transformed.

..

References

1. Ahmed, S. (2000). *Strange encounters: Embodied others in post-coloniality*. Routledge.
2. Ahmed, S. (2004). *The cultural politics of emotion*. Edinburgh University Press.
3. Appadurai, A. (1996). *Modernity at large: Cultural dimensions of globalization*. University of Minnesota Press.
4. Apter, E. (2006). *The translation zone: A new comparative literature*. Princeton University Press.
5. Aquino, N. L., & Knowles, R. (Eds.). (2011). *Asian Canadian theatre*. Playwrights Canada Press.

6. Balibar, É., & Wallerstein, I. (1991). *Race, nation, class: Ambiguous identities*. Verso.
7. Bannerji, H. (2000). *The dark side of the nation: Essays on multiculturalism, nationalism and gender*. Canadian Scholars' Press.
8. Basch, L., Glick Schiller, N., & Szanton Blanc, C. (1994). *Nations unbound: Transnational projects, postcolonial predicaments, and deterritorialized nation-states*. Gordon and Breach.
9. Bhabha, H. K. (1994). *The location of culture*. Routledge.
10. Bharucha, R. (1993). *Theatre and the world: Performance and the politics of culture*. Routledge.
11. Bharucha, R. (2000). *The politics of cultural practice: Thinking through theatre in an age of globalization*. Wesleyan University Press.
12. Bissoondath, N. (1994). *Selling illusions: The cult of multiculturalism in Canada*. Penguin.
13. Bouchard, G. (2012). *Interculturalism: A view from Quebec*. University of Toronto Press.
14. Bouchard, G., & Taylor, C. (2008). *Building the future: A time for reconciliation*. Government of Quebec.
15. Brah, A. (1996). *Cartographies of diaspora: Contesting identities*. Routledge.
16. Buchignani, N., Indra, D. M., & Srivastava, R. (1985). *Continuous journey: A social history of South Asians in Canada*. McClelland and Stewart.
17. Butler, J. (1990). *Gender trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity*. Routledge.
18. Byrd, J. A. (2011). *The transit of empire: Indigenous critiques of colonialism*. University of Minnesota Press.
19. Clifford, J. (1997). *Routes: Travel and translation in the late twentieth century*. Harvard University Press.
20. Conquergood, D. (2002). Performance studies: Interventions and radical research. *TDR/The Drama Review*, 46(2), 145–156.
21. Crenshaw, K. (1991). Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color. *Stanford Law Review*, 43(6), 1241–1299.
22. Desai, J. (2004). *Beyond Bollywood: The cultural politics of South Asian diasporic film*. Routledge.
23. Fanon, F. (1963). *The wretched of the earth*. Grove Press.
24. Felman, S., & Laub, D. (1992). *Testimony: Crises of witnessing in literature, psychoanalysis, and history*. Routledge.
25. Filewod, A. (2002). *Performing Canada: The nation enacted in the imagined theatre*. Textual Studies in Canada.
26. Fraser, N. (1990). Rethinking the public sphere: A contribution to the critique of actually existing democracy. *Social Text*, (25/26), 56–80.
27. Gilbert, H., & Tompkins, J. (1996). *Post-colonial drama: Theory, practice, politics*. Routledge.
28. Gopinath, G. (2005). *Impossible desires: Queer diasporas and South Asian public cultures*. Duke University Press.
29. Hall, S. (1990). Cultural identity and diaspora. In J. Rutherford (Ed.), *Identity: Community, culture, difference* (pp. 222–237). Lawrence & Wishart.
30. Harvie, J. (2013). *Fair play: Art, performance and neoliberalism*. Palgrave Macmillan.
31. Hirsch, M. (2012). *The generation of postmemory: Writing and visual culture after the Holocaust*. Columbia University Press.
32. Johnston, H. J. M. (2014). *The voyage of the Komagata Maru: The Sikh challenge to Canada's colour bar* (2nd ed.). UBC Press.
33. Knowles, R. (2004). *Reading the material theatre*. Cambridge University Press.
34. Knowles, R. (2010). *Theatre & interculturalism*. Palgrave Macmillan.
35. Mercer, K. (1990). Black art and the burden of representation. *Third Text*, 4(10), 61–78.
36. Muñoz, J. E. (1999). *Disidentifications: Queers of color and the performance of politics*. University of Minnesota Press.
37. Nixon, R. (2011). *Slow violence and the environmentalism of the poor*. Harvard University Press.
38. Prashad, V. (2007). *The darker nations: A people's history of the Third World*. The New Press.
39. Rajadhyaksha, A. (2003). The "Bollywoodization" of the Indian cinema: Cultural nationalism in a global arena. *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies*, 4(1), 25–39.
40. Safran, W. (1991). Diasporas in modern societies: Myths of homeland and return. *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies*, 1(1), 83–99.

41. Schechner, R. (1985). *Between theater and anthropology*. University of Pennsylvania Press.
42. Schneider, R. (2011). *Performing remains: Art and war in times of theatrical reenactment*. Routledge.
43. Simon, S. (2006). *Translating Montreal: Episodes in the life of a divided city*. McGill-Queen's University Press.
44. Taylor, D. (2003). *The archive and the repertoire: Performing cultural memory in the Americas*. Duke University Press.
45. Teesri Duniya Theatre. (n.d.). Mission and history. <https://www.teesriduniyatheatre.com>
46. Varma, R. (1990). *No man's land* [Play]. Teesri Duniya Theatre, Montreal, QC, Canada.
47. Varma, R. (1996). *Counter offence* [Play]. Teesri Duniya Theatre, Montreal, QC, Canada.
48. Varma, R. (2001). *Bhopal* [Play]. Teesri Duniya Theatre, Montreal, QC, Canada.
49. Varma, R. (2003). *Trading injuries* [Play]. Teesri Duniya Theatre, Montreal, QC, Canada.
50. Varma, R. (2009). *Truth and treason* [Play]. Teesri Duniya Theatre, Montreal, QC, Canada.
51. Varma, R. (2012). *State of denial* [Play]. Teesri Duniya Theatre, Montreal, QC, Canada.
52. Vertovec, S. (2009). *Transnationalism*. Routledge.
53. Warner, M. (2002). *Publics and counterpublics*. Zone Books.
54. Williams, R. (1977). *Marxism and literature*. Oxford University Press...