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Neoliberal Capitalism in the Indian Organized Crime Fiction of Vikram Chandra and Salman Rushdie

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Abstract: Close study reveals the systemically interwoven nature of the criminal and licit sectors of capitalist economies, yet capitalist society seeks to legitimize the latter sector by attempting to hegemonically externalize or Other the former. It often does so by associating the criminal sector with stigmatized minority and/or immigrant groups, who are blamed for all of society's ills. Placing blame in this way allows the capitalist ownership class to falsely pass itself off as virtuous and free of the taint of criminality or of having engaged in criminal acts. There is a systematic sociocultural denial of the fact that capitalism produces all forms of conceivable capitalist accumulation, regardless of whether they accord with received notions of morality or legality. This essay argues that Vikram Chandra's *Sacred Games* and Salman Rushdie's novels *The Moor's Last Sigh* and *The Golden House* challenge this hegemonic Manichean conceptualization of crime and capitalism by thematizing the close relationships between capitalism and organized criminality in India. In the face of a socioeconomic system whose spiraling material inequalities are eroding democracy and fueling the rise of fundamentalist nationalisms, these novels counter the hegemonic legitimizing narratives that present success within the world of neoliberal capitalism as a function of meritocratic entrepreneurialness. They also present a perspective on organized crimes that resists the doxa that criminal acts and capitalist successes are wholly discrete, disparate phenomena.

Keywords: organized crime and capitalism, Indian crime fiction, Vikram Chandra, Salman Rushdie, neoliberalism in literature

> All I do is supply a demand. . . . Capitalism is the legitimate racket of the ruling class.
>
> Al Capone qtd. in Southwell, *The History of Organized Crime* 7

The historical intertwinings of the organized licit and illicit sectors of the world's capitalist economies are varied and profound. Although criminality is a somewhat arbitrarily defined social construct whose corpus changes over time and whose social function is to a great extent to safeguard the socioeconomic interests of the ruling classes,[1] it can be said that pre-capitalist organized criminality was fairly limited in scope: the stuff of highwaymen and brigands, be they of the redistributing Robin Hood-esque noble thief stamp or of a decidedly less altruistic persuasion. But as Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels point out in the *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, the advent and development of capitalism, steered by the bourgeoisie, introduced amazing new forms of economic complexity and productivity:

> It has accomplished wonders far surpassing Egyptian pyramids, Roman aqueducts, and Gothic cathedrals; it has conducted expeditions that put in the shade all former Exoduses of nations and crusades. . . . The bourgeoisie, during its rule of scarce one hundred years, has created more massive and more colossal productive forces than have all preceding generations together. Subjection of Nature's forces to man, machinery, application of chemistry to industry and agriculture, steam-navigation, railways, electric telegraphs, clearing of whole continents for cultivation, canalisation of rivers, whole populations conjured out of the ground—what earlier century had even a presentiment that such productive forces slumbered in the lap of social labour? (ch. 1)

This more complex form of political-economic organization also created more complex and lucrative forms of profit accumulation that fell outside the legal strictures and/or moral norms of capitalist nations,

particularly when coupled with prohibitions against widely desired goods and services like intoxicating substances and commercial sex.[2]

As Michael Woodiwiss points out in *Gangster Capitalism: The United States and the Global Rise of Organized Crime*, historically organized crime aided the development of what is now accepted as licit capitalist accumulation, as the captains of industry employed various gangster methods and actual gangsters themselves to achieve their aims (4). To give two illustrative examples, the Ford Motor Company employed crime syndicate-run services for things like waste disposal and strike breaking (Pearce 178), and in 2009, in the midst of a major global economic recession, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime reported that funds from Mexican drug cartels were the only thing keeping some banks liquid (Saviano 259). While their economic activities were already firmly enmeshed within the capitalist system as of the middle of the twentieth century, organized criminals were given opportunities to expand into seemingly legitimate activities like running unions because they were seen by the ruling elite as preferable to communists. For instance, the Central Intelligence Agency funded the Corsican mafia's takeover of the docks of Marseille from the French Communist Party, which then paved the way for the mafia's lucrative "French connection" of heroin exportation to the United States (Pearce 188). Woodiwiss goes on to argue that organized crime is inherent in insufficiently regulated capitalism, a point made by Charles Beard, Walter Lippmann, and others as far back as the Great Depression era (58). This is both because the lucrativeness of the leading capitalist industries invariably attracts parasitic seekers after profit accumulation—see, for example, the role of criminal organizations in real estate development throughout the world and the longstanding organized criminal uses of the internet—and because the banking and investment sectors are so ravenous for capital, regardless of its provenance.

But rather than acknowledge the blurred lines between organized crime and more commonly accepted forms of capitalist accumulation—their systemically interwoven nature—capitalist society seeks to legitimize the latter by attempting to hegemonically externalize or Other the former (Woodiwiss 67). It often achieves this by associating crime with

stigmatized minority and/or immigrant groups who are blamed for all of society's ills. This allows the capitalist ownership class to pass itself off as virtuous and free of the taint of criminality or of having engaged in criminal acts that cause far wider social damage than the odd back-alley shootout, such as insider trading or toxic waste dumping. That is to say, there is a systematic sociocultural denial of the fact that capitalism produces all forms of conceivable capitalist accumulation, regardless of whether they accord with received notions of morality or legality, and the overemphasis within numerous popular and professional discourses on ethnically identified organizations engaged in criminal activity enables this to a considerable extent.

This essay considers how recent works of Indian fiction challenge this hegemonic Manichean conceptualization of crime and capitalism by thematizing the close relationships between capitalism and organized criminality. The essay looks to Indian fiction not because India has any exceptional claim to organized criminality, which is almost prosaically omnipresent in the context of capitalist globalization, but because of the fascinating ways that these works trace the evolution of organized crime in its imbrications with various economic sectors and social institutions across the transition from the Jawaharlal Nehru years of central economic planning and (at least nominal) socialism to the late twentieth/early twenty-first-century neoliberal era of vast wealth accumulation and spiraling material inequalities. The vicissitudes of this transitional period of Indian history have inspired a rich array of fictional responses, a body of writing Nina Martyris compares to the boom in US fiction that engaged with the ascendant laissez-faire capitalist society of the Gilded and Jazz Ages (174–75). In a manner fundamentally similar to how, according to Georg Lukács, the fiction of Honoré de Balzac grapples with and chronicles "the torments which the transition to the capitalist system of production inflicted on every section of the [French] people" (12), recent Indian organized crime fiction centrally engages with the transition to market-fundamentalist, inegalitarian neoliberalism. This essay analyzes three novels, Vikram Chandra's *Sacred Games* (2006) and Salman Rushdie's *The Moor's Last Sigh* (1995) and *The Golden House* (2017), that deftly portray the organized criminal as capitalist and the

inherent amorality of capitalist success stretching across such ostensibly disparate social sectors as business, politics, religion, and gangsterism.[3] The essay focuses not only on how these narratives complicate received notions of licit versus illicit capitalism but how they reorder our moral outlook and fundamental notions of justice and criminality in the era of global neoliberal capitalist predominance.

In *Sacred Games*, the most epic-in-scope fiction treatment of organized crime in India to date, the central narrative trajectory of Ganesh Gaitonde, the crime don who serves as one of the novel's dual protagonists, mirrors the historical development of capitalism in postcolonial India in two fundamental regards. First, as Erin Paszko argues, Gaitonde's movement from a community builder and protector early in the novel to a delocalized expatriate kingpin with a wide array of financial interests accords closely with India's movement from Nehruvian welfare protectionism and developmentalism to a neoliberal order based more on competition, transnational economic flows, and "theft" (40–41)—i.e., what David Harvey calls "accumulation by dispossession."[4] Secondly, on a more literal level, Gaitonde's trajectory reflects the historical evolution of actual Indian organized crime figures in tandem with changes in the forms and scale of economic opportunities afforded to them by the radically changing political-economic landscape that Liza Weinstein observes in her sociological study of organized crime and urban development in Mumbai (25, 30–33). Gaitonde is first a gold smuggler during the former era of import substitution industrialization buttressed by high tariffs, but he then becomes involved in real estate development, film production, and other diversified forms of licit and illicit economic activity during the neoliberal era. So, in a sense, the crime don Gaitonde personifies or allegorizes certain aspects of India's shifting society over the last decades of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first.

At the same time, Gaitonde and the novel's other protagonist, Sartaj Singh, the Mumbai police officer who investigates Gaitonde's suicide and the nuclear terrorist plot in which he was unwittingly involved, illustrate the systemic, synergistic relationship between criminals, law enforcement, industry, and politics in contemporary India. In the novel

the police and criminals trade information and bribes, are presented as often having climbed the ladder of success together, and even use the same money launderer (Chandra 86). Those advancing in politics like the nationalist Bipin Bhonsle and aspiring "community leader" Wasim Zafar Ali Ahmad make use of both groups and extend favors, economic or otherwise, in return. Politicians and gang leaders collaborate in intercommunal violence that clears land of slums for lucrative real estate development by their associates (393–94), similar to how gangs have been used by Mumbai municipal authorities to help with its slum rehabilitation scheme (Weinstein 34). So rather than existing in Manichean opposition, criminal activity and the law, governance, and legally sanctioned business work together in the novel to produce the social system of Mumbai. As Chandra reflects in his afterword to the novel, his narrative belies the common metaphor of a criminal "underworld," testifying instead to a complex system of intersecting lives and systems readily apparent on the face of Mumbai social life (Chandra, back matter 11).[5] In other words, the novel illustrates how organized criminality does not loom in the shadowy corners of society—it is just another set of nodes in the capitalist socioeconomic system, bound up with other social institutions like religion and politics.

In this regard, criminal figures like Gaitonde illustrate the interdependence of the hegemonically sanctioned and illicit faces of capitalist globalization, as Kelly Anne Minerva points out (218). Gaitonde's capital, initially garnered through extortion and smuggling, from fairly early on in his career flows fluidly by way of his investment agent/money launderer, Paritosh Shah, into construction, restaurants, rental properties, factories, and an airline (Chandra 268). After the latter's killing by a criminal rival, Gaitonde "consolidates" his business, which consists of protection rackets, "interests in real estate, . . . importing of electronic and computer parts, . . . cash investments in the entertainment industry," and odd consignments of smuggled arms, while branching into providing logistical support to drug smugglers (472–73). As his investment—and the investment of other crime dons—in the Mumbai film industry becomes common knowledge (506), his business grows to three billion rupees a year:

> Of course we still made money the old-fashioned way, from our taxes on businessmen and movie producers, from commissions earned from good middle-class householders who needed their retirement flats emptied of sticky tenants, from moving substances and materials across borders, from bookies and touts. But we had legitimate investments thrown across Bombay and into India, we had funds and stocks and real estate and start-up companies. (570)

By this stage in his career, Gaitonde has come to resemble less, in conventional terms, a *goonda*[6] than a venture capitalist.

In doing so he comes to embody the ethos of neoliberal capitalism, not only in his myopic individualistic pursuit of profit and the forms of personal gratification it can purchase[7] but also in his willingness to use violence to open up avenues of economic development. As I argue elsewhere, the cultural myth of the entrepreneur serves as a chief legitimizing justification of neoliberal capitalism, making economic success in an increasingly inegalitarian system seem like the product of vision and merit rather than illegal and/or immoral business practices, nepotism, generational familial economic advantage, or graft evident in the historical cases of most successful business figures.[8] Much entrepreneur discourse draws on conservative economist Joseph Schumpeter's concept of "creative destruction," the process by which already-profitable sources of economic activity are destroyed to make way for even more profitable ones. In a social milieu in which police killings of criminals, dubbed "encounters" in Indian vernacular English,[9] are hailed as potential means of major socioeconomic advancement (237), Gaitonde puts into practice a particularly violent form of creative destruction: taking over other gangs' territories through coordinated killings, importing arms for militant Hindu nationalists, and, as previously mentioned, using anti-Muslim mob violence to clear slums of their inhabitants to pave the way for lucrative real estate development (393–94). Along these lines, Caroline Herbert argues that Gaitonde's easy recourse to violence in pursuit of profit links the disposability of Mumbai's subaltern to "global capitalist traffic" (958). The novel, thus, suggests that the

sort of voracious, multi-sectorial capitalist acquisitiveness embodied by Gaitonde risks a drift towards destructive nihilism. The blockbuster film he bankrolls is titled *International Dhamaka* (*dhamaka* meaning bang, detonation, or explosion in Hindi), which foreshadows his life's strivings culminating in his suicide and, unintentionally, the creation of an atomic device whose detonation is only thwarted at the last minute.[10] Together these resonances of "dhamaka" suggest the socially destructive volatility of his efforts to garner profit and construct his own destiny no matter the cost. Shortly before his death Gaitonde is bothered by a crowd celebrating a festival and curses "the over-populating bastards of India, milling about in their lakhs and crores. I wished then that they all had one head, so that I could shoot them all dead at once" (Chandra 816). His paraphrase of Caligula's wish that the people of Rome had only one neck here suggests a basic affinity between sociopathy and the power that Gaitonde has attained through his intermingled success as a licit and illicit capitalist.

Yet for all this Gaitonde largely remains a sympathetic character in *Sacred Games*—because he recoils in horror when he discovers the prospect of Mumbai's nuclear destruction, because he resists being drawn into the fray of religious nationalism for as long as possible, and because he is consistently self-reflective, honest, and generous. His character does not fall into the mold of criminal as aberration or monster, allowing him to be dismissed as a bad actor within an otherwise sound socioeconomic system. Rather, as a character Gaitonde challenges the mystification and dehumanization of the organized crime figure in a way that bolsters the novel's critique: if Gaitonde is bad, then the much-lauded capitalist boom of neoliberal India that he embodies is bad. The problem in India is then not its organized crime figures but the larger socioeconomic system with which they evolved in tandem.

A very similar-spirited use of an entrepreneur-figure character whose business interests inextricably mix licit and illicit forms of capitalism features centrally in Salman Rushdie's two novels that treat the subject of organized crime in India, *The Moor's Last Sigh* and *The Golden House*. The plots of both texts lead to the same revelation: that the affluent businessman patriarch of the family at the heart of each narrative, Abraham

Zogoiby and Nero Golden, respectively, has made much of his fortune in financial cahoots with an organized crime figure based very clearly on Dawood Ibrahim, the Muslim kingpin of Mumbai's premier gang, the D Company.[11] *The Moor's Last Sigh*, a text Yumna Siddiqi claims ushered in a wave of narrative fiction exploring "the wholesale criminalization of politics and finance in Bombay" (1218–19), follows the travails and vicissitudes of the Da Gama/Zoigby family from their roots as spice traders in the Christian and Jewish communities of Cochin through to their relocation to Bombay,[12] where they thrived economically for the first four decades of India's independence. While much of the narrative focuses on the artist and matriarch Aurora Da Gama's dominant influence on the family, her husband, Abraham, becomes increasingly central in the latter parts of the novel, particularly after Aurora's death. The novel presents Abraham up until the halfway point of the novel as a mild-mannered and uxorious man who shows a knack for business dealings after taking over the family spice business. However, as expansion into most other areas of legal business has been blocked by the established trading families of Bombay, the narrator (Abraham's son Moraes, or "Moor") suddenly reveals that Abraham has made dealings with the city's bootleggers, begun a sex-trafficking importation sideline, and secured protection from the city's ruling Muslim crime boss (Rushdie, *The Moor's Last Sigh* 182–83). Drawing on the language of corporate commerce, Moor describes this activity, as well as the drugs Abraham smuggles inside of talcum powder containers his company manufactures, as "broad-based corporate diversification" (184). He then wonders how, with the black market so barely submerged beneath the licit capitalist economy in Bombay and India as a whole, this expansion into illicit activities "could . . . have been any different?" (184). Abraham climbs to the apex of Bombay's criminal hierarchy, "the biggest dada of them all. Mogambo!"[13] and unifies the city's Muslim gangs under him (331). Finally, with law enforcement closing in on him and a struggle with the local Hindu nationalist party mounting, Abraham becomes involved in a slew of bombings carried out in the wake of the destruction of the Ayodhya Mosque.[14] Based loosely on the 1993 Bombay terrorist attacks, it is unclear whether these attacks are in part sponsored by

Abraham, as they eliminate many of his rivals (372), but they ultimately claim him as one of their victims when a former lieutenant/enforcer of the Hindu nationalist party blows up his corporate headquarters skyscraper while he is inside (375).

Revisiting these thematic questions of corporate capitalism in the age of globalization, organized crime, terrorism, and right-wing nationalism over two decades later, Rushdie's *The Golden House* employs a similar narrative arc for patriarch Nero Golden. *The Golden House* narrates the eight years following Nero's decamping from Bombay to a mansion in New York City's West Village on the day of President Barack Obama's inauguration in 2009—Nero's subsequent marriage to a Siberian gold-digger, the deaths of his three sons, and his eventual growing senility as the hegemonic consensus that had governed American political life breaks down in the years leading up to the presidential election of Donald Trump. A self-constructed veil of secrecy and mystery surrounds Nero, his family, and the sources of their fortune: all have adopted classically inspired pseudonyms and refuse to speak of their backgrounds, including their country of origin—they are testing out whether the Obama-era US, and New York City in particular, is a place where they can wholly break from their past and reinvent themselves. But it quickly becomes apparent to René, the young Belgian-American aspiring filmmaker neighbor who narrates the novel, that there is an air of extra-legality to Nero. He reminds René of the filmic criminal mastermind Dr. Mabuse (Rushdie, *The Golden House* 52), and René describes his close associates as possibly hoteliers or possibly Mafiosi (123). Ostensibly Nero is a real estate developer, as he was back in India, but in the seventies he was introduced to the profits that could be made in conjunction with organized criminal enterprises by a man he dubs "Don Corleone" (192–93), based on the historical figure of the smuggling kingpin turned real estate magnate and film producer Haji Mastan Mirza (Zaidi 15). Subsequently, Nero had gotten involved as a money launderer and bag man for the don who succeeded Don Corleone, the Muslim leader of the Z-Company gang, Zamzama Alankar (Rushdie, *The Golden House* 325–31), the text's thinly fictionalized stand-in for Dawood Ibrahim (see above). Zamzama pressured Nero into helping

him facilitate attacks based very closely on the 1993 and 2008 Bombay terrorist attacks, after which Nero fled to the US in both grief and fear, as his wife had been unwittingly killed in the 2008 attack[15] and as he had angered former criminal associates of his and Zamzama's, who did not appreciate the disruptions caused to their various rackets by intercommunal violence. Eventually Nero's past follows him to Manhattan. Bombay's organized crime travels transnationally along the paths laid by the constituent diasporas and trade networks of globalization, and angered gang leaders manage to burn down Nero's home with him and his second wife still in it.

The Golden House reemploys several themes, character traits, and plot devices from *The Moor's Last Sigh* as a means of reiterating, revisiting, and/or qualifying ideas hazarded in the earlier text. Both novels, like *Sacred Games*, testify to the intermingled nature of legal and extra-legal capitalism in the world of neoliberal globalization and how the enterprises and agents who blur the distinctions between the two have taken on an increasingly diversified, transnational character over time. While Abraham's "corporate diversification" (Rushdie, *The Moor's Last Sigh* 184) efforts include both illegal and legal banking practices, arms smuggling, "drug-smuggling, [and] giant-scale 'black money' dealings and procuring" (360), Nero's wealth comes precisely from laundering money from the illegal affairs of Bombay dons—through real estate flipping (Rushdie, *The Golden House* 324), investing in Bollywood films (320–23), and participating in the *hawala* system of unregulated, undocumented oral money transfers (331)—so as to inextricably muddy the forms of capitalist pursuit that the legal system seeks to demarcate into licit and illicit branches. Nero's entrepreneurial acumen thus consists of enabling the intermingling of capital streams that both national and transnational legal structures seek to keep separate while (unsuccessfully) suppressing those labeled illegal. Nero brags that he is a master of "briberyandcorruption" who facilitates this and any other sort of economic activity in India (240–41). The fallout from this corruption is not isolated to politics and criminality but spreads to all areas of the economy. Nero highlights this spread when observing a parallel sort of parasitic economic activity, noting that the cost of extortion

payments made to the Z-Company gang are invariably passed on by shopkeepers, prostitutes, and small commodity producers to their consumers (326–27).

In both texts organized criminality, inexorably intertwined with more socially sanctioned forms of capitalism, takes on an increasingly transnational character as neoliberal globalization proliferates over time in the post-Cold War era. By emphasizing Abraham's smuggling enterprises, *The Moor's Last Sigh* draws attention to the shadow side of India's opening to the greater transnational circulation of goods, while it also enumerates his big-money illegal dealings, which are equally transnational in character: "Corrupt global-scale banking schemes, stock market fixing at the super-epic Mogambo level, multi-billion-dollar arms deals, nuclear technology conspiracies involving stolen computers and Maldivian Mata Haris, export of antiquities including the symbol of the nation itself, the four-headed Lion of Sarnath" (Rushdie, *The Moor's Last Sigh* 251). The illegal exportation of India's national emblem in this manner symbolizes neoliberal globalization's diminishment of the power of the nation both as an ideal governing human behavior and as a force capable of controlling amoral and potentially socially disruptive capitalist activity. As a result, and as an integral part of globalization's transnational economic flows, organized crime syndicates that have been historically rooted in a particular geographic territory—like the Mumbai mafia—are beginning to exercise an international reach. A retired Indian police officer in *The Golden House* notes that

> there is much enthusiasm among these American [organized crime groups of South Asian extraction], much potential for rapid growth. There is also a degree of outreach to the mother country, an interest in globalization, in shared activities. Our people in the USA are willing to help the people in the mother country, to facilitate actions here, in return for parallel facilitations back home. (Rushdie, *The Golden House* 350)

Similarly, in another passage René explains that "those men's [Bombay mob dons'] reach grows longer. They can stretch out their arms and touch places and people they couldn't reach before. There are companies

here to lend assistance to companies there, to facilitate journeys, to execute strategies" (377).

The use of the term "company," in this passage and throughout the text, both makes use of Indian English slang for an organized crime group[16] and highlights the deep intermingling of licit and illicit capitalism. Relatedly, another commonality between the two novels' thematic critique of capitalism and organized crime is that both Abraham and Nero are real estate developers who help to build up Bombay (and then New York City, in the latter's case) as global cities plugged into networks of transnationalism and as residential havens for neoliberal globalization's economic elites and their capital. This thematizes the historic ties of organized crime to the building trades that René notes in *The Golden House* (144). But it also draws attention to how, even with their spectral, deterritorialized transnational economic dealings and the mutability of their capital, Abraham and Nero still require spatial grounding in a base of operations. And it is noteworthy that both men are destroyed in tandem with the structure that bears a metaphoric relation to some aspect of their worldly power: Abraham in the explosion that levels the Cashondeliveri Tower, where his multi-sectoral business is based, and Nero in his titular Golden House, which represents his familial dynasty. This might be taken to suggest that their ways of living and pursuing profit are ultimately ill-fated, but as *The Golden House* shows, gangster-businessmen are ultimately fungible, while the socioeconomic system that allows for their rise prevails: Don Corleone is succeeded by Zamzama Alankar, who is in turn succeeded by his former henchmen Big Head and Little Feet, who watch as Nero and his home burn to the ground in retribution for upsetting their business dealings (377). In fact, both texts take pains to establish these criminal-patriarchs as personifications of their era of neoliberalism that endures undamaged after the demises of their standard-bearers. In *The Moor's Last Sigh*, Moor calls neoliberal India, with Bombay as its heart, "the new god-and-mammon India" that has emerged with the fading of Nehruvian secularism and socialism[17] and presents Abraham as the embodiment of mammon-orientedness[18] and Hindu nationalist leader Mainduck as the pursuer of religious-inspired aims (Rushdie, *The Moor's Last Sigh* 351). And in *The*

Golden House, Nero is "the embodiment and apogee" of the capitalist greed and "public shamelessness" that leads up to and allows for the election of Donald Trump, figured as the character the Joker (Rushdie, *The Golden House* 276). So the way that both of these characters represent the deep intermingling of organized crime and licit-sector capitalism testifies to this aspect of the neoliberal era as well, wherein all public institutions end up falling under the sway of market economics.

Both novels suggest that this intermingling of the licit and illicit geared towards an ultimate search for profit extends to the political realm as well. *The Moor's Last Sigh* poses the struggle between the nationalist party and Abraham as simply one of "which gang (criminal-entrepreneurial or political-criminal) would run the town" (Rushie, *The Moor's Last Sigh* 352), and in *The Golden House* Zamzama expostulates, "[o]nly two gangs in Mumbai now. The *gang*-gang, the mafia, that is me. Z-Company, we only are that. And what are we, ninety-five percent? Musalman people. People of the book. But there are also the political gangs, and they are Hindu. Hindu politics is running the municipal corporation and Hindu politicos have their Hindu gangs" (Rushdie, *The Golden House* 332). For Rushdie, as to a great extent for Chandra in *Sacred Games*, neoliberal India is the place of "god-and-mammon" in politics as in economics, and the hyphenation of this phrase suggests that these forces, like so-called "free market" capitalism and criminality, are fundamentally interlinked. Politicians engage in gangsterism and religious zealotry for profit and organized criminals engage in business, politics, and religion, for the same reason. As Siddiqi argues, *The Moor's Last Sigh* dramatizes the interwovenness of crime, politics, and business in Bombay and by extension India (1230); or as Nicole Weickgenannt Thiara puts it somewhat more mildly, the novel reveals "the intimate dependence of the elite and middle-class life of the city on the underworld" (32). Neoliberalism undergirds all of this, providing the opportunities and ethos for profit accumulation at any cost and in any sort of venture while also exacerbating economic inequalities,[19] which produce the social strife that erupts in communal violence.

In using realist fiction[20] to reveal the blurred lines between criminality, legally sanctioned business, religion, and politics in neoliberal India,

Sacred Games, *The Moor's Last Sigh*, and *The Golden House* call for a rethinking of the ideologies and values of a society structured on profit-seeking, consumerism, and individual economic self-interest. They raise implicit moral questions that reframe the conventional notions of capitalist business practices as virtuous and criminality as an unconnected "underbelly" of society, to use a common metaphor. For Rushdie, this means that looking closely at the businessperson reveals criminality and partnerships with criminal leaders, as these provide distinct advantages for advancing capitalist careers. But he poses this as a matter of a hidden dark side that calls capitalism morally into question while not fundamentally challenging received notions of the criminal as "bad guy"—Abraham in *The Moor's Last Sigh* is an unalloyedly evil pulp-type villain, while Zamzama Alankar in *The Golden House* is equally a two-dimensional embodiment of badness and menace. In *Sacred Games*, on the other hand, Gaitonde proves to be more complexly human, redeemable, and capable of transcending self-centeredness than the corrupt police commissioner Parulkar, the religious fundamentalist political boss Bipin Bhonsle, or Gaitonde's genocidally oriented guru. In this sense, Chandra's sweeping narrative rendering of the constituent social systems of twenty-first-century Mumbai reaches farther than Rushdie's novels in its reframing of capitalism and criminality by morally relativizing the figures of the cop, the criminal, the politician, and the religious leader—and by extension the institutions these characters personify.

Nonetheless, all three novels perform the invaluable cultural work of testifying to the intermingling of the forms of capitalist success that are lauded in the popular press and those that are Othered as alluring but ultimately aberrant, dangerous, and ethnically marked. In doing so, they raise fundamental questions about criminality, economics, justice, and morality in the face of a socioeconomic system whose spiraling material inequalities are eroding democracy and fueling the rise of fundamentalist nationalisms. In conjunction with this, they counter the hegemonic legitimizing narratives that present success in the world of neoliberal capitalism as a function of meritocratic entrepreneurial behavior. Part of the malaise occasioned by the rise of an increasingly globalized society consists of anxieties about large drug gangs, sex trafficking, arms

trafficking, and such. If these are perceived as wholly discrete, disparate phenomena, then little headway will be made against them because they will only be addressed symptomatically. But if narratives like Chandra's and Rushdie's can offer us ways of imagining these activities as *systemic* phenomena, enacted by individual agents and broad national and transnational economic structures, then perhaps we will be able to respond more meaningfully and prevent the social disruptions and human suffering that they sow.

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Notes

1 Certainly there are some actions, like murder, that are defined as crimes across almost every human society for pragmatic reasons of social stability. However, to give just a few brief examples of the rather arbitrary and mutable nature of sociocultural constructions of criminality, prostitution and drug use have been legal in most societies for most of human histories, while the commission of homosexual acts was still a capital crime in Great Britain in the early nineteenth century and is illegal in various countries like Jamaica and Saudi Arabia to this day. And to give a couple of well-known examples of how legal systems are structured to safeguard the economic interests of the capitalist elite, take the various English Enclosure Acts of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and international intellectual property laws used today to safeguard corporate profits, even at the expense of poorer countries manufacturing cheaper versions of patented life-saving medicines.

2 However, it should be recognized that in the United States a lot of what is commonly recognized as organized criminal activity was only fully legally established as such after the passage of the 1970 Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations (RICO) Act. Al Capone famously could only be brought to justice as a tax-evader.

3 Though it is outside the geographic scope of this essay (as the novel of a British Pakistani writer who presents the book's subject matter in broad regional "Asian" terms), Mohsin Hamid's *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia* (2013) is another illuminating work that evidences some of the various intersections of capitalism and criminality. In his rise to capitalist success, the novel's second-person protagonist both engages in illegal activities like selling expired canned goods

and bribing government officials and collaborates with organized crime figures in securing "protection" for his business endeavors.

4 Harvey writes:

> By this [accumulation by dispossession] I mean the continuation and proliferation of accumulation practices which Marx had treated of as "primitive" or "original" during the rise of capitalism. These include the commodification and privatization of land and the forceful expulsion of peasant populations (compare the cases, described above, of Mexico and of China, where 70 million peasants are thought to have been displaced in recent times); conversion of various forms of property rights (common, collective, state, etc.) into exclusive private property rights (most spectacularly represented by China); suppression of rights to the commons; commodification of labour power and the suppression of alternative (indigenous) forms of production and consumption; colonial, neocolonial, and imperial processes of appropriation of assets (including natural resources); monetization of exchange and taxation, particularly of land; the slave trade (which continues particularly in the sex industry); and usury, the national debt and, most devastating of all, the use of the credit system as a radical means of accumulation by dispossession. (159)

5 In regards to Salman Rushdie's *The Moor's Last Sigh*, which I consider later in this essay, Henry makes much the same point (146).

6 A *goonda* is a hooligan or hired thug.

7 In terms of this shift of values in neoliberal India, early in the novel Sartaj Singh reflects that

> [a]mbition had spread like an inescapable virus in those Harshad Mehta [Indian stockbroker accused of numerous financial crimes surrounding a 1992 securities scam] days, and there had been stock market crashes and bubble bursts since, but the contagion had taken firm hold. Now these outsize aspirations were something like a universal condition. Maybe it was a form of health—after all, it gave you vim, zip, velocity. He had read an editorial in the papers not long ago, which had noted gratefully that the Indian cricket team had finally acquired some killer instinct. Yes, they had acquired cash and killer instinct. (Chandra 211)

8 There are countless examples one could provide to substantiate this point, from Rockefeller-hired "detectives" machine-gunning striking miners to the Microsoft Corporation's violations of US anti-trust laws. But to take the example of one of India's most illustrious business families, the Tata clan has engaged in violent union-breaking policies that have helped sharply reduce industrial wages

in the country (Sanchez 223) and has worked out mineral extraction deals with various Indian state governments involving the forcible expulsion of indigenous peoples from their lands (O'Brien 189).

9 An "encounter" is an extra-judicial killing in which Indian law enforcement agents carry out the premeditated killing of a criminal suspect, claiming after the fact that they had killed the party in a shoot-out the latter had initiated (Belur 237). Amnesty International claims that over a thousand such "encounters" were carried out between 1993 and 2008, the period under exploration in these novels, and in 2008 the Indian National Human Rights Commission found that 1,224 out of 2,560 complaints it received were in fact instances of these extra-judicial murders (B. Das).

10 While some scholars have referred to the impending nuclear cataclysm in the novel as apocalyptic, this Judeo-Christian concept of end time is not in line with the Hindu theological outlook that motivates the desire of Gaitonde's guru to stage a nuclear attack. Rather, the guru wants to provoke a massive war that will bring an end to the debased, fallen era of Kaliyug that the human race is stuck in and thereby inaugurate a new golden age (Chandra 837–39).

11 Interestingly, in 2012, between the publications of the two novels, Ibrahim purportedly put a hit out on Rushdie in furtherance of the fatwa on *The Satanic Verses*, causing the writer to have to cancel a scheduled appearance at the Jaipur Literature Festival (Henry 138).

12 In deference to Rushdie's usage, which privileges the historic cosmopolitanism (though unavoidably the colonial legacies as well) of "Bombay," this section of the article will use this name instead of "Mumbai," itself the product of Marathi nationalism.

13 As the novel mentions, Mogambo is the criminal mastermind in the James Bond-esque film *Mr. India* (1987). After discovering his father's criminality, Moor continually uses this as a nickname for him. Commenting on the film, Moor muses:

> The hero was a slick young loverboy trying to convince us of his super-heroic powers. . . . Just a made-in-India runty-bodied imitation of Bond[,] . . . [but] the producers did unintentionally provide us with an image of the National Father after all. There he sits, like a dragon in his cave, like a thousand-fingered puppet-master, like the heart of the heart of darkness; commander of uzied legions, fingertip-controller of pillars of diabolic fire, orchestrator of all the secret music of the under-spheres: the arch-villain, the dark capo, Moriartier than Moriarty, Blofelder than Blofeld, not just Godfather but Gone-farthest, the dada of all dadas: *Mogambo*. (Rushdie, *The Moor's Last Sigh* 168)

14 In December 1992 a mob of Hindus destroyed the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya, believing that it had been erected over the birthplace of the deity Rama in the

sixteenth century by the Mughal emperor Babar. This prompted civic unrest and small-scale violence against Hindus by Mumbai Muslims the following January, which in turn sparked massive anti-Muslim rioting and killings stirred up by the leader of the nationalist Shiv Sena Party, Bal Thackery (Mehta 40). As a reprisal for this, Mumbai Muslim gangsters orchestrated a series of bombings across the city on 12 March 1993 that killed 317 people (Mehta 40). In his take on the riots and the larger rise of the Shiv Sena Party, Mehta discusses the close affinities between organized crime and politics in Mumbai—which I consider in terms of the city's gangster fiction later in this essay—noting that the very same angry young men who carried out the violence that allowed the party to rise to greater power would drift away to organized crime groups if not kept continually engaged (87, 112).

15 Julia Hoydis misreads this as Nero having ordered the attack (161), when in fact he has only been coerced by Zamzama into making a bribe that would allow the attack to happen (Rushdie, *Golden House* 343).

16 As Mehta puts it,

> [t]he boys [criminal organization members] don't refer to the organizations they work for as gangs, they call them companies, and there is indeed something corporate about the organization. Within the structure of the gang, there is a minute specialization of labor. There are people responsible for giving out salaries every month, just like in a company. There are others in charge of supplying weapons, and a separate group responsible for storing weapons. There are special cells that are in charge of threatening witnesses. (143)

17 In a bit of playful symbolism, the novel presents Nehru's political vision as a stuffed dog that, by the time the 1990s have rolled around, "had seen better times" (Rushdie, *The Moor's Last Sigh* 395).

18 In the same spirit, *The Moor's Last Sigh* uses the character of Adam, the baby at the end of *Midnight's Children*, who represents in that text the promise of an India of continuing heterogeneous inclusiveness in the period moving out of The State of Emergency. In *The Moor's Last Sigh* Adam becomes Abraham's greedy, amoral protégé and adoptive son (342), thus signifying the neoliberal rise of self-centered individualism at the expense of the greater society.

19 The billionaire class of India now ranks globally only second to that of the US in terms of total wealth (Bhadurai 59), while 800,000,000 Indians live on fifty cents a day, every half hour a farmer commits suicide because he cannot pay his bills, and a child under the age of five dies every fifteen seconds for want of access to food or healthcare (R. Das 1093).

20 Though Rushdie is widely celebrated as one of the most renowned practitioners of magical realism, the magical elements of magical realism are almost wholly absent from the parts of *The Moor's Last Sigh* that deal with Abraham's criminal

and capitalist exploits. Numerous reviewers have noted that *The Golden House* is written in the mode of a realism like that of Edith Wharton.

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