

Families are Complicated
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On the icy shores of Lake Erie



Minita Gandhi as Priya (far left), Adam Poss as Vijay (center), and Mark Smith as Bernard (far right) in Silk Road Rising's 2013 World Premiere production of Rajiv Joseph's *The Lake Effect*, directed by Timothy Douglas, and co-commissioned with Crossroads Theatre Company.

In Rajiv Joseph's *The Lake Effect*, an Indian American brother and sister were reunited by the sudden death of their father amidst a fierce winter storm in Cleveland. Enter their late father's African American confidante and gambling bookie, and a slew of family secrets got inadvertently revealed.

The Lake Effect set into motion a complicated web of relationships and conflicts that challenged our perceptions of race, gender, and success.

Check out the videos below.



The Polyculturalist

Journeys in Cultural Interchange



Our latest offering of Polycultural Institute's soon-to-be-launched online publication, *The Polyculturalist*, features A. George Bahalia, Assistant Professor of Anthropology at Wesleyan University.

Stay tuned for expanded interview transcripts when *The Polyculturalist* officially debuts on Substack.

Reimagining Borders with A. George Bajalia

This interview was conducted on December 15, 2022, by Dr. Tasneem Mandviwala, Polycultural Institute's Advisory Council Coordinator.

Tasneem Mandviwala Your current book project, *Waiting at the Border: Language, Labor, and Infrastructure in the Strait of Gibraltar*, focuses on West and Central African immigrants living and working around the Moroccan-Spanish borderlands. What insights have you gleaned about the cultural, social, and political meanings ascribed to "borders"?



George: A lot of the work I was seeing about borders focused on the spectacular; like, when people are climbing fences, or when they're in boats. What I find in my field research, though, is that there's so much more happening besides these spectacular moments of crossing. The border could be a physical, material object as much as it could be something that you're constantly dancing around but never actually crossing. This led me to the idea of waiting, and the time that we

normally just put into parenthesis: “Oh, they’re just waiting.” But entire lives are lived while people are waiting. I’m interested in how the border is creating things; it’s creating worlds. Borders generate things; they generate communities. There are ways of being in common together that emerge in these border areas where people are “waiting” at the border. I’m interested in holding these things out of their parentheses and looking at the different types of meaning that emerge around them.



Tasneem: In 2015, you directed Silk Road Rising's video play, *Multi Meets Poly: Multiculturalism and Polyculturalism Go on a First Date*, written by Jamil Khoury. How did your understanding

of polyculturalism evolve during the creative process, and has it changed since?

George: I didn't have any idea what polyculturalism was at the beginning of that creative process, so it was really a deep dive into the idea itself. I hadn't been exposed to alternatives to the concept of multiculturalism. It was really refreshing to see something that didn't put up borders, but rather accepted things that flowed between them. The thing that I think about now is a concept I'm calling "shared difference." The best example is to think about this neighborhood in Tangier that has people who are not the same as each other in lots of different ways (religion and ethnicity, for example), but they're different from something else, which is maybe mainstream Moroccan society, which creates a sort of shared difference. And that shared difference is something that is akin to polyculturalism in a way or something that emerges in polycultural environments.



George directed Silk Road Rising's *Multi Meets Poly: Multiculturalism and Polyculturalism Go on a First Date*, a video play written by Jamil Khoury, and released in 2014.

Tasneem: The Youmein Festival is a unique 48-hour annual art festival in Tangier, Morocco that you co-founded and co-direct. How does polyculturalism influence the festival's aesthetics and values?

George: I like to think about the festival as a pressure cooker where you have a time limit—48 hours—during which you have to quickly take down a lot of your own barriers and allow yourself to be influenced in different ways by different people and the place you're in. Tangier fundamentally has a polycultural spirit of flow and fluidity. It is a place where, yes, because of empire and colonialism, but also because of lots of other things, where people move rapidly between languages, in one conversation; in one sentence. Letting yourself be immersed in that environment, in this stew of language and culture that's got a time limit, you can't be so beholden to one way of looking at things or one way of doing things or one way of being. That's part of polyculturalism.



Youmein Festival, Tangier, Morocco, 2021

Tasneem: Please tell us a story of a time when someone surprised you because they supported you or demonstrated compassion towards you even though you expected otherwise.

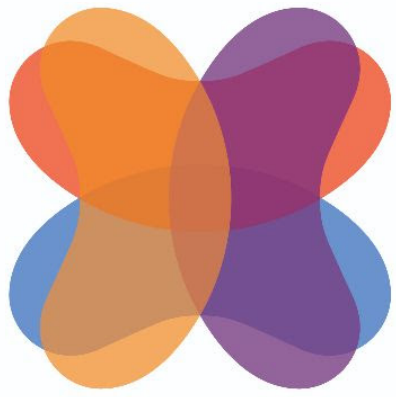
George: When I started grad school, my roommate, Les Sabiston, helped me realize that there was a whole world around me that I didn't understand at all. He is also an anthropologist, from Canada; he's native: Cree-Metis from Manitoba. I thought I knew something about indigenous history in North America at the time, but I later realized

settler colonialism is not a history, but a present. Les must have thought I was crazy or really arrogant or an idiot, but he didn't say that. He treated me with care and love and slowly opened me up to understanding this world.

He and I were standing in the kitchen one day, drinking coffee, talking about the Florida State Seminoles, the sports team at Florida State University. I said, "I'm pretty sure that [the university and the tribe] have a treaty, and [the team name] is agreed upon." He said, "I don't know too much about them—that's not where I'm from—but I find it hard to believe that this is all consensual. It sounds like it may be more complicated." He was really gentle. I went and looked it up, and of course, he was totally right; this was ridiculous. That was a shifting moment for me.



Documenta 15, a contemporary art exhibition in Kassel, Germany, 2022



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