

Affect Theory Cluster

Failures that Connect;  
or, Colonial Friendships in  
E. M. Forster's *A Passage to India*  
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**Abstract:** This article reexamines the role of friendship in *A Passage to India* that previous scholarship has analyzed in terms of function, teleology, and political efficacy. Examining friendship in terms of its continuing flows and affects, this essay explores the moments and spaces in which friendship, in bringing together bodies and social worlds, challenges established social dynamics and spatial regimes. What is the point of being friends with someone in a colonial outpost like Chandrapore, the fictional Indian city in Forster's novel? What happens—or does not happen—when Dr. Aziz and Adela Quested have afternoon tea together or venture into the unknowns of the Marabar Cave? These questions, among others, serve as the starting point from which I trace the potentiality of colonial friendship as well as its relation to structures of power and knowledge. This article, in short, offers friendship as an analytic tool and subject matter to situate *A Passage to India* away from an identitarian logic that often takes the study of colonial relations to a host of ideological impasses.

**Keywords:** friendship, space, colonial relations, E. M. Forster, *A Passage to India*

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E. M. Forster dedicated *A Passage to India* (1924) to his life-long friend Syed Ross Masood, who, at seventeen and in need of a Latin tutor for his entrance exams to Oxford, was introduced to Forster in 1906. The timing was perfect: Forster was going through a period of solitude while writing *The Longest Journey* (1907). This interim of single-minded pro-

ductivity, “[a] narrow suburban life that would stretch out interminably, unchangingly into the future . . . [was disrupted by a] wonderful dark-skinned boy” (Moffat 88) whose grandfather had risked his life protecting the Anglo-Indian community during the Indian Mutiny of 1857. The friendship between Forster and Masood, born out of a working relationship between tutor and pupil, would eventually outlast Forster’s romantic relations, including his romance with Ali Mohammed, an Arabic Egyptian whose premature death in 1922 slowed down and much complicated the completion of *Passage*. “When I began the book I thought of it as a little bridge of sympathy between East and West, but this conception has had to go,” Forster later told Masood: “my sense of truth forbids anything so comfortable” (qtd. in Moffat 190). Where invocations of interracial romance are caught in the impasse of identity and ideological differences, friendship offers itself as a narrative thread with which the writer sutures together cross-cultural affinities. Instead of a “little bridge of sympathy between East and West” that was initially supported by Forster’s fantasy of cross-cultural—and primarily homosocial—romance, *Passage* ultimately became a novel featuring colonial friendship as that which has the potential to disrupt a certain single-identity-based way of being with others. It makes “[a] sympathy between East and West” seem unattainable in the first place.

Indeed, friendship would inspire Forster as an enduring force, informing not only his views on subjectivity and sociality but also matters concerning the British Empire. In a BBC recording studio on 15 August 1947, a decade after Masood’s death, Forster was asked to comment on the birth and partition of India and Pakistan. Instead of politics, however, Forster invoked once more his friendship with Masood as he spoke over the microphone radio to listeners at home and abroad:

Today, the country I have known as India enters the past and becomes part of history. A new period opens, and my various Indian friends are now citizens of the new India or of Pakistan. You must excuse me if I begin with my friends. They are much in my mind on this momentous occasion. It is nearly forty years since I met, here in England, the late Syed Ross Masood.

But for Masood I should never have come to [that] part of the world. (qtd. in Lago, Hughes, and Walls 394)

In real life as in fiction, Forster's insistence on placing friendship ahead of political concerns or historical events reflects a strategic refusal of a subjective life which bears a recognizable cultural and national identity in favor of a life that, in apprehending and articulating its subjectivity and relation to space, does not seek to belittle, romanticize, or negate the lives of others, as experienced by the characters in *Passage*.

In employing friendship as a lens through which to read the different modes of meaningful contact in *Passage*, I reexamine Forster's notions of intimate encounter and collective belonging to challenge certain analytic frames and Manichean logic (that of homosexuality or anticolonial nationalism, for example) within and through which critics have studied the novel.<sup>1</sup> Rather than assessing Forster's representations of friendship in *Passage* as effective or ineffective responses to the uneven material conditions of colonial India or to forms of binary resistance that would coalesce into a subaltern subject/identity or an anticolonial nationalism, I read friendship as it is *collectively* represented in the novel—as a way of life—to show the extent to which *Passage* creates moments and spaces in which to imagine alternative ways of being oneself and belonging to others that undercut the colonial taxonomies of gender, race, and class. In this essay, I explore a dimension of friendship that is more experiential than epistemological and argue that friendship carries the potential to foster multiple ways of being and belonging with others in a world dominated by contractual modes of affiliation and affection. According to Leela Gandhi, friendship has a radical potential in collecting individuals as “singularities” to “form community without affirming an identity . . . [and to] co-belong without any representable condition of belonging” (26). Gandhi theorizes friendship as a mode of belonging that feels itself but fails to rise to the level of representation or legibility. It is a concept that orients my thinking about colonial friendships in *Passage*. The idea that friendship exercises itself over time in space for its own pleasure, not always purposeful or in support of other relationships, is a way of life and way of being with others that need not reinforce established

and usually hierarchical relationships, including colonial relations. This inventiveness of friendship, what Tom Roach refers to as “a communal invention,” involving oneself and others, brings with it a pre-condition of shared frustration toward stasis and a potential for redefining life—singular and multiple—afresh as a collective impulse, however tenuous or unattainable that life may be (2). Gandhi and Roach call attention to a shared sense of belonging that is also a collective effort to invent new conditions of possibility for friendship to take place and thrive. This achievement of friendship outside the “representable condition of belonging,” I argue, hinges on an ethics of non-recognition that does not reinforce the affective and spatial arrangements of sameness and difference because it bears witness to an everydayness of close encounters and proximate relations between bodies and groups—individual or collective—that is too often written outside the purview of normative belonging.

In representing friendship in *Passage* as an affective force that binds together bodies and social groups, I will focus on moments and spaces that escape hegemonic epistemologies of sameness and difference. The sense of possibility and the ongoing nature of friendship, I argue, help resituate discussions of being and belonging with others on a human scale and in ways that dissociate colonial and postcolonial realities from a historiography sustained by Manichean reasoning. *Passage* challenges colonial biopolitics and its attendant taxonomies (i.e., race and sexuality) by downplaying the dialectical tension between the colonizer and the colonized in order to recuperate the possibility of achieving cross-cultural affinity and intimacy as a thinkable past, one that will in turn shape the contours of the present and future. By invoking friendship in unlikely social situations—and involving unlikely bodies therein—Forster recuperates rather than reduces the complexity of colonial lived experiences that were often rendered as non-events invisible in the face of the grand narratives of colonialism favored by “official” accounts of history.<sup>2</sup> I argue that Foster’s privileging of an everydayness of proximate relations over a reality of anticolonial struggle in Chandrapore—a fictional city of India—should not be seen as naïve escapism, as critics have consistently argued, but as a commitment to understanding colo-

nial encounters whose lived experience and affective impact are always already at risk of being erased or reified.

### I. Queer Affects and Colonial Friendships

Small yet enigmatic gestures and interactions abound in *Passage*: Mrs. Moore's removal of her shoes in a Muslim temple; Aziz's outpourings of emotion—first surprised anger, followed by feelings of gratitude and camaraderie—at the presence of Mrs. Moore; Aziz playing impromptu polo with a British soldier; Mr. Fielding's unorthodox tea party, for which Aziz shows up unfashionably early and offers his collar stud to the host; Aziz spontaneously inviting the English to the Marabar Caves (little does he know what is to come); Mr. Fielding's feeling compelled to visit the sick Aziz; Miss Quested's fainting in one of the Marabar Caves; the list goes on. These everyday interactions between Mr. Fielding, Aziz, Mrs. Moore, and Adela Quested are confusing and spastic rather than meaningful and steady. At first glance, they lack coherence; they seem like exceptions rather than the norms of colonial relations. Suggestive rather substantive, the intermingled lives of these characters resist translation into a series of events, into a history of successes or failures of colonial relations. The social web thus formed by the crisscrossing of characters, who are strangers to one another, is akin to a colonial microcosm comprising small-scale lived experiences between the colonizers, the colonized, and the in-between, whose daily interactions with one another reveal something different from the ones traced by larger and less experiential narratives of colonial history. The encounters between the characters in *Passage*, uneventful and seemingly lacking in purpose, bring a sense of particularity to colonial relations. As Sara Ahmed asserts, "particularity is not necessarily to assume the other [as] graspable . . . [but to] move our attention . . . to the particularity of modes of encountering others . . . [that] move beyond the dialectic of self-other" (*Strange Encounters* 144).

I argue that the "non-events"—along with their affective and spatial irregularities—between Aziz, Mrs. Moore, Adela, and Mr. Fielding are integral to an ethos of friendship, which is the cornerstone of the novel. *Passage*, in many ways, exemplifies what Judith Halberstam refers to

as “imaginative ethnograph[y],” an approach to observing and writing about lived experiences that does not begin “with a goal, with an object of research and a set of presumptions” (12). The accidental aspects of colonial friendship in *Passage* point to interstices of everyday colonial relations that cannot be explained by established—or borrowed—epistemologies that seek to label and confine them.

Instead of bringing to surface a legibility of identity crisis or sexual desire and its relation to neocolonialism or anticolonialism, my reading of the novel is more aligned with what Stuart Christie refers to as “queer illegibility,” a reading that privileges “the ‘prophetic’ . . . [and its] creative pressure on representation” (157). In *Queer Forster*, Robert K. Martin and George Piggford likewise see in queerness a potential for prying open texts, for “find[ing] and analyz[ing] . . . aporias often invisible to . . . gay readings” (7), which, I argue, tend to reinforce—not refute—assumptions underpinning identity politics.

Taking a queer stance on friendship, I seek to highlight moments in *Passage* where cross-cultural affinity and affection are presented as a way of life, an end in itself and not a means to something else.<sup>3</sup> Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick has apprehended a queer mode of knowing that opens up places that are prescribed and contained by established hermeneutics. In *Cruising Utopia*, José Esteban Muñoz brings out the expansive range and orientation toward the future of queerness, envisioning queerness as “a structuring and educated mode of desiring that allows us to see and feel beyond the quagmire of the present” (1). Taking a cue from contemporary queer theory, I want to focus on the areas where queer theory and Forster’s depiction of friendship intersect or complement one another.

Previous readings of Forster’s representations of friendship in *Passage* stress the alleged failures or unsustainability of cross-cultural friendship, which they attribute to Forster’s obsession with a class-specific homosexuality trapped within the binary of self and other or of nation and empire.<sup>4</sup> My reading does not seek to repeat previous claims made about Forster’s notions of friendship, especially those filtered through a psychoanalytic frame that, in privileging sexuality or homosexuality as a site of knowledge, neglect nascent structures of feeling that colonial friendship may invoke in non-teleological ways. Instead, I want to recuperate

moments of arrested potentiality, of emergent forms of intimacy, in a host of places within *Passage* that point toward present and future moments of meaningful contact and spaces beyond an epistemic violence that characterizes colonial history. Foster's novel, I insist, should not be read as a failed attempt to represent cross-cultural affinities that inadvertently reinforces the dictates of colonial history. Rather, in dedicating itself to the everyday interaction between racialized and gendered bodies and their attendant social groups, the novel actively imagines the present-future of meaningful contact between identities and categories whose orientation toward the not-yet-known disrupts the Manichean logic of colonial history. As a narrative of colonial friendships, *Passage* reimagines the colony as a policed state that nonetheless contains individuals with spontaneous emotions that cannot be predicted or preempted.

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Against the backdrop of the slow decline of the Raj, before India's eventual independence in 1947, *Passage* is haunted by memories and representations of colonial violence—namely the Indian Mutiny of 1857.<sup>5</sup> However, the novel chooses not to dwell on those collective memories but begins its tale with a conundrum: the possibility of a sustained friendship between Indians and the British. The novel's remove from the documented trauma of colonial relations is not an act of irresponsibility (as critics have called it) but an attempt to preserve literature's autonomy from a historiography that pre-empts the possibility of reconstructing the past differently. Critics such as Ian Baucom attribute this distancing from colonial violence in *Passage* to Forster's escapist, Orientalist fantasies about empire and thus condemn him for “manufactur[ing] the India he encountered in 1912–1913 as a space of tourism . . . [ignoring] the Mutiny . . . [for] a vision of a reified, precious India threatening always to collapse into a souvenir of itself” (121). But if, as Dipesh Chakrabarty argues, “[s]ubaltern pasts [are] like stubborn knots that stand out and break up the otherwise evenly woven surface of the fabric” of the novel (106), Forster's reticence regarding the persistent memory of the Indian Mutiny in the text is a deliberate gesture of failure that allows for alternative ways to fill the gaps of history.

Opening the novel with musings over the possibility of cross-cultural friendship between the English and the Indians, Forster bypasses larger debates over colonial subjugation and subaltern resistance to enter into a complex social sphere made up of small-scale, everyday colonial relations that are more fluid and difficult to define. In Chapter II, *Passage* introduces three Indian characters—Mahmoud Ali, Hamidullah, and Aziz—whose dinner gathering becomes an occasion for a discussion “as to whether or no it is possible to be friends with an Englishman” (7). While Mahmoud Ali rejects the idea of colonial friendship altogether, Hamidullah, who has been to England before, partially agrees with his friend but complicates the verdict by saying “I . . . contend that it is possible in England,” conceding to his friend that it is difficult to maintain any genuine friendship with the English in India but not that it is impossible to be friends with the English (7). This opening exchange between Mahmoud Ali and Hamidullah expands the question of colonial friendship from one of relationality—personally and socially speaking—to one of geography as well. In other words, this spatial aspect of friendship brings to the fore a connection between sociality and space that figures into perceptions and performances of colonial relations. Hamidullah’s view that colonial friendships can happen in certain places (England) but not others (Chandrapore) suggests an irreducible situatedness that affects a relationship. For him, where a relationship takes place is as important as what that relationship is or represents. Indeed, the spatial aspect of friendship is useful for understanding Forster’s representations of friendship in the novel. A closer examination of Forster’s views on colonial relations, I argue, should focus not simply on what colonial friendship is or is not as a mode of relationality but on why it tends to thrive in certain places and not others and how spatial regimes affect the conditions of colonial friendship. Moving away from epistemology and closer to experientiality—a word I use to describe a self-orientation and relation to others that is primarily informed by the sensorium—I approach Foster’s representations of colonial friendship less as an ideological stance against a racialized, bourgeois identity politics that helped secure British rule over India and more as a pliable way to capture and amass inchoate meaning out of a range of lived experiences between the



putative agents and subjects of empire, between insiders and outsiders, that often go unnoticed or are downplayed. This conscious move away from analyzing what colonial friendship is or represents to exploring what colonial friendship feels like in this moment or that place brings to light the affective dimensions of friendship as they are represented—or not represented—in various colonial locations in *Passage*.

Bearing out the affective potential of colonial friendship in various places in the novel is one way out of an ideological impasse that colonial and postcolonial studies sometimes run into, what Sara Suleri identifies as “a conceptual impoverishment[:] . . . the fiction of complete empowerment both claimed by and accorded to colonial domination [being] repeated by the fallacy of the totality of otherness” (13). The extent to which categories like “the colonizer” and “the colonized” have become convenient shorthand for complex identities and ideological leanings is problematic because it oversimplifies the highly fragmented and hybrid realities of colonialism.<sup>6</sup> In highlighting the lived experiences of colonial friendship, I attend to the lineaments of colonial relations whose affinity with the realm of the everyday, as a body of non-knowledge, is in fact strongly felt in and intimately bound up with the reparable histories of colonialism.

## II. Unlikely Colonial Encounters; Unscripted Structures of Feeling

The initial musings over the possibility of cross-cultural friendship in Chandrapore, British India that fill the pages of Chapter II continue, like a succession of waves, to ebb and flow in subsequent chapters, bringing together Aziz, Mrs. Moore, Fielding, and Adela in accidental and unscripted ways that confound the familiar structures of feeling through which they perceive themselves and others and lead them to places where available expressions of self and belonging—racial and cultural stereotypes, patriotic feelings, gender divisions, class-specific expectations, etc.—fall short in defining their experiences throughout the novel. One such accidental encounter between Mrs. Moore and Aziz takes place in a mosque near the English club, immediately following Mahmoud and Hamidullah’s debate over the locatability of colonial friendship. Unfamiliar with the cultures and customs of Chandrapore,

Mrs. Moore walks about as she would in London, blithely unaware of the spatial dynamics of the colonial state as she walks toward a nearby temple. Little does she know that Aziz, after having dinner with his friends, will take refuge in the same temple to avoid the British quarter of Chandrapore, with its streets “named after victorious generals and intersecting at right angles[,] . . . symbolic of the net Great Britain had thrown over India” (Forster, *Passage* 12). This and other occurrences of crisscrossing characters and the resulting emotional effects of these spontaneous encounters form the very structure of the novel through which Forster imagines the affective and spatial dynamics of colonial friendship.

Mrs. Moore and Aziz’s first encounter is an accident, to say the least. The physical layout and social sphere of Chandrapore leave little room for genuine contact between Indians and the English. As Alan Johnson writes, “[t]he interest in spatiality . . . was especially powerful under colonialism because the tools behind Europe’s global conquest . . . were precisely those geared to geographical acquisition and control” (29). Read in this context, then, Mrs. Moore’s decision to leave the English club for fresh air when the colonial officers and their families are at their seats watching *Cousin Kate*, a comedy about English middle-class romance, and her subsequent entry into a temple are radical actions. Mrs. Moore’s movement away from a familiar site of solidarity to a holy place for Muslims, a space in which she does not belong by virtue of her race and faith, is just the kind of spontaneity that colonial spatial regimes seek to prevent. If, as M. Keith Booker argues, *Cousin Kate* “conveys a complacent sense of security and stability that differs dramatically from the air of crisis that permeates in Foster’s novel” (72), then Mrs. Moore, by distancing herself from the English club and *Cousin Kate*, suggests her intuitive awareness—and disapproval—of a jingoistic, willful display of solidarity shared among the Anglo-Indian community from which she wishes to distance herself.

When he hears Mrs. Moore enter the mosque, Aziz, as if being hailed by the history of colonial violence, shouts: “Madam! Madam! Madam! . . . this is a mosque, you have no right here at all; you should have taken off your shoes; this is a holy place for Moslems” (Forster, *Passage* 18).

Upon learning that Mrs. Moore has taken off her shoes at the entrance, Aziz promptly adjusts his tone from an insulted colonial subject to an amicable local, saying to Mrs. Moore, "I think you ought not to walk at night alone, Mrs. Moore. There are bad characters about and leopards may come across from the Marabar Hills. Snakes also" (19). As Mrs. Moore and Aziz continue to go off-script, the two begin talking about personal and intimate matters, so much so that, without knowing it, "[t]he flame that not even beauty can nourish was springing up . . . [and Aziz's] heart began to glow secretly" (21). When Mrs. Moore says to him suddenly, "I don't think I understand people very well. I only know whether I like them or dislike them," Aziz responds with an air of absolute certainty: "Then you are an Oriental" (21). Mrs. Moore's evolving status from intruder to "an Oriental," in short, indicates not only Aziz's changing attitude toward her or perhaps Mrs. Moore's attitude toward him but also the extent to which the emotional experience of colonial encounter often confounds the terminologies of bourgeois subjectivity and racialized otherness that are mapped onto different bodies and places.

The goodwill invoked between Aziz and Mrs. Moore, more spontaneous and accidental than logical, is something that the colonial machinery cannot easily predict or preempt. This goodwill, for one, temporarily dulls, if not nullifies, the subtle snubs and blatant contempt directed at the colonized. Reading the sign announcing that "Indians are not allowed into the Chandrapore Club even as guests," Aziz is unperturbed: "As he strolled downhill beneath the lovely moon, and again saw the lovely mosque, he seemed to own the land as much as anyone owned it. What did it matter if a few flabby Hindus had preceded him there, and a few chilly English succeeded" (22). This change in Aziz's emotional state, from calling Mrs. Moore "an Oriental" when she (technically) is not to making light of the invidious colonial divide and the exile of his people, may have been an exercise in wishful thinking on Aziz's part. But I would like to read this particular encounter instead as a kind of historical retrieval of emotional and cross-cultural amities that were previously erased or papered over in the production of an official colonialism. The novel suggests that the palimpsestic and unpredictable nature of colonial

encounter, good or bad, is subject to present and future unfoldings, not just the dictates of an artificially made and unvaried past.

This friendly colonial encounter between Aziz and Mrs. Moore makes space within the novel to cultivate intimacy that is informed by past events but whose narrative trajectory need not be predestined. As Ahmed writes, “emotions are performative . . . and they involve speech acts . . . which depend on past histories, at the same time as they generate effects” (*Cultural Politics* 13). Aziz and Mrs. Moore’s mutual feelings of goodwill, unstructured and ephemeral, perform a retrieval or revisiting of previously damaged conditions on which cross-cultural intimacy and sociality were thought to depend. These encounters and emotions of colonial friendship, then, are of a temporal and spatial order that challenges any straightforward chronological account of colonialism that seeks to compress its uneven histories into the emptied, homogenous time of the modern nation-state.

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Accidental encounters and their complex emotional impact on the major characters in *Passage* also highlight the artificiality of the colonial social sphere, as well as various kinds of spatial partitioning of race, gender, and class used to reinforce, not always successfully, Britain’s rule over India: “The colonial population in India tended to define itself in terms of a very narrow class and income range: they adopted the way of life and norms of behaviour appropriate to upper-middle-class or upper-class British people” (Mills 45). But bourgeois cultivations of subject-formation and collective belonging in the colonies were never a secure project; as Ann Stoler argues, “subjacent histories [are] wedged in the folds of dominant ones . . . in the proximities of socialization . . . and caught in the interstices of elaborate state inspection systems . . . that . . . could not manage desire—much less sex” (7). Although I agree with Stoler’s general position on the subversive potential lodged within the micro-sites and “interstices” of empire, I am hesitant to place too much emphasis on sexuality as a site of resistance or counter-knowledge.<sup>7</sup> My reading of *Passage* thus far has examined the accidental and experiential qualities of friendship to reimagine alternative colonial relations that are

less subject to the reproduction of knowledge and hegemonic epistemologies. The radical nature of colonial friendship lies not in its ability to pose a direct challenge to colonial power; rather, colonial friendship supplies an indirect influence over the everyday maintenance of personal and social relations by introducing unfamiliar structures of feeling and modes of belonging to a carefully stratified society that seeks to dictate every aspect of subject-formation and affiliation. Illegible and non-threatening in the eyes of the law, colonial friendship can more easily enter into the zone of cross-cultural intimacy than can interracial sexual and familial relations.

When Adela travels from England to Chandrapore to meet her future husband, Ronny Heaslop, a city magistrate who is also Mrs. Moore's eldest son, her desire to see the "real" India is stymied consistently by those in her community. She first articulates her frustration with the British circle—for their conservative jingoism and purposeful obfuscation of her vision of India—on the same evening that Mrs. Moore first encounters Aziz. "It'll end in an elephant ride, it always does," Adela complains to the elderly woman. "Look at this evening. *Cousin Kate!* Imagine, *Cousin Kate!* But where have you been off to? Did you succeed in catching the moon in the Ganges?" (Forster, *Passage* 22). Adela's anxiety to see the real India stems from her ambivalence toward her possible future should she decide to marry a colonial officer and be labeled an Anglo-Indian wife, a stereotype she tries to avoid.<sup>8</sup> Her earnest wishes to see the real India, however, are interpreted as signs of innocence and nuisance among the Anglo-Indian circle. When pressed by Adela's pleas—"I'm tired of seeing picturesque figures pass before me as a frieze . . . I only want those Indians whom you come across socially—as your friends"—Mr. Turton, the collector, responds offhandedly, "Well, we don't come across them socially. . . . They're full of virtues, but we don't and it's now eleven-thirty, and too late to go into the reasons" (26).

The bridge party given by the Turtons in honor of Mrs. Moore and Adela is a complete failure, further impressing upon Adela that any attempt at extending friendship outside one's designated community of belonging is a doomed project from the start. "The Bridge Party was not a success," the narrator tells us, "at least it was not what Mrs. Moore

and Miss Quested were accustomed to consider a successful party” (39). Despite Adela’s wish to meet “those Indians whom [the Turtons] come across socially as friends,” the hosts re-enact the impossibility of genuine exchange between the English and Indians within the different spaces of the bridge party. For example, the tennis courts reinforce colonial authority and its attendant divisions rather than serve as a neutral playground: “[W]hen tennis began, the barrier grew impenetrable. It had been hoped to have some sets between East and West, but this was forgotten, and the courts were monopolized by the usual club couples” (47). Small talk proves difficult for the ladies as well. Among the few Indian women in attendance, none sees the party as an opportunity to bridge the social gap between the two camps. As the narrator remarks,

[i]ndeed, all the [Indian] ladies were uncertain, cowering, re-covering, giggling, making tiny gestures of atonement or despair at all that was said, and alternately fondling the terrier or shrinking from [the English.] Miss Quested now had her desired opportunity; friendly Indians were before her, and she tried to make them talk, but she failed, she strove in vain against the echoing walls of their civility. Whatever she said produced a murmur of deprecation, varying into a murmur of concern when she dropped her pocket-handkerchief. (43)

However Adela tries to break the ice, however earnestly she attempts to reach out to the other side of Chandrapore, her friendly gestures cannot penetrate the cold barriers of sociality the bridge party has erected. The party fails miserably, from Adela’s point of view, and she is ashamed of it. But for the Turtons and other British officials, the party’s failure to create the condition of possibility that would engender cross-cultural affinity is, ironically, a sign of success. The party at the Turtons, I argue, is the antithesis of a cross-cultural friendship that the novel imagines. To the extent that both parties—the British and the Indians—are retreating to what they think they understand of the other, to a place of race-based and culturally-specific belonging to which the other has no access or recourse, both the colonizers and the colonized in Chandrapore are performing in front of Adela and Mrs. Moore. This performance enacts

a cultural distancing that makes clear that the two groups have little interest in doing anything to *bridge* cultural differences. This mutual unwillingness prohibits cross-cultural affinities from taking place; it also brings to light an entrenched, normative mode of belonging that refuses to offer space to the possibility of colonial friendship. The bridge party is, by design, a prescriptive and policed space in which no meaningful cultural exchange can take place.

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Mr. Fielding was also present at the bridge party, and he did not approve of the insipid show of welcome that was meant for Adela and Mrs. Moore. An academic, Mr. Fielding has his own views on colonial relations and on what the English should and should not do in India. His views and relative independence from the Anglo-Indian community in Chandrapore are such that he often disagrees with his countrymen or countrywomen's behaviors among themselves and toward the colonized. Embarrassed by what he saw at the Turtons' party, he decides to invite Adela and Mrs. Moore to a gathering on his own. In many ways, the afternoon tea party at Fielding's is a turning point and an unprecedented occasion for Adela. The small gathering is cosmopolitan rather than bourgeois, confounding rather than confirming the genteel ritual of Englishness. In bringing together Fielding, Aziz, Mrs. Moore, Adela, and Professor Godbole, a Brahman, the otherwise familiar routines of afternoon tea become strange and foreign, an event to be experienced for the first time by the host and his English and Indian guests. Similar to the colonial encounter at the mosque, this social exchange between different cultures (English and Indian) and beliefs (Christian, Hindu, and Muslim) is an aberration. As the novel tells us, "[a]s a rule no English woman entered the College except for official functions" (66). By virtue of his position as a colonial school principle, Fielding should be classified as an agent of empire. Surprisingly, however, Fielding has "no racial feeling" and is without "the herd instinct" (65). His disposition creates the condition of possibility in which host and guests can experiment with new social dynamics that confound the distinctions of "colonizer" and "colonized." The afternoon tea at Fielding's residence,

though a place within the colony, in fact develops a feel of place whose function and purpose is not tied to the reproduction of colonial power dynamics. More of a social space that is open to sensory experience and play and less of a place that invokes colonial governance, Fielding's residence calls for what Yi-Fu Tuan describes as "spatial skill," which, "[i]n a broad sense . . . is manifest in our degree of freedom from the tie to place, in the range and speed of our mobility" (75). Since this space of a bachelor pad is within, but not of, the colony, the host and his invited guests enact a sociality that flouts the dictates of the Victorian home. The English gentleman's house is, in contrast, a carefully prescribed space whose material comforts appeal to the ideal of bourgeois domesticity.<sup>9</sup>

The domestic setting and "spatial logic" of Fielding's house, however, is anything but exacting or "rigorous" (Chase and Levenson 165). For example, having shown up early, Aziz is invited right into Fielding's bedroom, where the host is "dressing after a bath" and has to wear Aziz's collar stud because the host, rushed by the early guest, has dropped and broken his own. Surprised by the simple tastes and carefree nature of Fielding's house, Aziz exclaims, "I always thought that Englishmen kept their rooms so tidy. It seems that this is not so. I need not be ashamed" (68). The intimate proximity between the English host and his Indian guest and the absence of colonial authority within the house reveal the everyday nuances of colonial encounter to which the novel attends. A new social space carved out of an otherwise Manichean colonial society, the afternoon tea brings Aziz, Fielding, Mrs. Moore, and Adela closer together; the meeting, with no objectives or expectations on the agenda, is an experiential stretch of time in space, where we find a conversation that takes many unexpected turns rather than a script playing out colonialist logic. "How fortunate that it was an 'unconventional' party, where formalities are ruled out," Aziz thinks to himself, for example, as he lets his guard down and approaches the English party with increasing ease and zeal (71).

Perhaps one of the most extraordinary achievements of this afternoon tea is that it serves no clear purpose at all. This is extraordinary not in an ironic sense but in the sense that the afternoon tea gathering, occupy-



ing an official colonial site (the university), disregards the duty to produce knowledge through bodily and social etiquette on which colonial power depends. That the physical closeness and social exchange of the afternoon tea does not overtly endorse racialized notions of proximity and distance, too, is a radical gesture that should not be ignored. The conversations of so diverse a group of people in terms of experience and taste, of history and religion, move in every direction, follow no particular track or order, and prove nothing important. From a brief mention of post-impressionism to Aziz's rendition of the Mogul Emperors, Professor Godbole's eating habits as a Hindu, and an Urdu proverb about happiness following a conversation about mangoes, the party of five unlikely strangers manage to get along well. The sociality of these five friendly figures, sustained by goodwill and a willingness to trade historical facts and cultural specifics for easy conversations, represents an affective force—if nebulous and vague—aimed at proximity, a shared feeling of togetherness in the present. This stranger-oriented sociality, invoked within an institution of colonial education, is more radical than it appears, for in bypassing formality, the group, consciously or not, also does away with certain forms of behavior established by colonial hierarchies. In trading politics for pleasure, the afternoon tea party opts for a strategic forgetfulness of the past in favor of things to come. What anchors the structure of feelings of the afternoon tea is not historical or cultural specificity but the improvisational performance of colonial encounter in the absence of knowledge and authority. If, as Ahmed explains, “[e]motions . . . are not only about movement . . . [but] also about attachments[,] . . . that which holds us in place . . . [and] connects bodies to other bodies” (*Cultural Politics* 11), the friendly emotions infused at Fielding's—though unspecific in nature—successfully transform an official place, the Government College of which Fielding is principal, into an experiential space.

### III. Failures and the (Intimate) Spaces of Non-Representation

In Chapter VII, Forster takes the afternoon tea to an unscripted space, flouting conventions for the possibilities of closeness. The unexpected turn of the afternoon tea, for better or for worse, decontextualizes and

disorients many fundamental beliefs and understandings of life and intimacy that have hitherto anchored Aziz and Adela. From the “Mosque” section of the novel to that of “Caves,” Aziz and Adela inch closer to an India that “is . . . older than anything in the world. . . . something unspeakable” (Forster, *Passage* 136). In *this* India, in the Marabar Caves, the characters lose their bearings and Adela faints. The “Caves” section of *Passage* covers a vast expanse of the “unspeakable” and the non-representational in which the characters flounder in search of meaning.

Adela’s desire to visit the Marabar Caves testifies to her increasing resistance to impositions of Western epistemologies—personal, cultural, and legal—that have been pressed upon her mind and body. Bored by the Anglo-Indian community (unlike Elizabeth Lackersteen in George Orwell’s *Burmese Days*, who comfortably assimilates herself into the role of the memsahib), Adela is eager to trade her ennui for an enlightened, if physically demanding, journey to the Marabar Caves:

Most of life is so dull that there is nothing to be said about it, and the books and talk that would describe it as interesting are obliged to exaggerate, in the hope of justifying their own existence. . . . It so happened that Mrs. Moore and Miss Quested had felt nothing acutely for a fortnight. Ever since Professor Godbole had sung his queer little song [at the afternoon tea at Fielding’s], they had lived more or less inside cocoons. (146)

Adela’s desire for India to reveal its subaltern knowledge drives her expedition to the caves. Her intellect, single-minded and empirically-inclined, is at odds with the vast and unvarying landscapes of India that do not seem to register or respond to her inquisitions. The India that Adela wishes to know more deeply fails to represent itself in such ways that are legible to her. Even though “it [is] Adela’s faith that the whole stream of events [in India] is important and interesting” (146), “India,” the narrator remarks, “has few important towns. India is the country, fields, fields, then hills, jungle, hills, and more fields . . . [with] paths fray[ing] out into cultivation, and disappear[ing] near a splash of red paint. How can the mind take hold of such a country?” (150). The opportunity to truly know India, which Adela hopes the trip will provide,

does not occur, for there is nothing particularly special for her to look at: the caves, one after another, seem identical. At this critical juncture when friendly conversations are most needed, neither Adela nor Aziz can find a way to communicate or connect with each other. The pleasant conversations about India that they engaged in at Fielding's house two weeks before take a serious turn, and Aziz and Adela find themselves disagreeing on the notion of universality and the role it might play in India's future: "Miss Quested . . . You keep your religion, and I mine. That is the best. Nothing embraces the whole of India, nothing, nothing. . . .' Oh, do you feel that, Dr. Aziz?' she said thoughtfully. 'I hope you're not right. There will have to be something universal in this country—I don't say religion, for I'm not religious, but something, or how else are barriers to be broken down?'" (160). Neither of them realizes that, miles and miles away from Chandrapore, the Marabar Caves decontextualize their attempt to define the human experience in historical or philosophical terms as they know them. "The echo in a Marabar cave is . . . entirely devoid of distinction," the narrator reports: "'Boum' is the sound as far as the human alphabet can express it . . . utterly dull" (163). And inside one of these caves Adela gets disoriented, experiences an epistemic crisis, and faints.

I read Adela's collapse in the Marabar Caves as a physical reaction to an epistemological crisis, specifically an affective response to an India whose meanings and significances are vast, overwhelming, and not always comprehensible to a newcomer like Adela, who is eager to learn about the subcontinent. Her collapse is a bodily sign of letting go, a shift of register from the epistemological to the experiential. What we might call Adela's temporary succumbing to India is, as Charu Malik argues, a moment "that the text refuses to master, disrupting the plentitude of representation . . . [and offering a] critique of the discourse of colonial authority" (224).

If "the making of 'the Orient' is an exercise of power," as Ahmed argues (*Queer Phenomenology* 114), Adela's collapse signals an affective resistance to an exhausting ethnographic gaze that seeks to impose a single meaning onto India, to render the continent knowable and conquerable. What Adela says to Aziz right before they venture into an-

other cave—"I can't avoid the label. What I do hope to avoid is the mentality. . . . [S]ome women are so—well, ungenerous and snobby about Indians, and I should feel too ashamed for words if I turned like them" (Forster, *Passage* 161)—communicates an important part of her character that critics seem to miss or downplay when analyzing her collapse and her deteriorating friendship with Aziz. This exchange between Aziz and Adela, before they are made to face each other again as defendant and plaintiff in court, holds significant weight. It helps Adela to later question her identity as a European woman in the colony and the designated places to which her body—as a sign of bourgeois domesticity and racial superiority—is bound. In many ways, Adela's wish to untangle herself from an Anglo-Indian community that seeks to control her is similar to Mrs. Moore's intuitive grasp of a self-knowledge and intimacy with others that bears no name or legibility, as she thinks to herself "that . . . though people are important, the relations between them are not, and that in particular too much fuss has been made over marriage" (149). The feelings of disorientation that contribute to Adela's fainting, I argue, are in no small part inspired by her belief in cross-cultural friendship. However difficult and counterintuitive it may seem, Adela's new orientation of selfhood and community suggests her attempt to break away from Oriental fantasies of India for something more real, if un-representable.

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The collapse in the Marabar Caves marks a serious turn in the novel, which moves from friendly bantering between strangers to evidence of the heavy price one pays for entering into such an unpredictable sociality. The final parting scene between Fielding and Aziz, where the "echoes" of the caves are replaced by "the hundred voices" of India, offers little closure (165, 362). The reunion of old friends, complicated by a rising anti-colonialism in India and by Fielding's new status as a married man, is now fraught with tension, lacking the luster and goodwill of their first encounter. Their terse conversation during "their last ride in the Mau jungles" suggests as much: "[W]e shall drive every blasted Englishman into the sea, and then'—he [Aziz] rode against him furiously—and

then,' he concluded, half kissing him, 'you and I shall be friends.' 'Why can't we be friends now?' said the other, holding him affectionately. 'It's what I want. It's what you want'" (361–62). The "failure" suggested in this scene, Baucom argues, is "due . . . to [Forster's] incapacity to locate friendship outside of [the] moment of crisis in which intimacy is offered as war's alternative. Friendship atrophies in this text because it cannot survive the encroachments of the mundane" (132). Judging by the affective gestures of Fielding and Aziz and the tone of their conversation, however, the scene allows hope of future reconciliation as well. Indeed, I argue that the failure of communication allows the two to come closer together physically.

Fielding's gestures toward Aziz—whispering into his ears and "half kissing" and "holding him affectionately"—evinced an intimacy, a lived experience of closeness that cannot be ignored or explained away. Despite its spastic and agitated nature, this final scene takes us closer to the inarticulate friendship between Fielding and Aziz, which throughout the novel expresses itself not in words but through everyday acts of epistemological failure. These failures, in vexing larger narratives of meaning and signification, draw the two men closer to each other physically and emotionally. Their shared bond, an intimacy that feels the other but cannot articulate itself fully, is at odds with what Elizabeth Povinelli refers to as "the intimacy grid" that places intimacy squarely in the sphere of legibility and legitimacy, into "[a] regulatory ideal [that] renders actual life irrelevant" (208). In failing to acquire meaning or evidence of their intimate friendship beyond the purview of a colonial, hegemonic epistemology, Fielding and Aziz's relationship remains in the field of potentiality. The seeming unintelligibility of their friendship keeps it un-coopted by the contents and contexts of colonialism and anticolonial nationalism. While their everyday moments with one another—such as when Aziz offers his collar stud to Fielding or Fielding visits the sick Aziz—do not rise to the level of event, they do convey a closeness and familiarity on which their friendship is based. Aziz and Fielding's gestures of closeness are akin to what Muñoz refers to as "ephemera"—affective presences that "[stand] against the harsh lights of mainstream visibility and the . . . tyranny of the fact" (65). In short,

these acts embody an everydayness of friendship that fails to acknowledge or adhere to larger narratives of self and other, in terms of culture, politics, or sexuality, that are of a teleological nature. The affective presence of their friendship, instead, speaks to a desire of nearing one another that, in reaching one another, sets in motion a certain surrender to non-rational thinking—and to spaces of non-representation—that is key to its future unfolding.

In the penultimate chapter, Aziz reunites with Fielding along with Fielding's wife and Mrs. Moore's younger son (the three are touring Mau, where Aziz now practices medicine). Aziz is surprised upon finding out through Godbole that Fielding is staying at the European Guest House nearby, as Mau, far away from Chandrapore, is "a remote jungle, where the sahib seldom comes" (Forster, *Passage* 328). Despite telling Godbole that he has no intention to see Fielding, however, Aziz finds himself one day with his children wandering about in the "grey-green gloom of hills, covered with temples like white flames" not far from the guest house where he will run into Fielding and his companions one last time before the novel ends (334).

A rigid coolness and formality permeates this reunion, as neither Fielding nor Aziz feels capable of ameliorating the situation; instead, they retreat from each other, choosing to play the parts of the colonizer and the colonized. Aziz is reluctant to bring closure to his former life in Chandrapore: he can neither forget Mrs. Moore nor easily forgive Adela. And Fielding, "giving up his slight effort to recapture their intimacy," seems "more official . . . older and sterner" (337). These characterizations, which precede the final scene in the Mau jungles, prompt Aziz and Fielding subliminally to reanimate their friendship elsewhere; as if by instinct, both understand that they need to invent a new social space where there is none, to find a home for their intimacy. Fielding's "half-kissing" and holding Aziz is met with the rising landscape of India, which responds to these actions "in their hundred voices," "No, not yet . . . No, not there" (362). Yet these voices of opposition cannot completely drown out the plea for and the possibility of friendship. At the very end of *Passage*, the quest for finding a space within the English Empire that is conducive to friendship remains urgent and palpable.

Failure or not, Aziz and Fielding's reunion is reminiscent of the debate between Mahmoud Ali and Hamidullah over the possibility of friendship, for the two friends once again return to the now-or-then, or here-or-there, of friendship. The final scene does not question the existence of friendship so much as it quibbles over the timing and possible location of its present and future.

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In folding friendship—as an affective persistence in time and space—into the reading of *Passage*, I have envisioned friendship less as direct resistance to colonialism or normative sexuality than as an exploration of how embodied lives and their spatial relations exercise self-orientation and disorientation in ways that deviate from patterns of the past, deferring rather to the optimism of the not-yet-known and without having to conform to the established modes of intimacy and sociality imposed upon them. Looking at the cross-cultural friendships in the novel as a network of intimacies sustained by the strangers of empire, I have illustrated that the emotions and lived experiences born out of everyday colonial encounters and the places that bear witness to them are far less amenable to the maintenance of colonial power than official accounts of colonialism would have it.

I have claimed that friendship is patient and sensitive to the emergence and everyday care of potential affective ties and allows for small-scale and context-specific analyses of colonial relations. Or, as Mrs. Moore puts it, “though people are important, the relations between them are not. . . . [There have been] centuries of carnal embracement, yet man is no nearer to understanding man” (149). The idea that friendship both gives and takes time away from colonial relations is a concept that I test in this essay. The time *given* to Mrs. Moore, Aziz, Adela, and Mr. Fielding to cultivate friendship with others, for instance, is time *taken away* from performing normative colonial relations. If events, as Povinelli calls them, “are things that we can say happened such that they have a certain objective being . . . [that] quasi-events never quite achieve” (13), I see the colonial friendships in *Passage* as occupying the liminal space between the eventful and the uneventful. It is in this middle range

of affects and spatial dynamics where Forster allows cross-cultural affinities to accrue their inchoate meaning.

## Notes

- 1 See Suleri's "Forster's Imperial Erotic" and Baucom's "The Path from War to Friendship" for critiques of Forster's colonial or flawed representations of cross-cultural relations.
- 2 See Chakrabarty's *Provincializing Europe*, particularly Chapter 4, "Minority Histories, Subaltern Pasts," for his distinctions "between historians' histories and other constructions of the past" (106).
- 3 Sedgwick uses the example of queer friendship to describe the "deroutinized . . . temporality" associated with those deemed abnormal or those who fail to adhere to common sense. Reparative reading, according to Sedgwick, is more attuned to "what it means to identify with each other" and to the "barely recognized and little explored" (148). For more details, see Sedgwick's "Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading, or, You're So Paranoid, You Probably Think This Essay Is About You" in *Touching Feeling*.
- 4 See, for example, Lane's "Managing 'The White Man's Burden': The Racial Imaginary of Forster's Colonial Narratives."
- 5 In *Colonial Power, Colonial Text*, Booker argues that "[t]he use of . . . violence by the British is . . . an important subtext in almost all British fictions about India, ranging from early post-Mutiny visions of deranged murderous Indians (and concomitant British retribution) to . . . retrospective accounts of the Mutiny as the result of a failure of epistemological and theatrical techniques of power that rendered military intervention necessary" (11).
- 6 Nandy argues that studying the psychodynamics of empire reveals "a false sense of cultural homogeneity in Britain" (33).
- 7 See Foucault's *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction, Vol. I* for his discussion of sexuality, power, and their regeneration through incited proliferations of knowledge on their behalf.
- 8 See Collingham's discussion of the figure of the burra memsahib as "pleasure-seeking, superficial and unrefined . . . separated from their husbands during the hot weather and thrown together with young military men on leave in the Hills, [having] a reputation for indulging in affairs" (179–80).
- 9 See Chase and Levenson for their discussion of the gentleman's house and its spatial logic.

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