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Anger, Cognition, Ideology: What Crash Can Show Us About Emotion

Sue J. Kim
University Of Alabama At Birmingham

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Author: Sue J. Kim

Abstract (E): Sue J. Kim's essay "Anger, Cognition, Ideology: What *Crash* Can Show Us About Emotion" argues for the relevance and importance of cognitive studies to ethnic and postcolonial literary studies, and vice versa. After surveying recent developments in the field of cognitive studies, the essay combines cultural and cognitive approaches in order to examine anger in and around the 2005 Paul Haggis film *Crash*.

Abstract (F): Dans cet article, l'auteur fait un plaidoyer pour l'application des études cognitives aux études ethniques et postcoloniales et inversement. L'essai présente d'abord un survol des récents développements dans le domaine des études cognitives, puis combine les approches culturelles et cognitives dans une lecture détaillée du thème de la colère dans le film *Crash* de Paul Haggis (2005).

keywords: anger, emotion, cognitive studies, *Crash* (Paul Haggis), film

Article

Why was the 2005 film *Crash* so popular? Various critics have discussed how *Crash* actually exacerbates the racial problems that it strives to critique. Directed by Paul Haggis, *Crash* was lauded for its unflinching portrayal of race relations; Roger Ebert called it "a film about progress," and Oprah encouraged everyone to go see it (Glaister). The film won numerous awards, including the Academy Award for Best Picture in 2006, and is used in schools and institutional "diversity training" programs (Alquist and Milner). But ethnic studies scholars and others have repeatedly pointed out that the film, in failing to expose the histories, structures, and practices of power that give shape to our current racial formations, actually reinforces racial and gender hierarchies. As Hsuan Hsu writes, the film's "reduction of racism to the scale of individual characters [attitudes and practices] occludes crucial and harmful institutional, legal, and historical aspects of racism" (144). Lundegaard adds that today *covert* racism, rather than the overt kind displayed in the film, is the real problem.[i] The liberal multicultural model of race is limited and ultimately harmful because it contradictorily relies on notions of individual attitudes and "stereotypes," while also flattening group differences into discrete, relatively homogenous racial and/or ethnic categories, unsituated in space and time. In other words, the dominant model of race relations in the U.S. naturalizes racial formations and encourages all parties to stay within those lies, rather than critically historicizing and challenging such formations.

While I agree with the critical views of the film, I want to raise questions about the bases upon which such critiques are made, because these underpinnings speak to what I see as larger problems—even potential impasses—in our discourses about race, in public spheres as well as academia. Critiques of the film point out crucially important conflicts in ideological framings and constitutive histories, but, on a local level, the question remains, why do audiences have such different emotional reactions—rather than consciously political ones—to this film? I will argue that we can understand the film and reactions to it by thinking in terms of ideology as a

cognitive tool and film (like literature) as a multivalent emotional experience. On a larger scale, what are the intellectual and ethical bases on which we can argue against racism, discrimination and "Othering," oppression, exploitation, abuse, etc.? And rhetorically, how can we make convincing arguments to all kinds of people, regardless of social position?

I argue that bringing ethnic and postcolonial studies further into conversation with cognitive studies can be productive and is, moreover, necessary for both fields. Cognitive approaches can help ethnic studies move past some of the problems of poststructuralism. At the same time, in order to develop a truly human cognitive theory, we have to understand a variety of humans and their thoughts, emotions, experiences, histories, etc. The "cognitive revolution" is happening, and just as narratologists working in cognitive studies have argued that humanists should be involved, interdisciplinary ethnic studies scholars need to be involved, partly because of the necessary insights ethnic and postcolonial studies can bring to cognitive studies, and partly because it would be dangerous not to do so. And parsing the various registers of anger in and around a film like *Crash* can give us insight into some of the specific ways that emotion, cognition, ideology, and aesthetics are interrelated.

My current project focuses on the emotion of anger, because while anger has been much discussed in fields concerned with difference, power, identity, and ideology (e.g. ethnic studies, women's studies) as well as in cognitive considerations of anger, the two areas of discussion rarely come into contact. Part of my argument is that, as scholars working in cognitive studies in the humanities have pointed out, our historically and socially produced behaviors, frameworks, scripts, etc., must be taken into account, but they must be taken into account *critically*. In other words, while race and ethnicity are central to any overarching theory or understanding of emotion and cognition, at the same time, as Frederick Luis Aldama, David Herman, Patrick Colm Hogan, Lisa Zunshine, and others have argued, we have to be very careful about generalizing fundamental, innate, and/or universal cognitive structures based on observable human behaviors. Such a circumspect and complex cognitive approach can help not only ethnic studies but also much of cultural studies in general work through some key issues left in the wake of poststructuralism.

The question of how to understand different stories has important political and ethical ramifications, particularly in the wake of the poststructuralist assault on humanism, empiricism/reference, and universalism. Literary and cultural studies, including fields such as ethnic, postcolonial, and women's studies, have been transformed—in both productive and problematic ways—by the insights of poststructuralism. At the same time, scholars in ethnic and postcolonial studies have challenged the premises of "mainstream," "Western," or "white" poststructuralism. In particular, the skepticism toward our ability to know reality, past and present, has never sat very easily with scholars in these fields because of the political demands of recuperating lost histories, correcting official narratives, and forging better stories.[ii]

Critics working in ethnic and postcolonial studies are leery of science and medicine in general and cognitive studies in particular because, historically, "science" writ large has been used to articulate racial and sexual difference as inferior and/or pathological. Examples range from Lothrop Stoddard's *The Rising Tide of Color Against White World-Supremacy* (1920), Madison Grant's *The Passing of the Great Race* (1916), and other eugenicists, to *The Bell Curve: Intelligence and Class Structure in American Life* (1994) and other contemporary arguments correlating race, innate cognitive ability, and therefore social hierarchies. In this context, then, cognitive studies can seem both dangerous and appealing to the ethnic studies scholar. But recent work in cognitive literary and cultural studies signal directions that are

consonant with the concerns and aims of ethnic studies. Among such historicized approaches are methodologies that allow us to understand that human commonality *and* difference underlie human behavior, including cognition and emotion, in ways that may be compatible with accounts of political anger.[iii]

First, "cognitive studies" includes a wide range of *approaches*; it has been described as a set of concerns more than a shared methodology.[iv] The spectrum of understandings of what Hogan refers to as "cognitive architecture" ranges from emphases on the physiological and neurobiological, to evolution and adaptation, to culture and history. Within this heterogeneity, many cognitive theorists distinguish between fundamental or common human cognitive capabilities and particular, concrete human behaviors in any given place and time; such scholars place central importance on the historical and social nature of human cognition. As David Bordwell has noted, insight into the physiological workings of human eyesight does not determine how any particular culture in a given historical moment attributes meanings to colors. Bordwell argues that cognitive approaches address the questions of a priori factors that enable constructivism, and that rather than crass "biologism," cognitivist approaches are "explicitly constructivist," while also searching for "fundamental assumptions and principles that guide human perception and thought." That is, we have to be careful about generalizing too quickly from observable behaviors because they are not necessarily reliable indicators of basic/common human cognitive abilities, but we do not have to completely jettison the notion of such fundamental shared faculties. As a result, investigation of the *specific* histories and mechanics of "cultural causation" becomes a central issue, because, as Abbot writes, "by now it is impossible to reduce these issues to the business of simply striking a balance between genetic and social determinisms" (4).

Along these lines, cognitivists see stories and storymaking as central to human cognition but *not* in any simple or direct way. Despite the range of specific theories and approaches, cognitivists generally agree that storytelling helps us adapt and survive, manage information, learn and assess values, define groups, etc., in a complex, imperfectly known, and changing world. As Spolsky writes, "narratives are themselves the processes that human beings have evolved to understand, express and meet the need for revised and revisable behavior in an unstable world…The indirections of narratives…allow us to be flexible in the face of the new, and flexibility is by definition the most valuable survival mechanism" (181). Furthermore, telling stories is key not only to understanding the world but also to the *creation* of minds themselves. Herman notes that, rather than assuming that minds exist before narratives, "storytelling practices…themselves help constitute the minds engaged in the production and interpretation of narrative discourse" (314). And these processes are not limited to singular minds; social groups shape and are shaped by narratives and have an impact on cognitive tools/structures in a variety of ways. For instance, from the perspective of mind as "distributed":

> cognition should be viewed as a supra- or transindividual activity distributed across groups functioning in specific contexts, rather than as a wholly internal process unfolding within the minds of solitary, autonomous, and de-situated cognizers. Hence, instead of being abstract, individualistic, and ratiocinative, thinking in its most basic form is grounded in particular institutions, socially distributed, and domain-specific, that is, targeted as specific purposes or goals. (Herman 319)

Moreover, many cognitivists recognize that emotion is linked to cognition and to social groups but not in any simple or unilinear way. Studies of emotion focus on the relationship between reason and emotion, the origin of emotions (e.g. emotions are shaped by neurological

and physiological factors, conscious evaluations of a situation, communal norms, memory triggers, etc.), the social nature of emotions, and the extent to which emotions are culturally specific. Emotions are related to narrative patterns and to time: "our emotions are learned rather like a language and that they have an essentially dramatic structure (de Sousa xvi).[v] In classical "appraisal" theories, "emotion results from a type of evaluation in which one judges the implications of a certain situation for oneself," usually in relation to achieving some goal, and the emotion helps us to organize information and decide on actions (Hogan, *Cognitive Science* 140-1). A reader's response to a text may arise from identification with a character (usually the protagonist) or from the reader's goal of a "preferred outcome" for the character (Hogan 149; see also Tan). Memory accounts of emotion suggest that we experience emotions when some trigger, such as a scene in a movie or novel, makes us recall a memory of an experienced emotion, even if it is partial and/or not conscious. But recent studies of the brain that suggest that the emotion centers of the brain are distinct and autonomous from other parts of the brain, so while emotions communicate and work with other parts of the brain (for example, we can control or reason ourselves out of certain emotions), this separate center may impact us autonomously (Hogan 174-6).

By the same token, emotions are not only triggered by our own memories; our imagination and empathy makes us respond to imagined and/or others' situations—fictional or not—in ways similar to how we would respond if we were in those situations. Hogan argues that "in approximating emotional egocentrism, such evolutionary mechanisms [such as empathy triggered and/or increased by proximity] actually avoid emotional egocentrism" (217). In other words, while the "appraisal" account of emotions tends to focus on one's *own* survival, safety, and/or achievement of goals, the phenomenon of empathetic emotions induced by someone else's suffering or joy suggests something about our ability to move beyond a purely egocentric survival mode. Such empathetic capabilities coincide with findings about how altruism not only helps us survive but also makes us feel good physiologically.[vi] In other words, as Greg Smith puts it, "an associative model of emotions" must deal with "multiple sources of input" ("Local Emotions" 111).

But cognitive studies of emotion in the laboratory tend to be limited by the methodological parameters of research. In order to attempt to isolate specific emotions, scientists and psychologists tend to focus on immediate and individual emotional responses, as self-reported or measured according to some pre-existing scale. But as Lisa Zunshine writes, "Cognitive *literary* analysis…continues beyond the line drawn by cognitive scientists—with the reintroduction of something else, a 'noise,' if you will, that is usually carefully controlled for and excised, whenever possible, from the laboratory settings" (39). In fact, inquiry into emotion as cognition is just beginning; research into the unconscious, collective emotions, emotions over long period of time, and culturally different conceptions of emotions have all been noted as needing further study.[vii] The kinds of insights into ideology, culture, emotion, and experience produced by cultural studies are crucial for a better understanding of how emotion and cognition work in the real world.

For example, David Herman has written about "emotionologies," or "the collective emotional standards of a culture as opposed to the experience of emotion itself" (322). Such cultural emotion systems not only affect—although not necessarily determine—our emotional responses to texts, but they also play a role in shaping our cognitive architectures and subjectivities. That is, stories convey cultural emotional scripts that inform, shape, influence, and affect individual emotional responses; at the same time, those individuals exist in groups that

collectively create, change, and carry on certain stories that reflect their collective standards, including who is inside/outside the group and what the primary goals and values of that group should be. And if this is the case, then the projects of changing societies and minds are necessarily interrelated, and those fields invested in interrogating power and bringing about meaningful social change should have an investment in the ongoing field of the study of the human mind. As James E. Smith argues in his study of emotion and race,

> Race does matter, and it is correlated with emotion and behavior in numerous ways, positive and negative, conscious and unconscious. Any theory, research or program that seeks to understand, explain, educate, or provide therapeutic intervention and treatment to people of any race, ethnicity, or culture or to bring people of different races together must seek to understand the symbolism, meaning and the emotional connection of being white or a person of color.

We need to understand emotions cognitively as well as ideologically not only to understand how things—including our brains—work, but also to negate the still prevalent perceptions of people of color as either or less emotional than a perceived norm. Or, to put it another way, rather than dismissing or pathologizing anger, we can discern some of the social, cognitive, ideological, etc., reasons for various kinds of anger.

The metanarratives, dominant discourses, and hegemony familiar to us from poststructuralism and from political analyses can be explicable in cognitive terms, but cognitive approaches can help us explain differences without surrendering to incommensurability. That is, why do some people believe certain narratives about other groups of people as inferior or alien? Is it that such believers are just "bad people"? Because if "they" think, believe, and act in certain ways that are different from our own, how do we think about them and interact with them? The recognition of others as common human beings with shared cognitive capabilities, formed in specific historical-cultural ways in ongoing processes of exchange with communal narratives, can potentially provide updated justification for human rights and social change. So we need to consider race when studying human beings—and that means ethnic and postcolonial studies becoming engaged with cognitive studies *because* of the vexed history of intelligence and race— while also keeping in mind common human potentials when studying racial formations and other such social organizations.

Anger in *Crash*

The film *Crash* calls our attention not only because it is about race and emotions, but also because it elicited such a variety of strong emotional responses. In considering anger in and around *Crash*, we must ask why and how do the film's content and form not only affect differently the "recognition, comprehension, inference-making, interpretation, judgment, memory, and imagination" of different audiences (Bordwell), but in its portrayal of human beings experience various emotions, how does the film itself suggest that human beings do all these things? Because such narratives about feelings inform how we feel and how we think about those feelings. And how do these two—the film's presentation of human emotional cognitive process and the audience's responses—relate to one another? Such intertwined questions considerations can help us understand the political and ethical valences of such a film.

I would like to focus on one of the most discussed scenes, which involves a confrontation between police officer John Ryan (played by Matt Dillon) and HMO administrator Shaniqua Johnson (played by Loretta Devine). Ryan, suspecting that his father has prostate cancer but has been misdiagnosed, wants permission to see a doctor outside the HMO network. The night

before his face-to-face meeting with Johnson, Ryan is frustrated by the bureaucratic obstacles and makes a racist comment to her on the phone. When they do meet in person, he apologizes for his comment, explaining that he hasn't been getting a lot of sleep and that his father is in a lot of pain. But when Johnson refuses to help him, Ryan becomes angry and says, "I can't look at you without thinking about the five or six more qualified white men who didn't get your job." As she calls security, he continues:

> I'm saying this 'cause I'm really hoping that I'm wrong about you. I'm hoping that someone like yourself, someone who may have been given a helping hand, might have a little compassion for someone in a similar situation…
>
> You don't like me, that's fine. I'm a prick. My father doesn't deserve to suffer like this. He was a janitor. He struggled his whole life. Saved enough to start his own company. Twenty-three employees, all of them black. Paid 'em equal wages when no one else was doing that. For years he worked side by side with those men, sweeping and carrying garbage….
>
> Then the city council decides to give minority-owned companies preference in city contracts. And overnight, my father loses everything. His business, his home, his wife. Everything! Not once does he blame your people. I'm not asking you to help me. I'm asking that you do this small thing for a man who lost everything so people like yourself could reap the benefits. And do you know what it's gonna cost you? Nothing. Just a flick of your pen.

Johnson refuses to help, saying, "Your father sounds like a good man. And if he'd come in here today, I probably would've approved this request. But he didn't come in."

Figure 1 "John Ryan Meets Shaniqua Johnson"

This event is pivotal to the film's plot, starting a chain of events that will lead to the central car crash rescue scene, a still from which was featured in most publicity about the film.[viii] Ryan's resulting impotent anger leads to him to stop a black couple in their SUV and sexually assault the woman, Christine Thayer (played by Thandie Newton). Later, however, Ryan heroically saves an injured Thayer from her overturned, burning Jeep, despite her initial revulsion when she realizes who is trying to save her. Ryan's action is meant to redeem him; according to the film's script, "Ryan looks into [Thayer's] face and sees her pain and humiliation, and knows he was the cause of it" (scene 66, pg. 69), and Dillon and Newton effectively portray this exchange.

Figure 2 "John Ryan Saves Christine Thayer"

The film ultimately depicts Ryan as someone who, despite making bad decisions regarding race in a confusing world (pretty much everyone in the film does), is essentially a good person. While Ryan is not the clear protagonist, he is one of the central dynamic characters and emotional centers of the film.

A cognitive approach can help us to parse reactions to the film, to understand why this film was so appealing to some and so repellent to others. I will first examine the anger of the characters and the implications of that anger, and then I will consider a range of responses to the film.[ix] First, the anger of Dillon's *character*, John Ryan, can be understood in terms of appraisal *within* contending social-ideological systems or, to use Herman's term again, "emotionologies." John Ryan is angry about a number of things: his father's ailing health, the intractability of the health insurance system, the African American woman's apparent indifference to his plight and implicit anti-white racism. His immediate goal is to alleviate his father's suffering, which suggests that since this motive is not merely selfish but empathetic, he is not an irredeemable character. At the same time, since his father's suffering makes him suffer empathetically, alleviating his father's pain will help alleviate his own pain. His goal is initially balked by the implacable bureaucratic hurdles of HMOs, but his frustrated anger is channeled into a different narrative that informs a collective concept of anger, the narrative of "reverse racism," in which white people—men in particular—are victimized by the preferential treatment given to people of color.

But his individual experience of emotion doesn't just draw on this emotionology; his particular emotion is given particular intensity by the immediacy of his father's physical and emotional suffering *and* his father's past actions, which in the liberal multicultural model of races, in which groups of people are organized socially and institutionally by a naturalized notion of race ("your people"), he assumes must have helped Johnson. So for Ryan, Johnson represents not only the balking of Ryan's current goals, but also a betrayal of his father by the "people" whom he went through so much to help. Not only do painful memories stir Ryan's current response, but also he has a sense that in the division of labor to achieve communal goals (good white people like his father sacrifice, so black people—perceived by him as one unit—should be properly appreciative), Johnson is not doing her part. And Johnson responds in kind; she acknowledges that while Ryan's father was a "good man," because Ryan falls into the category of "white racist," her anger leads her to deny Ryan's father's request.

This scene is most problematic because it presents two minds trapped within their racial identities; Ryan can only see the health insurance problem in terms of race, and Johnson, while recognizing Ryan's father's merits and needs, refuses to help because she sees Ryan as a racist. In the film, everyone is similarly limited. Cognitively, they are trapped within their racial groups, and their actions, responses and emotions are determined by their situations within those groups and relation vis-à-vis other groups. For the most part, they have severely limited ability to read other people's intentions or situations or to even to recognize other people as *having* minds. And at its very worst, the film participates in this logic, such as in the portrayal of the smuggled Asian captives chained in the back of a van. I would argue that this logic, which underlies liberal multiculturalism, is the most problematic thing about the film. Such a view of human minds neglects the fact that we are not cognitively limited to any *one* set of collective values. The great thing about human beings is that we can imagine beyond what exists; in cognitive terms, we can also say that *everyone* has the same cognitive *potential*.

In terms of different viewers, we can understand responses to Ryan's anger in ways that reveal surprising results. I will consider the viewer who identifies with Dillon's anger, the viewer who either distances him/herself from or completely suspends judgment about Dillon's anger (i.e. the liberal multiculturalist), and the viewer who is angered by the politics of the scene (say, an ethnic studies scholar). For all these viewers, we can understand their reactions in terms of a) appraisal in terms of the character's goal, b) appraisal in terms of the viewer's desired goal for the character, c) individual and collective emotional memory triggers, d) empathy, e) politics and ethics. All of these elements, moreover, are linked and interact in a variety of ways.

Viewers who openly identify with Ryan will be very few in number in the likely audience for this film. But if we suppose a viewer who identifies and agrees with Ryan, oddly enough this viewer's reaction may hold within it the seeds of its own demise. Someone who has experienced what he/she believes to be reverse racism or who accepts a collective narrative about reverse racism will agree with Ryan and share his anger in relation to the viewer's situation, goals, society, etc. Interestingly, however, in empathizing with Ryan, such a viewer has moved beyond his/her individual interests and participates in a collective narrative. Structurally speaking, the simple phenomenon of empathizing with the emotions of a fictional character for both collective and individual reasons denaturalizes the "innateness" of ideology or emotions. While I do not want to make too much of this point, I do believe it is significant. On one hand, this denaturalization itself would most likely not be an effective political tool in convincing people that structural racism still exists. On the other hand, the fact that human beings share the cognitive ability to participate in the emotions of others and to have their own emotions informed by collectives suddenly puts us in a world where we share common bases and tools and can, ostensibly, identify, analyze, assess, and debate these emotions. In a sense, we can take this viewer's anger seriously as real (physiologically, phenomenologically, existentially, neurologically, etc.), while also providing potential grounds upon which to assess it. We can ask questions such as: What are the implied goals of the angry individual (appraisal), and how do that individual's goals relate to the community's goals? If such emotions are in part tied to individual and collective memories of perceived reverse racism, can we assess the factual validity of those memories?

The liberal multiculturalist viewer, or most of the film's positive reviewers, will either distance him/herself from the racial elements of Ryan's anger, incorporating this particular event into the "everybody is racist" logic of the film. This viewer may share Ryan's frustration over his inability to help his father, but the viewer's goal both for him/herself and for the character Ryan

is that *they not be racist*. In contemporary liberal multiculturalism, one of the most central fears of (particularly white) liberals is to be called racist, and everything is done to prevent the *perception* of being racist. (Along these lines, the district attorney played by Brendan Fraser is one of the most realistic characters in the film.) Given this racial anxiety, the appeal of *Crash* makes complete sense. When John Ryan saves Christine Thayer, he is redeemed. His courage, fear, remorse, and generally confusing welter of emotions after the rescue suggest that he is *not simply* an angry racist. Whatever mistakes he may have made in the past, the film implies, whatever he may have said out of irrational anger, he is not fundamentally a racist because he values all human life and is willing to risk his own life to save a black woman. The viewer's goal for the character has been fulfilled, and in wishing that Ryan learn the error of his ways and then having that wish fulfilled, the viewer believes he/she has succeeded in fulfilling his/her goal of not being a racist. Whatever mistakes viewers may have made in their own lives, whatever disconcertingly non-"politically correct" memories are triggered by earlier scenes in the film, they can be reassured that they, like John Ryan, will be excused and redeemed. Such viewers find the film *emotionally* satisfying because it fulfills and reinforces the cultural scripts and narratives of liberal multiculturalism.[x] It is at this level, with such a reaction elicited by such a film, that the whole *Crash* phenomenon is most problematic and dangerous.

On the other hand, a viewer who is angered by the film in general and this scene in particular may be angered for a number of reasons. Of course, the absence of actual historical and structural explanations of race relations is problematic, but most movies and television shows neglect such considerations, so *Crash* is not noteworthy in this regard. Rather, in relation to Ryan, this viewer is not just angry because Ryan is racist, but also because the viewer's protagonist-focused empathy has been divided or even betrayed. If, as Ed Tan argues, the viewer's emotional response to a film has to do in part with a viewer's desired goal for the protagonist, the angered viewer is in a bit of a quandary. On one hand, having witnessed his father's suffering, the viewer identifies with Ryan's goal of helping his father and empathizes with his frustration with the insurance bureaucracy. On the other hand, the viewer cannot identify with Ryan and feels compelled to condemn him. This viewer may resent having been manipulated by the film into identifying with a protagonist, without the ability to respond, and thereby have some individual or collective memory of exclusion triggered.

The ways that we then respond to this anger have important political and theoretical underpinnings. One response would be simply to deny Ryan's point of view (his sense that his claims, emotions, and actions are valid), subjectivity and even humanity. This impasse is implied by liberal multiculturalism and, I would argue, is related to a poststructuralist ethics of insuperable difference. We can analyze the historical, economic, racial, social, and other elements of the scene using the tools of Marxism, ethnic studies, and cultural studies. But thus far, only certain cognitive approaches allow us to combine serious considerations of emotion, reason, and culture in conjunction with an ostensible basis for a critical humanism, in which human beings share fundamental capabilities and yet exist quite differently in the world. And that is why *Crash* is problematic: because it portrays racism as a trait or attitude that everyone shares, without considering the shared cognitive potentials to move beyond certain problematic social norms dictating and dictated by structures of power, such as racism and patriarchy. The film fails to portray human beings as capable of changing the way we think by altering our frameworks, increasing knowledge and empathy, and/or redefining the boundaries of groups, *and* it fails to account for the structures and histories in and through which we perform these cognitive processes. The irony of *Crash* is that despite its desire to grapple with race relations, it

portrays, enacts, and elicits emotions complicit with extant cultural scripts of division and in-group defense.

Any model or theory that projects human beings as locked into their identities, points of view, behaviors, thought processes, etc., should be considered insufficient. Complex cognitive considerations of ideology offer a number of options and benefits for ethnic studies, particularly at this moment. First, cognitive theory offers us one way to go after many critiques of the relativism, skepticism, and political despair of certain strands of poststructuralism. Second, it addresses the need for better information, providing a means for, as Rey Chow puts it, an interruption of the skepticism of referentiality; even if we do not know things perfectly, at least we can know things *better*. Third, it offers a way to think about sameness (cognitive capabilities shared by all humans) as well as difference (recognition of historically and socially produced differences). Fourth, it offers a way to recognize emotions like anger as *real* as well as a means to analyze and assess those emotions. For instance, the varying social impacts of a film like *Crash* can arguably be *better* parsed through a combination or cooperation between cognitive and cultural studies approaches than by any of the methods alone.

These are just a few of the reasons that it is incumbent upon ethnic and postcolonial studies scholars to engage with the ongoing cognitive revolution. Just as the excesses and ideological pitfalls of the sciences must be checked by the developments in the humanities, particularly fields such as ethnic, postcolonial, and women's studies that are tied to social movements, some of the impasses in literary and cultural studies may be remedied by conversation with insights in other fields. In fact, arguably the most important reason for ethnic and postcolonial studies scholars to engage cognitive studies—particularly in terms of emotion and anger—is that without our insights, the concepts of "human" and "cognition" more than ever run the danger of becoming liberal multicultural, bourgeois, First World fallacies.

Notes

[i] See also Chang and Chan, Howard and Dei, and the *Symposium* on *Crash* in a 2007 special issue of *College English*.

[ii] For just a few discussions of such issues, see Aldama, Chabot-Davis, Chow, Dubey, and Kim.

[iii] For further discussions of political anger, see hooks, Mohanty, Scheman, Silver, and Spelman.

[iv] For just a few such overviews, see Hart, Herman, Plantinga and Smith's introduction, Richardson, Hogan (esp. chapter 2), and Zunshine.

[v] For additional reviews of such debates, see Ahmed and Tan.

[vi] See "Inner Workings," Regan, and Vedantam.

[vii] For examples of such studies, see Brescoll and Uhlman; Carter, Pieterse, and Smith; Ghazinour and Richter; Izard, Parkinson, Roper, and Simons; Phelps; and Stimmel et al.

[viii] For analysis of this image, see Hsu 132-3.

[ix] I will not go here into a detailed discussion of emotion at the level of form, but in the vein of recent work on film, cognition, and emotion, I do think that stylistic and formal elements—such as scene juxtapositions, mood, music, tone, discourse vs. story, etc.—also work in conjunction with the various other plot elements and social contexts to produce a range of emotions with a

concomitant range of social, political, and ethical implications. For instance, in *Film Structure and the Emotion System*, Greg M. Smith discusses what he calls the "mood-cue approach," in which "facial expressions, figure movement, dialogue, vocal expression and tone, costume, sound, music, lighting, mise-en-scene, set design, editing, camera (angle, distance, movement), depth of field, character qualities and histories, and narrative situation" work together to establish a general mood at the beginning of the film. This mood guides a viewer's emotional response and is sustained by more intense bursts of emotion throughout the film (Smith, *Film Structure* 41-8). In the vein of realist aesthetics, *Crash* uses the most unobtrusive or conventional lighting, pacing, editing (for example, cutting back and forth between the speakers in the Ryan-Johnson scene), dialogue, etc., perhaps in order to bolster the film's sense of seriousness and authenticity.

[x] It's interesting to note that Paul Haggis wrote the film after being carjacked at gunpoint and 9/11. It is typical of a liberal multicultural view that explanations for such events would be cast in terms of race and ethnicity instead of economics, politics, ideology, history, structures, etc.

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Sue J. Kim is Associate Professor of English at the University of Alabama at Birmingham. She is the author of *Critiquing Postmodernism in Contemporary Discourses of Race* (Palgrave 2009) as well as essays in *Narrative*, *Modern Fiction Studies*, and the *Journal of Asian American Studies*.